Electronic Resources for Schools

REPORT CARD

★★★★★ = Highly Recommended
★★★★ = Recommended
★★★ = Good
★★ = OK in some cases
★ = Don't consider

This section provides concise, original reviews of new or important hardware, software, websites, and electronic media that relate to the K–12 curricula. All reviews are written by practicing educators who, in most cases, have used the software in a school environment. Where grouped into broad, age-appropriate categories, these categories should not be viewed as prescriptive. To facilitate "comparison shopping," these reviews are highly structured. Reviewers prepare a "report card" based on a five-star scale.

LearningStation Insight

Company: LearningStation, Inc., 8008 Corporate Center Drive, Suite 210, Charlotte, NC 28226; 888-679-7058; Website: learningstation.com.

Price: Pricing is available by contacting LearningStation, Inc. at 1-888-679-7058.

Audience: District administrators, school administrators, and teachers

Format: Runs on iPads, iPods, iPhones, and other mobile and tablet devices.

System Requirements: PC: Windows XP or later, 233 MHz Processor, 512RAM, 200MB hard drive space, browser IE 8 and above and Firefox 10 and above. Mac: OS 9.x or later, 233 MHz Pentium PPC/G3/G4 Processor, 512MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, Firefox 10 and above.

Description: LearningStation Insight provides educators with a tool that can create

★★★★★ | REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

assessments aligned to state standards, can identify achievement gaps, and can access aligned resources for immediate remediation. Student progress is monitored through daily and weekly reports.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation: Installation requires a subscription to the service. Devices must be available for students and teachers. Teacher training is essential and a question bank must be available before the program can be used with students. **Installation Rating: A**

Content/Features: Insight Reports offer three ways to look at Assessment results.

Item Assessment provides an analysis of how students performed on each question. Student Proficiency shows the overall student scores and identifies which students need help. Standards Assessment shows how students performed on each standard and identifies students who need improvement.

Reports are presented as graphs, tables, and representations and can be exported to PDF and Excel. District, school, and class averages can be used for in-depth comparison. Reports can be sent home to parents or shared at conferences.

Customized question banks can be created and aligned to standards. Assessments can be assigned by grade level, school, course, teacher, or classroom. Instant access to progress is available to school, teacher, class, and student.

The browser-based platform provides access anytime, anywhere. All data is saved to a central location, not the individual hard drive. **Content/Features Rating: A**

Ease of Use: Initial use will require time to build a question bank and train both teachers and students in the use of the devices that will be utilized. ***Ease of Use Rating: A***

Product Support: Support is available through the website, FAQs, email (lscsupport@learningstation.com), or phone (888-705-3276). ***Product Support Rating: A***

Recommendation: LearningStation Insight offers an effective way to integrate assessment and intervention in the daily classroom activities. Tests can be created in minutes. Assessments in the form of quizzes, tests, and benchmark assessments can be taken anywhere at any time, providing opportunities for remediation and differentiation. With the emphasis on Common Core State Standards, LearningStation Insight will provide an effective tool to measure if the curriculum is appropriate and rigorous.

There are a variety of methods that can be used to offer the assessments, including iPads, iPhones, and iPods. Results can be seen by the teacher while the test is still being taken, making it easy for the teacher to identify achievement gaps. Targeted intervention can be assessed for the entire class or an individual student. Resources can be accessed within seconds of assessing student needs. Question banks can be created at the district, school, or classroom level and can draw from other item banks for test creation.

A question counter shows which questions have been answered and which need to be completed. This is particularly useful if questions were skipped during the testing session. LearningStation will provide teachers with the opportunity to provide assessment and interventions on a daily level. ***Highly Recommended.***

Reviewer: **Sally Finley** is an educational consultant based in Coral Springs, Fla. Email: sallyfinley1@yahoo.com.

Mayan Mysteries

Company: Dig-It! Games, LLC, 4402 Elm St., Chevy Chase, MD 21202; 877-213-4448; Website: dig-itgames.com/mayan_mysteries.

Price: A single user license allows one user to register for a 1-year subscription of $21.99 for the online game. The Classroom Edition includes 1-year licenses of $299 for a class of up to 30 students and includes a Teacher Management System to track progress. Bulk pricing is available.

Audience: Grades 5–9

Format: Access to a Mac, PC, or tablet. It is available as an app from the App Store for use with an iPad.

System Requirements: The game runs in the browser.

★★★★★ REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

Description: Mayan Mysteries is an online puzzle-based game. Players explore the world of the ancient Mayan civilization.
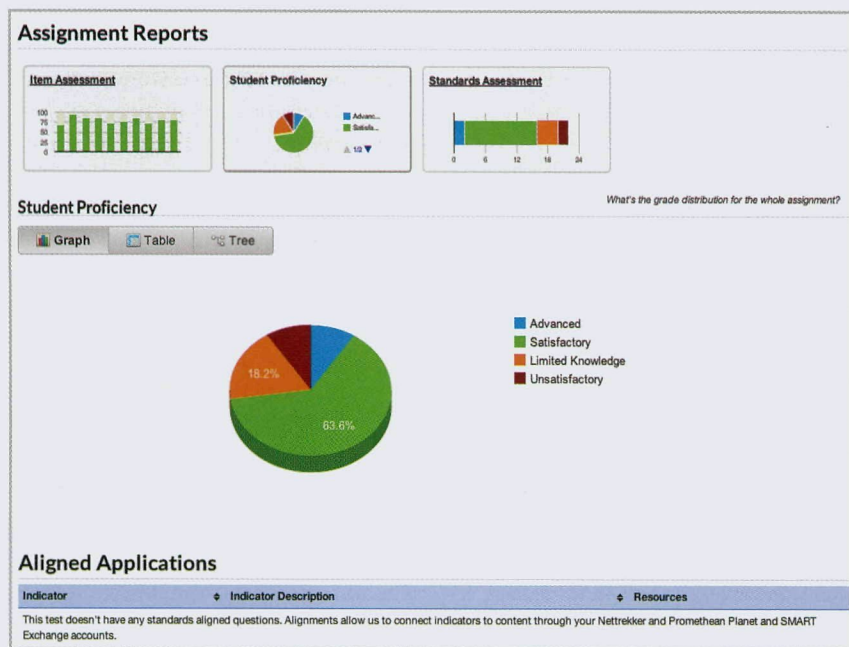
Reviewer Comments:
Installation: Access is easy and quick. The site requires a login and password. ***Installation Rating: A***
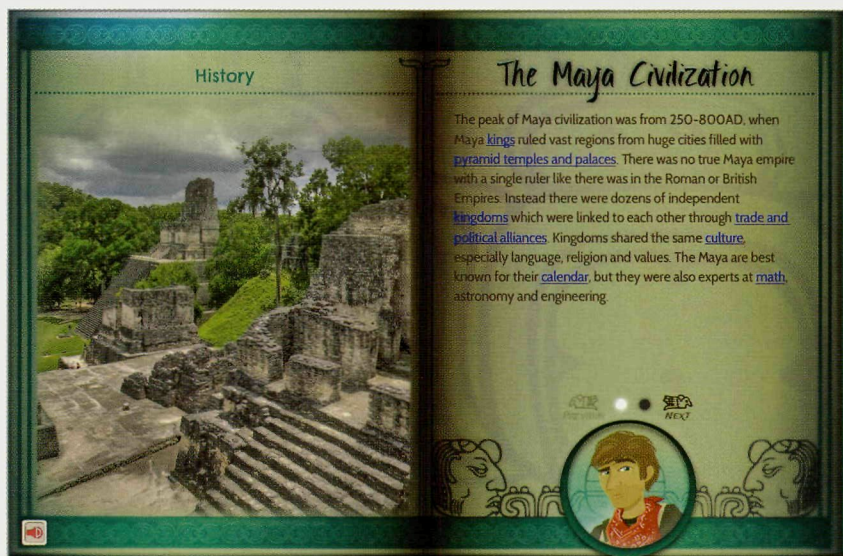
Content/Features: Learning activities focus on map games for identifying Central American countries, digging for artifacts using archaeological techniques, identifying artifacts, and understanding the Mayan language through glyphs, the Mayan calendar, the number system, and Mayan daily life.

Content focuses on social studies and meets the standards set by the National Council for the Social Studies national curriculum through the major themes of social studies: areas of culture; time, continuity, and change; people, places, and environment; individual development and identity; individuals, groups, and institutions; power, authority, and governance; production, distribution, and consumption; and science, technology, and society.

Users can excavate the Mayan sites of Cerén, Copán, Tikal, and Caracol as they search for

LearningStation Insight

The peak of Maya civilization was from 250-800AD, when Maya kings ruled vast regions from huge cities filled with pyramid temples and palaces. There was no true Maya empire with a single ruler like there was in the Roman or British Empires. Instead there were dozens of independent kingdoms which were linked to each other through trade and political alliances. Kingdoms shared the same culture, especially language, religion and values. The Maya are best known for their calendar, but they were also experts at math, astronomy and engineering.

Mayan Mysteries

priceless Mayan artifacts. They can discover artifacts, decode glyphs, learn their math system, visit ancient Mayan cities, and explore the Mayan calendar.

An in-game encyclopedia called L.E.A.R.N. (locate engrossing and relevant knowledge) provides topics to provide information on Mayan government systems, farming practices, and Mayan beliefs about time.

Mayan Mysteries can be played at home or at school.

A Teacher Management System tracks students' progress and performance with the game. Teachers can follow individual and class progress and performance on standards-based assessments targeted for each grade level.

An Educator's Manual provides valuable background information. There are playing instructions, an introduction to archaeology, a glossary, fun activities, and discussion ideas. ***Content/Features Rating: A***

Ease of Use: Any computer with a web browser will work. ***Ease of Use Rating: A***

Product Support: Contact the company for help in solving any problems that arise. ***Product Support Rating: A***

Recommendation: Mayan Mysteries promotes creative thinking, independent learning, and cultural understanding.

Students employ problem-solving skills to solve a variety of puzzles. An encyclopedia provides a wealth of information on archaeology that can help with solving the puzzles. The game format promotes interactive learning, engaging the student with challenging activities. History comes to life as students learn about the ancient Mayan culture. Students can use their mobile devices to access the game anytime and anyplace. The game can be obtained at the App Store for use on the iPad.

The game provides an in-depth study of a historical time period. Students must use higher-level thinking skills to analyze reading text, geographical knowledge, spatial reasoning, and science and math skills. The game content is aligned to standards based on the National Council for the Social Studies curriculum.

Content aligns with the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts and Mathematics. The game focuses on research and evidence and promotes a rigorous in-depth study. Critical reading skills are emphasized. The content is historically accurate and detailed. In math, the game

promotes process skills stressing conceptual understanding of key ideas.

Teachers will especially like the evaluation tool that tracks student progress and performance. ***Highly Recommended.***

Reviewer: **Sally Finley** is an educational consultant based in Coral Springs, Fla. Email: sallyfinley1@yahoo.com.

Compass Learning Odyssey

Company: Compass Learning, 203 Colorado St., Austin, TX 78701; 512-478-9600; Website: compasslearning.com/common-core.

Price: Contact Compass Learning for information about the cost of Odyssey in your situation. It depends on the number of grades, buildings, and students involved.

★★★★★ REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

Audience: Compass Learning Odyssey is a complete K–12 curriculum, but some tools will work better with upper elementary and older.

Format: This comprehensive curriculum is digital with sound and animation delivered via the internet.

System Requirements: Odyssey requires fast internet access, current computers, and adequate computer access; the faster, the better for all students.

Description: Compass Learning Odyssey K–12 language arts and math curricula are fully aligned to the Common Core State Standards. It includes complete K–12 math, language arts, social science, and science curriculum, which are research-based and include rigorous interactive activities, col-

orful, age-appropriate manipulatives, videos, graphics, and animations along with audio reading passages in digital format. Assessment prescribes personalized learning paths using those materials.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation/Access: This is a matter of being sure technical resources such as computers and internet access are adequate, arranging teacher training, and purchasing Odyssey from Compass Learning. ***Installation Rating: A***
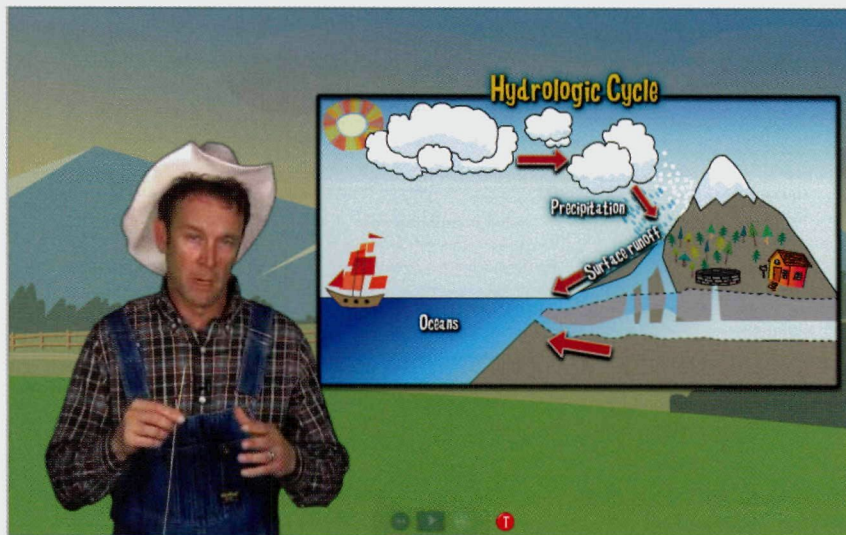
Content/Features: Compass Learning Odyssey offers an outstanding means of working with and complying with ever-present Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Odyssey is a complete digital curriculum while Renzulli Learning works with current school curricula.

With Odyssey, teachers use multidimensional assessments to determine each student's achievement level, learning style, interests, and expression style. Based on achievement and grade level, Odyssey helps teachers prescribe personalized learning paths aligned with CCSS.

Teachers then use Compass Learning's course work to instruct students and augment easily modified lesson plans. Course work includes K–12 digital lessons in math, language arts, social studies, and science, supported by scaffolding, spiraling, classroom flipping, and enrichment. Materials are also available for ACT, GRE, and GED test prep.

Anywhere, anytime accessibility enables student learning at school or at home. Teachers monitor student progress in real time to identify the skill and concept mastery of each student. With a large number of customizable reports, educators can track student, class, and school achievement to make data-driven decisions.

An Odyssey-based community enables improved instruction by integrating 21st-century learning skills with social media capabilities. The easy-to-use tools available to the community build online conversations and improve student-teacher interactions within in a safe, protected environment. Parents

Compass Learning Odyssey SCIENCE: High School Earth/Space

can log in and monitor student progress and achievement on assigned activities.

This is an excellent program; it is well thought out and developed. However, if students don't have nearly full-day computer access, school districts will be unable to take full advantage of it. Please keep that in mind as adoption is considered. ***Content/Features Rating: A***

Ease of Use: Compass Learning Odyssey is relatively easy to use, especially for students and teachers who are already computer literate. Instructions appear on-screen and are intuitive. ***Ease of Use Rating: A***

Product Support: Technical support assistance is available at 800-678-1412 along with much of the usual online support material. Compass Learning has created the Compass Learning Impact Teacher Academy, which makes more help available in the form of programs delivered by Compass Learning's team of educators as a blend of workshops, leadership planning, instructional coaching, and technology training. ***Product Support Rating: A***

Recommendation: In Odyssey, Compass Learning has created an excellent curricular product that incorporates social technologies, digital material, the internet, attention

to Common Core State Standards and more, with K–12 education. That is becoming increasingly essential, and I highly recommend it to any school district whose students have adequate computer access. ***Highly Recommended.***

Reviewer: **Charles Doe** (chasgd62@gmail .com) is a 39-year teacher, including 10 years as elementary media specialist in Hastings Area Schools in Michigan. For the past 15 years, he has written articles and reviews for *Internet@Schools*.
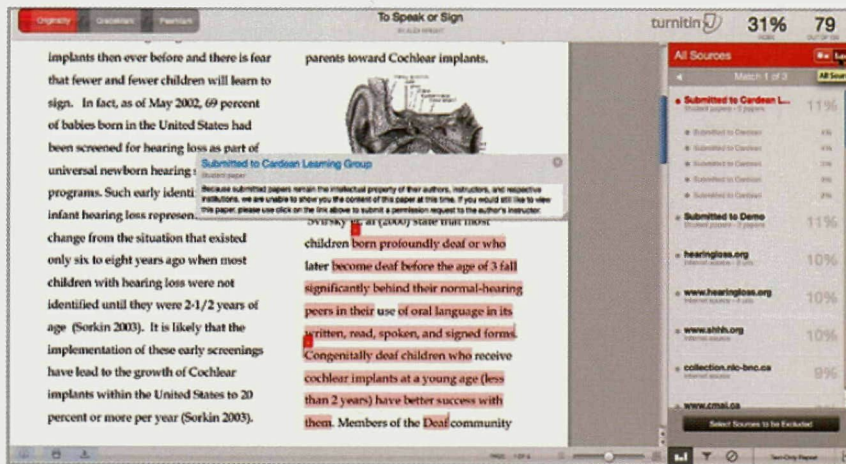
Turnitin

Company: Turnitin (iParadigms, LLC), 1111 Broadway, Third floor, Oakland, CA 94607; 510-764-7600; Website: turnitin .com/en_us/home.

Price: Contact Turnitin for estimates of cost of this annual subscription, web-based service. Cost is based on the number of

★★★★★ REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

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Turnitin OriginalityCheck

schools, teachers, and students, etc., using the product.

Audience: This is intended for students who are doing at least two- or three-paragraph, if not longer, writing and their teachers, probably middle and high school and older.

Format: Turnitin is an anytime access, web-based program in three parts: Originality-Check, GradeMark, and PeerMark. In addition to the usual, these rely on writing rubrics and predesigned evaluation tools, both of which can be modified, and feedback using drag-and-drop marks, voice comments, and the rubrics.

System Requirements: Turnitin requires Microsoft Windows Vista Service pack 1, Windows 7, or Mac OS X v10.4.11+ with 3GB of RAM or more and a 1024 x 768 display or higher. A broadband internet connection is also required, the faster the better, using either Firefox 15+, Chrome 23+, Safari 5+, or Internet Explorer 8 or 9, set to allow all cookies from Turnitin.com and JavaScript enabled.

Description: Turnitin is a tool especially for use with student writing whether in a writing instruction class or as part of other subjects, such social studies classes. The teacher sets up a class and assignment(s) in the Turnitin service. Students or instructors then submit papers to Turnitin via file upload or cut and paste. Turnitin then evaluates the writing using three core tools so students and teachers can see the results as layered feedback.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation: Using Turnitin is a matter of subscribing to the service and then setting up students and assignments online. *Installation Rating: A*

Content/Features: Turnitin has recently gained notice for releasing six rubrics developed in partnership with the English Professional Learning Council, using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). They were originally available to users of Turnitin only but have been released, with online help, for free use by teachers.

Teachers can begin the process by attaching one of the standard CCSS rubrics to any writing assignment, conveying their expectations to students. The rubrics are for grades 9–10 and 11–12 with argumentative, narrative, and informative essay assignments.

If desired, student writing can then be submitted to Turnitin, initially using OriginalityCheck, which compares it to a database of 24-plus billion pages of digital content, including archived internet content no longer available. This database is from a variety of sources and is constantly updated.

Once the paper's originality is assured, instructors can use GradeMark to provide feedback using drag-and-drop marks, voice comments, and rubrics. Educational Testing

Service e-rater technology is integrated with GradeMark to identify spelling, grammar, mechanics, usage, and style along with some other tools. When completed, PeerMark facilitates the management of peer review exercises so students can evaluate and learn from one another's work. *Content/Features Rating: A*

Ease of Use: Turnitin is easy to use, with clear, intuitive instructions. Difficulties with its use come from inadequate computer access and getting student writing into digital form. *Ease of Use Rating: A*

Product Support: Extensive support is available online in the form of the Help Center for teachers, students, administrators, and more. Among extensive offerings, it includes FAQs and integration help for using Turnitin with systems such as Blackboard and Moodle. *Product Support Rating: A*

Recommendation: Using CCSS and avoiding plagiarism are both important considerations in today's digital age. Turnitin is an excellent tool for both. *Highly Recommended.*

Reviewer: **Charles Doe** (chasgd62@gmail.com) is a 39-year teacher, including 10 years as elementary media specialist in Hastings Area Schools in Michigan. For the past 15 years, he has written articles and reviews for *Internet@Schools*. ∎

PRODUCT REVIEWS