

Rating: ★★★★★

Start Smarter: Relax & Learn - Video Review

The Bottom Line

A pleasing soundtrack, gentle humor, and educationally rich content are some of the things that set this designed-for-toddlers video apart.



Product Overview

With its successful mix of education and entertainment, *Start Smarter: Relax & Learn* is an outstanding developmental video that will please both young children and their parents. Young viewers are treated to engaging visuals, clear narration, and meaningful lessons—all set to a varied and pleasing classical music soundtrack.



As the title implies, *Relax & Learn* is at once soothing and stimulating. The care that went into the video is evident throughout, from the excellent choreography to the well-timed humorous vignettes. This video attempts to teach children new vocabulary words, as well as the meaning behind the concepts. Words are spelled out on the screen, and then demonstrated in a variety of ways. Children are introduced to words like "on", "circle", and "duck", and young viewers are given enough time and examples to truly learn what these words mean. Several phrases are used for each featured word, and these phrases are supported by visual demonstrations and reinforcements. For example, the phrases "Let's turn the light on" and "The light is on" are used in the "on" vignette.

Of course, educational videos are not worth much if kids don't watch them. Fortunately, *Relax & Learn* is just as successful at entertaining as it is educating. Plenty of sights and sounds capture—and keep—children's attention: fun sound effects, visually interesting toys and objects (a dancing disco bear, for example), the voices of both children and adults, and a variety of music from Beethoven to Mozart. Sequences featuring animal hand puppets are especially funny, such as one in which a cow makes decidedly "un-cowlike" sounds. Some sequences teach children about object permanence and encourage them to predict outcomes. Toy trucks glide across the screen, basic shapes are introduced, and hand puppets play peekaboo.

Relax and Learn may not be quite as polished as some other baby videos on the market, but children won't miss things like smooth "page turns" and state-of-the-art production. ***This video never misses a beat, and its educational focus is a breath of fresh air.*** This video is chattier than most baby videos yet never *too* chatty. As a result, language development is encouraged and, at the same time, children get enough opportunities to process the new information. We also applaud the video's use of print to demonstrate new vocabulary words.