

VOCABULARY APP Exercise 1:1

Competitive Analysis

I will give an analysis and summary below of the following apps. Each analysis will include screenshots of the app in question, several positive and negative attributes, and my thoughts on whether each app was successful in terms of meeting the goals of its users.

I will then draw a general conclusion from this analysis and use that as a springboard for designing a vocabulary app that is customizable, easy-to-use, educational and entertaining.

WORD UP a feature-rich app intended to help users learn English

FLASHCARDS a customizable app focused on vocabulary only

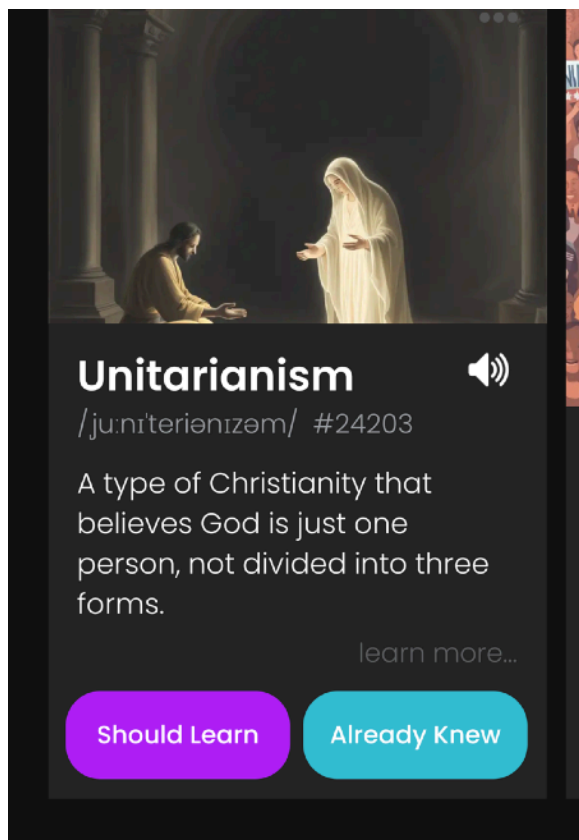
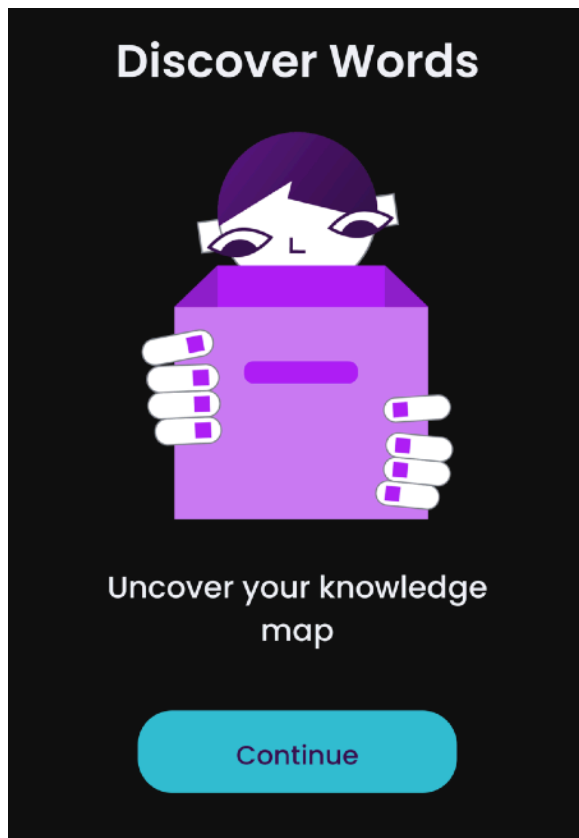
WORD TRIP a word game app like Boggle that takes you places

WORDS OF WONDERS a relaxing word game app, where you collect places you “visit” as you progress

ZEN WORD a chill word game app like Boggle with non-intrusive ads and music

JOEY’S FARM a matching game that helps you build out Joey’s farm along the way





In this app and the others that follow, the screenshots trace my journey through the app for the first time. I will point out the positives and negatives along the way, and summarize each app experience before drawing a final conclusion from perusing the apps.

Word Up is a feature rich app that helps you learn English. I chose to look at this app because learning vocabulary is a large part of language learning and I wanted to see how they approached that aspect of the learning process.

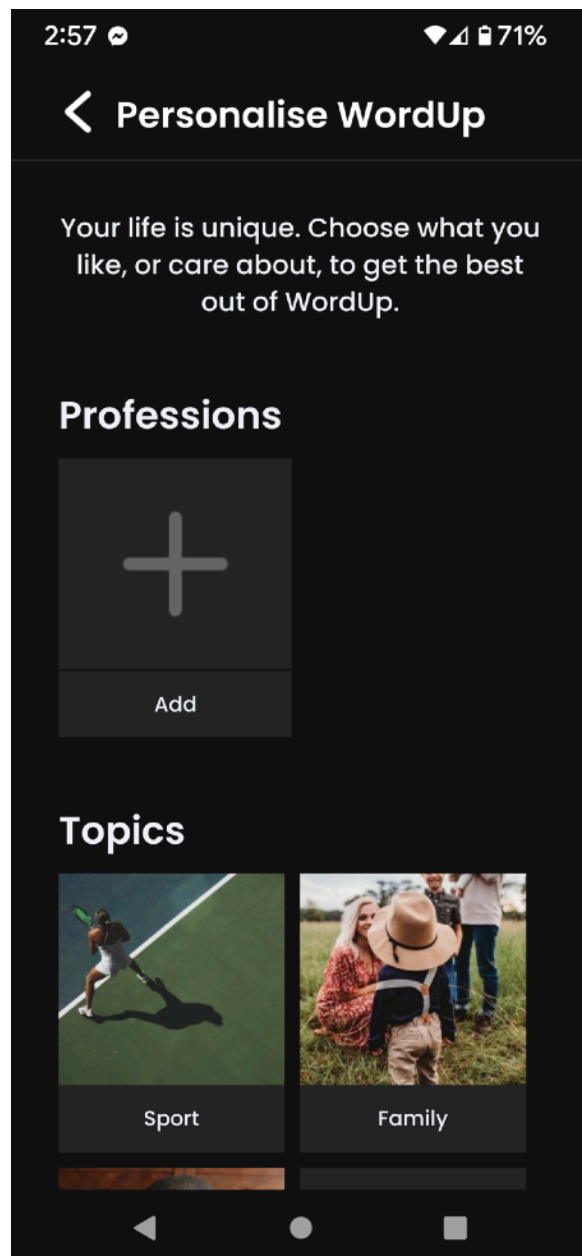
It started out with the screen at the top left, and the very first thing I noticed after clicking continue is that it dumped you right into the “main” page with a plethora of icons to click and virtually no explanation as to how to use the app. This was a terrible experience and I was frustrated right off the bat, even as a native speaker.

What if I had been a non-native speaker?

negative: no onboarding!

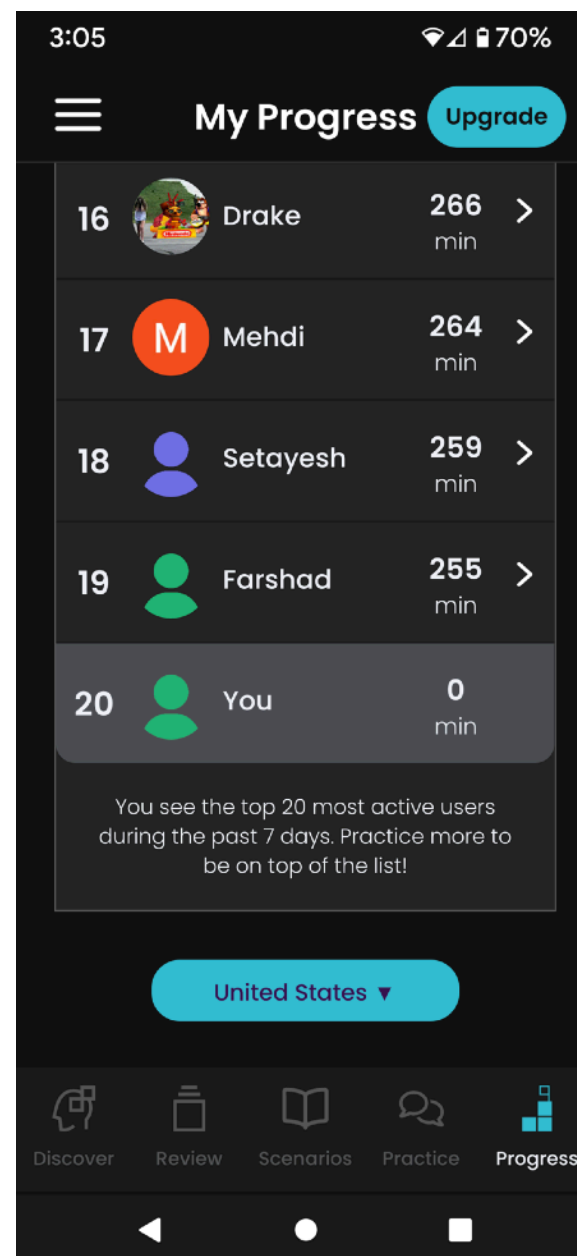
After clicking around a bit, I figured out that the main vocabulary learning feature has several ways to lay out the words available, including the one to the left which lets you scroll through the word bank one at a time and indicate whether you need to learn the word. If you’ve already learned it, it is excluded from your word bank.

positive: various word bank layouts



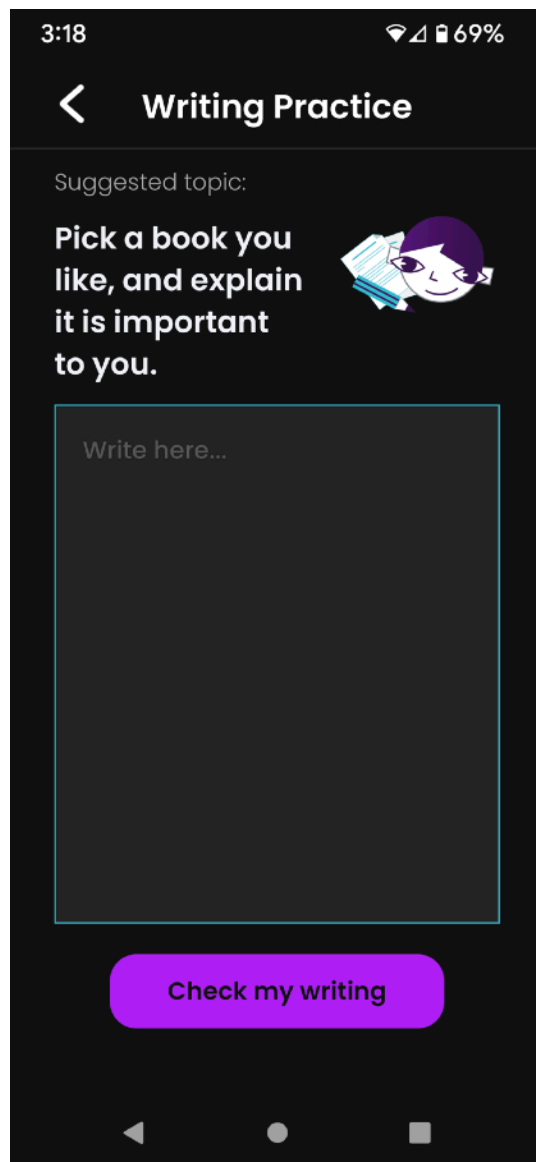
It also has features such as categories of interest for learning vocabulary (to the left) and allows you to track your progress, making it tailored to your learning needs as well as allowing you to be part of the community of learners (below), both good features.

positives: tailored vocabulary and community!



The “features” menu is aligned at the bottom of the screen as you can see below left, and the main menu button with more of the standard platform options is at the top left. However, as I mentioned before, there is zero onboarding so figuring out what all the feature icons mean and how to use them once you click on them is left up to your imagination. Also, I felt that there wasn’t enough white space in the layout. Things felt crowded and hard to separate.

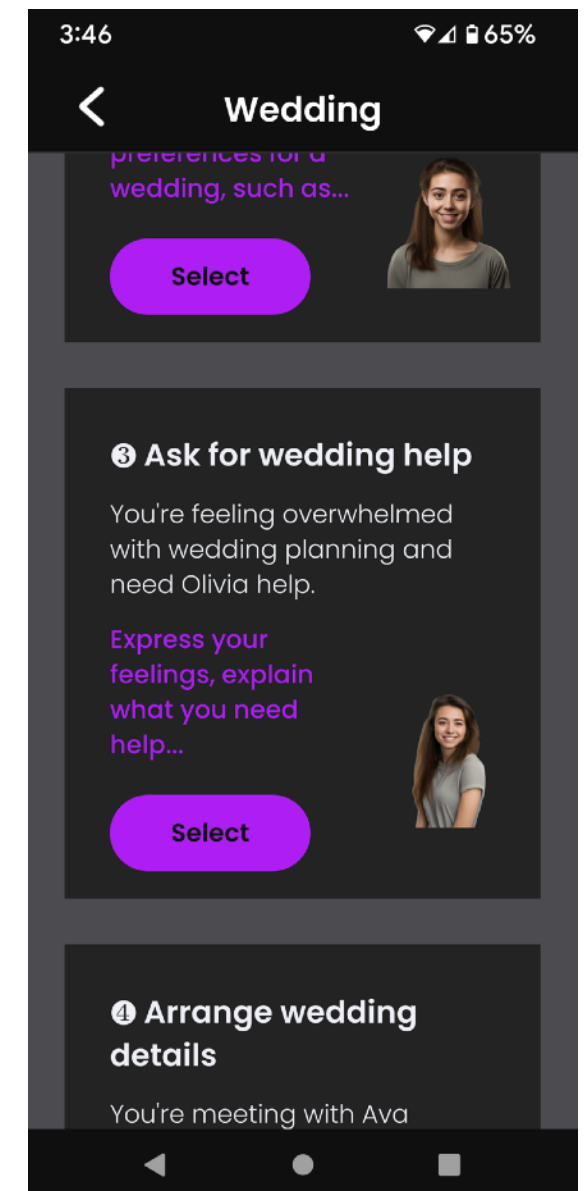
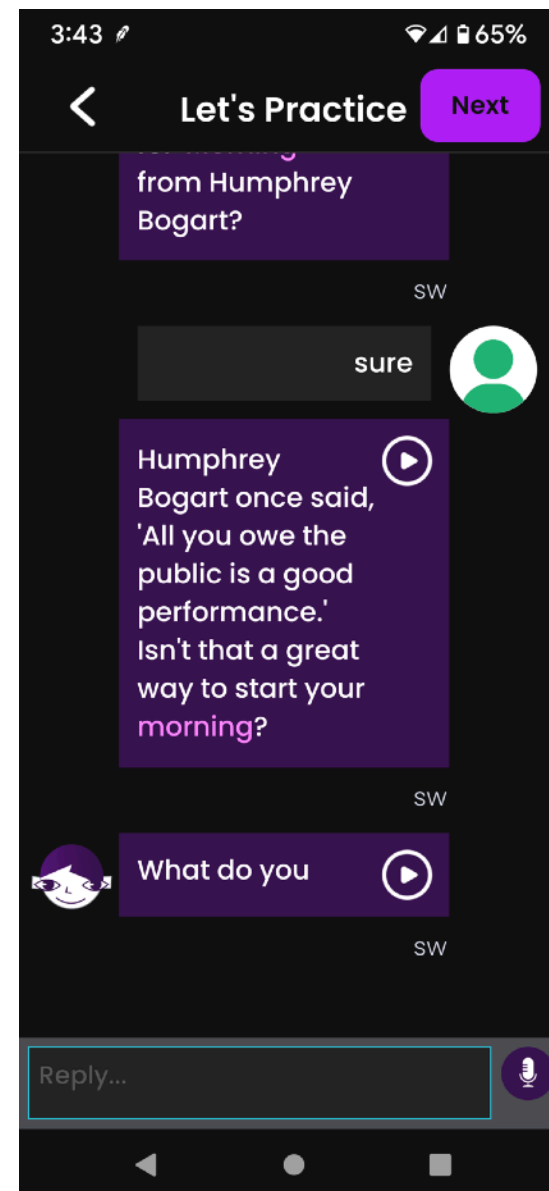
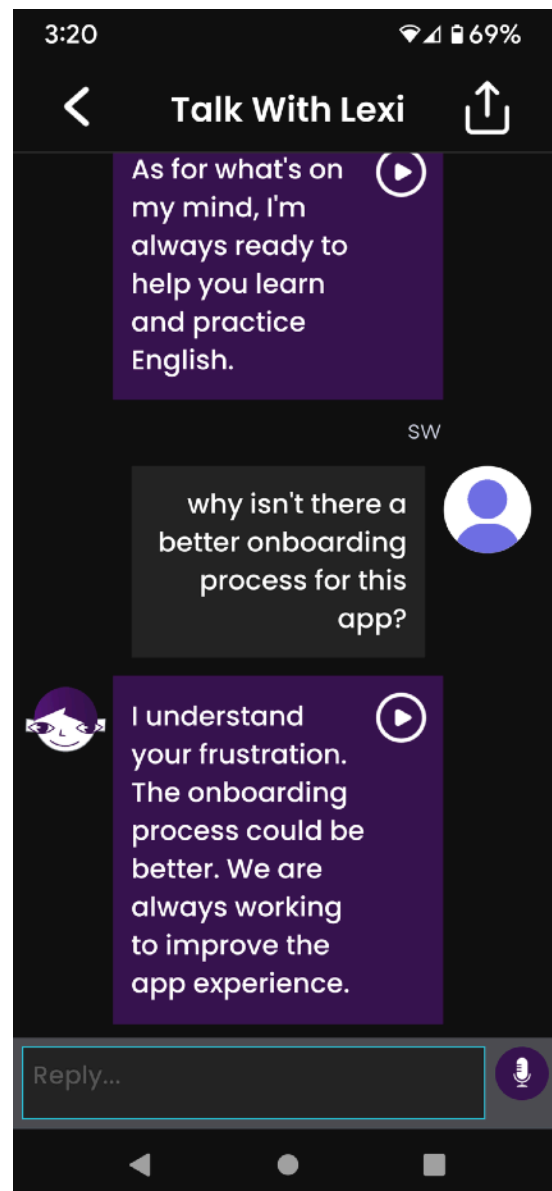
negative: crowded design!



There were some great features though to facilitate different ways to learn. You can write out your thoughts as a conversation (left), or interact with an AI person (bottom left, center, right) to practice conversing or using specific vocabulary in conversation. However, the AI wasn't perfect, and I also found a few typos in the AI and elsewhere (note Lexi's prompt at the left).

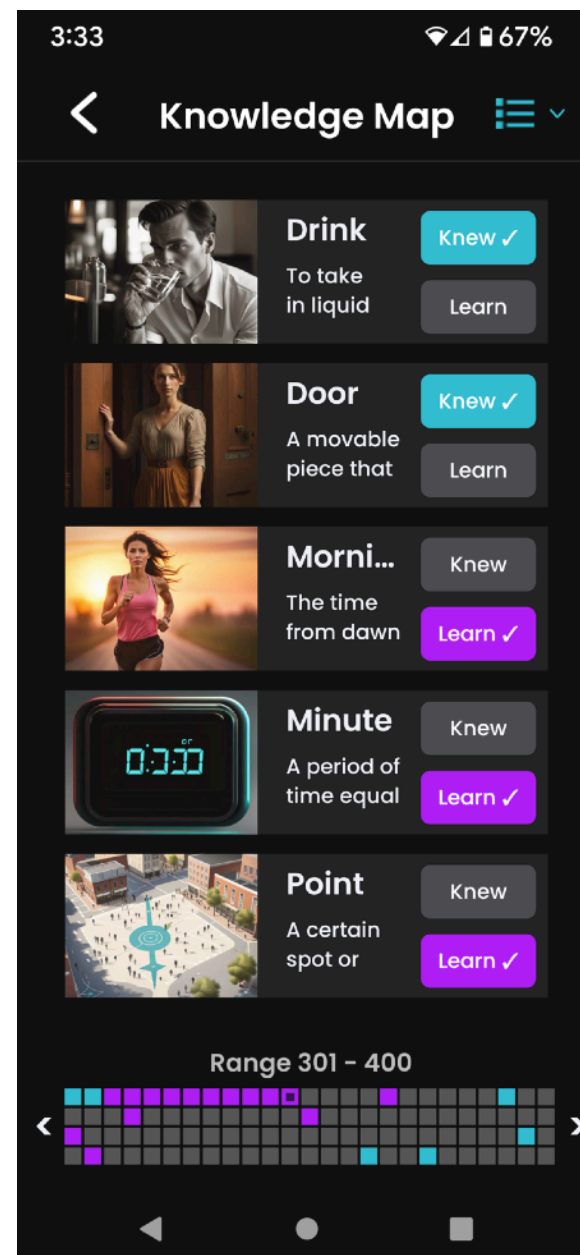
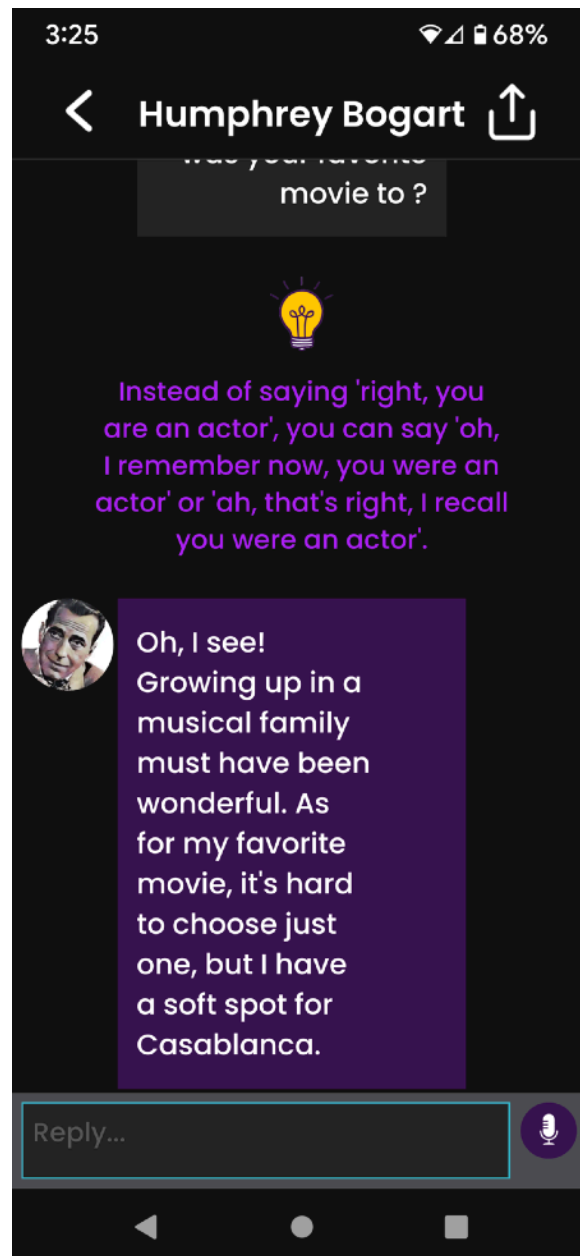
negative: typos in a language app

positive: various ways to learn!



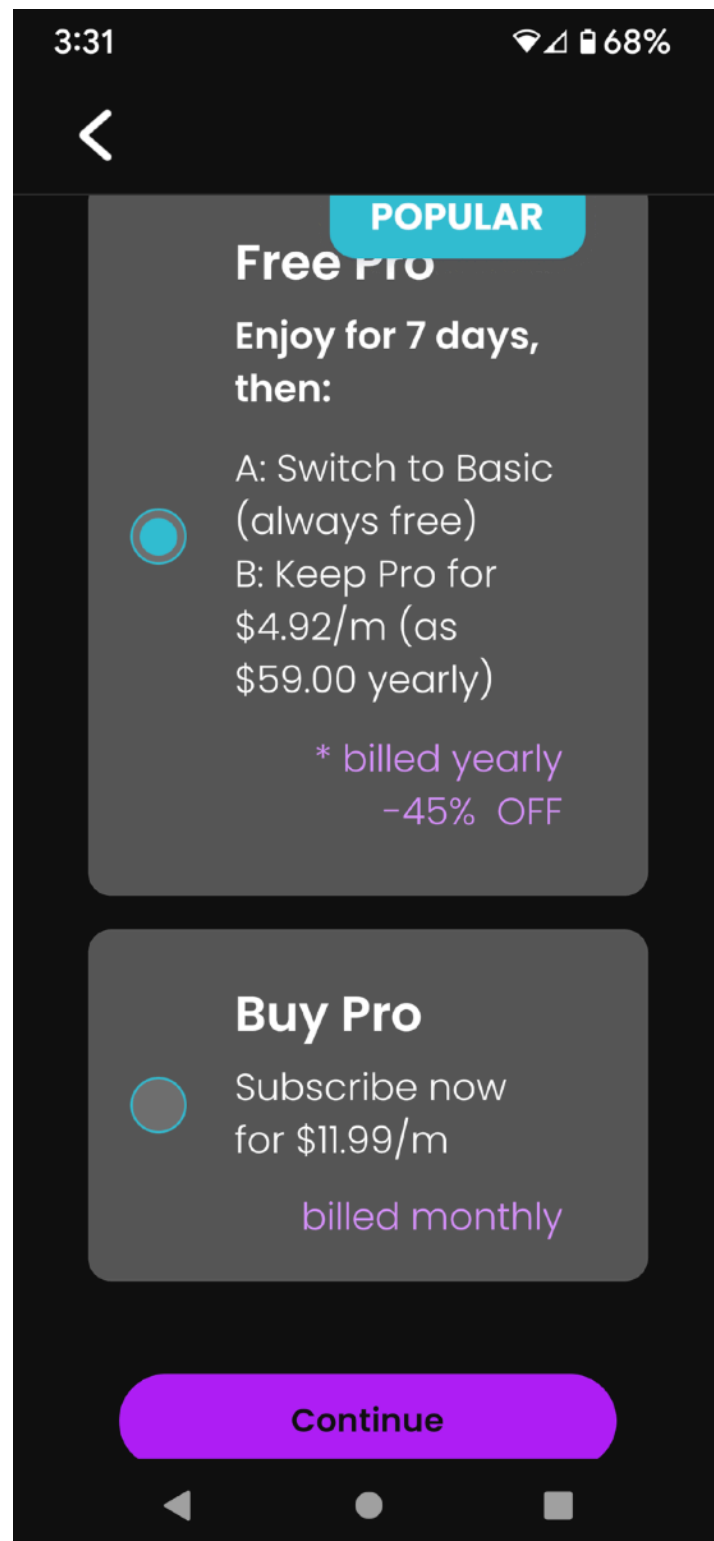
The AI also allowed you to choose a character you may admire such as Humphrey Bogart, and emulated their personal history while conversing (left). A little light bulb icon gave you a tip for a better way to say something, which was helpful. And since this is a language learning app, you could carry on a voice conversation.

positive: voice capable and interactive AI



The vocabulary bank, known as the “knowledge map”, also had visual illustration thumbnails (left) paired with each word as a layout option, helping to utilize other senses in the learning process.

positive: images paired with words



The Word Up business model was to offer some basic functionality for free, and have a subscription plan to unlock the other features. A bonus was no ads in the basic version, and the subscription price was reasonable for a multi-faceted app.

However, any help as to how to use the app I actually found buried in the support and feedback tab below the member FAQ.

positive: ad free basic version and reasonable subscription plan

negative: instructions for app use were buried in the support and feedback tab after the membership FAQ.

POSITIVES

ad-free basic version and reasonable subscription plan
images paired with words
voice capable and interactive AI
various word bank layouts
tailored vocabulary and community!
various ways to learn!

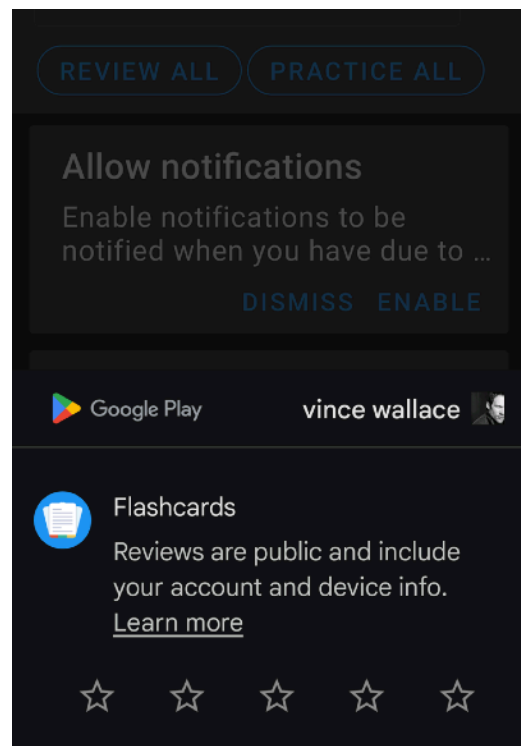
NEGATIVES

no onboarding!
crowded design!
instructions for app use were buried in the support menu
typos in a language app

I liked that the app utilized a wide variety of learning methods including flash cards, writing, voice technology, interactive AI and visual imagery to help its users learn English.

However, the fact that there was no onboarding process, that the user instructions were buried in the support menu, and that the design was too crowded made it a frustrating, confusing experience - so much so that I lost interest in using the app. It is a great example of poor user experience losing a customer.

FLASHCARDS



Flashcards is a customizable app focused on vocabulary only. I chose to look at this app because it took a traditional approach to vocabulary learning.

This app didn't have much of an onboarding process either. However, it was narrower in focus than Word Up and so was much more straightforward to figure out, although there still was a learning curve. After a brief first exploration, I closed the app and upon reopening was immediately asked for a review (top left). Early review prompts annoy me because I haven't had a chance to really get a feel for it yet - review prompts should come later, in my opinion.

negatives: sparse onboarding, early review prompt

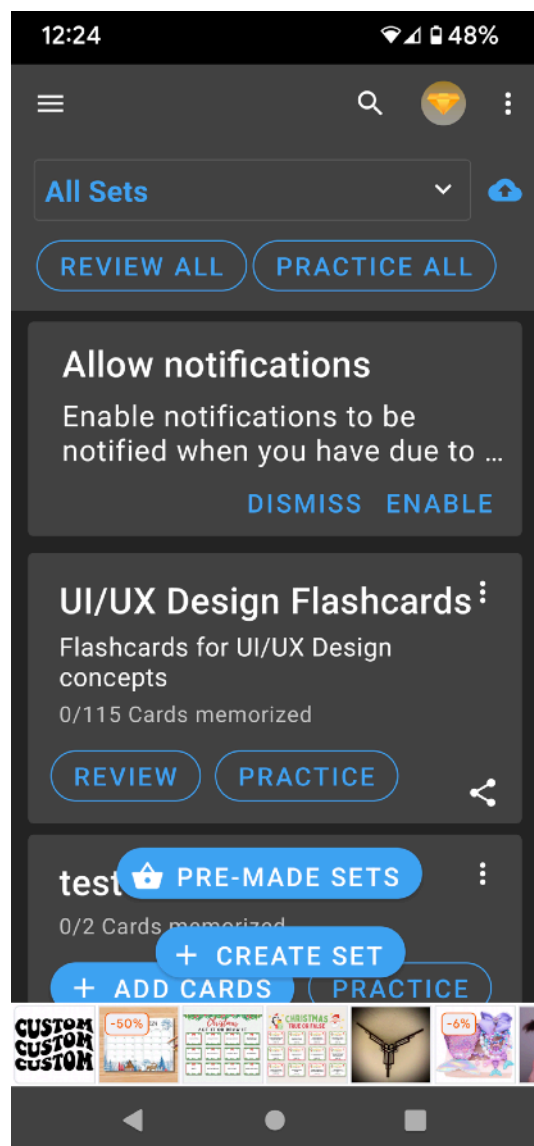
After clicking around a bit, I figured out that the flashcards have several ways of being laid out. They also allow you to create and download your own vocabulary list, including definitions. I created a UX/UI list this way (left).

However, there was a mash-up at the bottom of the screen (lower left) with the buttons, as the top layer could scroll over the bottom layer but the resting position was overlapping.

On a positive note, the ad bar was only at the bottom of the screen, and while always there, was minimally noticed. I did notice the ads, though, so I think it struck a good balance.

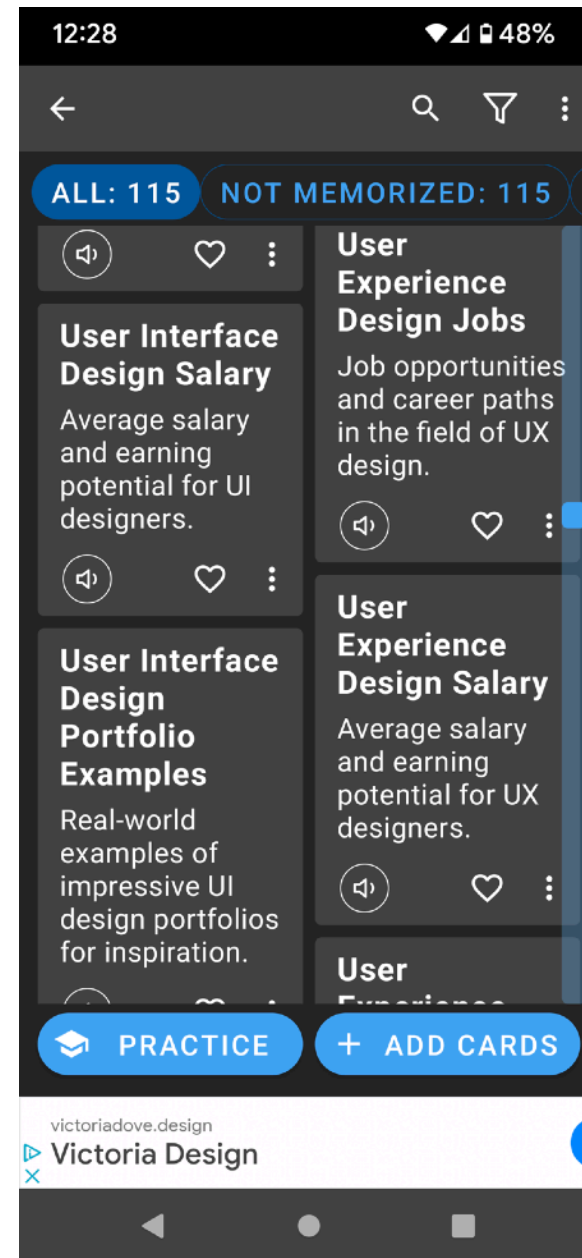
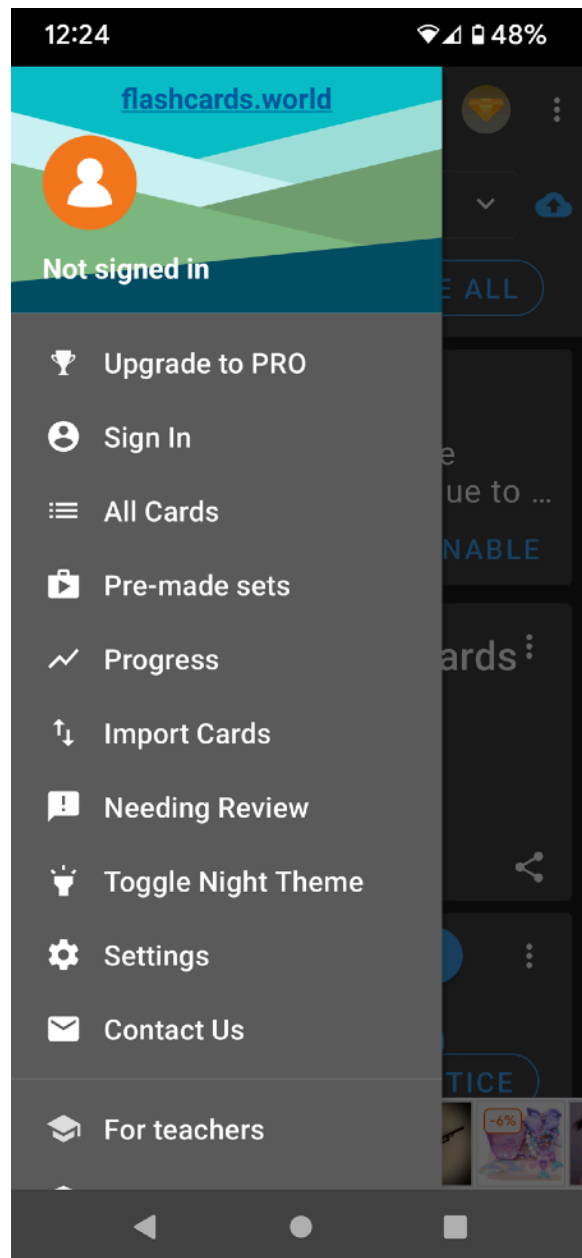
positives: several word bank layouts, user-created word banks; no annoying ads

negative: overlapping buttons on layout

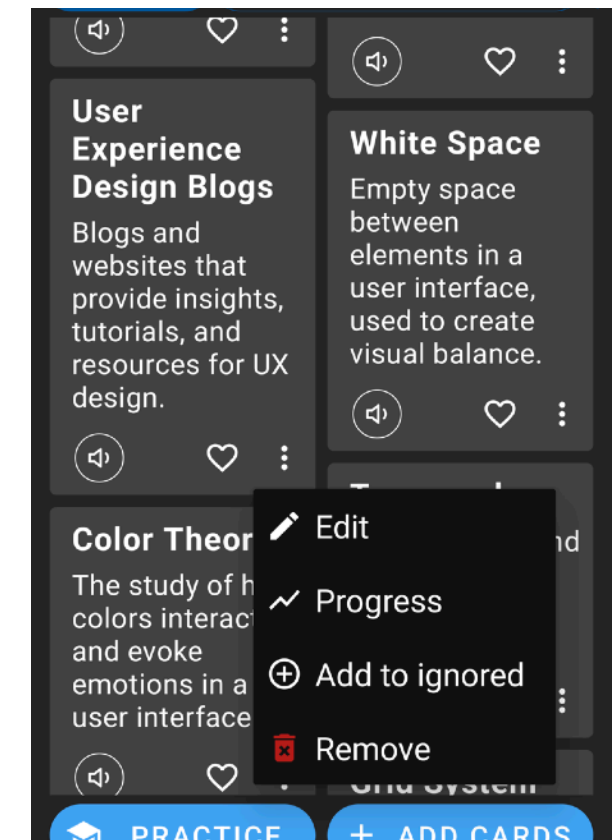
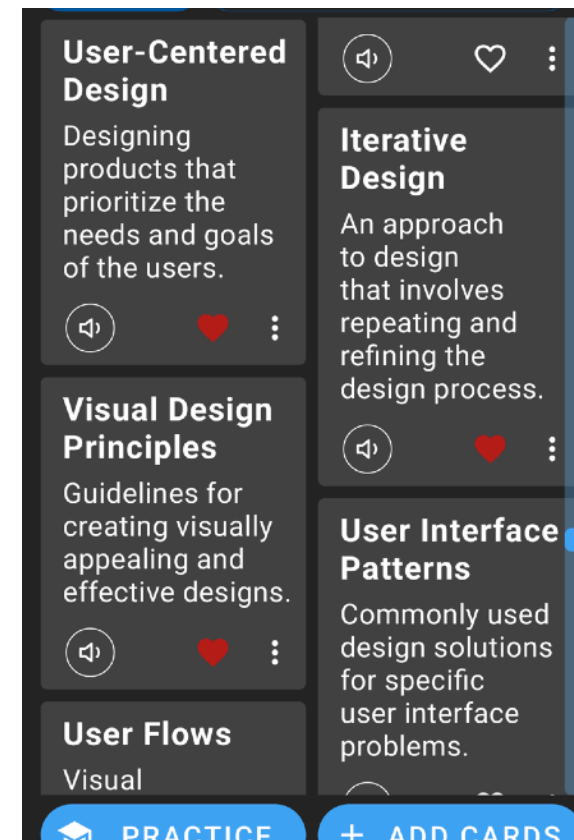


FLASHCARDS

Overall, compared to Word Up, I thought the main menu was much more well laid out and simple to navigate, with the most used features easy to find (left). **positive: well prioritized and laid-out menus**



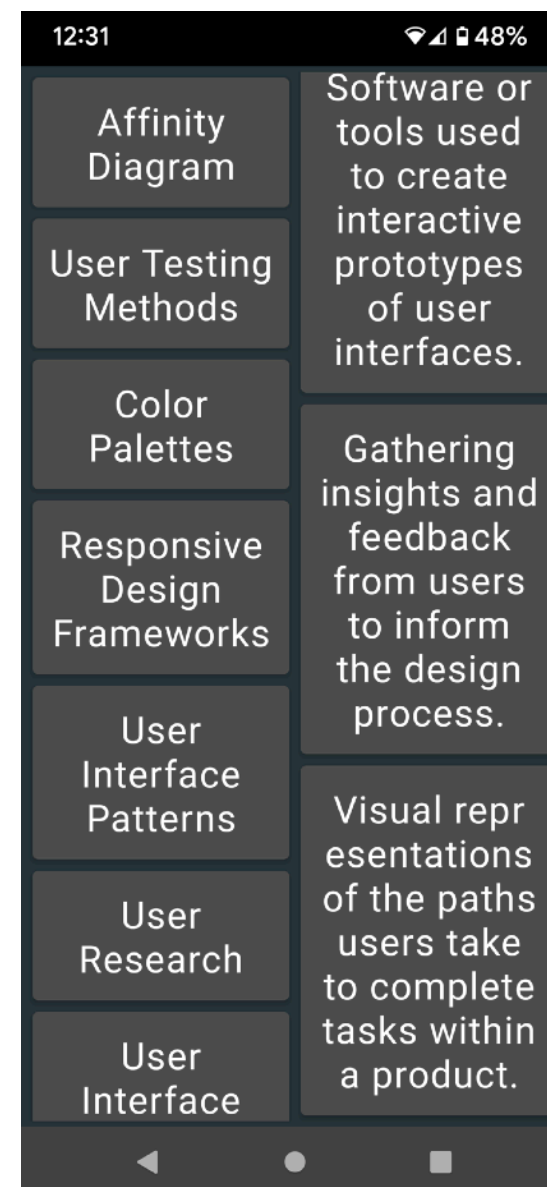
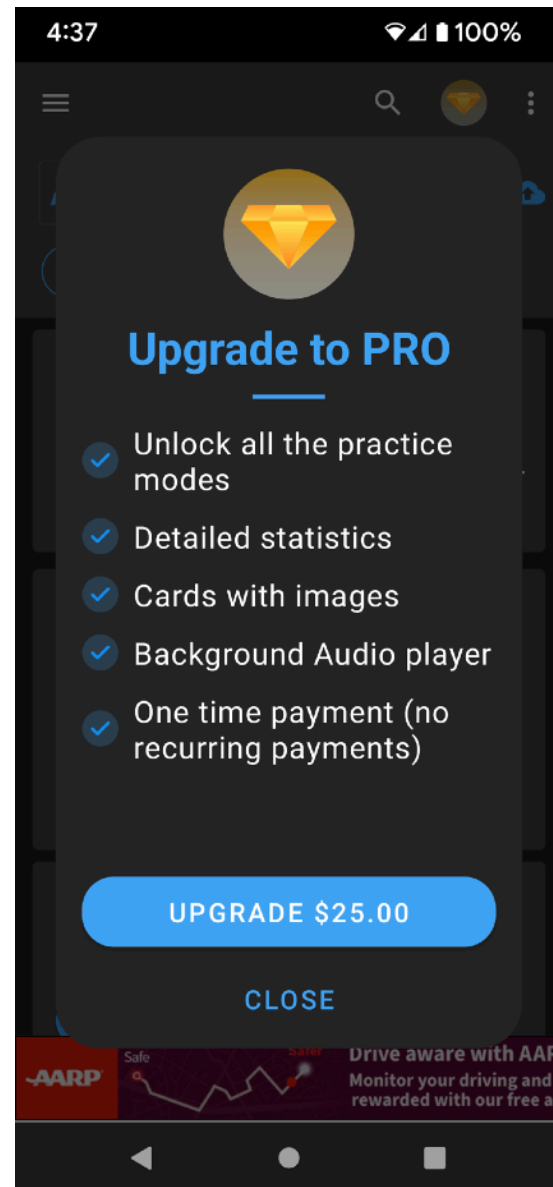
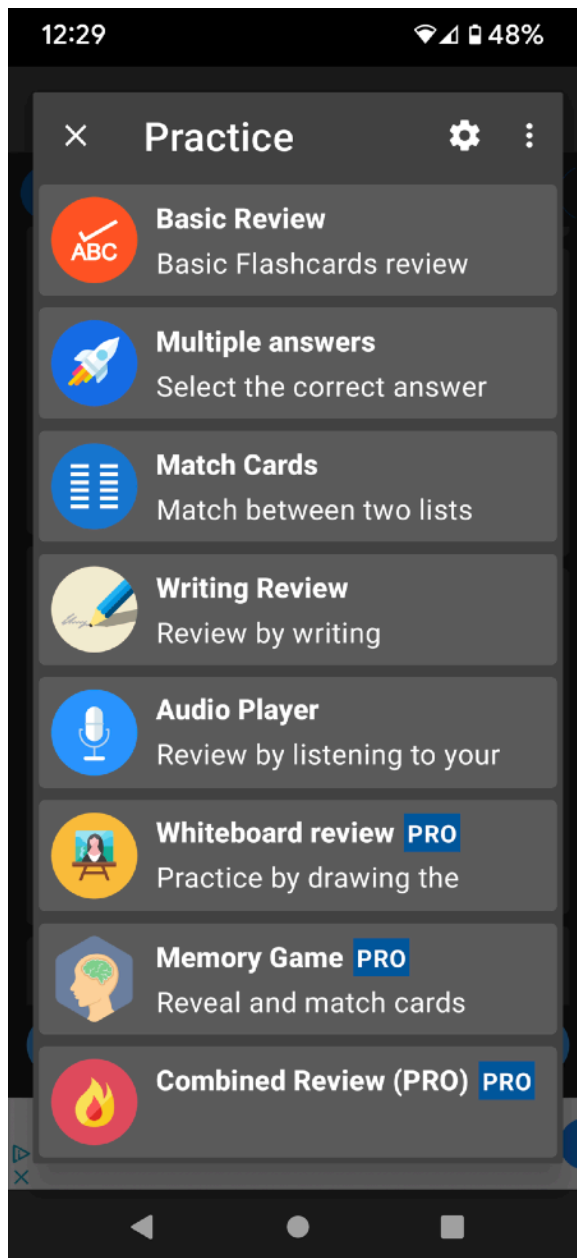
The interfaces for the different flashcard features were also well laid out and easy to read, as well as very smooth while scrolling and selecting options. **positive: good functionality**



FLASHCARDS

The menus were easy to read, and the PRO features were clearly distinguished from the basic features that come with the free version (left, center).

positive: basic and pro features clearly marked

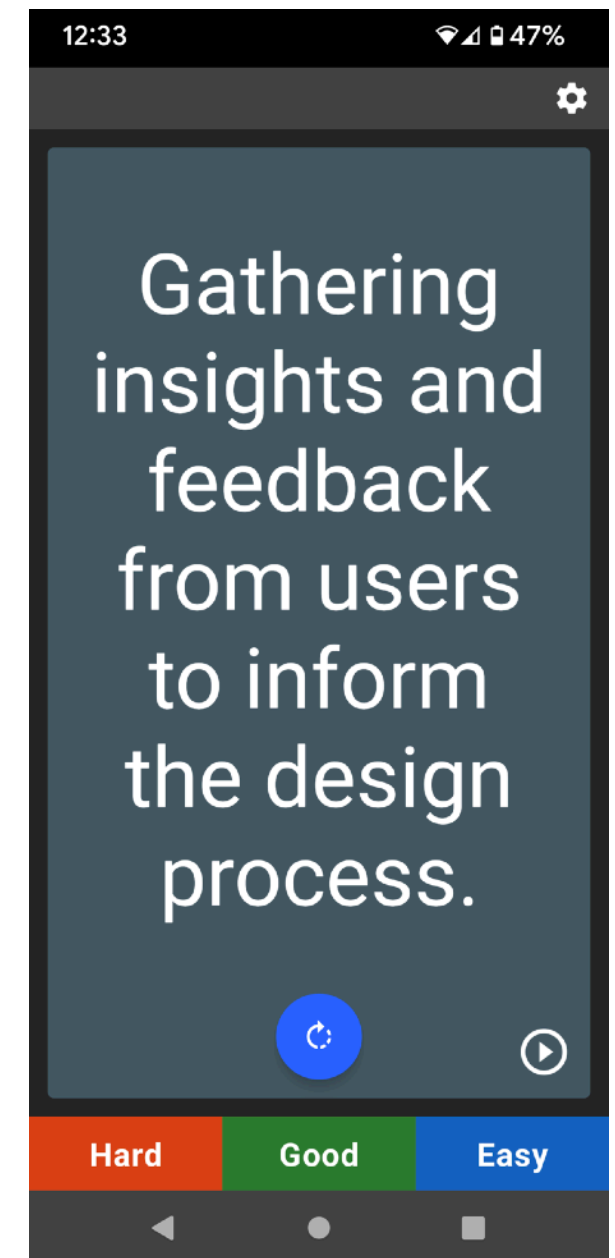
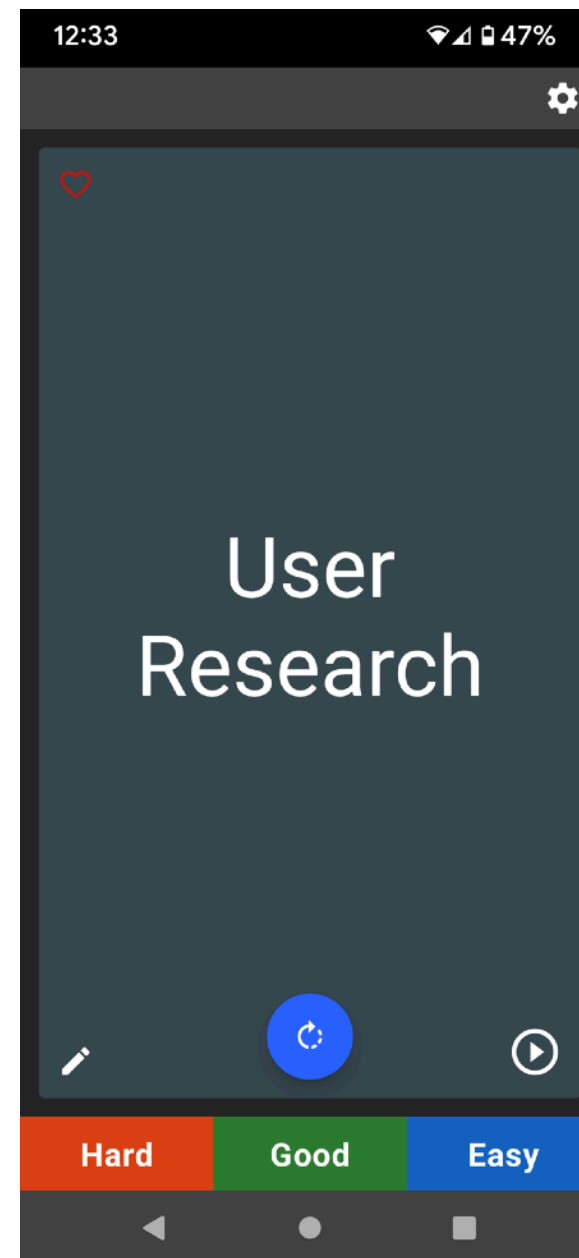
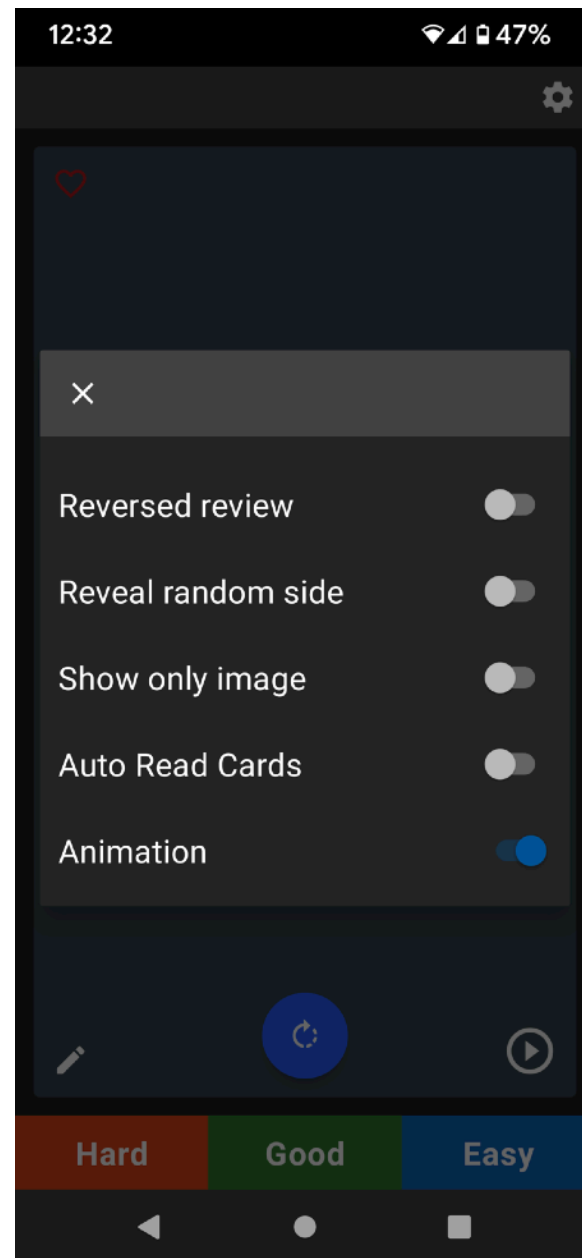


I also liked the double column feature and that the columns move independently of each other. There is a lot of info on the screen as well, but it doesn't feel crowded. Great engineering and UI on that.

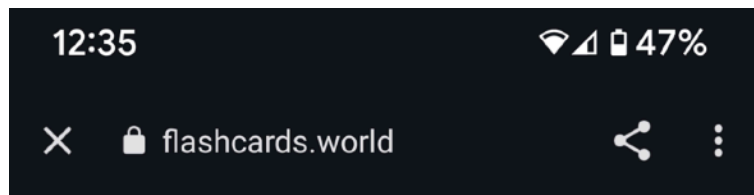
positive: good use of screen space

FLASHCARDS

Here are a few more screen shots illustrating what I feel is an effective layout and design of a couple of flash card options.



FLASHCARDS



Intro:

- Basic usage: (create s cards, and review then
- Use a computer to wri cards
- Fixing audio and missi languages issues.
- Share a set with some who has the app
- How does the review c
- How is the order of the defined during a review
- How to backup my car
- Reveal definitions first reviews
- Match only images to
- List of the premium fe
- General tips

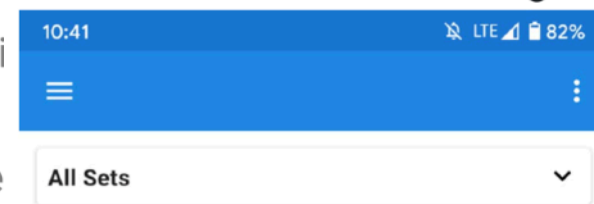
Basic Usage:

Create your first set by clic

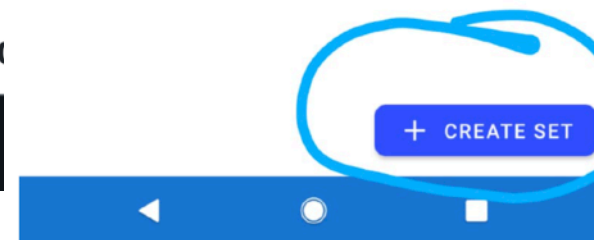


Basic Usage:

Create your first set by clicking on 'create set' on the bottom right.



Create your first set



Although the initial onboarding was scarce, the app does have an easy-to-find scroll down instructional section with clear steps on how to use the app.

positive: easy to find and use scrollable instructional section

FLASHCARDS

SUMMARY

POSITIVES

- several word bank layouts, user-created word banks; no annoying ads
- well prioritized and laid-out menus
- good functionality
- basic and pro features clearly marked
- good use of screen space
- easy to find and use scrollable instructional section

NEGATIVES

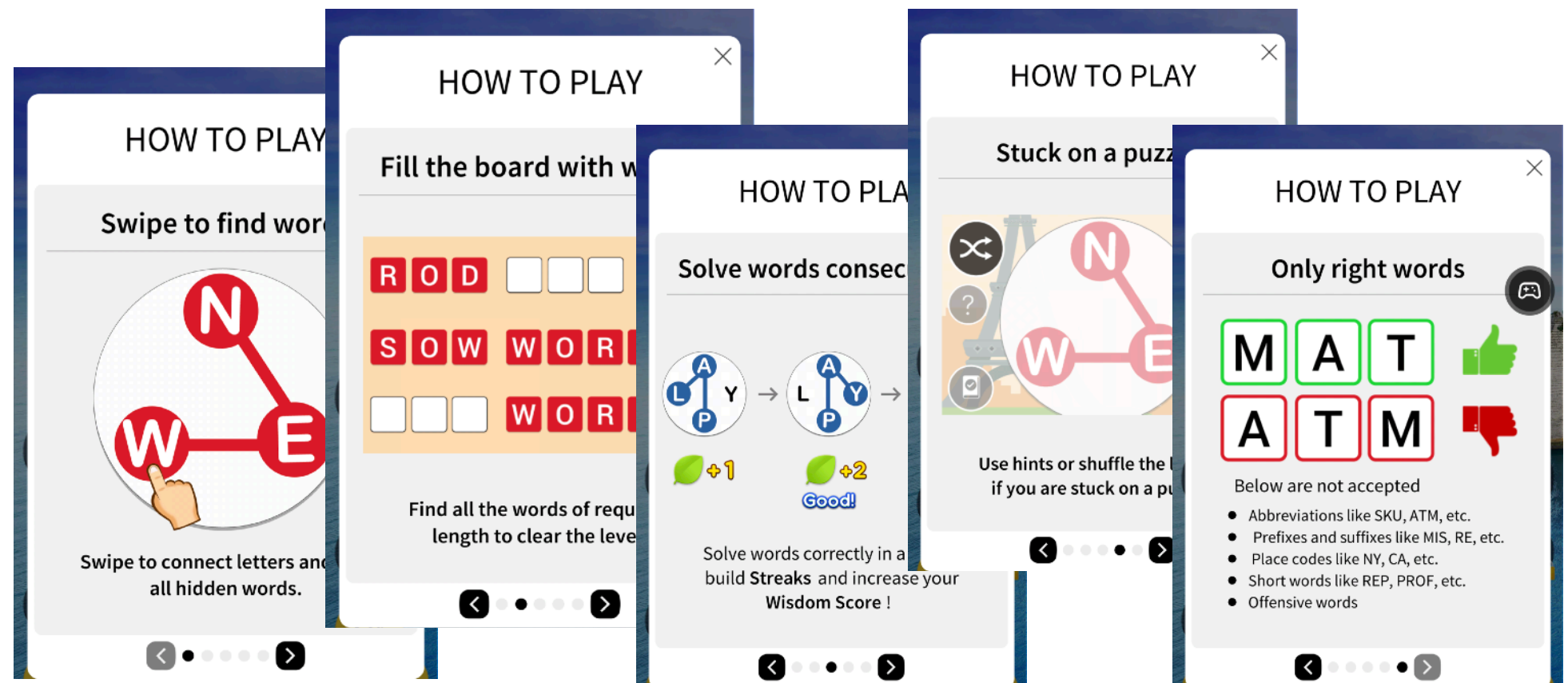
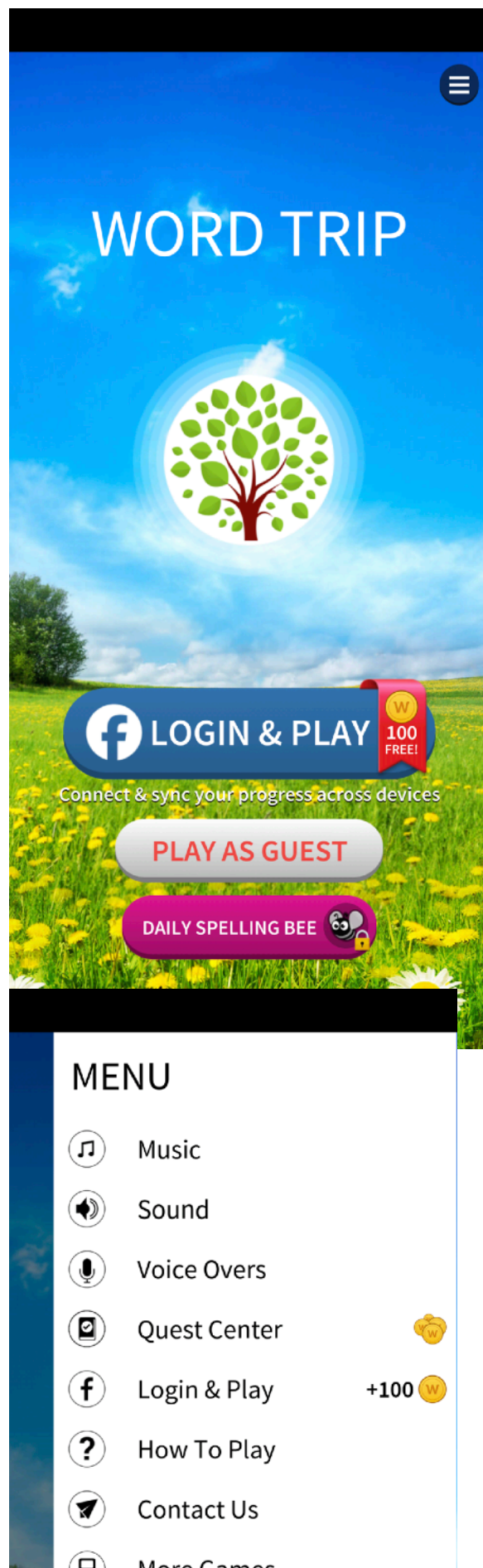
- sparse onboarding, early review prompt
- overlapping buttons on layout

As you can see in the above lists, there are far more positives than negatives for this app. Overall, in spite of a few minor UI glitches, the Flashcards app was an effective, customizable, easy-to-use, easy-to-read vocabulary app. It also had a clear, easy-to-understand monetization structure divided between the ad-based Basic and single buy Pro versions. The basic version had unobtrusive, well-balanced ads that didn't interfere with the educational goals of the app while still providing good visibility for advertisers. This is meant to be an educational tool, and it fulfills this purpose well. But I was still looking for something that could be entertaining and educational, as I feel it would be more motivating in the long run for users.

WORD TRIP

Word Trip, Words of Wonders, and Zen Word are similar in overall concept and purpose, with some important difference, which I explore below. They each are based on achieving higher levels of play. You have to connect letters to make various words and fill in the spaces provided on each level. There are certain play features that require coins to implement, and coins are awarded for completing levels. However, the games are set so that the coins eventually run out at which point you have to start over or make in-app coin purchases to continue play. I'm curious how well this monetization technique works, which would be an interesting question to find an answer to.

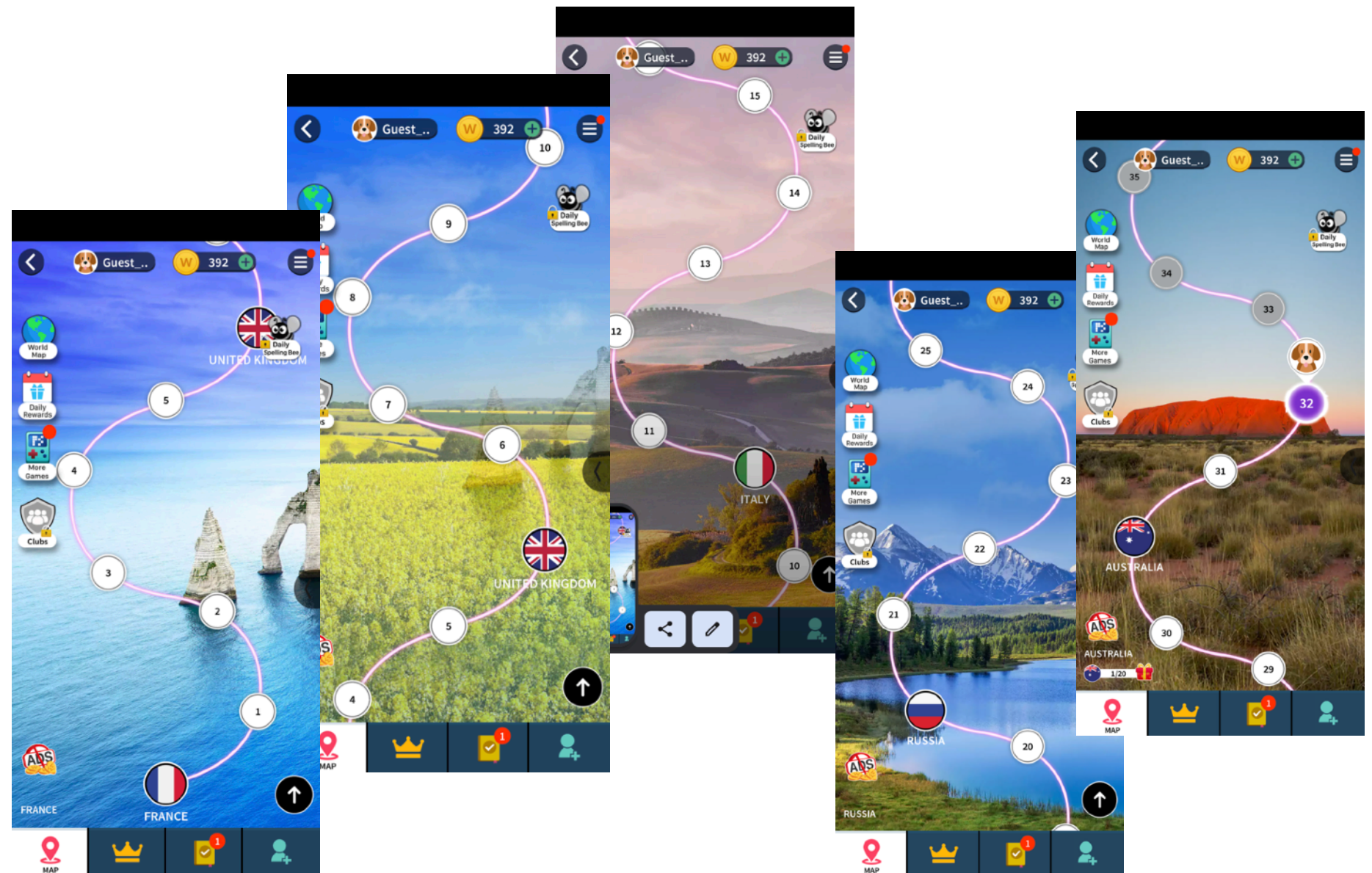
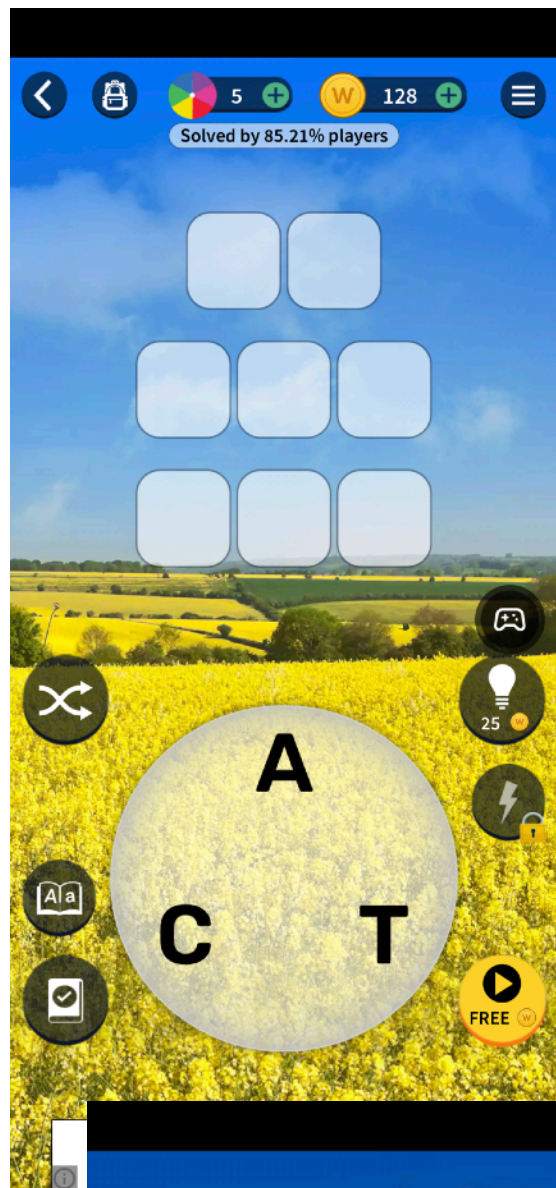
The Word Trip app had a great onboarding experience, and was very clear as to how to use the app, shown here.



WORD TRIP

The app started out with a chill vibe, with a clean interface and gorgeous images representing places you were at for each level. An interface lets you scroll along a line through various levels as you progress, flowing from place to place.

positives: great onboarding and pleasing interface



WORD TRIP

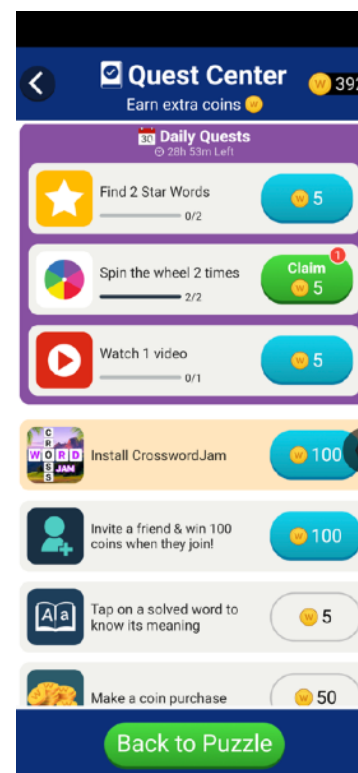
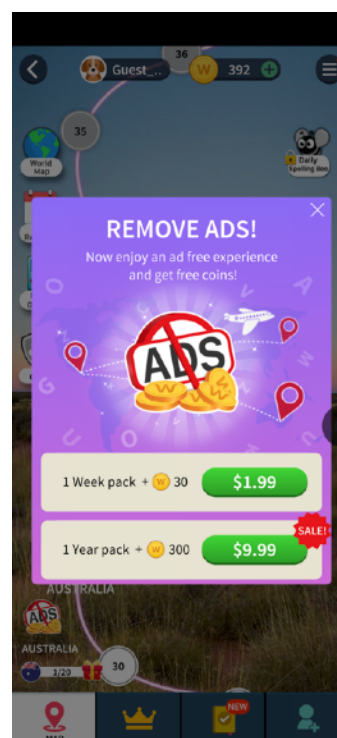
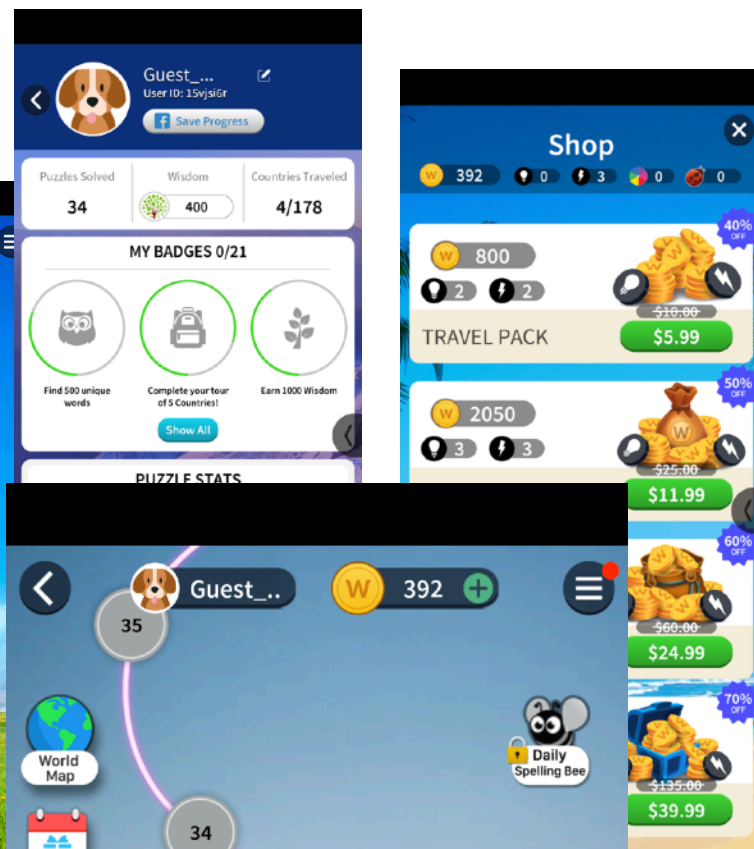
On the main map page around the periphery are several icons. While not intrusive, if you click on them you quickly realize that this game is all about one thing: **Coins**. You can get coins in just about every way possible, connected to in app purchases and advertising. Refer a friend, get coins. Complete a quest, get coins. Watch an ad, get coins. Go to the shop, buy coins using real cash. Register, get coins.

It's all about coins, and sending those coins to Word Trip for everything. If you want to keep playing, you'll eventually have to buy some coin.

positive: easy navigation

The more you play the more you are harassed to collect coins, and you are primarily harassed through mounting ad intrusion.

negative: coin harassment



WORD TRIP

Playing the actual game is straightforward and fun. There is a backpack to collect extra words not on the grid, which, you guessed it, you can exchange for coins. Which encourages you to keep playing, level after level.

Another nice feature is a dictionary (bottom left of main screenshot) that allows you to scroll through the words you've guessed correctly on that level, and it also has an audio button so you can hear how the word is pronounced. **This is useful for learning vocabulary.**

There is also a spinner and you get two free spins that give you, uh, coins. But you only get them every so often. If you're impatient, you can buy spins with real cash to get more coins.

positives: fun incentives to keep you playing and educated.



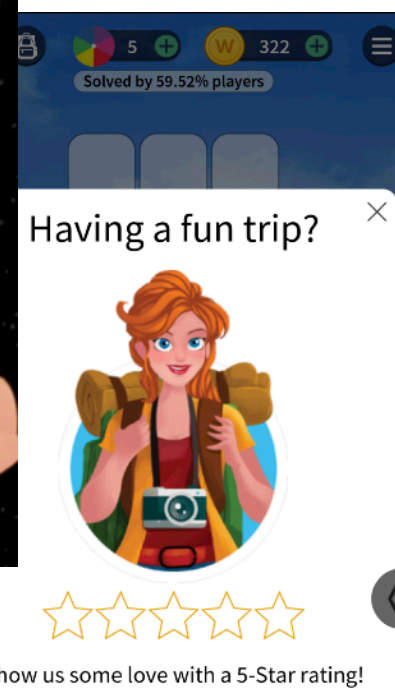
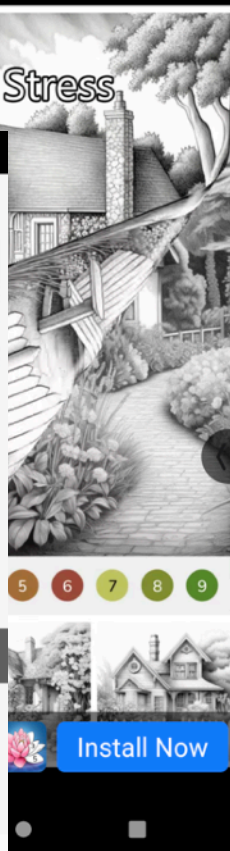
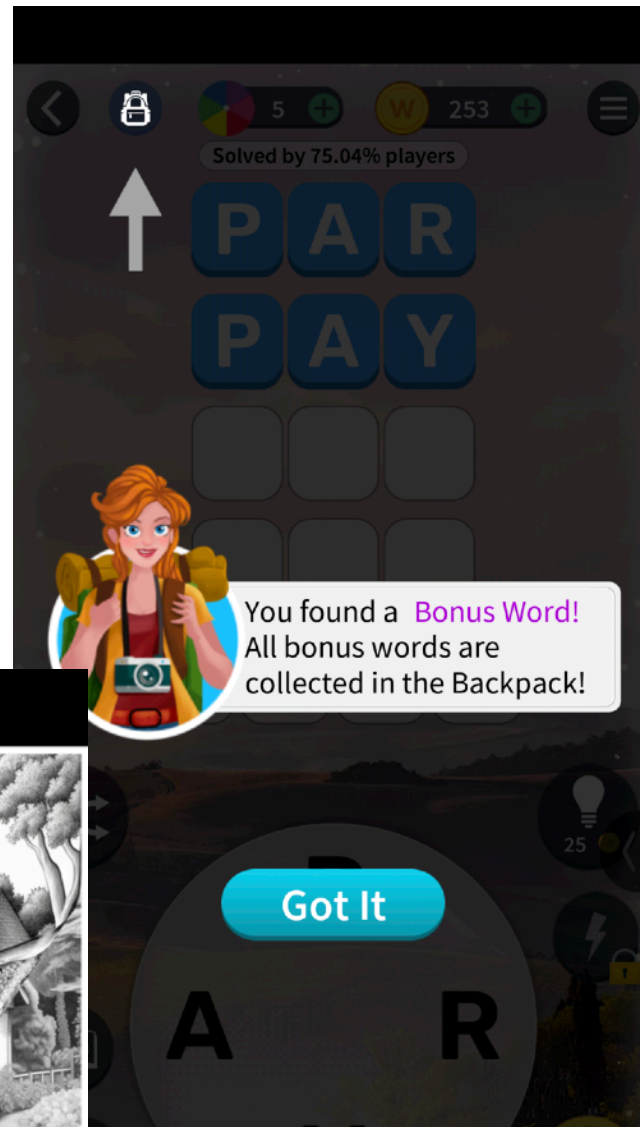
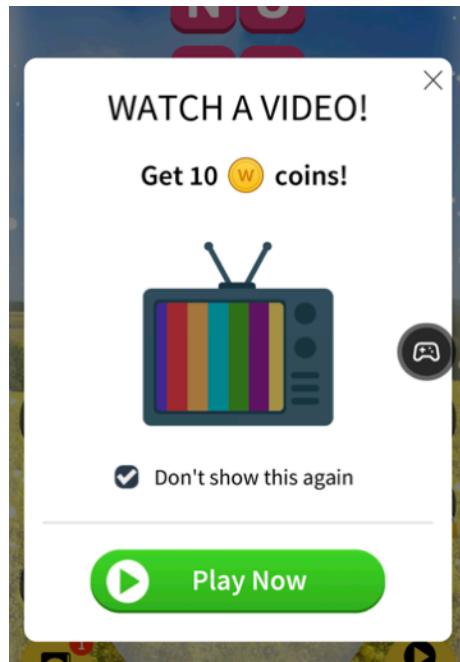
WORD TRIP

As you progress and use different features, like shuffle or the backpack or dictionary, helpful tips pop up to explain their function.

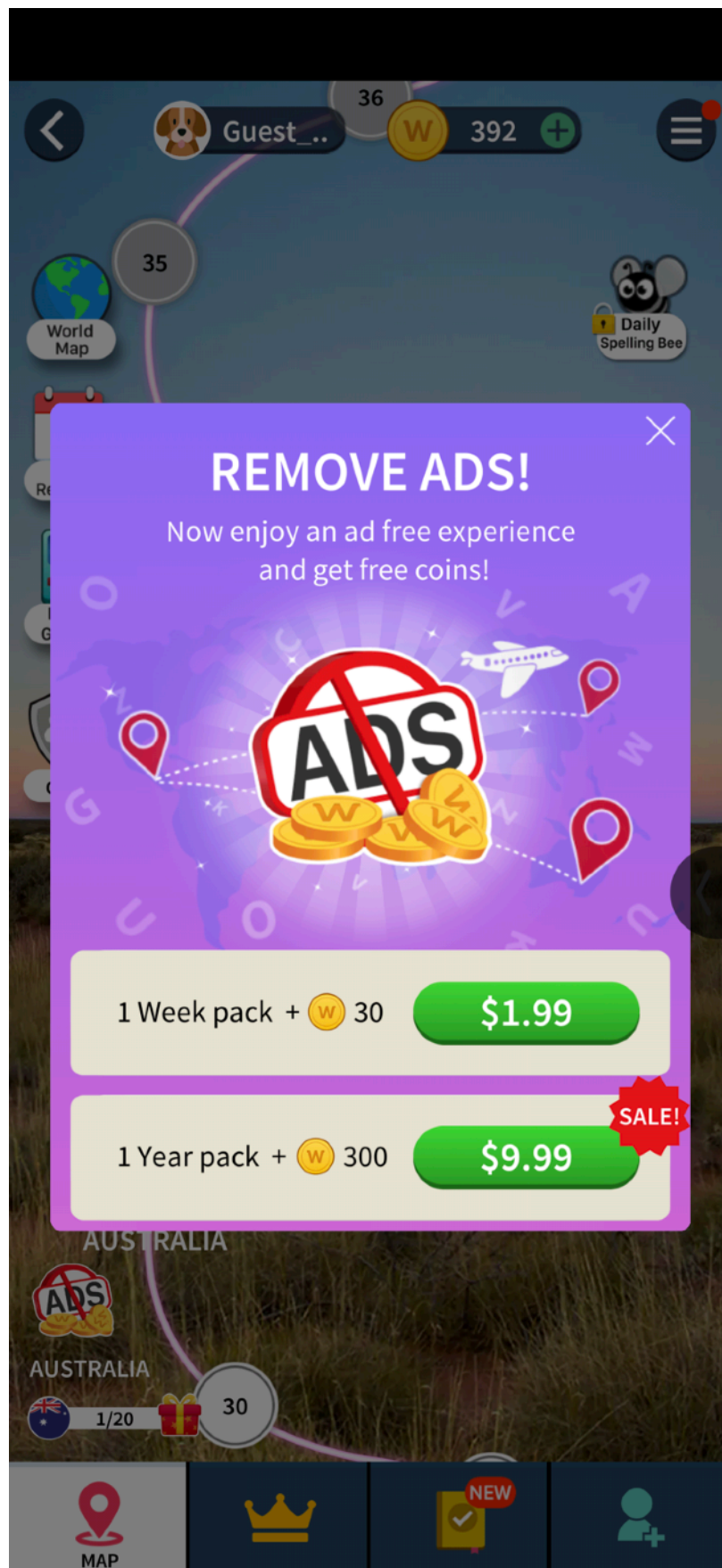
positives: helpful tips during game play

But the fun game play rapidly becomes overshadowed by the seething world of coinage and advertising. After playing the first few levels, the harassment begins in earnest, and 30 second ads automatically play between every level accomplished. Some of the ads you can't even get back to the game from and you have to quit the app entirely and re-open it to continue play.

negative: ad pimping



I was having a fun trip, but I'm not any more due to being hounded by coins and ads. 1 star.



In the end, this game is geared to get you to do two things:

1. Upgrade to the ad-free game play
2. Buy coins with real cash to keep the game play going.

POSITIVES

great onboarding and pleasing interface

easy navigation

fun incentives to keep you playing and educated

helpful tips during game play

NEGATIVES

coin harassment

ad pimping

In summary, Word Trip had some real potential to be a fun, educational game incorporating geography, beautiful imagery, brain work with the puzzle, and vocabulary learning with the dictionary feature. It had a good interface, well organized menus, and a chill vibe.

Unfortunately, that was all ruined by the slimy feeling created by overzealous coin harassment and ad pimping. At the end of the day, the creators revealed what really mattered to them. My cash, not me. Sadly, Word Trip metaphorically broke down half way through our journey and ended up stranding me in the desert. I won't be booking with them again any time soon.

WORDS OF WONDERS



Words of Wonders could have been everything Word Trip promised to be but wasn't. Like Word Trip, it has a great onboarding process, approaching it with a different concept. Your first time playing, it gives you continual hints or prompts that give you a kind of guided tour through the game play.

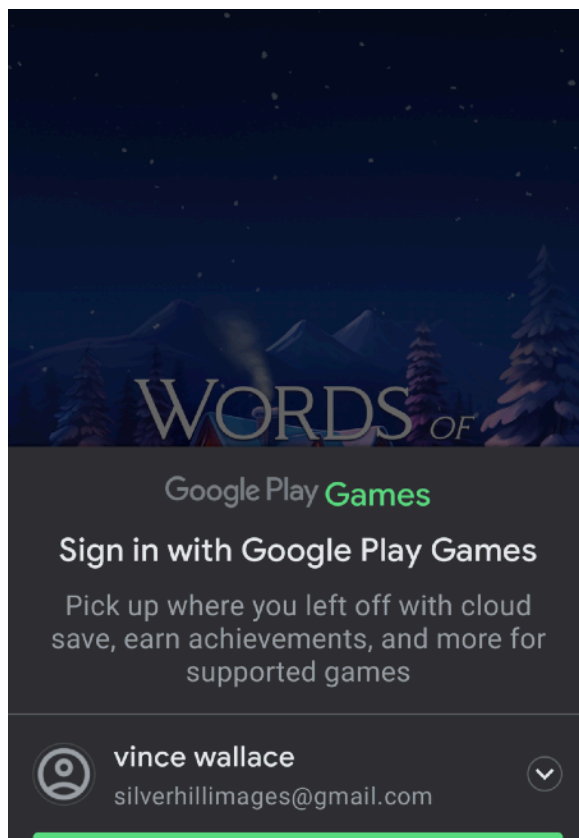
It has a very nice UI and well organized menus and game play. For each city/geographical area you are playing, there is some historical information, which adds interest and learning. You can collect the images of places you go as you travel through the game, rather like collecting stamps in a passport book.

In my opinion, the interface is even more relaxing and clean than Word Trip. However, it doesn't have a dictionary option for the vocabulary, which takes away from its educational value.

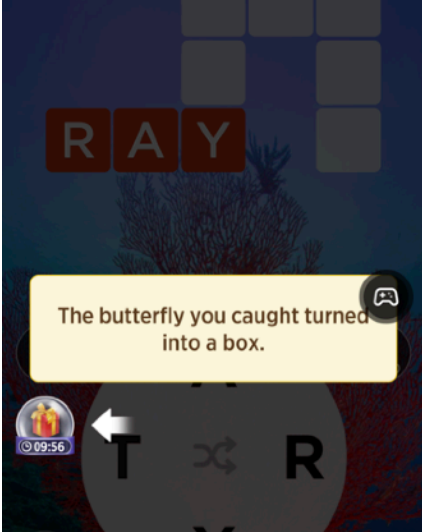
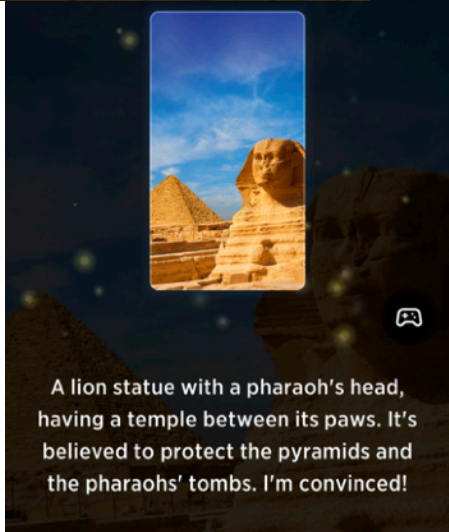
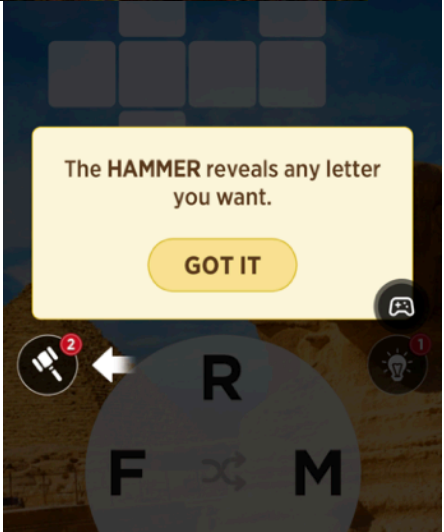
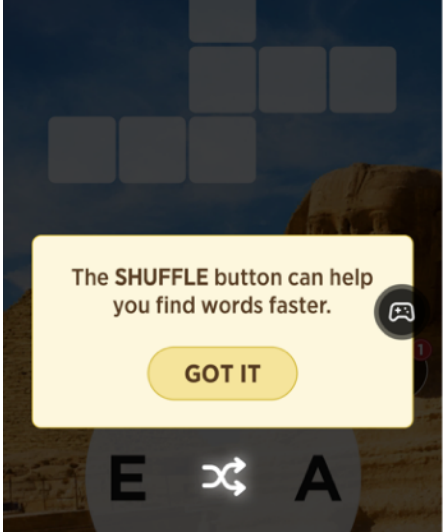
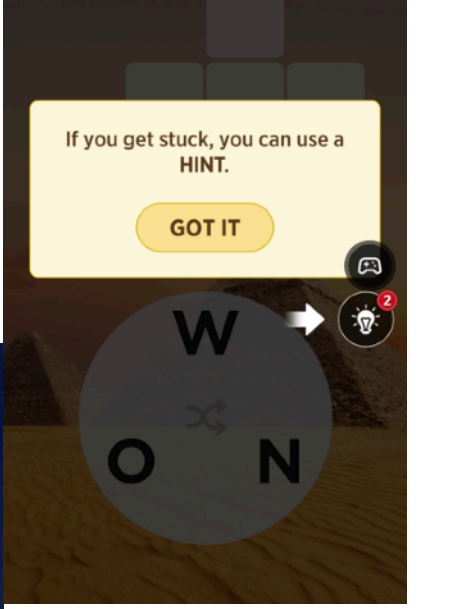
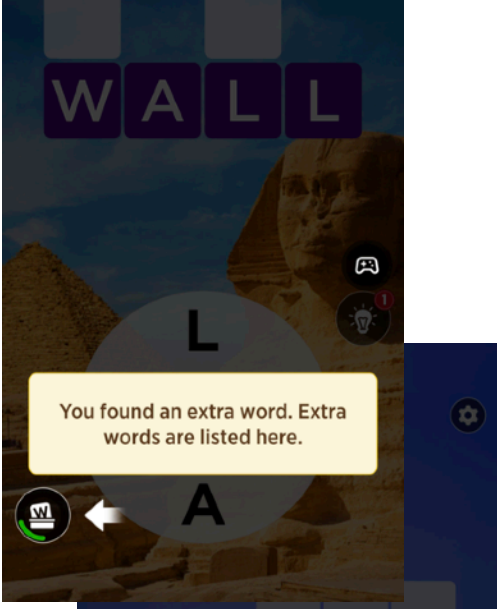
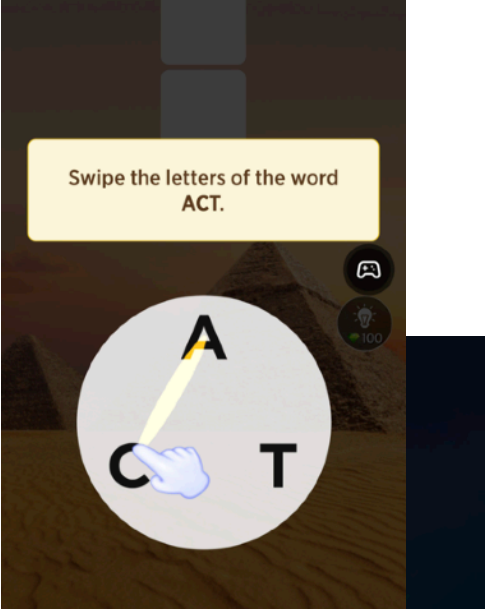
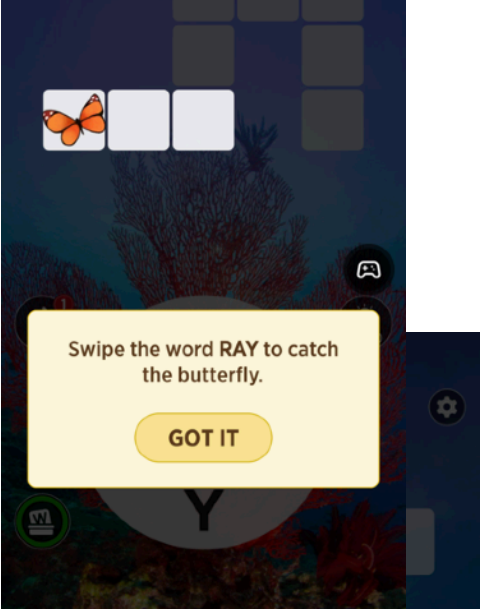
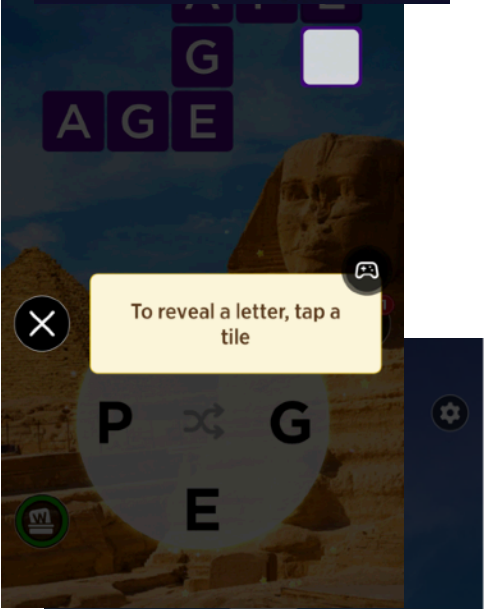
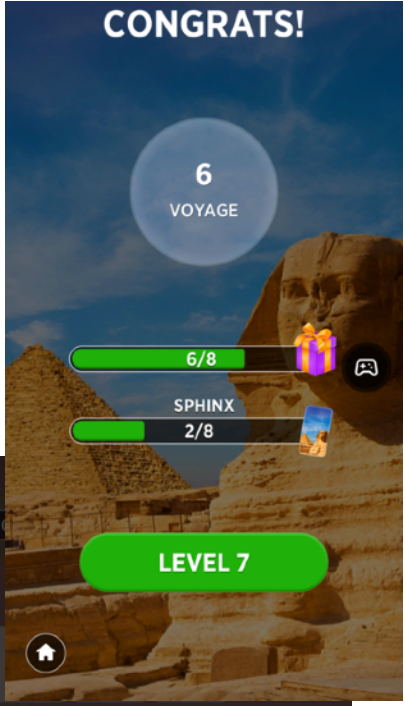
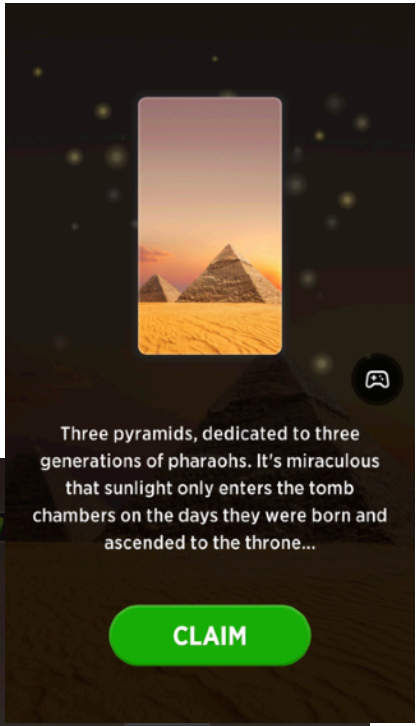
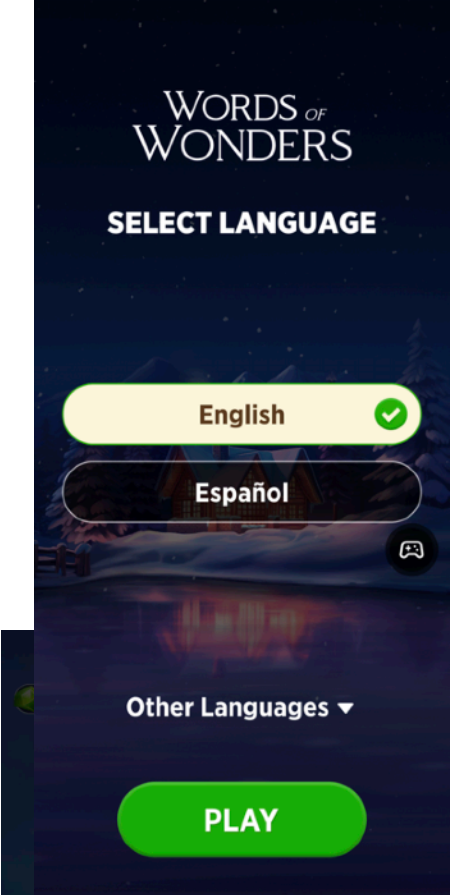
Some screenshots of the "onboarding" process are on the following page..

positives: easy to learn, good onboarding, great UI, nice travel theme.

negative: doesn't have a dictionary feature



WORDS OF WONDERS

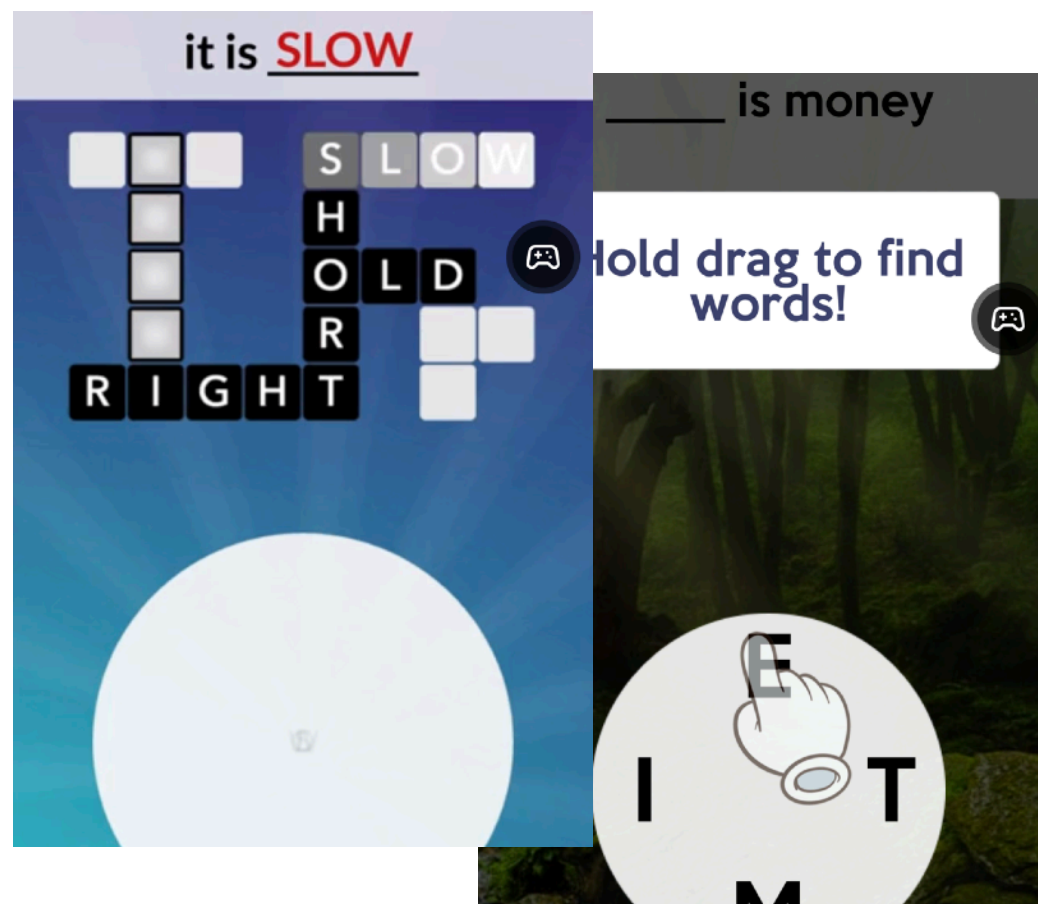
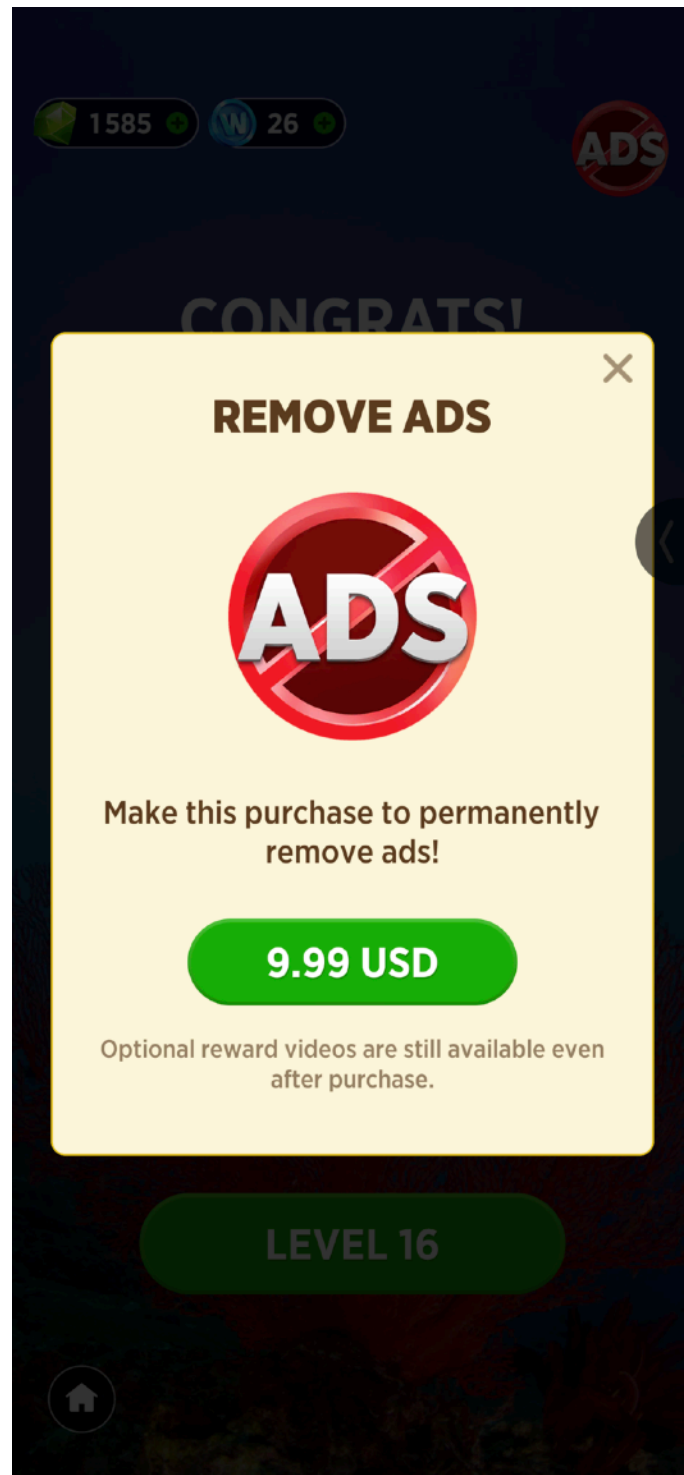


WORDS OF WONDERS

Level play is driven by coin acquisition, except in this instance it is gems you are collecting. The forced ad plays seem to be more subtle than Word Trip. However, the higher you go in the levels, the more ads you are forced to interact with.

At the end of the day, the driving force behind Words of Wonder is the same as Word Trip: cash flow through ad revenue and in-app purchases. This is true even in the paid version, based on reviews.

negative: cumbersome forced ads



Many of the forced ads are for other games by the same company, such as the ones to the left. With all of the games, the company is creating one giant cash funnel.

WORDS OF WONDERS SUMMARY

POSITIVES

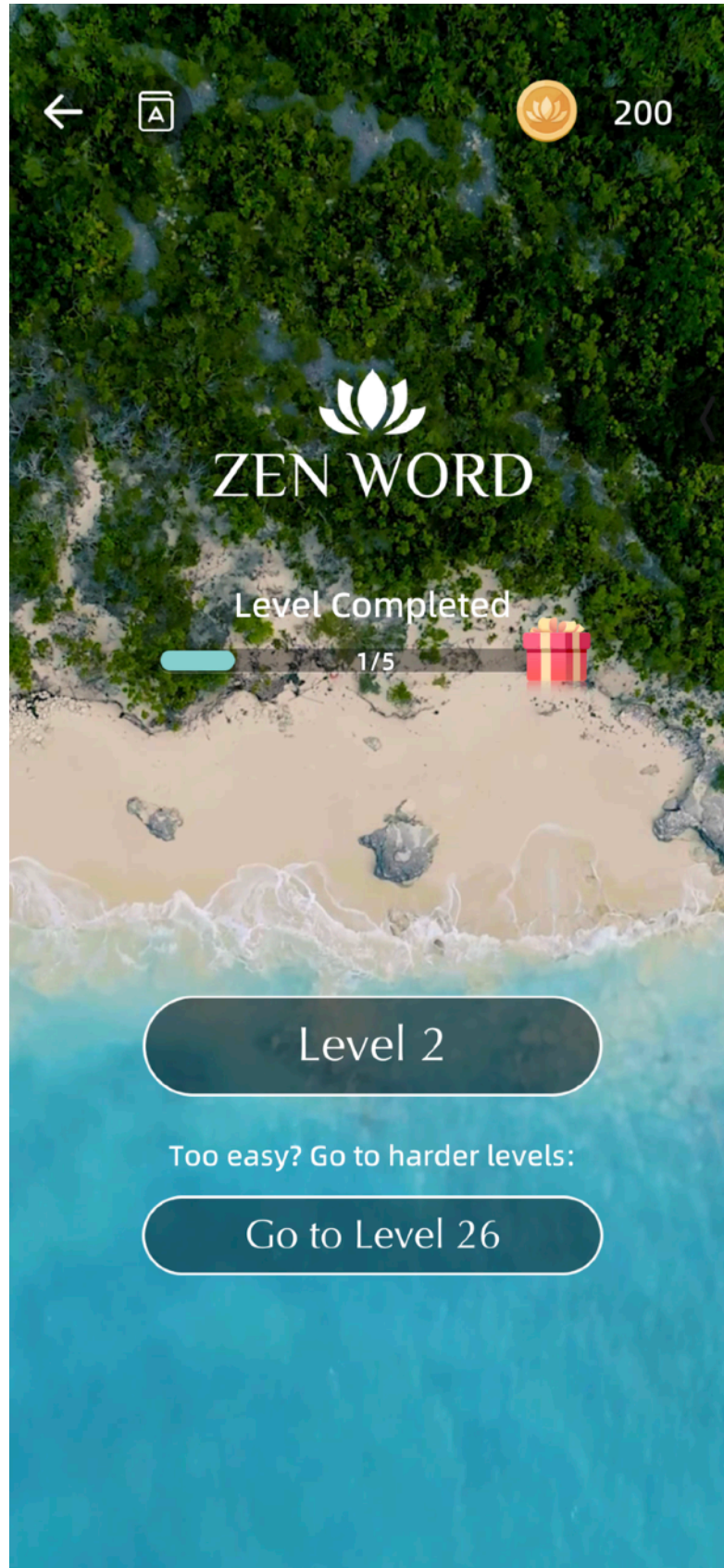
easy to learn
good onboarding
great UI
nice travel theme
educational

NEGATIVES

doesn't have a dictionary feature
cumbersome forced ads

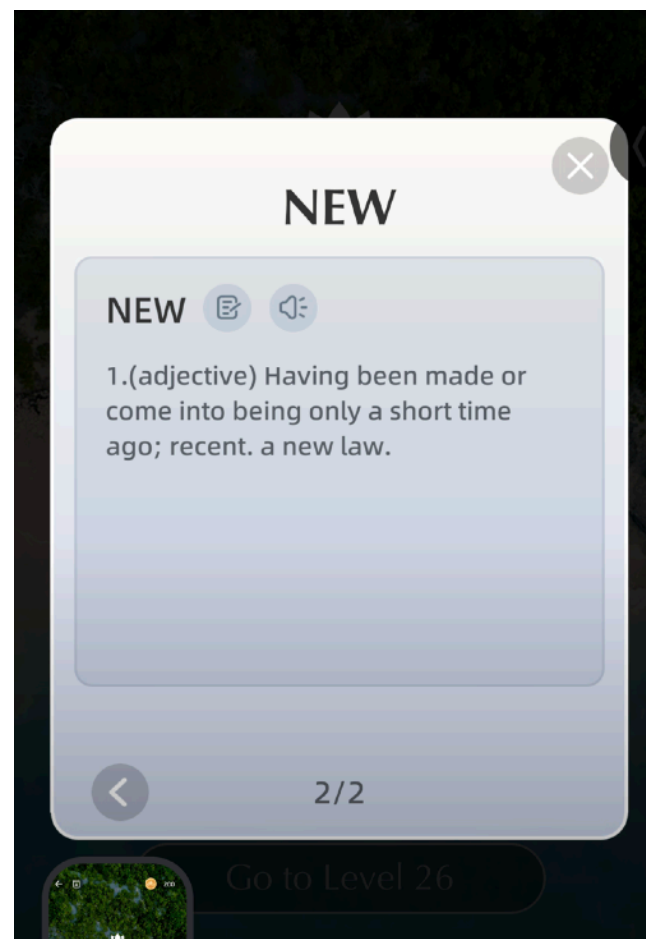
Words of Wonders and Word Trip both have some features to emulate when creating a vocabulary app that is educational, fun, and addicting.

However, If Word Trip was like playing the slots in a sleazy bar, Words of Wonders is like playing roulette in a high end members-only club. You may feel nicer at the high end club but they both play you for your cash.



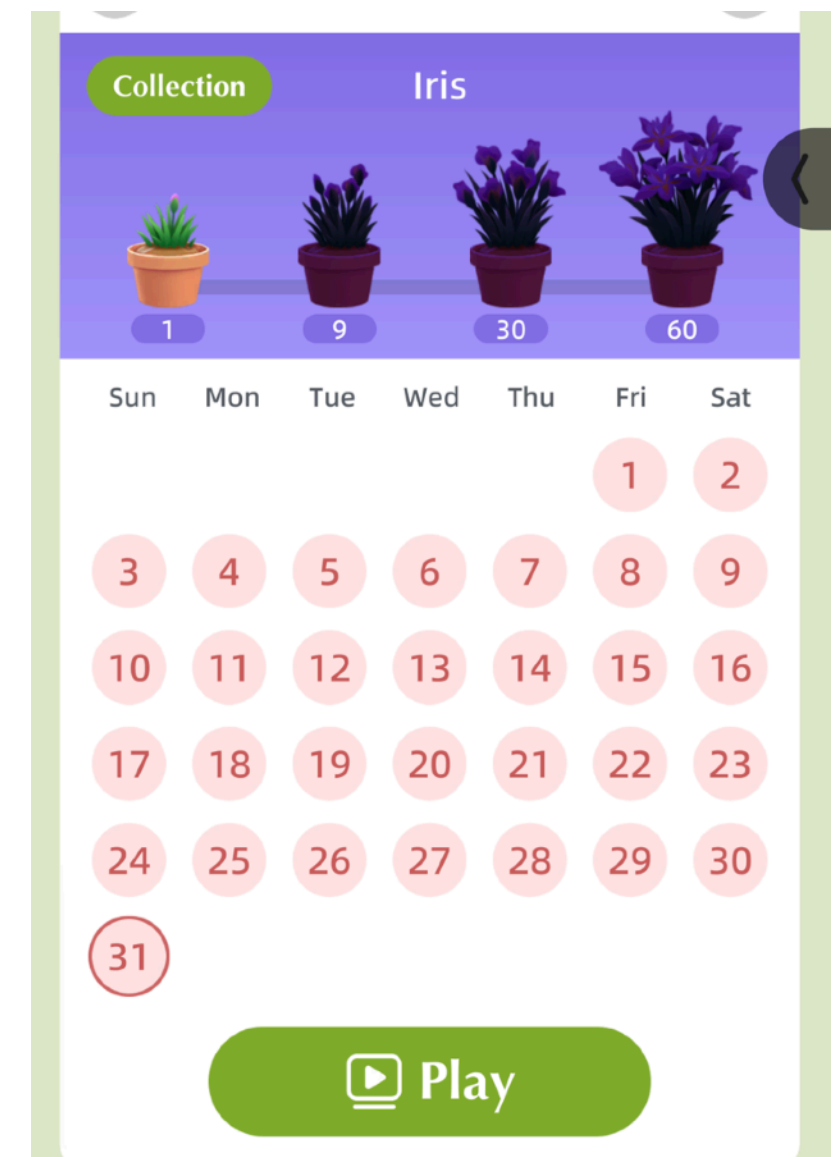
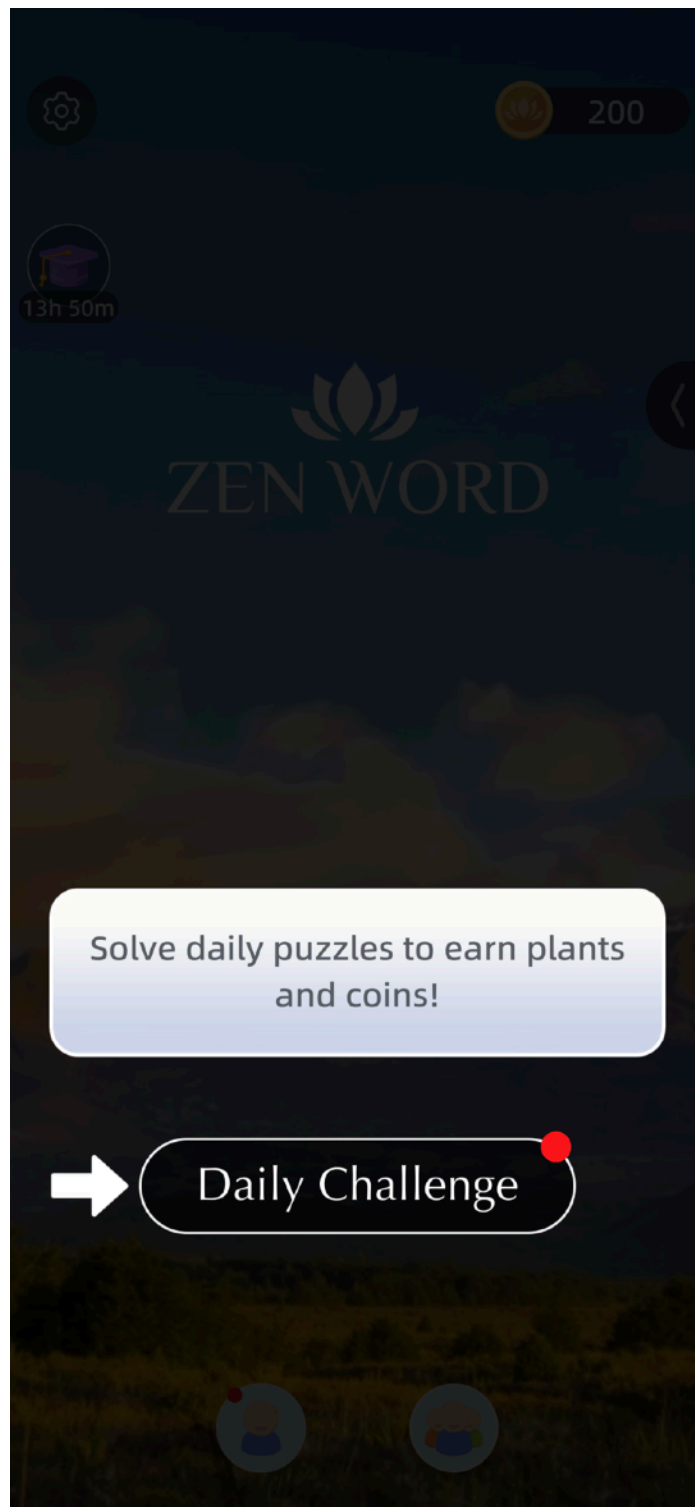
Zen World is by the same company as Words of Wonders and functions essentially the same. I have included it here to highlight two features that I thought were interesting as far as providing motivation to use the app.

Dictionary. Like Word Trip, Zen Word provides a dictionary that goes along with the vocabulary words for each level. I thought this was executed a bit better here than in Word Trip.



ZEN WORD

Daily Challenge. Several of the previous apps have a daily challenge of some sort. Zen Word provides a calendar that checks off each day as you do another challenge. As you go through the month, you are watching the plant of the month grow, and the mature plant and accompanying reward is collected by the end of that month.



POSITIVES

dictionary feature

interesting zen themed daily challenge incentive

NEGATIVES

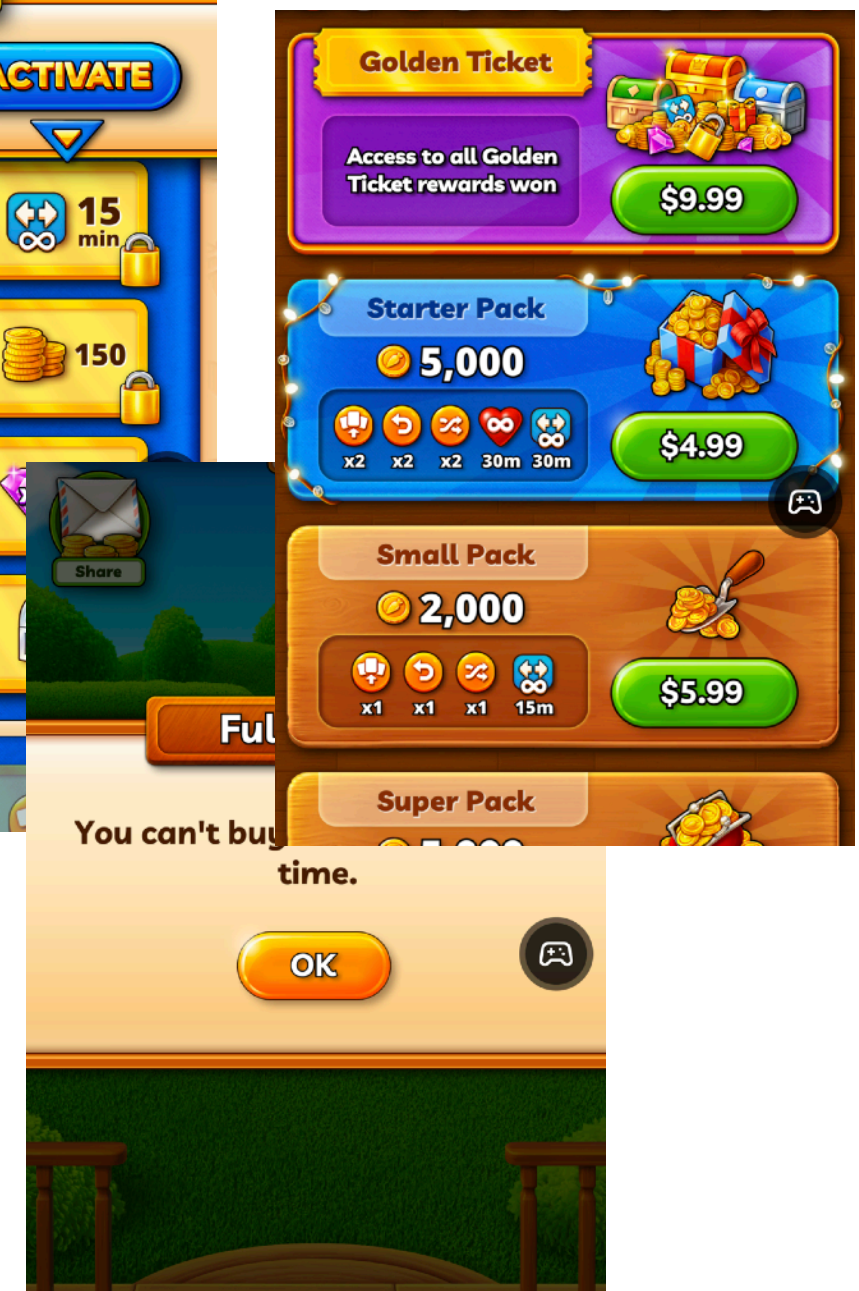
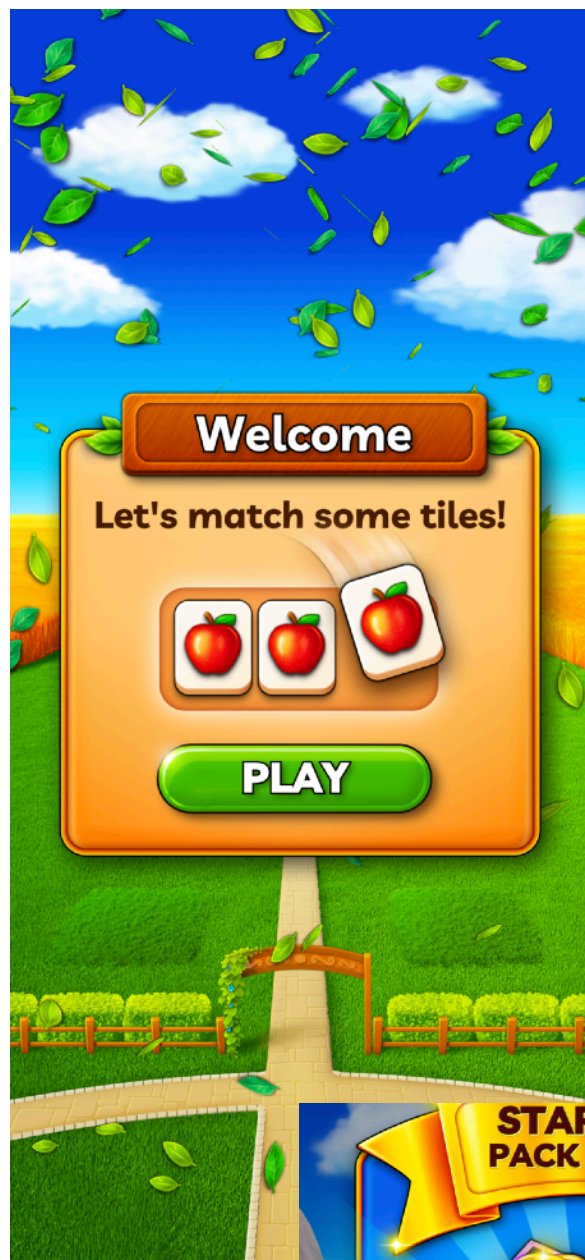
cumbersome forced ads

Zen Word, along with Words of Wonders and Word Trip are similar in their user experience, and the most glaring fault with them is their revenue structure.

Zen word does the best at its dictionary feature and has an interesting incentive for continued game play. It is a good example of an entertaining vocabulary app that is also educational.

JOEY'S FARM

Joey's Farm is not a vocabulary app. It is a matching objects app but it has several features that are just FUN to play, and out of all the apps, this one is at the top of the list as far as amount of time spent playing. It's revenue structure is similar to the previous three vocabulary apps with in-app purchases and the collection of coins and gems to drive the game forward.



JOEY'S FARM



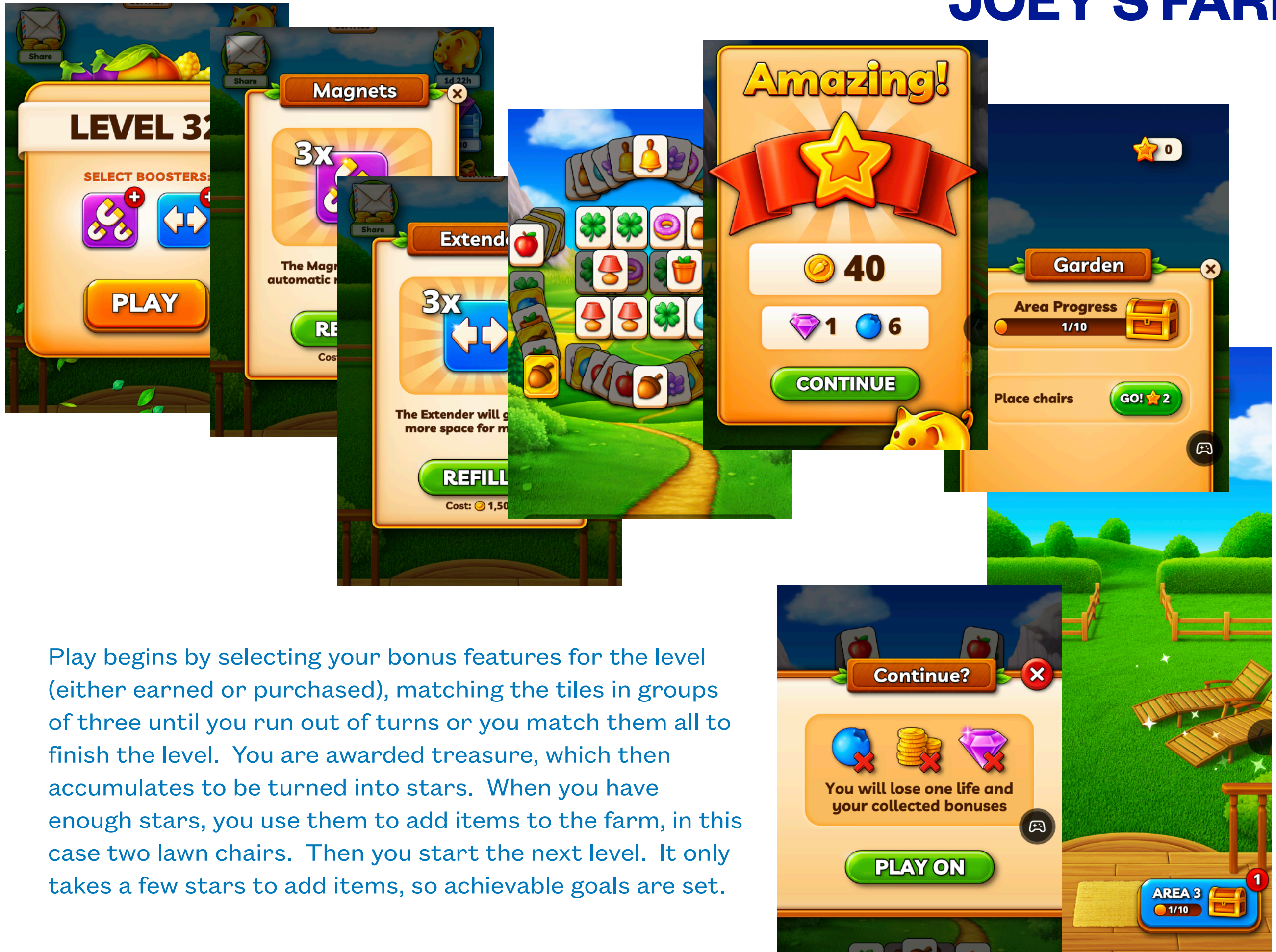
However, the gems, coins, and berries collected are used not only for game play but to gain stars - and *stars* are used to build out all of the different areas of Joey's peaceful farm.

I like this approach because instead of just trying to complete as many levels as possible, the user is utilizing those completed levels to accomplish a different creative task.

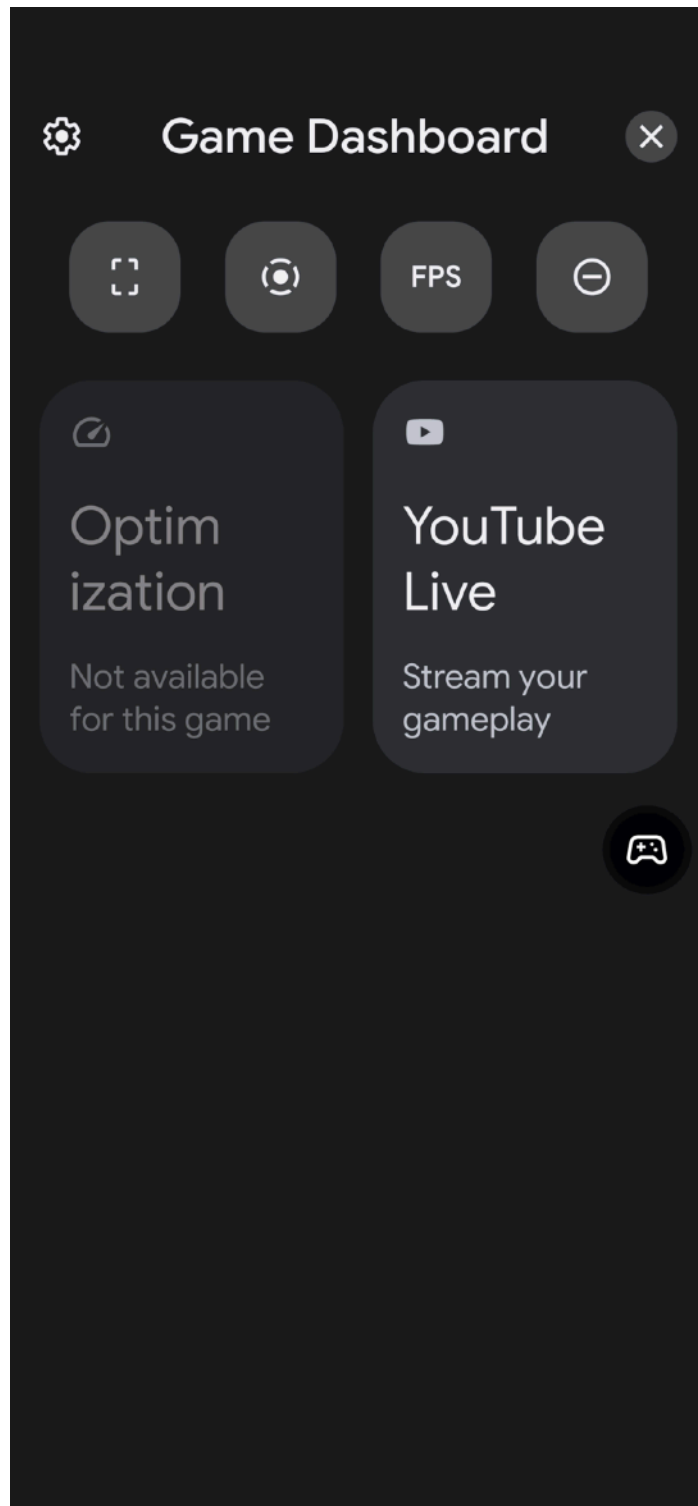
This makes the game more compelling than the other language learning, vocabulary, and game apps reviewed, and is why I included it in the review. You're not just completing levels, you're not just collecting things along the way, **you're building something, and that's different.** Winning levels have become a means to an end, and not the end in itself.

positive: finishing levels allows you to build something separate in the app, increasing incentive to keep playing.

JOEY'S FARM



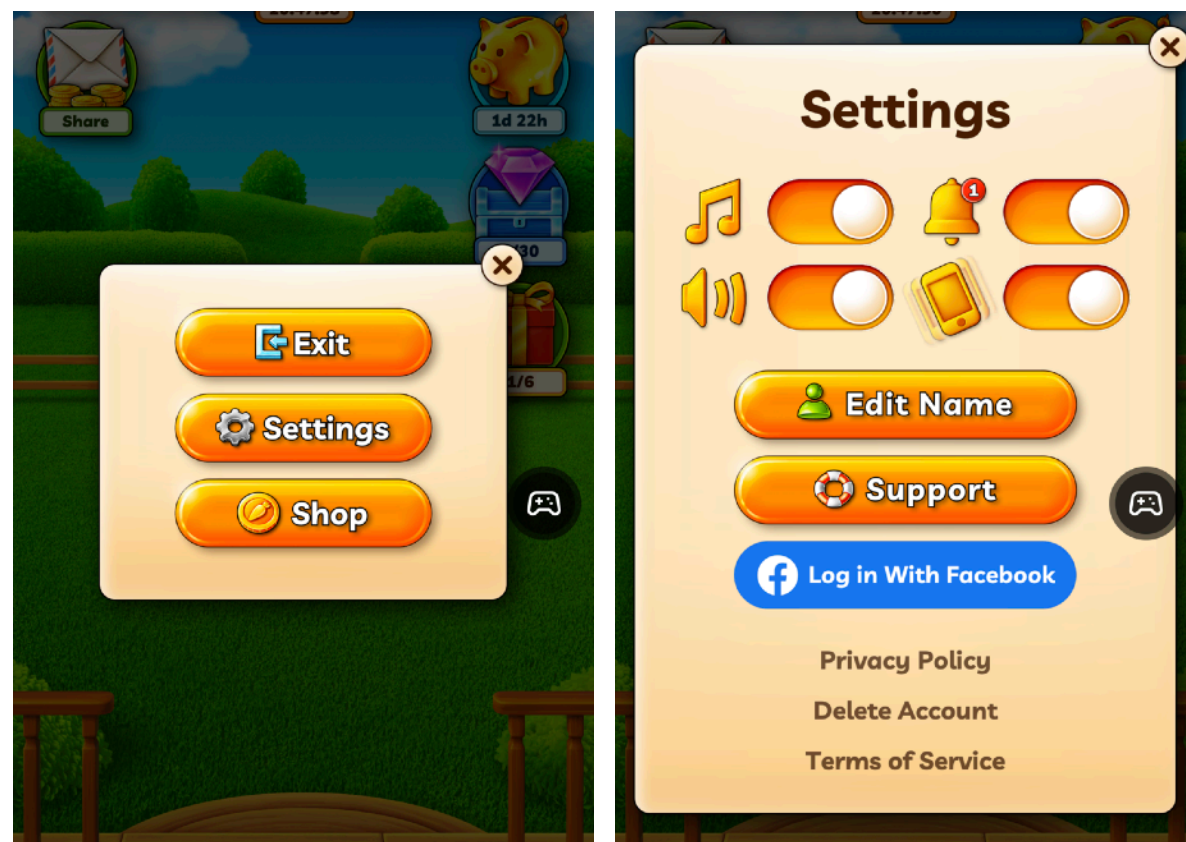
Play begins by selecting your bonus features for the level (either earned or purchased), matching the tiles in groups of three until you run out of turns or you match them all to finish the level. You are awarded treasure, which then accumulates to be turned into stars. When you have enough stars, you use them to add items to the farm, in this case two lawn chairs. Then you start the next level. It only takes a few stars to add items, so achievable goals are set.



Like the previous three apps, you can also stream your game play live on You Tube. This is an interesting idea to apply to a straight vocabulary app - almost like watching or participating in a “spelling bee” type contest online.

positive: live streaming capable

You also have simple, straight-forward menus with easy to access and understand information but the support button did not work properly.



negative: non-working support link

POSITIVES

live streaming capable

finishing levels allows you to build something separate in the app, increasing incentive to keep playing.

NEGATIVES

non-working support link

My goal in doing a competitive analysis is to gain an understanding of different approaches to the problem I am trying to solve, which is to create a vocabulary learning app that is FUN and EDUCATIONAL in equal parts, that has great UX and an innovative, non-intrusive monetization structure.

Joey's Farm brings a couple of great concepts to the table in regard to the FUN part of that equation. It presents a way to incentivize more time spent in the app through its model of using level completion as a means for completing a larger, unrelated project.

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION

The problem I am trying to solve is *to create a vocabulary learning app that is FUN and EDUCATIONAL in equal parts, has great UX and also an innovative, non-intrusive monetization structure.*

CONCLUSION

Each of the above apps brings something unique and useful to the table to help create an app that is the solution to the stated problem. They also expose areas to avoid in creating a successful app.

INFORMATION FLOW, ACCESSIBILITY, AND INTEREST

- strong onboarding with initial instruction or guided play
- simple, clear navigation with sticky icons
- well prioritized and laid-out menus
- helpful tips during game play
- some form of monetization

USER INTERFACE

- simple, clean interface
- adequate negative space
- prominent onboarding and user instruction icons
- easy to find and use scrollable instructional section
- good use of screen space
- use of photographic/visual images for vocabulary

CONTENT

- fun incentives to keep you playing and educated
- finishing levels allows you to build something separate in the app, increasing incentive to keep playing.
- images paired with words
- various word bank layouts
- user-created word banks
- customizable vocabulary
- dictionary feature
- voice capable and interactive AI
- live streaming capable
- connection with community
- factoids connected to vocabulary

MONETIZATION

- ad-free basic version and reasonable subscription plan
- basic and paid features clearly marked, if any
- no forced ad consumption interrupting game play

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION

APPLICATION

Educational and entertainment content, the layout and prioritizing of information, the user interface, and how the app is monetized are the four basic areas listed above that affect whether or not an app is successful.

If any one of these areas is lacking, the app will fail.

The vocabulary app I am creating most importantly will be user-customizable regarding content, will be educational, will be entertaining, and will incorporate a project-building component unrelated to the levels themselves but fueled by continual level completion.

Examples of a project to be completed outside of the vocabulary levels being won would be climbing a virtual mountain, cooking a virtual meal, or building a virtual cabin. The project possibilities are endless, but they provide an important external motivation to continue completing levels and learning more vocabulary.

The vocabulary levels themselves will be gamified in order to help stimulate the desire to stay engaged through the use of multiple senses (sight, sound, speaking, writing, sorting, etc.) and fun interactions such as those seen in the Word apps and Joey's Farm.

Finally, the monetization of the app will be subservient to the educational and entertainment goals of the app, and be structured so as to see the student and not their money as the entity to be served.