

HAVENS

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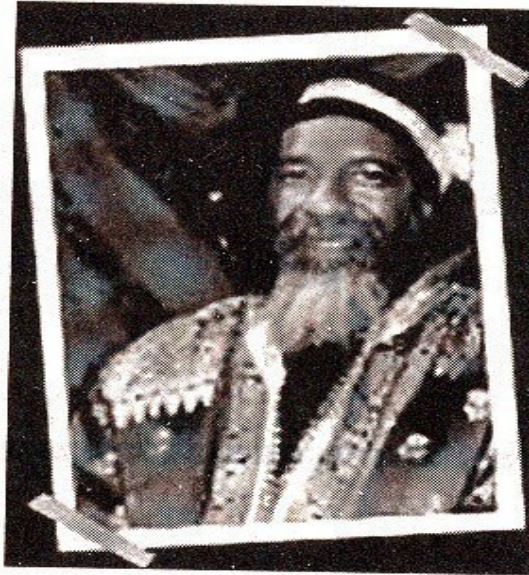
new – just ask Mr. Rogers or Barney. Better still, ask any post-baby-boom thirtysomething to rattle off a few bars of “Conjunction Junction.” Children have been using catchy tunes to memorize facts ever since there were facts to memorize.

What is new about “Mister Word Wizard” is the use of the Read Speak technique, which incorporates written language – text – into graphic components right there on the screen.

As children watch the show, with its fanciful collection of characters like Art Power, Senorita Sider-Rita and Madeline Read-write, they see the words the characters speak come out of their mouths in fully formed words.

“Words are concepts that have meaning,” Kirksey explains. “These context-rich situations assure the words themselves aren’t isolated, like on a flashcard.”

Indeed, the words don’t just appear on the screen; they move along with the actors, taking on a life of their own. Kirksey believes



that exposing children to the look of a word will help them greet it like an old friend when they come across it in a book.

“It’s common knowledge that children have an ‘understood vocabulary’ long before they can speak,” he points out. “An 11-month-old child can’t talk yet, but may have a vocabulary of 200 words.”

Tap into this ability to recognize, he says, and you can jump-start the learning process.

Tap into it with Richie Havens

and you just might have something parents will enjoy as much as their children. His four-decade career (maybe you caught his act at the original Woodstock) has been more about communication than commercialization.

“Richie is one of the great teddy bears of history,” crows Kirksey, delighted that his friend is on board. “He’s a minstrel – and what’s more natural than children gathering at a minstrel’s knee?”

While Havens was in town shooting the show, he popped into an open mike acoustic night at the Holiday Inn in Gaithersburg, joining local musician John Harbison to the delight of assembled fans.

These days, he’s a journeyman musician, out on the road most of the time. He’s done 21 albums and 13 motion picture soundtracks, but he continues to tour and take on new projects.

Does he imagine a whole new fan base developing from the children – and their parents – who will spend at least part of their four television hours a day learning to read with “Mister Word Wizard”?

Could be. After all, who wants to listen to George Carlin sing the blues?