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## FLO: Return of the Water Beetles

Spring 2006 Software

**Ages:** 3 - 6 yrs.

**Publisher:** Digital Praise, Inc.

**Home Use Price:** \$29.95

**Platform:** windows mac

### Review:

The popular insect band "The Water Beetles" contact Flo the Ant asking that she get everything ready for a concert in a few days. But that's a big order, so Flo recruits her pals Hermie and Wormie, the slow-talking, Christian Click and Clack of the caterpillar world who always take the high road. Too bad Flo didn't in the past when she told some stupid lies and now must face up to her wrong-doing and get her friends to forgive her.

A mini-morality play amidst the grass and shrubs of value garden? Exactly. This video game plays a lot like any other popular video game for this age group—except there's a difference. It's one of a growing list of titles in a niche trend that puts Christian values and the lessons of the Gospels right along side standard video-game content. Here, spiritual challenges about truthfulness, forgiveness, trust and praising God are entertained with puzzle solving and hand-eye-coordination skills.

In an indirect way, the game is based on the biblical sow-and-reap concept. Hermie and Wormie gather seeds from completing levels of activities and plant the seeds to create a musical garden to help Flo. At Antonio's Seed Zapper, for instance, players help the comely caterpillars match patterns to make beaded streamers for concert decorations. At Lucy's Cookie Maker, they design cookies by following simple recipes. And there's Buzby the one-time misbehaving bee who has turned another leaf these days; he needs help matching flowers in the meadow. Throughout the activities, players are practicing basic skills such as recognizing similarities and differences, sorting and matching, sequencing, ordering and exploring, while playing some entertaining games. Game play and quality here are solid—certainly the equal of some of the top edu-tainment games for kids this age. The 2-D graphics and 3-D video clips are good, recalling Pixar's 1998 hit animated film *A Bug's Life*. Here and there the animation gets a little rough, but over-all the visuals are compelling.

Like in the other new Hermie & Friends title, Hermie and Wormie do talk to God again during this game. Again, the divine conversation is with God's voice replying from the sky and seemingly not unusual. Just another day conversing with God—whose main message for the two Christian caterpillars is that he's always with them, no matter what challenges they face.

If a dose of Christian values in your child's software appeals to you, this nice and easy-going child's game will make your day. One caveat: Some of the activities here are similar to those in the new *Buzby: Breakin' All The Rules* video game by Digital Praise, so think twice before buying both.

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Don Oldenburg is a feature writer and consumer columnist at *The WashingtonPost*; and coauthor of "*The Washington DC-Baltimore Dog Lovers Companion*" (*Avalon Travel*).

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