

Review

School Rules!

Volume 1 and 2



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One click of the mouse on the CD ROMs *School Rules! Volumes 1 and 2* takes you right back to the good old school days—perhaps only “riveting” for its nostalgia value if you are an adult, but “really cool” and right-on if you are a member of the “8 to 18 set” for whom this product is designed. There are so many great things to say about *School Rules!* that it is difficult to summarize them all in one short review. So, in the spirit of preparing for a test, I will try to “cram” them into a user-friendly list:

1. **Appeal:** *School Rules!* has the best interests of its particular audience in mind, centered as it is around an appealing game that not only teaches its audience about project planning (i.e., the design of the school yearbook), but also delivers an important message: Quality counts! You see, the “catch” that makes this game appealing to adults is that the student must complete the various tasks *correctly* in order to earn time to even play the game. Thus, the adage “work first, play later” is reinforced here, as is the importance of maintaining attention to detail.
2. **Focus:** I really like that the game is separate from the tasks themselves, rather than having the game intertwined with them. This allows the program’s creators to focus on what they are trying to teach and how best to teach it, rather than being forced to fit the “square peg” of teaching topics and methodology into the “round hole” of a computer game. Stated succinctly, the instructional targets are not sacrificed to the constraints of the game.
3. **Individualization:** Each subject contains tasks for seven levels of instruction, encompassing a wide range of skills. I love that Level 1 begins by actually teaching the students about the social rules of that particular subject and which social behaviors in the characters are important in each scene. *No questions are asked at this level; the emphasis is strictly on input*—an increasingly lost art in our test-driven society! At Level 7, the student is asked to generate responses regarding how he/she knows that a character feels a particular way, based upon observation of that character’s behavior. Needless
4. **Comprehensive:** *School Rules!* isn’t afraid to delve into those aspects of school life that many people don’t want to talk about (e.g., “hanging out with friends,” “hallway behavior,” “personal hygiene”), as well as those parts of school life that are not part of academic programming (e.g., “cafeteria,” “PE class & locker room”). The two volumes together address a very comprehensive sampling of situations that can “fly under the social radar screen” of students with ASD and similar challenges.
5. **Fine-Tuned Instruction:** For those who want to address specific areas of social skill-building (e.g., perspective-taking) *School Rules!* includes “lesson plans” that present to the learner only those items that address a specific area of need. The instructor is also able to customize lessons by choosing specific video scenarios based on individual needs.

As a mother of young children who often feels bombarded by computerized instruction that is more pizzazz than substance, I was most pleasantly surprised by *School Rules!* It is far from the entertainment-laden fluff that many software creators try to pass off as “educational.” Instead, it effectively incorporates all of those things we teachers of social behavior wish we had in real life—the freeze frame and instant replay—along with well-paced, thoughtful instruction that truly addresses the needs of students with ASD and other social challenges.

Indeed, *School Rules!* serves as an effective interpreter of the social world for those students for whom the social world is foreign territory. The only “task” that is left after going through this program is engagement in the actual, real-life social experience—not to worry, because the students of this innovative compilation of scenarios will be well-prepared! 🌟

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