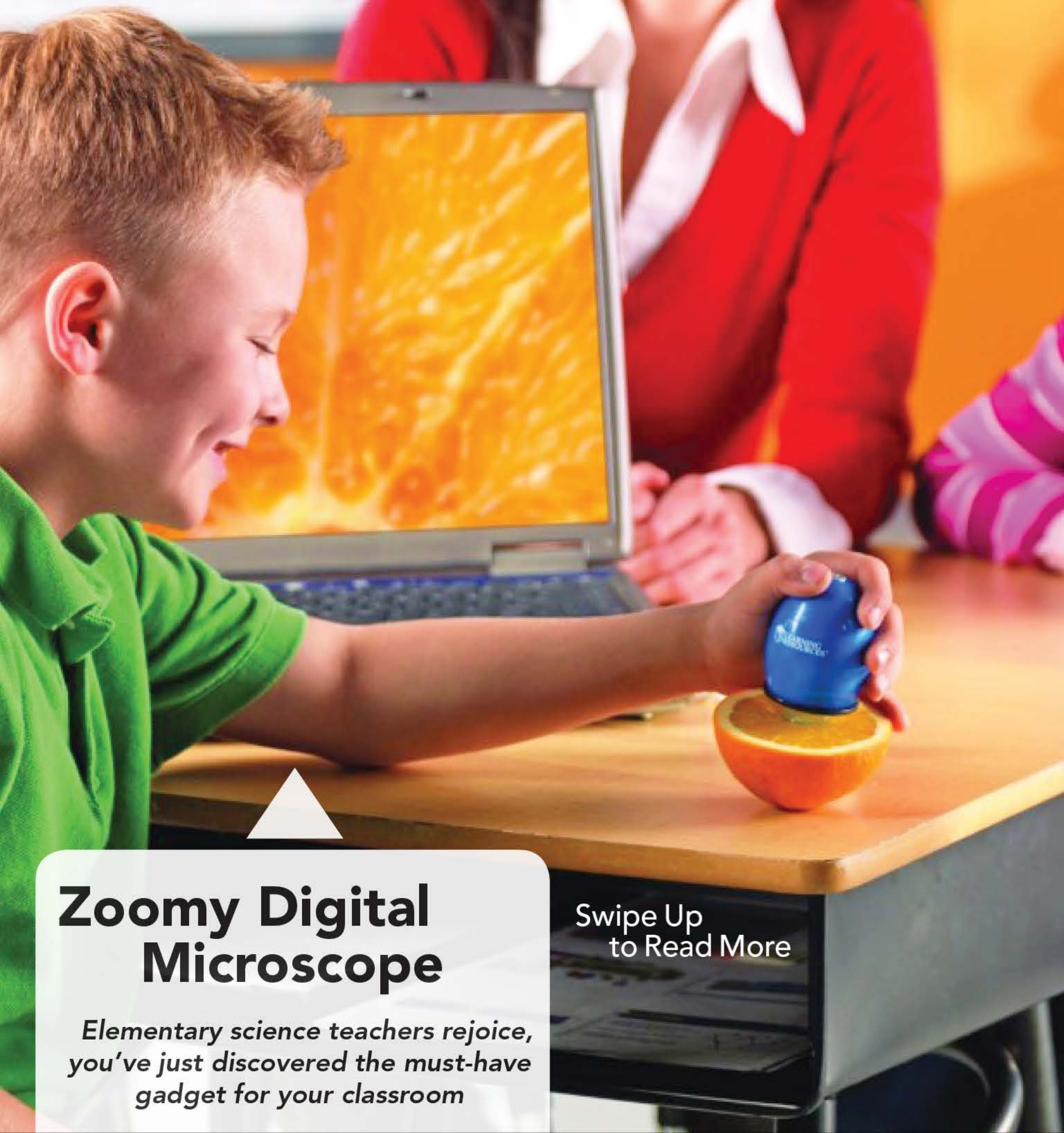


Review Tools



Zoomy Digital Microscope

Elementary science teachers rejoice, you've just discovered the must-have gadget for your classroom

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Elementary science teachers rejoice, you've just discovered the must-have gadget for your classroom

Actually, scratch that, anyone who enjoys being fascinated by the weird and wonderful world around us should rejoice. The Zoomy handheld digital microscope from Learning Resources is a fun, easy way to get a new perspective on all the stuff that fills your life. With it, any object in the classroom can be turned into a teaching tool. The Zoomy isn't perfect—its simplicity can be a drawback as well as a feature—but it's still one of the coolest gadgets you'll use this year.

The Zoomy's a simple handheld microscope that will keep you glued to your computer for hours. Magnify any object up to 43 times, then capture the images with the press of a button. We've all used microscopes before, but it's never been this easy. If you can get something within reach of the Zoomy's USB cord, you can see just what it looks like under the microscope.

The Zoomy's greatest strength is its convenience. It's not quite plug-and-play, but set-up is simple. On a PC, just connect the Zoomy to a USB port and put in the software disc (or download the software from <http://www.learningresources.com/zoomy>). You'll immediately be able to use the microscope with the image program.



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Some reviewers seem to have trouble using the Zoomy with a Mac, but if you're an Apple fan, don't worry: We have the solution for you. Just plug in the microscope as normal, then open up Photo Booth on your Mac. Select "Camera" from the menu and choose "USB 2.0 Camera" from the list. The application will treat the Zoomy like any other digital camera and work just fine.

Once you've got it plugged in, you're going to want to zoom in on everything in sight. Be warned: not everything is pretty close up! You might want to avoid putting the Zoomy against anything you plan on eating, for a start. (Okay, go ahead—we were curious, too.) Being able to just press your microscope against any object or surface is delightfully freeing—although the length of the USB cord isn't. Maybe one day we'll see a wifi-enabled Zoomy that brings the device to another level.



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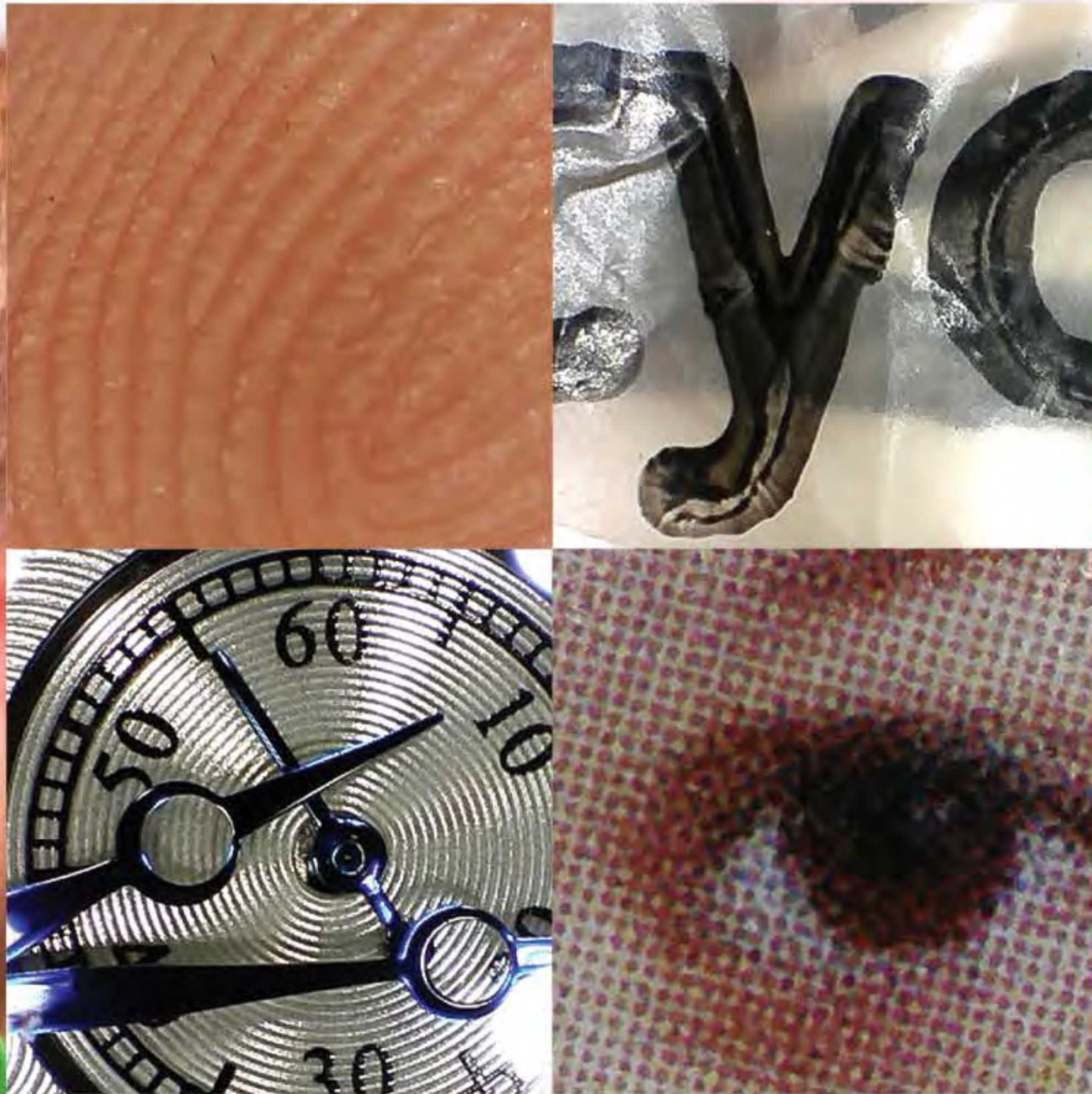
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The Zoomy's interface is simple and effective. Twist the top to focus, press the button to capture your image. The focusing works well; after a few hours of testing there was only one object that didn't seem to come into focus no matter how we twisted and turned. (We later got it to clear up by holding the microscope a few inches away. Effective, but it makes the image shakier.) Remember to save each image as you capture it—the software takes a screenshot when you press the button, but you have to save manually.

One limitation of the Zoomy that's worth pointing out is that it doesn't have an optical zoom. The only way to change the size of what you're seeing is to change the size of the window on your computer screen. This isn't a problem, exactly, but when you're looking at something really interesting it's hard not to want to zoom in even further.

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Fortunately, the Zoomy is one of those rare devices where the quibbles aren't about the frustrations of the product, but about the excitement you have about how it could be even better. It's pure fun to use, and an easy way to get your kids thinking about fibers, textures, printing and all the other microscopic details that normally slip by us.



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