Microsoft Introduces Imagine Cup Competition for Young Students
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Microsoft unites with Mercy Corps and Cooney Center to launch coding competition that challenges youth to create video games that illustrate the many ways water can impact lives.

REDMOND, Wash., March 19, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- Microsoft Corp. today announced the launch of the [Imagine Cup Kodu Challenge](#), a new [Microsoft Imagine Cup](#) competition that offers aspiring game developers, ages 9 to 18, the opportunity to learn coding by developing a video game with [Kodu](#), an easy-to-learn, game-creation toolkit and programming language available for [free download](#) on Windows-based PCs. Microsoft has drawn on the expertise of [Mercy Corps](#) and the [Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop](#) to launch this new challenge as part of Imagine Cup, Microsoft's student technology skills development program and competition.

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"Microsoft developed Kodu to transform programming from a skill perceived as overly difficult to grasp to one that is fun and kid-friendly," said Scott Fintel, producer for Kodu at Microsoft. "By getting students interested in game design at an early age through Imagine Cup, it's our hope they will acquire new skills that will translate into a lifelong passion for computer programming and computer science and will encourage them to explore STEM-related careers in the future."

The Kodu Challenge runs from March 19 through May 17, 2013, and invites students in two age brackets (9–12 and 13–18) to design games on the Kodu platform. For this challenge, participants will explore the relationships between water and people through the medium of Kodu video games. Although the only limits for these kids are their imaginations, the partnership with Mercy Corps offers the chance to learn and explore water-related issues, including disaster relief, clean-water engineering projects and much more, through a video series on the Kodu Challenge website. While acquiring valuable skills such as critical thinking, storytelling and programming, students in both age brackets will compete for first-place prizes of US$3,000, second-place prizes of US$2,000 and third-place prizes of US$1,000.

"At Mercy Corps, we are acutely aware of the relationship between water and people. While too much water can cause flooding, forcing people from their homes and destroying infrastructure, too little water can result in crop failure, conflict over scarce resources and malnutrition," said Dr. Rebecca Wolfe, senior youth and peace-building advisor at Mercy Corps. "We believe in the power of games to help young people grapple with difficult issues. The Imagine Cup Kodu Challenge offers young students a valuable opportunity to develop new skills while creating games that illustrate the important role water plays in people's lives around the world."

With nearly one-half million downloads since its release and more than 16,000 kid-created games currently available for download, Kodu has proven an effective way to teach programming to young students. There will be additional Kodu-focused Imagine Cup challenges by Microsoft launching later this year, reflective of Imagine Cup's evolution into an ongoing opportunity for students of all backgrounds and disciplines to learn coding and develop new skills with a chance to win cash prizes or travel.

"The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop studies how kids use and learn from digital media. The experience kids have creating their own video games with Kodu represents a strong, multidisciplinary approach to learning and skill development that harnesses kids' natural love of play with creativity, technical abilities and a deep immersion in fascinating topics," said Michael Levine, executive director of the Cooney Center.

As a key program of Microsoft YouthSpark, Imagine Cup inspires students to tackle software development projects using Microsoft's tools and platforms from the initial brainstorming phase through final release and beyond, transforming them from passive consumers of technology to skilled creators. Through its varied contests such as the Kodu Challenge, Imagine Cup uses the thrill of competition to drive students to develop new skills, test themselves in new ways, lead multidisciplinary teams and take command of their future careers.

In addition to unveiling the Kodu Challenge, Microsoft recently launched two new Imagine Cup competitions that focus on women and female technology innovators. The Women's Empowerment Award was established in partnership with UN Women, the U.N. organization working to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of women, and will be awarded to two student teams of any gender that create projects that best address issues impacting women globally. Microsoft also announced the Women's Athletics App Challenge, in partnership with the Seattle Storm women's basketball team, which encourages female developers, innovators and entrepreneurs to create software related to sports, health or fitness.

About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps helps people turn the crises they confront into the opportunities they deserve. Driven by local needs, its programs provide communities in the world's toughest places with the tools and support they need to transform their own lives. Mercy Corps works in over 40 countries, improving the lives of 19 million people. For more information, see mercycorps.org.

About the Cooney Center

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center (www.joanganzcooneycenter.org) is an independent nonprofit research and innovation organization that focuses on the challenges of educating children in today's rapidly changing digital media landscape. The Cooney Center conducts research on emerging technologies in learning and collaborates with educators, media producers, policymakers and investors to put research into action. The Cooney Center's research and programs primarily focus on intergenerational learning, literacy and educational games. The Cooney Center is the founder of the Games and Learning Publishing Council and co-presents the National STEM Video Game Challenge.

About Microsoft Imagine Cup

This is the 11th year of Imagine Cup, part of Microsoft YouthSpark, which will be celebrated at the Worldwide Finals in St. Petersburg, Russia, July 8–11. Students ages 16 and older are eligible to register and compete in Imagine Cup by visiting http://www.imaginecup.com. A full list of competition categories is available at http://imaginecup.com/main/compete.

About Microsoft YouthSpark

Microsoft YouthSpark is a global initiative that aims to create opportunities for 300 million youth in more than 100 countries during the next three years. This companywide initiative includes Citizenship and other company programs — both new and enhanced — that empower youth to imagine and realize their full potential by connecting them with greater opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship. Find out more at http://www.microsoft.com/youthspark.

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

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