

Welcome to the Future of Reading



*"a book that blinks, buzzes, hums, sings, jitterbugs, plays games
and on occasion, rains and snows"*

(USAToday education writer, Greg Toppo, [The Atlantic](#))

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The Inanimate Alice Research Group

An immersive contemporary tale that employs game-like techniques to stimulate screen-based reading and inspire student creativity, [Inanimate Alice](#) is the coming-of-age story of a girl growing up to become a game designer. Targeting adolescents and their educators, the progressive complexity of the unfolding narrative affords accessibility from elementary to tertiary education. *Inanimate Alice* makes reading and creative writing every bit as exciting as playing games.

An **interdisciplinary team**, the Inanimate Alice Research Group, has been established. Chair of Language and Literacy at Lesley University's Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts and President of the Massachusetts Reading Association, [Valerie Harlow Shinas](#), is the Principal Investigator, working with Instructional Designer, Information Scientist, and PhD candidate [Amanda Hovious](#) and the Series Producer, [Ian Harper](#). A digest of [prior studies](#) is available here.

Research indicates that literacy educators in the US have access to technology yet tend to use traditional methods of teaching. This is a **problem** for the born-digital generation that relies heavily on its digital skills for future employability. The group shares a **vision** to inaugurate an Immersive Literacy Laboratory with *Inanimate Alice* as the foundational title. The first laboratory will be built in New Bedford, MA, a district hosting underserved and underperforming schools with multi-lingual, multicultural challenges and opportunities.

The group's **paper**, *The Compelling Nature of Transmedia Storytelling: Empowering 21st-Century Readers and Writers through Multimodality*, presented at the American Education Research Association conference, held in Toronto, April 2019, has been published by [Springer](#). Multi-year research grant **proposals** have been submitted to national institutions for the development of an intervention using the title as the core text and, with the *Big City Life* concept, the creation of the digital+physical environment that will provide pathways to STEM education and employment.

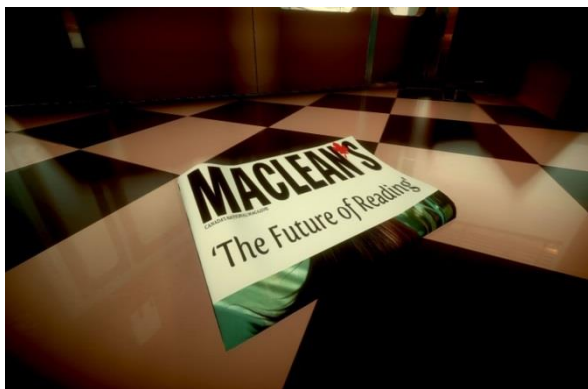
Inanimate Alice tells the globe-trotting episodic tale of an itinerant family pursuing her father's uncertain career in the oil patch. Commencing in China when she is eight years old and concluding with career success in the Big City at the edge of the world, it is full of the ups-and-downs of life. The story has been enjoyed by teachers and students in over 100 countries. As a groundbreaking work of digitally delivered literacy, it is of much academic interest as demonstrated in this [map](#).

It is noteworthy that this work will begin at [Lesley University](#). Founded in 1909 as a school of education, the university uses progressive approaches to prepare more educators for the classroom than any other institution in Massachusetts.

“Welcome to the future of reading”

....said [Macleans](#) in its feature article profiling the groundbreaking transmedia narrative *Inanimate Alice*. “Reluctant readers are discovering a passion for literature and those who were already reading are writing their own stories.”

*Inanimate Alice*TM is the first great literary work of the digital age for young people. Uniquely, it is a work of progressive complexity. Each element in the series, each episode and season, mirrors Alice’s age and digital competency. Just like real life, it demonstrates the incremental improvements that education provides. Young people, growing up in a world of considerable digital sophistication, relate to a title that has the dynamics and functionality of a computer game while delivering a high-quality literary work that they and their teachers can rely on for academic investigation.



The sprawling, world travelling, adventures of a girl dreaming of becoming a videogame designer have become an inspiration for teachers and students the world over. It is their support for the groundbreaking series that has taken Alice to places and to meet people never imagined at the outset. It opens windows on places in the world they will likely never have the opportunity to visit. In [Jakarta](#), it attracts poor students to a free school; for university students in [Russia](#) it provides an investigation into modern literature; it resonates with the children of Syrian refugees arriving in [Toronto](#).

This is also the story of an itinerant mixed-race family travelling the world in pursuit of opportunity. It talks of multicultural societies and empathy. It investigates societal issues like peer pressure and identity in a highly-connected world. Students feel compelled to get involved. They interrogate episodes of the series, concluding [“I can do that”](#) and

cannot wait to commit weeks of collaborative effort. Thousands of [examples](#) have been developed – just a small selection is available from the website.

Inanimate Alice addresses the widespread absence of engagement among young people in developing traditional reading and writing skills. By using game-like techniques to deliver a literary work laced with dynamism and tension, there are no reluctant learners. This matters, because the entertainment and social environments today's young people are exposed to are multi-dimensional and urgent while educational perspectives remain singular in dimension and pedestrian.

Young people naturally “get it” while teachers and adults often do not. We hear from teachers “this is a big stretch....a steep learning curve.”

This isn't an out-of-the-box product or solution, it requires a changed mindset and commitment. Where [success](#) is apparent, it is wonderful to behold.

The Reader's Journey

Alice's adventures [begin here](#). In the first episode, Alice is 8 years of age and living in a yurt with her parents in a remote part of China. She takes photos with her device and draws a stickman.

Scrolling up the page, the reader shares Alice's experiences and learning as she is growing up. Everything changes from episode to episode. Each story demonstrates incremental complexity over the one preceding it. The narrative structure “improves” as the stories become longer. The puzzles and games get more challenging. The imagery, typefaces, music soundtrack are all age-appropriate.

Each story is complete and self-contained.

The first 4 episodes are two-dimensional, to be read in a conventional way except for the interspersed challenges that propel the story forward. Three-dimensional elements are



first introduced in Episode 5. Episode 6: *The Last Gas Station*, is a fully immersive 3D experience and the latest development *Perpetual Nomads* is an experience in Virtual Reality.

The first 4 episodes remain free online while Adobe Flash Reader is supported for browser access. It is recommended that those relying on the series in their teaching activities procure the licenses they need and enjoy [the benefits](#) accruing to having the materials available immediately from their computer desktop.

What is it? Who is it for?

Inanimate Alice is a high quality, digitally delivered, text written by BC-born, Governor General's Award-winning novelist, Professor [Kate Pullinger](#). Although developed in a game-like style it has a narrative quality that is suited to the deep-reading and re-reading necessary for academic investigation.

"I think what makes Alice so special is the strong narrative that allows for deep reading, conversations that move into critical reading, prediction, a shared experience between readers who are anticipating what might happen next and then designing and writing their own 'next' episode."

Dr. Gloria Latham, School of Education, RMIT, Australia

The target audience is 10-14 year olds. With a female protagonist the audience leans towards girls yet there is plenty of tension and dynamism to retain the interest of boys too. The material plays to a wider audience with great success seen with 7-8 year olds and with older students when focused on the episodes where Alice is their age or older. Each episode is a complete and self-contained story, so older students joining the adventure at, say, episode 3, will not be lacking in context. In tertiary education it is employed as an introduction to digitally-delivered literacy and in English as a Second Language lessons.



Literacy and Languages



Thanks to invitations from the European Commission to participate in Intercultural Dialogue and eSkills initiatives, episodes have been translated into French, German, Italian and Spanish. Education Services Australia, a Government Ministers' Company, commissioned translations into Indonesian and Japanese together with [contextual journals](#) to assist Australian

teachers and students in acquiring those language skills.

It is the core research text addressing literacy instruction and second or foreign language acquisition at HAN University in the Netherlands. A team at the University of Coimbra has translated episodes and educational support materials into Portuguese. This effort has been rewarded by selection of *Inanimate Alice* for the National Reading Plan in Portugal; a 'first' for a born-digital title.

Why it works – An Educator's Perspective

Inanimate Alice is the missing link between girls and technology. Nothing quite like a character to lead them in."

I want to praise @InanimateAlice for being THE best non-coding related educational tool I have ever used because of how it engages my students. What is blowing my mind is seeing how my @InanimateAlice project has encouraged the usually most 'quiet' or 'usually less keen' girls to absolutely excel. I have used @InanimateAlice for 5yrs or more and this year the standard of pupil work is the best ever - they are absolutely astounding. Not only have my Year 8s made incredible Inanimate Alice non-linear slideshows, they also loved the Hour of Code today.



(Selected from Drew Buddie's Twitter Feed)

Around the World



The series has gained investment support from Education Services Australia, The Arts Council of England, Canada Media Fund, Screen Australia and CreativeBC. It is the first digitally delivered text in the Australian curriculum. It is a Best Website for Teaching and Learning at the American Association of School Librarians.

Now, with the recent investment from CreativeBC, it is time to build on prospects and strive for a vision for the future of education in a creative environment that provides opportunities for young audiences to discuss matters of interest and importance to them in settings which they recognize as authentic. Welcome to [Big City Life](#).