

Inanimate Alice

Translating digital literature in an educational context with Inanimate Alice

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This project has been in development since 2016, within the Research Group “Digital Mediation and Materiality of Literature” at the [Centre for Portuguese Literature at the University of Coimbra](#). With my coordination as a Professor at the University of Coimbra and the Principal Investigator of this project, Ana Aguilar, a PhD candidate and António Oliveira, a MA in Translation, became the first members of the team.

We translated the first five episodes of the series and adapted the associated pedagogical materials to the Portuguese curriculum (s. [Machado, 2018](#)). In 2018 Alice Matsuda, a post-doctoral student, joined the project team and together we created our own pedagogical guidance.

When series producer Ian Harper and digital artist Chris Joseph delivered the first two Portuguese episodes, Ana Aguilar and Alice Matsuda demonstrated them in two Portuguese schools, Anadia ([Escola Secundária de Anadia](#)) and Coimbra ([Escola Secundária Infanta D. Maria](#)). We then analysed the data they collected, relating to the experience and reception by students and teachers. We presented the results of this study at the Electronic Literature Organisation Conference held in Montréal in 2018.

In line with our goal of introducing digital literature in Portuguese schools, as we approached the end of the translation of episodes and guidelines, we made contact with the Ministry of Education. The reaction was positive with our work being rewarded by having *Alice Inanimada*, the Portuguese translation of *Inanimate Alice*, endorsed by the Portuguese National Reading Plan 2027 as “the first digital narrative fiction to be read/used in Portuguese schools from pedagogical



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scripts focused on the aesthetic perception of students, the understanding of multimedia and the immersive literary experience”.

Teachers training

As the National Reading Plan leadership (NRP) recognized the importance of including digital literature in its list of books, Ana Aguilar and I were asked to carry out two short-term training actions dedicated to the reading of digital literature with the objective of introducing teachers to interactive narrative. Those training actions (2019) were so successful that NRP had to close the registration process and double the number of sessions to be held either in Coimbra or in Lisbon. For all the teachers and librarians that attended those sessions, it was the first time they had read an authentic digital literary work and above all it was the first time they were given conceptual tools like hypertext, multimodality, ergodicity... to improve their digital literacy as well as their knowledge of digital literature.



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As a Director of the Master in Teaching Portuguese and Portuguese and other Languages, a programme that prepares future teachers, I was very aware of the importance of including a module focused on Digital Literature, exemplified by *Alice Inanimada*, so that in the future those teachers could themselves take part in the training of other teachers. Additionally, *Alice Inanimada* was included in two medium-term training actions that I coordinated. One was focused on Initial Teacher Training at the Faculty of Arts of my University; this with the participation of Rui Mateus, Ana Aguilar, Cecília Magalhães and myself. The other was provided to university students as well as teachers, delivered with the participation of Ph.D. students from the Programme in Materialities of Literature.



And so, we have taken the first steps in order to introduce *Alice Inanimada* in Portuguese schools. Throughout our engagement, students and teachers were very enthusiastic about *Alice Inanimada*, expressing an eagerness to experience more episodes of Alice and to build new ones themselves with the help of ICT teachers. *Alice Inanimada* proves to be an excellent work to develop critical digital literacy, comprehension and creative skills regarding digital literature. I only wish the Portuguese government would follow the UNESCO'2013 guidelines, believing that “a government’s investment in teacher training is more important than its investment in technology itself”. The pandemic has clearly shown just how much we still have to do and I am sure that Alice’s adventures are entirely suitable for both classroom presentation and online teaching. Through studying *Alice Inanimada*, students learn to sense and feel multiple layers of meaning, knowledge they can transfer to their study of print literature.



Regarding next steps, with the collaboration of the Master of Teaching in Portuguese programme, I intend to create a training session specific to teachers at 20 selected schools in the centre of Portugal, where the first two episodes of *Alice Inanimada* will be studied. I hope that once we overcome the current pandemic situation we can go on spreading information about this digital novel and further developing this project.

We also intend to create two prizes to encourage more interest and participation in *Inanimate Alice*. In a students' competition, we will choose the best student-created work about "Alice in Portugal". For the teachers' competition, we will reward the best pedagogical guidance developed to support an Alice episode. The prizes will include the presentation of those works in the Portuguese version of *Inanimate Alice* website.

Taking an international perspective, as part of the Master's Degree in Portuguese as a Foreign/Second Language, I will develop pedagogical guidance that contextualizes Portuguese as a heritage language, while implementing an "Atlantic Bridge", *i.e.* a collaboration protocol with Lesley University, in Massachusetts and Valerie Shinas as my counterpart PI. Soon, a Portuguese translation of the first five episodes will be adapted in a Brazilian Linguistic variant introducing *Alice Inanimada* in the world's largest Lusophone-speaking country.

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