

My Alice Experience

When learning something new, I am someone that doesn't like tutorials and instructions. So as you can imagine, sometimes I get stuck because I just try to figure it out on my own. This happened when learning Alice. Help can undoubtedly be a good thing, but I strongly believe in trying everything you can first. Doing this can help you learn things you wouldn't learn otherwise if you hadn't explored features, tools, and controls.

So I started working with Alice and unsurprisingly, had no idea what to do. After playing around with it for a while, I got the hang of it and came up with the idea of creating a story of some characters who were banished to "the land of ugly character models." I picked out the ugliest character models and worked on this for a while, then, as I tend to do, I decided that I didn't like my idea anymore and deleted it. I came up with another idea of a crazy dream that ends in somebody waking up. This proved to be a fun idea, I could make it as wacky and nonsensical as I wanted. I realized that the dream needed to have some sort of substance to make it interesting to watch, so I decided to sync up character movements to music. First, I found some bossa nova, elevator music that I thought would be funny to use. I put it into Alice and nothing happened. I thought that maybe I was doing something wrong, but I just couldn't get it to play. I discovered that Alice had some default music you could choose from, and this track called "spooky" really cracked me up, and it fit the dark, swampy setting, so I tried that out. This one actually played when I ran the code, so I went with it.

To sync up movements with the song, I would set a duration, guessing what time would work, then I ran the code and adjusted as necessary. I did work with some timing listeners, which were useful, but I was a little annoyed that I could only get things to happen one at a time outside of the listeners. I found ways to work around this though using duration and proceeded making the dream. I got to the point where I was setting the part of the scene where a person would wake up from the dream. I made an ugly looking guy, placed him in the bed, and.... Alice had died. It was not responding at all, I had to force quit. It was fine though, I thought, because I had just saved a little while ago. I went to reopen the project and see how much damage was done, but I did not expect the project to be damaged past the point of no return. The crazy dream was just that: a dream.

Things I liked about using Alice: it was accessible, the scene setup tool was nice to use, and there was a large asset library. I liked that even though Alice looked complicated at first glance, it was pretty accessible. I could probably teach my little sister how to use it, and then she could make her own projects. I also really enjoyed the scene setup, the ability to move, resize, and rotate the objects, and the large library to choose from. All these options allow for the ability to make many different projects, stories, and games. This differs from the Play Lab, where there were only a couple backgrounds, characters, and options for game mechanics.

One thing that I didn't like about Alice was that the visuals are kind of, well, ugly. I understand why it is this way, it keeps the download and file sizes low and there is no reason to make the visuals too complicated if the program is just being used by students as a learning tool. I didn't expect Alice to have movie level character models or backgrounds, but when I tried to make a person, they were really gross looking, so I eventually embraced it and made them as gross looking as I could. For contrast, the game I made on Scratch looked amateurish, but that was the point, it added to the theme of the game. I was proud of it and shared it with my friends. The archaic visuals on Alice prevented me from getting really invested in the end result, because I knew it wouldn't look very good. If I got to finish the project, I don't know that I would have shared it, because it looks amateurish, but not on purpose. This was the case, even though I put a lot of time and effort into making the project as good as I could.

In the end, I enjoyed working in Alice and figuring out how it worked. I might use it again in the future if I just want to play around with it some more, but I think I am more interested in focusing on other, more complex coding languages now that I have had some practice in Alice, Scratch, and Code.org.