

## Brazilian Child Book Brings Message from the Past: Reading Is Cool

Contributed by Isaura Daniel  
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The characters are Soninha, Zé Miguel, Mateus, Fabiana and Guilherme. The four adolescents discover in their school material some text that they did not write. The mystery text tackles the intellectual importance of Egyptian queen Nefertiti. This is one of the messages that the group starts receiving from anonymous senders.

Other messages, all sent by historical characters, appear in their computers, mobile phones and even in the form of music.

The plot above is part of the latest book for youths by Brazilian writer Ana Maria Machado, to be launched this month during the Book Biennial, in the city of São Paulo. The messages that the book's characters receive underscore the importance of reading and writing.

This was the hook that Machado used for inserting into the book, entitled "Mensagem para você" (Message for You), one of the objects of her fascination: the famous Egyptian queen.

"All the messages received from the past by the book's characters are related to writing and reading, which my book celebrates. Nefertiti was the first in a series. She could read and write, was intelligent and well prepared and had an outstanding position. I have always been fascinated by her and by another ancient queen of Egypt, Hatsepchut, whom I mention in the book," claims Machado, who is releasing the book through publishing house Ática.

The writer read many works on Nefertiti, among them one that she mentions and recommends in the book, by the Egyptian Naguib Mahfuz, winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize. This, in fact, is not the first book by Ana Maria in which she makes reference to a character or element of Arab culture. In children's book "Mas que festa!" (What a party), printed by the Nova Fronteira publishing house, some of the guests to a large Brazilian party are Syrian-Lebanese and bring in typical foods.

"I have always lived with that universe. My parents have always had many friends of Arab descent, and I so have I, ever since I was little. My godmother was Lebanese. She would speak strictly Arabic with her mother at home. I had brothers-in-law of Syrian-Lebanese descent. These memories come to me so naturally that I cannot even ascertain exactly where they come from," she says.

The author has 140 books in print and, according to her, has lost count of the elements from the Arab universe that are spread throughout her oeuvre. "In my books of essays for adults, one of the authors whom I often quote, because I feel a deep affinity with him, is Edward Said, of Palestinian origin," she claims. Said was one of the leading Arab intellectuals, of worldwide relevance, known for his thoughts on East-West relations.

The book "Message for you" is part of a collection named after the author, featuring more elaborate literary work, whose themes prompt reflection and debate. At the end of each work there is an illustrated biography of the author and section "Backstage of production", which tells about the process for writing the book.

The edition to be released at the Biennial will have 176 pages and is recommended for youths from the age of 11 on. The Biennial takes place between August 14th and 24th at Anhembi Exhibitions Park, in São Paulo.

Ana Maria has been a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters since 2003 and received the Machado de Assis award from the institution in 2001. Among the other awards received by the author, one of the main names of Brazilian literature, is Hans Christian Andersen, international recognition in the area of literature for children and youths.

## Service

Book: Mensagem para você (Message for you)

Author: Ana Maria Machado

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<http://www.anamariamachado.com/>

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