Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LEWIS CARROLL

Lewis Carroll, born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, grew up in Cheshire, England, to a long line of clergymen. He followed in these footsteps and was a deacon in the Anglican Church. Excelling at school but with difficulty socializing, Carroll matriculated at Oxford University and was awarded a first class math's degree, and became a professor. His ingenuity with numbers led him to the wordplay and riddles that he became known for in his fiction. Often feeling more comfortable with children than adults, he used his faculties for teaching and entertaining to make friends with children such as Alice Liddell, who served as inspiration for the protagonist of *Alice in Wonderland*. He gave up teaching in 1881 to focus on writing. By this point, the *Alice* stories had begun to achieve a good deal of popularity. He wrote many more stories with the same exciting use of language and with other child protagonists before passing away at the age of sixty-six.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Carroll was inspired to write *Alice in Wonderland* after a particular boat trip in Oxford with his young friend Alice Liddell, the daughter of Henry Liddell, whom he taught and inspired with his storytelling. The buildings of Christ Church, Oxford, are said to have been incorporated into Wonderland in the long hall at the beginning and the elaborate garden of the Queen. It is also said that *Alice in Wonderland* was a response to new theories in mathematics at Oxford that Carroll disagreed with.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other works that use nonsense and wordplay include Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. Many later writers were inspired by Carroll's sense of fun, including Dr. Seuss and Spike Milligan. Carroll also penned a sequel for Alice, called *Through the Looking Glass*, which sees the protagonist in a mirror-image of Wonderland.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (but often known by the shortened *Alice in Wonderland*)
- **When Written:** 1862-63
- **Where Written:** Oxford, England
- **When Published:** 26th November 1865
- **Literary Period:** Victorian England, soon to become the "Golden Age" of Children's Literature
- **Genre:** Children's story, Fantasy, Literary Nonsense, Adventure
- **Setting:** Wonderland, a dream world that Alice finds when she falls down a rabbit hole
- **Climax:** The trial of the Knave of Hearts, where all the strange creatures Alice has encountered assemble at the court of the nonsensically angry Queen of Hearts. To Alice's surprise, she becomes the crucial final witness
- **Antagonist:** The Queen of Hearts is the antagonist of Wonderland, with her ridiculous love of beheading, she reigns over her realm, representing the bossiness and silliness of the adult world.
- **Point of View:** A third-person narrator follows Alice through Wonderland, but also occasionally dips into the first person, when describing her thoughts, and also follows her sister's thoughts in the final chapter

EXTRA CREDIT

Night-writing. Carroll put his mathematical mind to inventions when he wasn't writing. He invented a tool for writing at night, using a system of symbols in the corner of cardboard squares, so that he didn't have to get up and light a candle.

Alice without Words. Alice in Wonderland has inspired many adaptations. Some artists have even challenged themselves to recreate Alice without the use of language that defines the novella, like the recent ballet from the English Royal Ballet, which uses choreography to recreate the *atmosphere* of wordplay without using words at all.

PLOT SUMMARY

A young girl named Alice sits beside her sister on a bank when all of a sudden a White Rabbit rushes past her, talking to himself about how late he is. Alice instinctively follows him down a rabbit hole. She falls and falls. Time and gravity seem to stop, so that she can explore the shelves and objects on the walls of the tunnel. At the end of the tunnel, she finds herself in a long hall, surrounded by locked doors of all sizes. She finds a key, which opens the tiniest door of all, but she is too big to fit through into the idyllic **garden** inside.

Alice finds a bottle labeled "DRINK ME" which she faithfully drinks and feels herself **shrinking**, but though she is soon the right size for the door, she can no longer reach the key for it. A **cake** appears labeled "EAT ME" so she eats it and **grows**, but she grows too much and soon fills the giant hall and starts to cry. As she cries, her big tears form a pool on the floor of the

hall. She shrinks again and slips and is swept up by the pool. The pool is occupied by some other swimmers, including a Mouse, who Alice tries to befriend. But she can't help talking about her cat, Dinah, whom she is very homesick for, and terrifies the Mouse. The animals eventually gather on the shore of the pool and debate how to get dry. The Dodo suggests a Caucus-race, which is a chaotic, rule-less race that everybody wins. Alice gives prizes but when she mentions her cat again, the animals all scurry away and she is left alone.

The White Rabbit returns, having lost his gloves, and, mistaking Alice for his maid, asks her fetch them. So Alice runs off to his house. She goes in and finds another **cake,** so she eats it hoping to grow back to her original size, but again she grows to gargantuan proportions and the White Rabbit returns to find arms and legs through his windows and chimney. He gets his gardener and some other animal servants to remove her – they try all sorts of methods, eventually throwing pebbles at her. These pebbles turn into cakes as they reach her, and she eats them up and shrinks again and escapes out of the Rabbit's house and into a nearby forest.

Here, Alice meets even stranger company. First, she encounters a giant puppy, then a Caterpillar sitting on top of a mushroom who interrogates Alice about her identity. Alice isn't at all sure who she is anymore and, when she tries to recite a nursery rhyme that she used to know by heart, it comes out all jumbled up. The Caterpillar tells her to **eat** the mushroom. She tries one side of the mushroom and finds it makes her smaller so quickly eats the other side, which makes her grow taller, but mostly in the neck. She swoops around above the forest, frightening a pigeon, who accuses her of being a serpent. She eats some of the shrinking side of the mushroom and sees a little house, with a Frog Footman outside, who has received an invitation for the Duchess to attend the Queen of Hearts' croquet tournament.

Inside this house, the Duchess is nursing a pig-baby and a cook is having a temper tantrum. Everyone is sneezing because of the pepper the cook is sprinkling everywhere. The Duchess is in a terrible mood and rudely addresses Alice before flinging the baby at her. Alice decides to take the baby outside to save it from the cook's flying pots and pans, and meets the Cheshire Cat, the Duchess's curious vanishing grinning cat. The Cat helps Alice find her way. He says that in one direction lives the Hatter and in the other, the March Hare. They are both mad, as is everyone in Wonderland, including Alice, he claims. The baby, meanwhile, has transformed into a little pig. Alice goes off in the direction of the Hare but when she finds him, he is having tea in the garden with the Hatter and a Dormouse.

The Hatter fires riddles at Alice, and is very keen to discuss the properties of Time with her. He tells her about when he "murdered Time" while singing a song for the Queen in March (when the Hare went mad). Alice gets fed up of not being listened to and leaves the party. She soon comes upon a tree, with a tiny door, and uses the shrinking mushroom to get to the right size to go in. She finally finds herself in the beautiful garden she has been aiming for. She goes in and meets some gardeners, who are flat and cardboard like playing cards, tending anxiously to the Queen of Hearts' rose bushes. The Queen's procession arrive, a whole set of playing cards, carrying clubs, diamonds and hearts. The Queen manically rules over everybody and regularly orders for playing cards who disappoint or annoy her in any way to be executed – she has already sentenced the Duchess to a beheading.

The Queen takes Alice to join in the croquet game. It isn't the kind of croquet that Alice is used to – instead of mallets and balls, the Queen's version uses flamingoes and hedgehogs, who become quite unruly when Alice tries to use them. Also, nobody takes turns, so the pitch is suddenly a mess with animals and playing cards. The Queen gets very irate, calling for mass executions. Meanwhile, the Cheshire Cat has returned and is causing trouble with the King, but when the Queen's officers try to catch him, he vanishes. So the game is abandoned and the Queen turns her attention to Alice.

The Queen thinks Alice ought to meet the Mock-Turtle and hear his history, so Alice is taken to see him by his old friend, the Gryphon. The Mock-Turtle slowly and sadly tells his story and soon is carried away with remembering the Lobster Quadrille and its accompanying songs, which he and the Gryphon sing for Alice. Alice then starts to tell her story and again finds that she has forgotten certain rhymes and songs, so she gives up telling her adventures and the Mock-Turtle starts a song about soup. He is interrupted by the sound of the Queen loudly commencing the Knave's trial.

The court room is filled with the creatures Alice has met in Wonderland. The King of Hearts is acting as the judge and the jurors are a collection of dim-witted animals. The White Rabbit tells the story of the Knave's crime. He is accused of stealing some tarts that the Queen made. The first witness is the Mad Hatter. He begins to describe the day in question, but keeps getting cut off by the Hare and the King threatens him with execution and calls the next witness. The Duchess's cook comes to the stand, but an argument about the ingredients of the tarts halts progress. To Alice's astonishment, she is called as final witness. By this time, she has grown again to giantess size, and knocks the jurors flying as she gets up to take the stand. Another piece of evidence is revealed, a letter supposedly from the Knave, though it has no signature. Alice tries to defend the Knave, but the Queen of Hearts is not interested in hearing anything further, she just wants to skip to the sentencing. But by now, Alice has grown not just in stature but in confidence. She will not allow herself to be afraid of a pack of cards.

At this, Alice wakes up on the bank beside her sister. She recounts her adventures, and then bounds off, leaving her sister to contemplate Wonderland herself, and imagine what Alice will be like as a grown woman.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Alice Alice is the protagonist of the story. Though she doesn't mention her age in the story, she is said to be seven years-old by experts, and in the sequel *Through the Looking Glass*, she does mention being seven and a half. She is inspired by the real Alice Liddell, the daughter of Henry Liddell, the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford and a contemporary of Carroll. In the story, she is a spirited child, often following her instincts and the other characters courageously and standing her ground when she suspects nonsense. But she is also anxious and becomes homesick when she is confused and lost in Wonderland. She is on the verge of **growing up**, and the adventures of Wonderland play on her insecurites and show how she is terrified by the unknown world of the future but also thrilled by it and eager to discover.

The White Rabbit The White Rabbit is the first creature Alice sees, anxiously running into the rabbit hole in order to not be late. He is a very distinguished rabbit, with a large house and a gardener and always wearing gloves, a waistcoat and a pocket watch, but he is always in a hurry. His fear of the Queen of Hearts while at the croquet tournament makes him a little rude and short with Alice.

The Caterpillar The Caterpillar sits atop the magic mushroom that Alice finds in the forest. He has the appearance of a wise old professor – he smokes a hookah lazily and takes a very long time to say anything. He treats Alice wearily and with condescension, but also gives her advice and shows her how to eat the mushroom to grow and shrink.

The Duchess The Duchess is a very ugly relation of the Queen. One minute furious, the next affectionate, the Duchess is a chaotic character and keeps a chaotic household, with a violent cook and a baby that looks very much like a pig, all presided over by the Cheshire Cat. The Duchess is sentenced to death by the Queen and is herself very fond of moralizing and justice, but always manages to escape with her head intact.

The Cheshire Cat The Cheshire Cat is a large, smiling cat with the power to vanish and appear whenever he likes, causing him to be a bit smug, even in the face of the King and Queen of Hearts. He guides Alice in certain directions and reappears as if to check on her, and she seems to like him.

The Queen of Hearts The Queen of Hearts terrorizes Wonderland with constant threats of execution, though we soon realize that these threats are ineffectual. Though she holds a trial for the Knave of Hearts, she would rather go straight to the sentencing and the proceedings turn into a charade. Alice remembers that the Queen's threats are nonsense, not to mention that she is flat and thin as a playing card, and overcomes her in the end. The Queen seems to symbolize or embody the sometimes nonsensical commands and punishments handed out by adults.

The Mock-Turtle The Mock-Turtle is a sorrowful figure, who sits reminiscing by the sea. With his friend, the Gryphon, he remembers his old school teachers and his youth, when he would joyfully dance the Lobster Quadrille. He indulges in telling his story to Alice, and when she leaves, goes on sighing and crying as before.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Alice's Sister She appears at the very beginning and very end of Alice's adventure. She is reading on the bank when Alice drifts into her dreamand when Alice wakes up, she kindly listens to her long adventure story, and daydreams more knowingly about Wonderland herself, contemplating how Alice will soon grow up.

Dinah Dinah is Alice's cat, a wonderful rodent catcher and a loyal friend – Alice misses her greatly when she is in Wonderland.

The Mouse A weary creature that Alice meets swimming along in the pool of tears. She befriends him but her mentions of Dinah, the expert mouse-catcher, greatly offends him. He does eventually agree to tell her his story, which is about a judge-like cat named Fury.

The Dodo The instigator of the Caucus-race and a very wise-sounding bird. He is solemn and loves a ceremony, as we see when he nominates Alice to donate the prizes for the race winners and bows low to her in gratitude when presenting a prize to her.

The Duchess's Cook She is seen cooking with huge amounts of pepper in the Duchess's kitchen, and making everybody sneeze. She has an awful temper, and flies into a rage for no reason.

The Mad Hatter The Mad Hatter is an eccentric host, a lover of riddles and wordplay and gives Alice a challenging time at his tea party, scolding and berating her. Time has frozen at six o'clock for the Hatter, so he lives in perpetual tea-time.

The Dormouse He is the sleepy friend of the mad Hatter and Hare. He lives on the tea table and is a renowned storyteller, though his stories are often quite nonsensical and quick, since he has to hurry to finish them before he falls asleep again.

The March Hare A hare that has been mad since March, when the Hatter sang out-of-time at the Queen's concert. He enjoys frustrating Alice , for example offering her wine when there isn't any.

The Playing Cards The terrified subjects of the Queen of Hearts' palace. They are gardeners, courtiers, soldiers and other royal guests, who live in fear of beheadings ordered by the Queen, even though they are made of cardboard.

The King of Hearts The King of Hearts is the slightly calmer companion of the Queen of Hearts, reigning over Wonderland,

but is a servant to the Queen's violent whims. He ineffectually takes on the role of Judge in the palace court.

The Gryphon The Gryphon is a mythical creature, half-lion, half-eagle, and an old friend of the Mock-Turtle. Reminiscing about his school days by the sea and the Lobster Quadrille makes him very excited and he loves showing off his expertise about Whitings and rhymes.

The Knave of Hearts He has been accused by the Queen of Hearts of stealing her tarts. A trial is held, but he is not given much of a chance to defend himself between the nonsensical testimonies of the Hatter, the Cook and Alice.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CHILDHOOD AND ADULTHOOD

Alice's experiences in Wonderland can be taken as a kind of exaggerated metaphor for the experience of growing up, both in terms of physically growing up and coming to understand the world of adults and how that world differs from a child's expectation of it. Alice's anxiety about growing up and about the wide world beyond her familiar comforts can be seen in her constant evaluation of her own size and worth. She physically grows and shrinks again and again in the story, at times not even able to see her whole shape. Her preoccupation with **growing and shrinking**, and finding the right size for what she needs to do, evokes how disorienting the idea of growing up can be. The physical changes can be both frightening and exhilarating.

Alice's sense of how life should be, how she, as a child, has been taught about life, can be seen in the stories she tells, which are full of goodness, love and affection. Whenever she meets a character that challenges her or appears rude, she recites the lessons and proverbial phrases that she has overheard in the classroom and from her parents. "`You should learn not to make personal remarks,'" says Alice to the Hatter. In this way, Alice's Wonderland allows her to be both child and adult at the same time – she tests out her authority and expertise in just the way her parents and teachers must tell her what to do, but at the same time she is forced to confront the fact that people, adults, *do* make personal remarks (along with other things she has been taught are bad.)

The adults in *Alice in Wonderland* order Alice around and give her advice and act like they are wise, but their orders are ridiculous and often cruel (like the Queen shouting at Alice about her impertinence when Alice is only being logical, their lectures are dry and boring, and sometimes their stories are both tragic and completely irrational, such as that of the Mock-Turtle). The "adults" of Wonderland show themselves to be less trustworthy, less good, than adults *should* be from the point of view of an innocent child. Further, the adults can be violent. In the Duchess' house, Alice hears the Duchess say "Off with her head" and thinks nothing of it, amid the absurd cooking rituals of the cook and the howling of the pig-baby. But as the dream goes on, this threat of beheading, of killing, becomes more real as it is spouted and over and over within the context of the ridiculous trial of the Queen of Hearts. The contradictions and inconsistencies of the adult world with how adults have told Alice she should behave is hereby revealed to not just be something that's funny and ridiculous (though it is that), it is also frightening and dangerous. The context of Wonderland allows Carrol to explore these ideas in a safe space of a "dream," but by creating such a space it allows him to explore those ideas more fully than he could in a realistic novel.

DREAMS AND REALITY

Alice in Wonderland is a dream world, full of curiousness, confusion and talking animals. Everything is a little off. This can be delightful and fund, but it can also create a menacing atmosphere that threatens to turn the story from a child's story of adventure and nonsense to something more like a nightmare, though it never quite does tip into true nightmare.

What is perhaps even more interesting, though, is the way that the ridiculous dream world of Wonderland comments or parodies the real world. Wonderland is full of misunderstanding, of meaninglessness, of pointless races, pompous characters, maudlin stories or reminiscences without purpose, and is further full of commands from leaders that make absolutely no sense and are based on pure vanity and cluelessness. Its residents mainly just want to get by and survive and maybe have a good time. Its justice is often laughably faulty. In other words, as a child growing up might realize as the curtains on the adult and "real" world fall away, Wonderland isn't actually so different from that real world. The real world may be less *exaggerated* in its arbitrary rules and adult nonsense, crookedness, cowardice, and venality, but it has such traits in equal measure, and in many ways the cruelty of the real world is greater. Wonderland, then, because it is a ridiculous dream, becomes a lace where Alice can begin to navigate the real world without, yet, having to actually face that real world.

WORDS, MEANING AND MEANINGLESSNESS

Wordplay makes Wonderland what it is. The moment Alice descends into the rabbit hole world,

she starts questioning everything the world above takes for granted, including and especially language. Sentences and phrases are twisted and turned around so that they mean several things at once and cause misunderstandings and humorous clashes between the characters. "`Do bats eat cats?'" Alice asks as she falls down the rabbit hole, trying to think of life above and life in the rabbit hole at once. "for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it." The order of the phrases doesn't matter because the meaning behind the phrases is unclear. And Wonderland is a place where Alice is struggling to find the meaning of the changes that are happening to her.

When the Mouse in the Caucus-race scene misunderstands Alice and leaves her, offended, Alice is left alone and disoriented – this happens a lot with the characters in Wonderland. Alice's journey is fraught with misunderstandings and offences due to language. Her inability to recite rhymes that she used to know by heart warn her that adulthood might be a less musical, comfortable place—or that she has ceased to be herself, as she no longer knows what she once did. And so words and meaning becomes tied up with the idea of the self, of who a person is.

The entire narrative has a verse-like quality because it is so packed with rhymes and recognizable phrases that should be set to tunes. But while in a traditional children's song or rhyme, the moral or message is clear, in Wonderland, nonsense rules and it is difficult to attach meaning, consequence, or moral to almost anything. The Mad Hatter is especially affected by this condition of meaninglessness and he is also one of the most wordy of the characters, constantly assessing his own and others' grammar and syntax to challenge the received meanings of language.

THE NATURE OF BEING AND NOT BEING

Alice's world is a philosophical puzzle. Even though she is just a child, Alice thinks and reflects deeply and comes up with some very existential problems. While in Wonderland she comes to wonder if she has become a different child completely, and lists the children she knows, trying to work out how their attributes define them as being Mabel or Ada. She then puzzles over the meaning of 'I'. Such a fundamental question of existence and identity is huge for a child to ponder, and it casts quite an uneasy shadow over Alice's movements through Wonderland. Her identity changes with each new scene and collection of characters, each questioning her and her authority, just as she herself does. The first thing the Caterpillar says to Alice is "Who are YOU?" and she is trying to find a consistent answer to this question the whole way through the story. Just as in life, the prospect of growing up and becoming someone different is threatening her sense of self and her vision of everything around her.

Questioning the nature of being also inevitably brings up the question of *not* being. In Wonderland, though absurdity and confusion abound, death still looms in a real way. Just as in Alice's life as a well-off rather sheltered child, the idea of death is both ever present, but shadowy and distant at the same time – a constant terrifying threat that never quite materializes… yet.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GARDEN

Alice finds herself in a giant hall at the end of the rabbit hole, surrounded by locked doors. She becomes frustrated and sad, homesick for her family and her pet, but when a tiny door appears and she manages to peer inside at a beautiful garden, she has something to aim for. The garden, full of beautiful colors and cool fountains, is an idyllic vision and Alice is desperate to get to it. It represents her desire, her will, and her belief in goodness and happiness.

EATING AND DRINKING, GROWING AND SHRINKING

Alice is on the verge of growing up and, in Wonderland, she experiences many bizarre physical changes. Being in Wonderland is unpredictable and disturbing at times, much like transforming from a child into an adult. In the hall of doors, mysterious potions and cakes give her the ability to grow and shrink, but she always misses out on the size she needs to be. When she is at her smallest, she is swept away by the pool of tears and when she finally manages to grow, thanks to the edible pebbles in the White Rabbit's house, she grows too much and gets stuck. This endless uncertainty is a visual way that Carroll plots Alice's spiritual journey as she comes to terms with both the physical and psychological changes that are part of growing up.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bantam Classics edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass* published in 1984.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head though the doorway.

Related Characters: Alice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the text, Alice has just followed the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole and has met her first Wonderland obstacle: she is too big to fit through the "rat-hole" doorway.

This moment is crucial because it establishes the absurd world of Wonderland, in which normal physical and spatial logic does not apply. Further, the portrayal of Alice as desperate, but unable, to get outside captures profound aspects of childhood: the desire to play and the restraint placed on that desire by society, whether parental rules in the "real" world or a too-small door here. (It's also worth noting that these images are reminiscent of the romantic gardens of which Carroll's contemporaries wrote, as well as the environments he may have been accustomed to seeing around Oxford College, where he taught—gardens where children often weren't allowed to play.)

The fact that Alice can't even get her head through the doorway also indicates that she *tries* to get through the doorway, implying a child's wishful belief that wanting something enough can make the impossible become possible. While the tiny door is itself an absurd and illogical thing to find in a big dark hall, Alice's inability to get through it here creates a sense that there is some logic to this world that makes sense: big things can't pass through small openings. But moments later Alice will shrink. Thus this image of Alice beside the small door creates a sense of logical stability that the novel then immediately subverts—Alice *is* able to get through, and so her childish effort to get through an absurdly small door is rewarded rather than proved to be silly, as it would in the "real" world. Wonderland is a world where rules can get broken precisely in the way that a child might wish real world rules could be broken.

'What a curious feeling!' said Alice; 'I must be shutting up like a telescope .'

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Alice says this line immediately after drinking the "DRINK ME" vial that causes her to shrink down to a small enough size to pass through the rat-hole sized passage. The shrinking and growing Alice experiences in this scene (and throughout the book) bring up Carroll's themes of growing up and moving from childhood to adulthood—a disorienting change of size and even identity.

The choice of the telescope image is also interesting for several reasons. Carroll could have chosen a more traditional sentence about shrinking, but instead we have a reference to a specific scientific device. The mechanical telescope can collapse to become larger or smaller, and its main use as an instrument is to change visual scale. It takes an object far away and hardly visible and expands it so the viewer can see more clearly.So while Alice may shut up like a telescope, the telescope itself actually *expands* things: another experiment with scale in the illogical rules of Wonderland.

This is actually the second time the telescope image is used in this scene. When Alice is looking around for a way to enter the door, she imagines a "book of rules for shutting people up like telescopes," Her wish thendirectly leads to this moment in which she actually is shutting up like a telescope—further emphasizing the dream-like reality of Wonderland, in which some wishes or desires manifest themselves in fantastical ways.

Chapter 2 Quotes

'But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, THAT'S the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them.

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Alice is moved to this existential question after she has grown very large from eating the "EAT ME" cake. She is confused about how the same self can be both so small and so large in quick succession, as well as how her current adventures are compatible with her normal life the day before. She wonders if she has perhaps taken on someone else's identity and tries to reassure herself by listing why she has not become a different young girl. She then tries (and fails) to do arithmetic and to list geographic capitols.

This quote gets to the heart of one of the book's preoccupations: how do we define identity? Here, Alice asks herself whether she can reasonably consider herself the same person if she has undergone such a dramatic physical change. That Alice would ask herself these questions suggests the instability of childhood identity (though one could also argue that she only grows and shrinks as she does, or is in Wonderland at all, because her unformed childhood identity makes it possible for her to do so). Yet Alice also attempts to use logic to answer the question for herself, eliminating possibilities and trying to assert her selfhood by showing that her mind remains unchanged through the display of knowledge. That she fails to display any such knowledge is humorous and another indicator of being a child, but her instinct to even attempt such methods suggests the adult she will inevitably grow up to become.

Alice's childish question is also, on deeper reflection, a profound one: Is the idea of a stable, continuous identity even a realistic one? Is there a point of change at which a person becomes someone else? A person who changes his behavior might refer to himself as becoming a "new man," after all. Alice's question, spurred by her physical change, can be seen as a penetrating question about the human condition in the face of other sorts of change: intellectual, emotional, or any kind of maturation.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ 'But who is to give the prizes?' quite a chorus of voices asked.
'Why, SHE, of course,' said the Dodo, pointing to Alice with one finger; and the whole party at once crowded round her, calling out in a confused way, 'Prizes! Prizes!'

Related Characters: The Dodo (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

These lines come just after the Dodo has led the other animals in a "Caucus-Race": a nonsensical competition in which the group runs aimlessly and without rules until they are suddenly instructed to stop. After ruminating for a while, the Dodo decides that all the animals have won and that they will all receive prizes from Alice.

The passage underscores the illogical nature of Wonderland, offers a political parody, and shows increased maturation in Alice's character. Carroll implies that politicians, like these animals, race in caucuses without sensible rules and without logical reward systems. The political stand-ins here receive prizes based not on aptitude or success, but on the whims of a Dodo and a child. It is notable that a Dodo decides who has won the race, as Dodo birds are considered symbols of stupidity and irrelevance, due to their rapid seventeenth-century extinction. Thus the leader and arbiter of the pack would seem the least qualified to make any decisions on who had won the race.

By asking Alice to apportion the gifts, the Dodo further inverts the authority structure one might expect from the scene. Alice plays, here, the role of the more mature adult, responding to the "confused" crowd. As she gives away sweets to the other animals, she is left only with a thimble, which the Dodo ceremoniously presents to her. Not only does this underscore the illogical nature of Wonderland and its allegorical political system, but it also points to Alice's development into a more empathetic and adult figure, in which she sacrifices of herself to provide for the animals around her.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ "It was much pleasanter at home,' thought poor Alice, 'when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole--and yet--and yet--it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life!"

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

After finding another growth-inducing liquid in the White Rabbit's house, Alice becomes trapped in the building. And, as often happens in the tale, a negative experience in Wonderland makes her yearn for her previous, simpler life.

The aspects of Wonderland that frustrate Alice are notable here: The first is "growing larger and smaller," a process that continues to undermine her sense of identity and which brings into question her relative age and maturity level. Simply changing her physical shape does not allow her to escape the rabbit-hole or to become any mentally older or younger, reiterating that physical shifts do not correlate to mental ones. The second is "being ordered around by mice and rabbits," an experience that inverts the authority structure of humans over animals to which she is accustomed in her "pleasanter" life. Yet even as Alice yearns for that more idyllic, more stable home, she recognizes how interesting and exciting this "rather curious" life in Wonderland can be.

These lines clarify some of the challenging but valuable lessons Alice must take from Wonderland. She must learn to interact with the animals, to be empathetic but also firm, and she must accept the uncertainty of the world and rapid changes in identity, particularly those associated with life beyond childhood.

❝ She stretched herself up on tiptoe, and peeped over the edge of the mushroom, and her eyes immediately met those of a large caterpillar, that was sitting on the top with its arms folded, quietly smoking a long hookah, and taking not the smallest notice of her or of anything else.

Related Characters: Alice, The Caterpillar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

This passage closes the fourth chapter and serves as the transition between Alice's encounter with an oversized puppy and her pivotal conversation with the Caterpillar. Her decision to explore the mushroom only comes after she looks around for something else to eat or drink. This plotting demonstrates, first, how Alice is gradually learning the symbolic logic of Wonderland. She knows, by now, that her dreamworld is organized around digestible objects.

By connecting the idea of a magical food with the following meeting with the Caterpillar, Carroll also seems to imply that the conversation with the Caterpillar will offer a different, non-physical form of transformation. And this preference for psychological exploration comes into focus when the Caterpillar is introduced with the "long hookah," a symbol with several interlocking meanings. It can be interpreted as an image of Eastern cultures (about which Europeans like Carroll often fantasized), as an indication of mind-altering substances, as a sign of laziness—or as a combination of all three. The Caterpillar's uninterested response to Alice highlights his apathetic or addled state, setting the stage for the dreamlike quality of their ensuing conversation about identity.

It is important to note, however, that no convincing evidence has surfaced regarding Carroll himself ever using mind-altering substances, despite the fact that his interest in dreams and fantastical worlds, which is clearly on display in *Alice in Wonderland*, is often misread as a sign that he himself was a proponent or user of psychedelics. While it may be tempting to interpret the hookah-smoking caterpillar as a symbol for drugs, it is unlikely that Carroll intended such a meaning.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ 'Who are YOU?' said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I--I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.'

Related Characters: The Caterpillar, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

The Caterpillar's question builds on Alice's continued anxiety about her identity. Alice has previously ruminated internally on the issue, wondering how she can be the same person when she changes size so rapidly. So when the Caterpillar voices a similar inquiry, what should be a perfunctory question—asking a new person who they are—instead becomes a deep philosophical quandary.

Alice tries to reassure herself with a set of logical

assertions. When she says she knew who she "WAS" previously, she points out that identity can only be known in retrospect. And she implies that understanding a past self does not guarantee comprehension of the present. Furthermore, she cannot pinpoint the exact moments of personal development, but rather notices the incongruity between the past self and the present one. From these two ideas, she arrives at the conclusion that she "must have been changed." The verb "must" is important here, as it shows that Alice demands that her conclusions be based on rigorous logic, not only on observation or emotion.

From this conversation, we see how Wonderland teaches Alice to find new depths in simple actions and words—and how she has begin to search for ways, both logical and illogical, to make sense of those depths.

'I HAVE tasted eggs, certainly,' said Alice, who was a very truthful child; 'but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.'
'I don't believe it,' said the Pigeon; 'but if they do, why then they're a kind of serpent, that's all I can say.'

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Alice's conversation with the Pigeon comes just after the one with the Caterpillar, and the bird challenges Alice's identity even more assertively. Whereas the insect was simply blasé, the pigeon interrogates Alice about her very humanity. He claims that because Alice eats eggs and has a long neck, she must be a serpent—because serpents have long necks and eat eggs. That is to say, because she has certain characteristics that resemble a serpent, she must *be* a serpent.

This quote builds on two main themes developing in Wonderland: the wish and failure to define identity through logical statements, and Alice's quest to empathize with the perspectives of others. In the first theme, we see how two observations—eating eggs and having a long neck—cannot equate to having a fixed identity, for they alone do not guarantee that Alice is a serpent. Existence, Carroll, implies, cannot simply be built up from a series of behaviors, for those behaviors may be shared by two very different beings.

Second, Alice must reckon with the fact that another being would receive the same information as her and arrive at a completely different conclusion. For the pigeon, egg-eating and long-necked creatures are equivalent to being a serpent, whereas for Alice these same qualities are simply markers of being human. This interaction, then, teaches Alice that different beings experience reality from different perspectives: a key lesson she takes away from her adventures in the text.

Chapter 6 Quotes

'If everybody minded their own business,' the Duchess said in a hoarse growl, 'the world would go round a deal faster than it does.'

Related Characters: The Duchess (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

The Duchess delivers this piece of nonsensical advice amidst a chaotic scene. Plates fly around her kitchen, hitting the Duchess and her pig-baby, and an overly-peppery soup causes all the inhabitants to sneeze excessively.

It's worth looking at the logic of the sentence, for Carroll, as we know by now, pays a lot of attention to differences between effective and ineffective language. First, the world can neither "go round" faster nor slower, for it maintains a constant speed despite what people do; second, everyone dealing with their own affairs is precisely and ironically what has caused the scene of mayhem; third, what the characters require at this moment is not increased speed, but a slower, less chaotic pace.

The meaningless of the Duchess' statement here conflicts with her presentation as an adult figure of authority. She gives Alice a great deal of advice and herself has a child, yet here she shows herself to be an entirely inept maternal figure. Thus Carroll further undermines the authority of Wonderland's adult figures, presenting them as obscuring the world's insanity with meaningless adages instead of pragmatically confronting situations.

'Oh, you can't help that,' said the Cat: 'we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.'
'How do you know I'm mad?' said Alice.
'You must be,' said the Cat, 'or you wouldn't have come here.'

Related Characters: Alice, The Cheshire Cat (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, one of the most quoted from Carroll's work, comes during Alice's interaction with Wonderland's perplexing Cheshire Cat: a character who seems wise, yet who never conveys any real knowledge to Alice or to the reader. He functions, then, almost as a parody of the truth-teller figure we might expect at this point in a childhood adventure tale. The Cat is prompted to make his comment on universal insanity when Alice asks advice on where to go and the Cat observes that both of her options—one leads to a Hatter, one to a March Hare—will bring her into contact with mad characters.

Once again, Carroll makes a mockery of supposedly logical statements: The Cheshire Cat constructs a quick proof of Alice's madness based on 1) All inhabitants of Wonderland are mad 2) Alice is in Wonderland 3) Therefore Alice is mad. This type of thinking recalls Alice's own failed attempts to define identity, but here the Cheshire Cat does not cite details concerning her personal characteristics. Instead he focuses on the environment in which Alice has found herself, implying that identity is more a factor of who and what surrounds Alice, not something internal to her character.

Furthermore, the claim of universal insanity makes a broader statement on Wonderland—and on the adult world that a maturing Alice is learning how to navigate. Though she might expect it to be firmly grounded in rules and ordered systems, it is in fact highly chaotic and fundamentally unhinged. Accepting this lesson becomes another component of her emotional growth as she progresses in Wonderland.

Chapter 7 Quotes

'Your hair wants cutting,' said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.
'You should learn not to make personal remarks,' Alice said with some severity; 'it's very rude.'

Related Characters: Alice, The Mad Hatter (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation comes just as Alice arrives at the Hare's house and sits down with him, the Hatter, and the Dormouse. Their rude behavior toward Alice causes her to first question and then challenge their personal etiquette.

Carroll stresses their rudeness even before Alice articulates it by noting that the comment on Alice's hair is the Hatter's "first speech." The Hatter, then, does not pay attention to the social norms of introducing oneself or behaving cordially, but rather jumps directly into criticism. His next comment will be to challenge Alice with a riddle, once more eschewing proper conduct for an overly aggressive statement.

Alice's response is a striking example of her growing confidence in Wonderland. Instead of accepting the Hatter's criticism or finding herself intimidated by him, she ripostes with her own "personal remark." (This is a bit ironic since she is guilty of precisely what she accuses the Hatter of doing.) Consider the difference between the Hatter's verb "want" and Alice's "should": both carry a normative weight, but Alice's choice is far stronger. She does not simply hope for a consistent ethical framework but actually believes that she knows one. Though she presents herself to be less mad than the others around her—and thus more of an adult figure—the irony of Alice's statement also slightly undermines her authority. Carroll leaves it open whether we should pay heed to Alice's rigid rules or to the madness around her: both perhaps have some merit for the reader.

'If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, 'you wouldn't talk about wasting IT. It's HIM.'

Related Characters: The Mad Hatter (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

The conversation here strays into even more existentially murky territory as the Hatter and Hare dispute Alice's belief in one of the most basic elements of existence: time.

More specifically, the Hatter complicates the notion of time by giving it a gender and personal identity: it is possible for him to "know" Time and to claim that Time's gender is masculine. When himself challenged by Alice, the Hatter justifies his outlandish claim by recounting how the Queen

of Hearts accused him of "murdering time." If the phrase is taken literally rather than figuratively—as phrases often are in Wonderland—this accusation would imply that for the Hatter, Time had to be a person. As a result it can be murdered, deceived, and warped, such as is the case at the tea party, where the time is always six o'clock.

Like the earlier questions posed on identity, this discussion takes a common term and renders it far more complex than Alice's previously fixed world view had considered it to be. Again, Carroll archives this end by relying on the deep philosophy inherent in simple adages, demanding that both Alice and the reader to think more critically about just what the concept of time means.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ The players all played at once without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs; and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious passion, and went stamping about, and shouting 'Off with his head!' or 'Off with her head!' about once in a minute.

Related Characters: The Queen of Hearts

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

The Queen of Hearts enters this fury during a game of croquet, in which the flamingos and hedgehogs function as mallets and balls and which Alice is expected to pick up without having been informed of any rules.

Much like the "Caucus-Race" of Chapter 3, the game entirely lacks order—with the merit of the players dependent on changing rules that are ultimately assured only by the autocratic Queen. Yet if the caucus race offered a lighthearted critique of politics with prizes for all, this scene is a cruel counterpoint, in which no player can correctly follow the shifting rules and thus all can easily lose the right to their heads. "Off with her head" is likely an allusion to Shakespeare's *Richard III* (a play about a famously murderous king), which Carroll would cite explicitly in a 1889 letter.

It is notable that the symbols and roles here should all be indicators of gentility: croquet is a slow game played on stately fields, cards are a similarly calming pastime, and royalty like a Queen and a Duchess ought to be stately in their behaviors. Thus Carroll has taken the stereotypical symbols of good English society, placed them in a romantic, Oxford-esque garden, and yet he has rendered them bloodthirsty and unordered. This furthers the presentation of Wonderland as a place where Alice uncovers the scruples in adult society. Reality is not nearly as ordered as it purports to be, and Alice continues to struggle to orient and reassure herself amidst the madness.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ 'Tut, tut, child!' said the Duchess. 'Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it.' And she squeezed herself up closer to Alice's side as she spoke.

Related Characters: The Duchess (speaker), Alice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

The Duchess speaks to Alice after being fetched to offer the King and Queen counsel on the state of the Cheshire Cat. As the two walk together, the Duchess grows fond of Alice, but also chastises her and offers gratuitous advice when she does not pay attention.

Carroll here presents the Duchess as a parody of the moralizing adult, a character with which children like Alice would certainly be familiar. Yet by this point in the tale, Alice and the reader have both grown skeptical of the Duchess' character—as well as with any Wonderland figure who tends to deal in adages and empty platitudes. More often than not, the "morals" presented thus far have been devoid of real meaning, even if they can be extracted from any situation, as the Duchess has implied. That anyone can "find" a "moral" in anything implies, after all, that morals are haphazardly discovered by individuals. They can be uncovered in or forced out from a given situation, but they do not emerge naturally.

Here, Alice continues to grow distant from the empty words of the adult figures in Wonderland. She recognizes that the Duchess is only interested in moralizing, rather than listening to any input from Alice's end. The Duchess only wants to find her own conclusions instead of actually communicating, and she even physically invades Alice's space, drawing ever closer like an over-protective mother. Nineteenth-century English children's literature was known to take a similar sermonizing tone, so Carroll uses this scene

to show both character development in Alice and to parody a literary tradition.

'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' Alice asked.
'We called him Tortoise because he taught us,' said the Mock Turtle angrily: 'really you are very dull!'

Related Characters: Alice, The Mock-Turtle (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

The Mock Turtle chastises Alice, here, for interrupting his story and for not understanding his pun on "Tortoise." The interruption is caused by the Mock Turtle noting that that his teacher was a Turtle but was called Tortoise—i.e. "taught us" when spoken aloud (with an English accent).

Despite her improved ability to navigate Wonderland, Alice struggles here to stay up-to-speed on the language games played by the other characters. And as before, her earnest questions induce a sharp reprimand: "dull" for having halted the Turtle's explanation to clarify how a turtle could also be a tortoise. Throughout this chapter and the next, the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon continue to make a dizzying number of similar puns. Some like "porpoise" and "purpose" Alice can grasp and clarify, while many others flit by without time for her to interrupt.

Carroll had actually used this pun once before, in a piece of philosophy called "What the Tortoise said to Achilles." This may seem like a small connection, but it also reiterates the deep thought that Carroll placed in the Wonderland world. Though Alice may experience her life through bizarre puns and confusing interrogations, each of these moments is built upon the philosophical and logical rigor Carroll was pursuing elsewhere in his studies.

Chapter 10 Quotes

'It all came different!' the Mock Turtle repeated thoughtfully. 'I should like to hear her try and repeat something now. Tell her to begin.' He looked at the Gryphon as if he thought it had some kind of authority over Alice.

Related Characters: The Mock-Turtle (speaker), Alice, The Gryphon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In these lines, the Mock Turtle confronts Alice on the quality of her storytelling, specifically on the form in which she recounts her previous Wonderland adventures. It is notable that the text does not give any of the direct speech from Alice, so the reader has no access to whether her words were actually inaccurate or badly composed.

The Mock Turtle's interjection is almost identical to Alice's own interruption of his story just one chapter earlier. We could very well charge him with the same "dullness" Alice was accused of earlier, in particular because the Turtle wants Alice to "repeat" instead of produce new information. That repetition causes Alice to compare this experience with her lessons in school, a further irony since the Mock Turtle had before said he wanted to move from lessons into games. And when Alice does try to repeat what she said, the game-song of the Lobster Quadrille instead fills her mind, causing her to recite a bizarre poem.

It is also worth examining what line of Alice's story causes the Turtle so much irritation: the moment when the Caterpillar corrects her citation of "You are old, Father William"—which is the first part of Robert Southey's 1799 poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them." The poem is an example of the more traditional moralizing literature Carroll pokes fun at throughout the text. As with the Caterpillar, the Mock Turtle explicitly denies the line in favor of the more playful and nonsensical Lobster Quadrille. But at the same time he also corrects Alice and looks to the Gryphon for authority, so he simultaneously plays both the adult figure and the silly disruptor of tradition.

Chapter 11 Quotes

'Give your evidence,' said the King; 'and don't be nervous, or I'll have you executed on the spot.'

Related Characters: The King of Hearts (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

The King gives this harsh pronouncement to the Hatter during a dystopian trial on the Knave of Hearts for having

stolen the Queen's tarts. Having already satirized politics and the monarchy, Carroll here takes aim at the judicial system, presenting it as a ridiculous, unorganized, and unfair game in which the King can play the judge in a trial for which the Queen is the accuser.

Previously, the King has been the more kind counterpoint to the Queen, for instance acquitting all the croquet players the Queen had wished to kill. But here, as the judge, he adopts a more violent position, promising to kill witnesses not based on any crime they have committed but simply on how they behave in the court. Of course, this is a self-defeating proposition, since threatening to execute someone will only make them more nervous. Just a few lines later, he will revise this statement to threaten execution regardless of whether the Hatter is nervous or not.

The remarkable shift the King's character indicates how his personality changes based on the context of his actions. Placed in this position of power and authority, his disposition changes entirely. This rapid change connects to the text's earlier preoccupation with how Alice's identity alters in different contexts. Here, however, the question is less an abstract philosophical one and more connected to a specific political situation.

❝ Here one of the guinea-pigs cheered, and was immediately suppressed by the officers of the court. (As that is rather a hard word, I will just explain to you how it was done. They had a large canvas bag, which tied up at the mouth with strings: into this they slipped the guinea-pig, head first, and then sat upon it.)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

These lines reveal a startling and perplexing break in the perspective and voice of the text. Previously Alice's adventures are recounted from an omniscient third-person perspective, but here a specific storyteller emerges to clarify the meaning of the word "suppressed."

That storyteller is presented as a helpful figure to Alice. In contrast to the other Wonderland characters who define words badly, correct Alice's speech, and generally only offer criticism, the "I" here is caring and attentive. He observes that the narration has included a word Alice (or the childhood reader) may not know, and then parses out its significance with a visual example that would be well-received by children. What is particularly notable about this disruption is that Alice herself responds to it, thanking the "I" (in her thoughts) for explaining the word. Then she shows off her new prowess when "suppressed" is repeated on the following page.

Beyond offering an alternative way of interacting with children to that of, say, the sermonizing Duchess or the enigmatic Cheshire cat, these lines call into question the entire narrative world of Wonderland. They seem to indicate that the story may be being told orally to a young Alice figure, or that her dream possesses some kind of internal narrator. But we should note that it is the *character* Alice who responds to the voice, not a separate listener, almost as if Carroll's voice inhabits her dream.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ 'Who cares for you?' said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time.) 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Alice responds, here, to the Queen's favorite exclamation of "Off with her head!" and her comment causes the cards to rise up and fly at her. The fight is provoked by Alice's increased confidence about the irrational proceedings of the trial, in which she continues to reject the false evidence and malpractice, in particular the Queen's wish for the sentence to come before the verdict.

Alice's maturation comes to a conclusion in these lines in several ways. She has been growing physically larger throughout the court proceedings (not based on eating anything, but rather of her own accord), and this physical enlargement is mirrored by her increased confidence. That confidence comes across in her flat-out rejection of the Queen as "nothing but a pack of cards." Whereas before Alice took issue with specific thoughts or speeches of the Queen, here she simply rejects her as an inanimate object. This is possible because of Alice's new size, for whereas before the cards were equally large as Alice, here they have been restored to their proper dimensions. Thus they can be seen not as threats or characters, but simply as objects.

Carroll completes this idea by making the lines serve as the transition from Alice's dreamworld back into her reality. As the cards fly at her, Alice awakens, indicating that, having learnt all she can from Wonderland, she can now depart. These details present the dream as a space for character and personal development, in which Alice must develop the maturation and self-confidence necessary to reject mad authoritarian figures like the Queen and acquire her own moral compass.

'Oh, I've had such a curious dream!' said Alice, and she told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about; and when she had finished, her sister kissed her, and said, 'It WAS a curious dream, dear, certainly: but now run in to your tea; it's getting late.'

Related Characters: Alice, Alice's Sister (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Alice and her sister converse just after Alice has awoken from her Wonderland experience. After recounting the dream, Alice will depart and her sister will enter a strange reverie where she too lives in the world of Wonderland images for a time—as if Alice's storytelling gives her access to the world and its lessons.

It is notable that Alice has explained her adventures already once before to the Mock Turtle, who listened but rejected the way in which she told the story. Though Alice's sister is more receptive, affirming the curiosity of the dream, she also quickly moves on from the tale, returning Alice to the normal rituals of waking life. This ritual, however, is "tea," an experience that Alice has now come to see not as an ordinary, simple process, but rather one filled with the madness of Wonderland. Furthermore, Alice's sister justices the ritual with an allusion to time—"it's getting late"—which is the exact theme called into question by Alice's tea with the Hatter, Hare, and Dormouse. (Remember, it was the Hatter who called time a "him," and the three had a broken timepiece stuck at six o'clock.)

Carroll's text, then, ends on an ambiguous note. On the one hand, Alice seems to have been restored to the normal rituals of her childhood life, in which Wonderland would simply be a magical outing. The sister's emphasis on the past tense of "WAS" highlights that interpretation. But on the other hand, the references to specific symbols in the dream imply that these symbols may have taken on new, more complicated meanings in Alice's life. Considering Alice's interest in how past identity defines the present self, perhaps the "WAS" should not be written off so quickly. That her sister can access Wonderland through Alice's storytelling also implies that the tales hold the power to affect others and to apply to "real" life. Furthermore, we have the notable reintroduction of the narrative voice, here enacted through the "you" that explicitly addresses the reader. Whereas before the "I" explained the term "suppressed" to both Alice within the text and to the reader, here he refers directly to us.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1 - DOWN THE RABBIT-HOLE

A little girl named Alice is sitting beside her sister, who is reading what Alice thinks is a very dull book, when suddenly a white rabbit appears and says "Oh dear! I shall be late!" For a moment, the rabbit doesn't strike Alice as odd at all, until she realizes that she has never seen a rabbit in a waistcoat or with a pocket-watch before. Instinctively, she follows him across a field and, before she has a chance to think, down a rabbit hole.

Alice is bored and sleepy on the bank, and though it is never outright stated the implication is that she is drifting into the dream. Alice's dream state—and her magical thinking as a young child—are on display as she is not surprised by the fact of a talking rabbit—it's only when she realizes that it's a well-dressed talking rabbit that it gets her attention. And she follows the Rabbit from her world to its world, the world of the dream.

The rabbit hole goes on and on like a vertical tunnel, and as Alice falls, it is as if time slows down – she is able to consider everything around her. The walls of the tunnel are filled with shelves and bookcases, from which she manages to select a jar labeled "Orange Marmalade", but finding it empty, puts it back as she falls. She muses on what her family would say if they could see her. She thinks she must be near the center of the earth by now, and proceeds to recite facts she has learned in school about the size of world, getting stuck on the ideas of Latitude and Longitude.

Alice is now in completely foreign territory. The rabbit hole does not seem to belong to the world of her sister and the bank, but a new world, not just a rabbit world, but one where gravity and the shape and composition of the earth do not exist as they did before, and everyday objects, like marmalade placed in new and ridiculous circumstances. None of this strikes Alice as strange or worrying, as she instead daydreams about facts things she's half-learned in school. A mixture of dream and reality is occurring, offering Alice the opportunity to see her own experiences in a new light.

As she keeps falling, Alice wonders if she might come out the other side of the world, and if people in Australia are themselves upside down. Then she starts thinking about her cat, Dinah, and wonders if cats eat bats. She begins to get dazed and sleepy, dreaming she is hand in hand with Dinah the cat, when she finally reaches the ground with a thump. She gets up straight away, not at all hurt, and sees another long passage before her, along which the white rabbit is hurrying, muttering again about being terribly late.

Alice often regurgitates information she has heard from adults. She has learned geography but doesn't entirely understand how gravity works and so the picture she has of the world is a mixture of facts and imagination—as a child, her "real" world is reminiscent of Wonderland. Her thoughts about cats eating bats, or bats eating cats, start the novella's exploration of language, its meaning, and its meaninglessness.

Alice follows, but when she turns a corner, she loses sight of the rabbit and finds herself in a huge hall, with doors all around her. All the doors are locked, so she comes back to the center of the room. Now she finds a little table with a key on top. Thinking it must open one of the doors, she goes around the room trying it but it doesn't fit any of them. Then a new door appears, a tiny door behind a curtain. The key fits perfectly. Alice opens the door and kneels down and peers through it to a beautiful **garden**. But the doorway seems to be for a small animal, not a girl. It's too small for Alice to fit through.

The long hall with the locked doors presents Alice with a puzzle. She understands perfectly well what she has to do: use the key to unlock one of the doors, but in the end she discovers that the key unlocks a door that is the wrong size for her. This is quite a metaphor for childhood, where children want to do things—and know just what it is that they want to do—but are told that they are too young or too small. Wonderland inverts this by making Alice too big. The garden, here, represents the dream of the thing she wants to do, or achieve.

Alice wishes she could "shut up like a telescope", and goes back to the table to see if she can find anything to help (she has started to believe that anything is possible). Something has appeared on the table that was not there before – a bottle of liquid, labeled "**DRINK ME**". Alice is a clever child, and will not drink it until she sees that it is not marked "Poison". It has a very pleasant taste and she finishes it quickly.

Unlike the world above ground, Alice is able to fulfill her imagination here – she imagines shutting up like a telescope and it seems that the mere wish is enough to conjure the bottle of magic. Note how she doesn't succumb to it though - she's still concerned about rules and safety. And yet, at the same time, she's also completely trusting: if she sees no note she assumes it must be safe. It doesn't occur to her that the world might not be straightforward.

Alice feels very strange, like she is **shrinking**, and in fact she is. She has become the perfect size for the tiny door. Alice hopes she won't shrink any further – she can imagine snuffing out entirely like a flame. She goes back to the door to the beautiful **garden**. She realizes she has forgotten the key, so she goes back to the table but, being the size of a mouse, can no longer reach it. She tries to clamber up, but the table is made of glass and she slips off again. She soon becomes very tired and upset, but then tells herself off for crying. Alice is generally very hard on herself.

What began as an adventure is now playing out like an impossible challenge for Alice – the moment she finds an opportunity, another obstacle springs up before her. The way these obstacles and opportunities appear according to what Alice needs at that moment. She seems at once to be in control – because the room keep changing according to her, and out of control, because it changes without her willing it to. Note how Alice has internalized the idea that she shouldn't get upset about things—something adults around must tell her all the time.

Alice finds a box under the table and in it, a tiny cake with the words "**EAT ME**" on the top. She decides to eat the cake, hoping she will get bigger, and waits anxiously to see which way she will **grow**, but she appears not to be growing any way at all, so she finishes the whole cake.

Alice's dream world is very focused on the idea of physical change – Alice must grow or shrink to transform to her new environment – this is not so different from the new demands that Alice faces as a child growing up.

CHAPTER 2 - THE POOL OF TEARS

Alice suddenly feels herself starting to **grow**. She can see her feet disappear beneath her as she gets taller and taller. She begins to worry that her feet will have no one to dress them and tries to work out how she can send parcels of shoes to her right foot at one address and her left foot at another. She berates herself for talking nonsense, but soon enough, she has in fact filled the large hall and her head has hit the ceiling.

Alice grows so much and so quickly that she soon views her body as a foreign entity, with a life of its own. This is very upsetting for her – she has no control over her own growth and even her limbs don't seem to be connected to her. This is a magnification of the problem of not feeling in control of one's body during the strange transformations of adolescence.

Alice looks down at the tiny door. She can now only peer through the doorway with one eye. She starts to cry again. She tells herself off but she can't stop – giant tears come pouring into the hall until she is standing in a pool of her own tears. Just then the white rabbit appears and scampers through the hall, beautifully dressed in a pair of white gloves. The rabbit is still worrying about being late – he says the Duchess will be very mad to be kept waiting.

As Alice grows and the garden becomes smaller so she can hardly see it, she gets very upset – her ideal place, her hope is being lost, reminding her of her uncomfortable situation and her loneliness in this strange world. Her inconsistent size frustrates and saddens her as she can't reconcile her identity as a sensitive young child and as a giant, independent and alone.

Alice, in quite a state, thinks she must take her chance and ask the rabbit for help so she calls out to him. The rabbit is startled and drops his gloves and fan, so Alice picks them up and fans herself with them – it has become very warm in the hall. The Rabbit runs off and hides. Alice starts talking to herself again, trying to solve the puzzle of who she has become. She thinks of all the children she knows, but doesn't think she has become any of them.

Alice's self-consciousness about her size and her self comes out here. She fills the hall and scares off the rabbit, who had initially provoked her curiosity. Feeling like a scary beast is not a nice feeling for a young girl and causes Alice to question whether she is even Alice anymore. This can be seen as a metaphor for how adulthood looms ahead of Alice.

Then Alice thinks of all the things she knows. She tries to remember a particular rhyme about a crocodile, but the words sound wrong and she starts to cry again, and imagines that if she got the rhyme wrong, she must be Mabel after all, and considers that if she is Mabel, she will stay in the rabbit hole forever, but then she wishes her family would put their heads to the hole because she's feeling very lonely. She cries even harder.

Alice's changing body has made her question her identity. She looks for reassurance to her mind, to what she knows. But what she knows has also somehow been modified in such a way that she recognizes the shift. Now she wonders if really may have become a different person. It does not occur to her that she could change and remain herself.

Alice realizes that she is now wearing one of the white rabbit's gloves. She is **shrinking** again. It must be the fan she's carrying, she thinks, and tosses it away and sure enough, she stops shrinking. She rushes for the tiny door, being even smaller now than before, but the door is locked again. Alice despairs. Then she slips and finds she has fallen into a pool of salt water that she cried when she was a giant.

Now the growing and shrinking phenomenon isn't reserved for edible and drinkable things. Just by holding the rabbit's fan, Alice starts herself shrinking. The rules of Wonderland constantly change, leaving Alice at its mercy and having to adapt, and that she is even affected by the things she did herself when she was different.

Alice spots another creature in the pool, swimming far off. She sees that it is a mouse, who has also slipped into the pool of tears. Alice thinks she might as well try speaking to the mouse but he doesn't seem to understand English, so she tries addressing him in French. The first phrase she thinks of is "Ou est ma chatte?" which means "Where is my cat?" The mouse is suitably unnerved. Alice protests that the mouse would like her cat, Dinah, and proceeds to list her virtues. The mouse is very offended.

Language is one of the things Alice is supposed to have mastery over. She loves riddles and songs and is a witty child, so when she finds these animals not just talking fluently but talking a language that she hasn't learned, Alice is made to feel silly and offensive. Yet she is also learning about having empathy for other people—that she loves a cat is not enough to make a mouse love a cat.

So Alice tries to talk about dogs instead, and recalls a particularly good specimen belonging to her neighbor. But the mouse has had enough and starts to swim away. Alice calls to him and he turns sympathetically back and suggests that Alice listen to his "history", and then she'll understand the mouse's feelings about cats and dogs. The pool is now full of other animals, and they all collectively swim to shore.

Throughout her adventures in Wonderland, Alice learns many lessons – one of them is sympathizing with others, including strange creatures with strange stories. Alice puts her affection for her cat aside and tries to imagine what the Mouse would like to talk about.

CHAPTER 3 - A CAUCUS-RACE AND A LONG TALE

The animals assemble on the bank and wonder how they will ever get dry. The Mouse makes a dry speech about William the Conqueror, but they all remain as wet as ever. So the Dodo suggests they have a Caucus-race. Alice, recognizing that the Dodo expects someone to say something in response, asks what a Caucus-race is, but apparently the best way to learn is to do, so the Dodo marks out an almost-circular race track. On the count of three, everybody starts running, however they like, for however long. The Dodo stops the race after about half an hour and considers who has won.

The animals have conflated the two meanings of the word "dry," and the mouse tries to physically dry them by giving a boring, or "dry," speech. The Dodo and the caucus-race are parodies of politics, as Carroll seems to suggest that the Dodo resembles a proud and ceremonious politician but the actual race is a jumble of animals running without direction and purpose and without any real effect, that is then treated as if it did have a purpose or "winner."

After a great deal of thought, the Dodo announces that everybody has won and that Alice must give the prizes. Alice looks in her pocket and luckily finds a box of sweets and hands them around. The animals insist that she must also have a prize but all she has left is a thimble. The Dodo takes it and presents it ceremoniously to Alice. Alice bows in return, trying not to laugh at the Dodo's solemnity. The animals attempt to eat their sweets with great difficulty.

Yet the winners turn out to be all of them because there is not criteria for judging anything, and the prizes are meager. And yet all of this ridiculousness is treated by the animals as being of great importance. They seem unable to understand the substance of things, focusing solely on the importance of surface actions (which isn't a bad description of a lot of adult life, frankly). Alice has become the authority – she is like the adult in a room of children, and she is given a great deal of solemn respect by them all – they approach her humble candies as if they are delicacies. Alice is in her own category of person, neither child nor adult.

Then, Alice urges the Mouse to tell her his story. It is a sad tale, says the Mouse, which confuses Alice, thinking he is talking about his *tail*. The Mouse ignores her and goes on with the story, a rhyming tale about a judge-like feline character called Fury who puts a Mouse on trial. Part-way through, the Mouse stops to shout at Alice for not listening. The pair argues, and the Mouse, thinking Alice is talking nonsense, storms off. Alice and the animals call him back but he is too upset.

The Mouse's story foreshadows later events at the Queen's court of law, as a court of law in which a mouse is put on trial by a cat certainly isn't going to provide true, fair justice. Issues of language continue to arise, making it difficult for Alice and the animals to communicate. Yet the Mouse's anger at not being listened indicates just how important it is to people (or talking mice) to feel listened to.

They all wish the Mouse would come back. Alice misses Dinah the cat again – she thinks Dinah could easily bring the Mouse back to finish its story. One of the birds in the group wonders who Dinah is, and Alice excitedly describes the talented, bird-catching cat, which causes the birds in the group to make excuses and hurry off until Alice is left quite alone, thinking sadly of her beloved pet. She hears little feet approaching and hopes it is the Mouse.

Alice continues to see the entire world through her own feelings—which is typical of a child. She believes that because she loves her cat, everyone will love her cat. It doesn't occur to her that Dinah certainly would bring back the Mouse—probably in her mouth—or that a bunch of birds might be made uncomfortable by her friendship with a bird-catching cat. It's worth noting, too, that Dinah certainly doesn't just catch birds—she kills them. There is a specter of death here that doesn't occur to Alice, but certainly does to the animals.

CHAPTER 4 - THE RABBIT SENDS IN A LITTLE BILL

It is instead the White Rabbit, looking for his fan and gloves. He is very worried about being late, thinking the Duchess will have him executed. Alice tries to find his things but the room has changed out of all recognition. The rabbit spots Alice and calls impatiently to her to fetch another pair of gloves and a fan from his house. He has taken her for his housemaid, she thinks, but she runs off in the direction of the rabbit's home nevertheless.

The White Rabbit's fears about execution raise the specter of both death and social hierarchy within the realm of Wonderland. That this is a rabbit worrying about such things makes it funny, but nonetheless the Rabbits fear is well. And then the Rabbit turns around and asserts that hierarchy against Alice, thinking she is a servant and ordering her around.

Alice soon arrives at a little house with 'W. Rabbit' on a plaque next to the door. Alice goes in without knocking. She considers how strange it is to be a rabbit's messenger. She imagines what Dinah would say if she could order Alice around. She makes her way to a little dressing room and finds several pairs of gloves.

Alice finds it strange that she has wound up a rabbit's servant, and that a rabbit should have a nice house and nice gloves. But Alice's surprise raises a deeper question: why is anyone in the real adult world a servant to someone else; why does anyone have nice gloves?

Alice also finds a **bottle of liquid** – it is unlabeled but sure to make something interesting happen so she drinks it down. She hopes it'll make her **larger** again. It certainly does, but she soon regrets drinking so much at once, because in a mere moment, she has filled the room and has one foot up the chimney. Alice thinks she would much rather be back at home. Everything is so very strange. She thinks she ought to write a book about it when she grows up, but then, confusingly, she is very big already.

Note how Alice conflates the ideas of size with the idea of growing up. For a child, the two are interchangeable, and the child tends to think that when they "get big" they will naturally become wiser and more knowledgeable too. But now Alice is big, and she's just as confused as she was before. It's also worth noting a deeper observation here, too, which is that even for real adults wisdom doesn't necessarily come with size or growing up. Note also how, whenever Alice is particularly upset, she wants to go home, to regain the comfort of being a protected child as opposed to an adventurer out on her own in the world.

Alice has a conversation with herself about the pros and cons of never growing older, until she is interrupted by the White Rabbit impatient for his gloves. She hears the little feet pattering up the stairs and then hears the rabbit try to open the door, but Alice—huge now—is blocking it. She hears the rabbit mutter that he will instead try to go through the window so she puts her hand through and bats him away so that he falls into his vegetable garden. Alice hears the Rabbit angrily asking the gardener to remove the giant person from his house.

Growing up is occurring to Alice like a choice between two lives. She wonders if she will stay large but not get older. She thinks that she would like not to get old, but what if she will always have to learn lessons like a child? Both lives are unsatisfactory. Just as she is being attacked from the outside when the White Rabbit sees her as an intruder, she also attacks herself and sees herself as a kind of foreign object.

After a brief silence, Alice hears the sound of a cart and a group of the gardener's animal friends getting out ladders and ropes, and someone called Bill being chosen to go down the chimney. Alice feels sorry for this Bill, having everything charged to him, but nevertheless, she puts her foot as far as it can go down the chimney and gives Bill a kick.

The similarities continue between the animal world of Wonderland and Alice's world – the White Rabbit, like a country gentleman, has a number of animals in his employ for household tasks and these all have their positions in the food chain, Bill the lizard being the lowest.

The White Rabbit suggests burning the house down, but Alice threatens to set Dinah on him. Then the animals try throwing pebbles in through the windows. To Alice's surprise, some of the pebbles start turning into **cakes**. She thinks that eating one would surely make her **smaller**. She is delighted when she starts shrinking immediately. She runs out of the house, past Bill and the other animals, into the forest. She plans to find something to make her a little larger so that she can finally get into the **garden**.

Notice how Wonderland revolves around Alice and her experience. Edible, magical things seem to be planted for her at each new location, for example. We never see the other characters eating and becoming larger or smaller, this is a phenomenon reserved for Alice—Wonderland, as a product of her dream, is something that is focused solely around her.

But Alice doesn't know how to become the right size. As she considers the problem, she is beckoned from a nearby tree, by a giant puppy. She coaxes the puppy down but then she realizes that such a giant and probably hungry puppy might rather eat her than play. She picks up a stick instead and the puppy leaps down and is very entertained by the stick, charging at it until he's tired and closes his eyes, giving Alice the perfect getaway. Now Alice turns her attention to finding something to eat. She sees a huge mushroom, and thinks it might do the trick. She gets on tip-toes to see the top of it. Sitting on the mushroom is a Caterpillar, smoking a hookah pipe.

Alice meets characters that contradict themselves, which helps her to puzzle out her own contradictions as she is a child and growing up at the same time. The puppy is a good example of one of these characters. Alice encounters him only briefly but he immediately embodies two different identities, one a cute baby animal that Alice is probably used to petting, and the other a giant, threatening creature that could eat her. She is beginning to understand that the puppy can be both things at once, just as Dinah the cat can be her beloved pet and a bird-killer.

CHAPTER 5 - ADVICE FROM A CATERPILLAR

The Caterpillar lazily addresses Alice, by saying "Who are YOU?" Alice explains that she doesn't know how to answer, having recently been so many different Alices. The Caterpillar won't accept that as an answer, so she asks him shouldn't he tell her who HE is first. The Caterpillar doesn't see why.

This is a very significant question for Alice, disguised as a blasé inquiry from the sleepy creature. The Caterpillar cuts right to Alice's main insecurity, her identity.

Alice turns away, but the Caterpillar calls her back and tells her he has something important to say. He tells her to keep her temper. Alice is starting to get very angry at this hypocritical creature, but she keeps her cool and waits for him to speak again. He takes his time, smoking the hookah leisurely before asking her about how she thinks she has changed. Alice says she can't remember rhymes and things as she ought to. So the Caterpillar asks her to recite one called "You are old, Father William". She recites the poem, but it is not quite right. The Caterpillar says it is completely wrong.

The Caterpillar acts like a kind of wise man or teacher, but the advice he gives is off-topic and hypocritical, or involves making Alice give her thoughts rather than providing any real insight of his own. Alice's mind continues to be as fluid and non-stable as her body.

After another long pause, the Caterpillar wants to know what size Alice would *like* to be. Alice says she doesn't have a particular preference and that it's actually the constant changing between sizes that bothers her, but when pushed she says she would like to be bigger. The Caterpillar angrily suggests that three inches is the perfect size. But like many of Wonderland's creatures the offence is as quick to fade, and he tells Alice that one side of the mushroom will make her **taller** and one side will make her **smaller**. Then he mysteriously crawls away.

Alice's comment that it is the shifting of sizes rather than being either small or large that causes her the most trouble is an indication of how hard it can be to get a sense of yourself when you are undergoing change—such as growing up. The Caterpillar's offense at Alice not wanting to be his size shows how prickly other people (or animals) can be about their identity.

Alice is left to examine the mushroom. Not knowing which side is which, she puts her arms around the mushroom's trunk and grabs a piece with each hand and tries the first sample, but it makes her shrink even further – suddenly her head is touching her feet. So she gobbles down the other piece as fast as she can and feels her head become free of her feet. But it is her neck that is **growing** rather than the whole of her, and soon she is looming like a giraffe over the mushroom. She can't even see her shoulders and hands. But she finds that her neck is marvelously flexible, and she can swoop it down towards the foliage below.

The bizarre dream world of Wonderland becomes even more bizarre as Alice nearly shrinks herself away and then sprouts into a kind of girl-giraffe.

As Alice swoops, a pigeon flaps into her, calling her a serpent. She insists she isn't a serpent, but the pigeon is chattering away, describing how it is impossible to please the serpents and everything he has tried has failed, and just as he thought he was free, one comes flying out of the sky. Alice apologizes, but tells the pigeon she is only a little girl (though she seems to hardly believe it herself). The pigeon doesn't believe her, and is sure she is looking for eggs to eat. She says that girls do eat eggs but she isn't looking for any and the pigeon, still quite confused, tells her to stop bothering him then.

Alice and the pigeon engage in a conversation about identity. Underlying that conversation is an argument about what makes up one's identity. From the pigeon's point of view, if you have a long swooping neck and like eggs then you are a serpent. Alice contends in contrast that she is a little girl, but has no way to explain why or how she is a little girl. Of course, Alice is right and the pigeon is wrong, but the exchange does point to the slipperiness of the categories we use to define ourselves to ourselves or others.

Alice remembers the mushroom, and tries eating again. Bit by bit, she transforms herself into her old size and now sets out to find the **garden** as she'd planned. She comes to a tiny house instead and thinks she'll go in, but not wanting to scare the owners, she eats some of the shrinking mushroom until she is nine inches high and approaches the house.

Alice is gaining control over her transformations. She now figures out how to eat little bits of each side of the mushroom and carefully controls her shrinking to get to where she wants to. She is approaching growing and shrinking more strategically.

CHAPTER 6 - PIG AND PEPPER

Alice stands outside, trying to decide what to do. She is interrupted by the appearance of two creatures, dressed like footmen, but with the faces of a fish and a frog. They are exchanging invitations. The Fish footman hands the Frog one from the Queen to the Duchess to play croquet and the Frog delivers the same invitation in reverse. Then the footmen bow and get their powdered curls tangled together. Alice laughs and dashes back into the forest so they can't hear her. When she comes back, the Frog is sitting beside the door, looking mindlessly up at the sky.

The ridiculousness of a frog and a fish as footmen is just plain funny, first of all. But so is the idea of the two footmen delivering identical invitations to each other—it is as if both the Duchess and the Queen want to be able to take credit for the croquet event that both of them are going to, both want to be host. This again foregrounds and parodies the way that adults jockey for position, and try to make themselves look and be powerful, at each other's expense (even as they give lessons to their children to not act that way at all).

When Alice approaches, The Frog tells her that there is no use knocking, because he is outside, and there is such a racket inside that no one would hear. Alice hears crashing and screaming coming from inside the house. Alice asks how she will get in, if knocking will do no good. The Frog replies indirectly that if she were inside, she could perhaps knock and he could let her out. He plans to sit where he is for the next day.

A number of times Alice has wished to go home when she was confronted by the strange rules or isolating failure to communicate when in Wonderland. Here is a Wonderland home—a domestic scene—but the comfort Alice expected to find in a "home" is missing. As if to hammer that home, the frog reverses the conventions of inside and outside, suggesting knocking to get out instead of in.

Just then, the door opens and a plate comes flying out, skimming the Frog's head. He still will not give Alice a proper answer and she feels quite frustrated at everybody's contrariness, so she lets herself in to the house, coming straight away into a kitchen, where a cook is stirring a cauldron and the Duchess is sitting, nursing a baby.

The scene inside is very domestic...

Everybody is sneezing because of the excessive amount of pepper the cook is putting in the soup; everybody except a cat, which sits on the hearth, smiling. Alice asks the group nervously why the cat is smiling, and the Duchess merely explains that it is a "Cheshire" cat and then shouts "Pig!" at her baby. Alice says she has never known a smiling cat, to which the Duchess insults her lack of knowledge, but before Alice can be much offended, the cook starts throwing things across the room, often hitting the Duchess and the child.

...until you encounter the comically grotesque details of it, with the cook producing a soup so peppery people can barely breathe much less eat it, and the Duchess shouting insults at her baby. Meanwhile, the Duchess acts like an "adult" toward Alice, voicing judgments about her knowledge. The way the Duchess deals with the chaos around her suggests the image of a matronly woman, but she actually has no control, as the cook's actions indicate.

Alice shouts at the cook to stop and the Duchess says angrily that the world would go round faster if people stopped interfering. The Duchess doesn't want to talk about figures – she starts singing a lullaby to the baby and shaking it violently. Soon, the cook joins in the singing and the whole room is howling.

The Duchess tells Alice off but uses nonsensical proverbs that alert us to the fact that she has shoddy knowledge herself. She is also a terrifying mother. She does all the typical maternal things, singing and scolding, but in a ridiculous and careless way.

Then the Duchess throws the baby to Alice to nurse while she gets ready for the croquet match. With great difficulty, Alice figures out how to hold the baby and carries it outside, thinking it would be murder to leave it in the hands of the Duchess. Then she notices how pig-like the child really is, with a turned up snout. It starts grunting, and Alice reminds it that grunting is not a proper way to express itself. The child keeps grunting. Alice sees that it is definitely becoming more pig than baby, and sets it on the ground. She knows some other children who would be better as pigs, she thinks.

The Duchess's relationship with the pig/baby is a mockery of all the kinds of mothering that Alice has learned is appropriate for mother/child relationship. It also seems likely that the pig/baby may not actually be related to the Duchess. Wildness and domesticity have become confused here, and Alice, always eager for things to belong to the right categories (as she's been taught that they should), does the right thing in her eyes by replacing the pig to its natural environment. At the same time, Alice recognizes that she knows many children who themselves have piglike attributes—in thinking this she is confusing categories of pig/child in much the same way as the pigeon confused the categories of girl/serpent.

The Cheshire Cat appears, grinning as before. Alice asks it which way to go. The Cat replies that the answer depends where she is trying to get to, but since Alice doesn't mind, only that she gets somewhere, the Cat says that all directions lead to somewhere. Alice asks what kind of people she will find in each direction. The Cat points in one direction to a Hatter, and the other to a March Hare, both mad; everybody is mad here, he says, even Alice. He says he knows he is mad, because he does everything in an opposite way to a dog, who they agree is a very sane animal.

When Alice asks the Cheshire Cat which way she should go she is making an assumption that the Cat will understand that she is looking to go to the best or right place. The Cat, though, refuses to grant such an assumption or to privilege one place over another. In so doing, it makes clear the assumption Alice was originally making. The Cat proclaims that Alice must be mad because everyone in Wonderland is mad, and she is in Wonderland, has the formulation of a logical statement and yet it comes to an illogical end.

The Cat asks Alice if she is going to play croquet with the Queen today but Alice hasn't been invited. Nevertheless, the Cat says he will see her there and proceeds to vanish. Moments later it appears again to ask what became of the baby. When Alice replies that the baby turned into a pig, he vanishes again, unsurprised.

The social etiquette of Wonderland is reminiscent of that in the real world—with get-togethers and invitations—and yet completely counter at the same time, in that the invitations don't actually seem to matter.

Alice decides to go towards the March Hare, thinking a Hare is much more interesting than a Hatter, and shouldn't be too mad, because it's past March. As she sets off, the Cat appears again to check if Alice had said "pig" or "fig", and then finally disappears from the tail up, leaving the smile without the cat for a moment. Alice goes off in the direction of the March Hare and soon spots the Hare's house, which has a roof thatched with fur. She eats a little of the mushroom to **grow** bigger and nervously approaches the house.

Proverbs, sayings and idioms have an interesting place in Alice in Wonderland. Alice takes them very literally, as a lot of children do when they are learning how to use their expanding vocabularies, and these literal meanings control and shape to a large extent how things appear in Wonderland. The March Hare is a good example. The phrase "mad as a March hare" comes from the behavior of hares at mating season, in March, but in Wonderland, this creature is permanently mad.

CHAPTER 7 - A MAD TEA-PARTY

Outside the house, a long table is set out on the grass, and three creatures, a Hatter, a Hare and a Dormouse, sit at one end, though as Alice approaches they insist there is no room for her. She sits down at the other end. The March Hare offers her a glass of wine, but she sees there is no wine and tells the hare off for being uncivil. It is Alice who has been uncivil by sitting down without an invitation, responds the Hare.

Again the novella puts Alice into a scene that in the real world would require a certain kind of etiquette—or the following of rules—and then has the creatures follow completely different, arbitrary rules while at the same time insisting on the importance of those rules. By doing so, Carroll is able to both generate humor and subtly question the value of the real world etiquette—why is it the way it is rather than another way?

They go on trading insults until the Hatter speaks up and asks "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" Alice is very glad to be given a riddle and is confident she can guess it. The Hatter thinks that "guessing" is not at all the same as "finding out the answer" and tells her off for not saying what she means, and the others join in berating her until they forget the riddle altogether.

The Mad Hatter's riddle isn't really answerable, and by being unanswerable it gives the Mad Hatter a kind of authority because one would naturally assume that he can answer it. Of course, in fact he can't, which makes it not really a riddle. At the same time, the Mad Hatter berates Alice for saying "guess" when she means "find out the answer" because one could guess without being able to or having any intention of finding out the answer. The Mad Hatter is here insisting that Alice must be precise with her meaning, while not holding himself at all to the same standard. This is something that characters in Wonderland do all the time, as do people in the real world.

Then the Hatter gets out his pocket watch and asks Alice what day it is. The watch is two days off. He blames the Hare for putting butter in it. Alice is fascinated by the Hatter's watch, which tells the month and not the hour. The Hatter thinks it is just as reasonable as Alice's watch and argues with her nonsensically. Meanwhile the Dormouse has fallen asleep. Alice pours a little tea on its nose to wake it up.

The nature of time is put up for debate in this strange place. To Alice, who has learned to accept the conventions of time and time-keeping that she has learned above ground, the Hatter's refusal to think of time so objectively is a further sign of his madness. And yet, what if we had twice as many minutes in a day that were all 30 seconds long? Our measures are conventions that are somewhat arbitrary, and the novella continuously points out this truth.

Alice remarks that they ought to do something better with their time than waste it on unanswerable riddles. At this the Hatter becomes very indignant. Time is a Him, not an It, he says. Alice says that she knows about Time, because she beats it when she plays music. This upsets the Hatter greatly. It reminds him of a time at the Queen's concert, when he had to sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, little Bat", an almost-recognizable nursery rhyme, and the Queen ordered his head to be cut off for "murdering Time". This was in March and the Hare has been mad ever since. Now it is always six o'clock, so they keep the tea things out and rotate places around the table because there's never any time to wash up.

The tea party has skirted some upsetting and dangerous territory with the Hatter's madness and the Hare's offensive comments to Alice, but now we also learn that the reason for the characters' strange ritual of changing places every so often is because it is always six o'clock at their table ever since the March Hare went mad. This suggests to Alice that time can be subjective, it can appear differently to different people. Put bluntly: what Alice considered to be perhaps the most universal thing in the world is not necessarily universal –an illuminating lesson.

The Hatter changes the subject and wants Alice to tell them a story. Alice nominates the Dormouse instead, not knowing a story to tell. The Hatter tells the Dormouse to hurry, before he is asleep again, and the Dormouse obliges, with a very hurried story about three sisters who live down a well. Alice is very interested by this story and wants to know what they live on and why they live in a well. The Dormouse answers "Treacle" to each of these questions. The well is a treacle-well.

We certainly know that Alice has plenty of stories to tell, having heard her tell stories in her own head and aloud already, so why does she say to the Hatter that she doesn't know any? Perhaps it is due to Alice's difficulty remembering rhymes that makes her want not to try. But she does respond like a good audience to the Doormouse's story; but the Doormouse's story lacks all the conventions of the story: plot, details, etc.

Alice begins to get impatient with this implausible story and the Dormouse's evasive answers. He says that the sisters were learning to draw in the well, things beginning with M, like "muchness". Alice confesses that she has never seen a muchness, to which the Hatter scolds her for talking. This is the last straw. Alice leaves the tea-party and wanders back through the forest. She soon comes to a tree with a door in the trunk. She goes in, and finds herself in the long hall again, finds the key and the tiny door, and this time, she has all she needs to get into the beautiful **garden**.

Alice wants the story to be a story, and tries to get the Doormouse to tell it as one, but the last straw occurs when the Doormouse uses a nonsense word to describe what people are doing and Alice gets scolded for talking when she wants to know what it is. Now, Alice has certainly been told not to do when someone is telling a story, but at the same time a person listening to a story has a reasonable expectation that the story has some comprehensible meaning in it. Alice keeps getting scolded for her behavior when she is simply reacting sensibly to their misbehavior. And now she stands up for herself and gets to the place she originally hoped to go: the garden.

CHAPTER 8 - THE QUEEN'S CROQUET-GROUND

Alice enters the beautiful **garden** and sees a rose tree, full of white roses, and a busy group of gardeners, painting the white roses red. They address each other by numbers, Seven accuses Five of splashing the paint and an argument escalates until the gardeners notice Alice and bow to her solemnly.

Alice's goal from the moment she looked through the little door, her purpose through all of her growing and shrinking, has been to get to the garden. It symbolizes the realization of her dreams. Now that she has entered the garden though, it is something less than paradise. It is tended by argumentative playing cards and flowers that looked so beautifully red from a distance are revealed to be painted that color. It is interesting that Alice is suddenly treated with respect by the cards (perhaps because she has a face and so is treated like a royal "face" card?).

Alice wants to know why they are painting the roses. The gardeners become very sheepish. Two admits that they planted a white rose tree by accident and are trying to amend their mistake before the Queen arrives. At that moment, they spot the Queen approaching and spread themselves on the floor before the Queen's entourage arrives. This entourage is comprised of ten soldiers carrying clubs, ten courtiers wearing diamonds and ten royal children decorated with hearts. Next comes a slew of royal guests, with the Knave of Hearts and the White Rabbit and, lastly, the King and Queen of Hearts follow.

Further, it's made clear here that the gardeners are painting he flowers out of fear of the Queen. The social hierarchy that was hinted at by the White Rabbit's initial nervousness about the Queen now comes into view as the Queen and her royal procession, following a strict procession of rank, comes into view. Once again, as it is depicted in the novella with a bunch of cards playing the roles this hierarchy comes across as ridiculous, but the "real" world follows similar hierarchies.

Alice decides not to genuflect like the gardeners have done, and the Queen notices her and asks for her name. Alice decides she needn't be afraid of a pack of cards and introduces herself. The Queen then asks who the cards on the floor are, and Alice boldly says that she has no idea. The Queen is outraged and orders Alice to be beheaded, to which Alice merely responds with "Nonsense!"

Alice has become bold – she thinks that the playing cards are a bit ridiculous spreading themselves on the floor and tells herself not to fear the Queen, who herself is paper thin. The Queen's threat reveals the foundation of her power—violence. At the same time, Alice's unpunished response reveals that the Queen's actual power is not so much in violence as the threat of violence.

The Queen lets the matter go and orders the gardeners to be overturned and to explain themselves, but before they can explain, she has ordered them to be beheaded. The cards run to Alice for protection and she puts them in a plant pot. The three soldiers whose job it is to behead are suitably confused and tell the Queen that they have done the job. The Queen then invites Alice to play croquet and takes her along with the procession. Alice walks beside the White Rabbit and asks him if he has seen the Duchess. The Rabbit swiftly shushes Alice – the Duchess has been sentenced to execution for boxing the Queen's ears.

The Queen is the personification of injustice – she has no interest in reason or emotion, only in mindless killing of those who annoy her. Though there are comic moments in this scene, the sight of the playing cards cowering in a plant pot for example, and the Queen's manic accusations too, there is a serious threat of death behind the comedy. That the Queen would then follow up her threats with invitations to play croquet hints at the way that violence and civilized pursuits are closely linked in the adult world.

As the Rabbit starts to explain the strange series of events, he is interrupted by the Queen ordering everybody to their places and a flurry of excitement as the cards double themselves over to make the arches and the flamingo that are the mallets and hedgehogs that form balls get ready. Alice has some trouble getting her flamingo tucked under her arm to strike the hedgehog, who also keeps rolling away. The rules of the game are also difficult to establish. Everyone plays at the same time and fights break out immediately and soon the Queen has ordered many beheadings. Alice wonders how anybody is left alive in the palace and tries to look for a way to escape.

This game of croquet is comprised of players and props that are similar to the paraphernalia of real croquet but awkward and unruly because the mallets and balls have wills of their own. What should be a light-hearted, fun activity becomes a cruel spectacle, as flamingoes and hedgehogs are man-handled and beaten. And without rules or an endpoint, the game is even more of a confusing mess for Alice as she is pressured to join in.

Just then, the Cheshire Cat appears, and Alice waits for its ears to arrive, before telling it her qualms with the Queen's version of croquet. The Cat asks what she thinks of the Queen, but the Queen passes at that moment so Alice compliments her on her skill. The King is curious about the Cheshire Cat, so Alice introduces them, but when the King offers his hand for the Cat to kiss, the Cat is uninterested and the King asks the Queen to have the creature removed. The Queen is happy to do so and orders its execution.

Alice is still careful not to offend the Queen—even though it is clear she does not like the Queen—whether out of fear or politeness is not clear. The Cat feels no such inclination, and is irreverent towards the King and doesn't seem to really care about the threats of execution that are being fired at him. His constant mischievous smile is a sign of his refusal to play by the rules.

Alice goes back to the game and, finding the Queen's accusations flying, goes in search of her hedgehog instead. She finds it fighting another hedgehog. She tries to get her flamingo so she can bat one of the hedgehogs away from the other, but it has taken refuge up a tree.

The chaos of the croquet game has reached a height now. There were no rules to begin with but now there are hardly any players and the animals are completely unruly to the point where they are almost wild again.

In the end, she gives up and goes back to the Cheshire Cat, who is causing quite a stir between the executioner, the King and the Queen because it's body has disappeared, leaving only its head behind. The executioner thinks he can't behead something without a body, but the King thinks that you only need a head. The Queen, meanwhile, would like to behead everybody. Alice suggests getting the Duchess, since she *owns* the Cheshire Cat, but by the time the Duchess is fetched, the Cat has disappeared and everyone is searching for it.

The characters essentially have a debate about the meaning of the word "behead". The King is a very literal man – he doesn't understand nuances of meaning, he thinks everything is the sum of its parts. The Queen doesn't care about meaning at all, she just wants to satisfy her bloodlust. Alice is the only one to make a reasonable suggestion. Though it's worth pointing out that Alice's reasonable suggestion would just allow the Queen to blame someone else—the Duchess. Alice is being logical, but not ethical. To put it another way, Alice is still playing by the crazy rules set by Wonderland and the Queen. The Cat, in contrast, is not.

CHAPTER 9 - THE MOCK-TURTLE'S STORY

The Duchess is very happy to see Alice – her mood is quite changed from earlier – and she takes Alice's arm to walk around the garden. Alice thinks to herself how she would act as a Duchess. She would feed her baby with sweet things instead, to make it sweet. The Duchess notices that Alice has stopped listening and tells her off. She adds that there is a moral to her comment, but she can't remember it. The Duchess is fond of morals and goes on to name several. She is just the right height to rest her chin on Alice's shoulder and speak into her ear, which bothers Alice exceedingly.

The Duchess is friendly so long as she thinks that Alice is listening to her, and nasty as soon as she thinks Alice isn't. She is not interested in Alice, just in having someone listen to her. Her insistence that everything has a moral—while being unable to remember any—makes it clear that her viewpoint about morals is ridiculous. In fact, Carroll uses the Duchess to mock those adults who are always moralizing to children, both for the way that they intrude on children's lives and into children's physical space, and also because the belief that life has a moral is patently untrue--as the craziness of Wonderland attests. It's worth noting that Victorian England, when Carroll wrote the novella, was known for its self-righteous moralizing.

The Duchess says that is weary of putting her arm around Alice's waist because of her flamingo's temper. Flamingoes bite, just like mustard, she says. Alice tells the Duchess that mustard isn't a bird; it's in fact a vegetable. The Duchess comes up with a very complicated moral for that lesson. The Duchess enjoys pleasing Alice and boasts about her powers of moralizing, until she suddenly trails off – the Queen has appeared before them, furious to see the Duchess with her head still on.

The exchange around mustard is further language play, as Alice confuses the Duchess's simile for an actual comparison. Alice, with her Victorian upbringing, has likely been taught that every story does have a moral, but the fact that the Duchess must cut off her boasting about her ability to moralize because she sees the Queen who wants to cut her head off for no good reason at all suggests that in fact there is no moral to life.

The Duchess runs off and they continue with the game, but there is so much cause for execution that the cards, which are needed to be the arches, are always disappearing to do the executing and quite soon, there are neither players nor arches left. The Queen asks Alice if she knows the Mock-Turtle (the thing Mock-Turtle soup is made from, she explains). Alice says she doesn't, so the Queen takes her to see it. They meet a Gryphon on the way, a half-lion, half-eagle creature. The Queen leaves the Gryphon to guide Alice. The Gryphon seems very entertained by the Queen – he tells Alice that she never actually executes anybody.

The Queens love of violence, which is the foundation of her control, can easily get out of hand and transform the "civilized" activities into chaos. The Gryphon is the first character in Wonderland who is not terrified of the Queen. He is the first character who can see past the surface of things to the truth—in this case that the Queen's threats of violence never escalate to actual violence. His level of awareness about the world makes him a different kind of companion for Alice.

They find the Mock Turtle sitting on a rock, singing very sorrowfully. The Gryphon says that the Mock-Turtle isn't really sad, it's just his fancy, and announces Alice to him. She would like to hear his history. The Turtle says he will tell it, so they all sit down and wait. He is very slow to begin, but finally he begins by saying that he used to be a "real turtle".

The Gryphon again sees past surface truths. Other characters in Wonderland (and Alice, probably) would hear the Mock-Turtle's sighs and think he is actually sad. The Gryphon knows that the Mock Turtle just enjoys seeming sad. At the same time, the Mock Turtle's story indicates that he is struggling with his identity just as Alice is. She has wondered if she was really still herself, just as the Mock Turtle now feels (or is) unreal.

This beginning is followed again by a long silence, filled only by the Mock Turtle's sobbing and strange noises from the Gryphon. The Turtle continues eventually, telling them that at school, he was taught by an old Turtle whom they called Tortoise, because he "taught us". Alice doesn't see the logic here and the Turtle and Gryphon think she's very simple. The Turtle goes on about his fine education. He one-ups the "extras" of music and French that Alice has learned at school by adding Washing to the list. He learned many other strange subjects, like Uglification, which the Gryphon explains for Alice, thinking she really is a simpleton.

The Mock-Turtle's boasts about his fine education parody how people often boast about their education: what great teachers they had, what amazing subjects they studied, how their school was better than other schools. Yet the touting of ridiculous "important" subjects like Washing and Uglification as being better than French and Music raises the question of what's so great about French and Music? Why not Spanish and Painting, or Japanese and Rugby? And yet the Gryphon and Mock Turtle believe that the critical classes are Washing and Uglification, and see Alice, because she did not study such things, as being dumb and unsophisticated. In other words, the value ascribed to these subjects is based on society's somewhat arbitrary decisions, but society treats them not as arbitrary but as absolute.

The Mock Turtle continues to list his classes and their masters. The Gryphon joins in – his Classics master was an old crab. The pair sighs to remember these old lessons. Alice asks how many lessons they had, and the Turtle replies that they had ten hours the first day and then of course they had fewer every day. Alice wonders about the twelfth day, but the Turtle is reluctant to explain and changes the subject.

These old school chums grow nostalgic for their ridiculous school. Meanwhile, more language confusion rears its head as "lesson" and "lessen" become confused. When Alice pokes holes in the Mock Turtle's story with her logic, the Mock Turtle cannot respond and instead evades.

CHAPTER 10 - THE LOBSTER QUADRILLE

The Mock Turtle is all choked up from sobbing, and the Gryphon shows Alice how he beats the Turtle's back to help him clear his throat. The Turtle recovers, and tells Alice, since she has never lived in the sea, about a dance called a Lobster Quadrille. He explains that the first thing to do is line up along the shore. Two lines, one for sea creatures and one for Lobsters and then the partners must step towards each other. It begins just like a square dance but quickly becomes very elaborate, with the lobsters being flung into the sea.

The Mock Turtle's constant crying about his past experiences indicates his profound sentimental side. The Lobster Quadrille is another example of a "civilized" activity—a dance—that ends in a strange kind of violence.

At this point the Gryphon and the Mock-Turtle get very excited and propose to show Alice the dance. The Gryphon nominates the Turtle to sing. They begin dancing around Alice, occasionally treading on her toes, and the Turtle sings mournfully about a whiting and a snail dancing the Lobster Quadrille. When it is over, Alice politely compliments them on the song. The Turtle asks if she knows about whitings. She narrowly avoids telling him that she has eaten whiting before. The Gryphon explains that they always have their tails in their mouths, because they insist on flying out to sea with the lobsters.

Alice is very polite to her new friends. She knows just what to say, that it was a very interesting dance, even though she is relieved it's over. Also compare her realization to avoid saying she has eaten whiting to her earlier insensitivity in talking about Dinah to the mouse and birds. She is beginning to be able to navigate social situation, to read between the lines and understand what will and won't make others unhappy or uncomfortable.

The Gryphon has lots more to say about the whiting. It tells Alice that it is called a Whiting because it "does the boots and shoes". She figures her own shoes must have been done by blacking. Shoes under the sea are different, says the Gryphon, they are made of soles and eels. Alice goes back to the song, in which a porpoise is always treading on the whiting's tail. The Mock-Turtle tells her wisely that no whiting ever travels without a porpoise. Alice thinks this is dubious and the Gryphon changes the subject, asking Alice about her adventures.

The Gryphon speaks with absolute conviction, so much so that Alice is taken in by his bizarre explanations for the names of things. Meanwhile, all of his explanations are puns : "eels" instead of "heels", "porpoise" instead of "purpose". Note that all of the other characters have wanted to tell Alice about them, but never were much interested in Alice. This is the first such instance, and seems to imply that the Gryphon and Mock Turtle might be more authentic friends for Alice.

Alice says she can describe her adventures from this morning, but that yesterday she was a different person entirely. The Gryphon wishes only to hear the adventures – explanations bore him – so Alice tells them both the story from the beginning. They listen intently. They are very interested in the part about the Caterpillar, and they tell her to recite another rhyme to see if she has forgotten it. Alice is getting quite fed up of animals ordering her about but she tries it. It comes out all mixed up. "Uncommon nonsense", the Turtle calls it.

Alice seems to be implying here that her adventure in Wonderland has changed her, made her a new person. The Gryphon and Mock Turtle pay close attention, again giving the impression of truly caring, but what becomes evident is that they are interested in the story, not in Alice. They are interested that she can't remember rhymes, not how she feels about that fact. They treat her as an object of interest, not as a person. Meanwhile, Alice is getting fed up with all of these animals telling her what to do.

Alice feels miserable again. She wishes things could be as before. But the Gryphon and the Turtle keep interrogating her about the rhyme and ask her for the next verse. She goes on though she really doesn't want to. It comes out awfully and the Gryphon and Turtle are very confused, so they tell her to stop and decide to sing again instead.

The focus on what she can't do, on what she's getting wrong, on how she's changed has made Alice sad. Alice's sense of self really rests on her memory and familiar things.

The Turtle sighs and begins, in a mournful tone, singing a song about soup. They enjoy themselves immensely but before the Mock Turtle can begin a repeat of the chorus, the Queen's voice is heard in the distance, announcing the beginning of "the trial", and the Gryphon pulls Alice after him, leaving the Turtle singing plaintively on the rock.

Like several other characters in Wonderland, the Mock-Turtle mixes the trivial with the serious as he dedicates his mournful song to soup. As the strains of "Beautiful soooup" get longer and more ridiculously mournful, suddenly the Queen once again comes center stage. The connection of the bloodthirsty and capricious Queen to a trial, a thing of fairness and justice, seems immediately laughable.

CHAPTER 11 - WHO STOLE THE TARTS?

The arrive at the court, where the King and Queen are seated on thrones and the kingdom is assembled and there is a table of tasty-looking tarts in the center – the court is just as Alice remembers courts described in the books she's read. She can tell that the man in the wig is the judge. It also happens to be the King.

The court looks real and official to Alice—just as she thinks it should look based on the things she's learned and read. She seems to think, too, that it will run like a real court, dispensing justice impartially, providing a logic and fairness—a rules were rules exist and are followed—that are absent in the rest of Wonderland. That the King is the judge clues the reader in that this will certainly not be the case. By presenting a trial that Alice thinks will finally provide order and justice, and then making that trial ridiculous, Carroll suggests that law in the real world, too, may not operate as purely and cleanly as Alice naively and innocently thinks it does.

Alice points out to the Gryphon the twelve jurors, who are all birds and other creatures and are busy writing things on slates. They are writing down their names, the Gryphon tells her, else they might forget them before the trial is over. "Stupid things!" says Alice, and the King calls for order in the court. The jurors proceed to write "stupid things" on their slates in all kinds of spellings. She also notices that one of them has a squeaky pencil, which won't do at all, so she sneaks up behind him and steals it so that he must write with his finger for the rest of the trial.

The image of the jurors writing on their slates conjures the idea of serious people taking notes in order to ensure they are ready to give a fair verdict. The reality that they are writing down their own names puts the lie to that initial image, and severely outrages Alice's sense of how a trial should be. Alice steals the one jurors pencil in order to maintain the decorum of the trial, to make the trial seem more like what she thinks a trial should *be.*

The King finally calls the White Rabbit to start the proceedings. The Rabbit unravels a scroll and reads the accusation that the Knave of Hearts has stolen the tarts that the Queen made. He calls the first witness, the Hatter, who comes in still finishing his tea and bread. The King tells the Hatter to remove his hat. The Hatter explains that the hat is not his to remove, as he doesn't own the hats but instead sells them. The King and Queen are very suspicious of the Hatter. The King warns him not to be nervous or he will be executed on the spot.

The trial begins normally enough. But with the Hatter's entrance as a witness the sense of the trial as a logical, justice-infused affair immediately disappears. First the King and Hatter become confused over the word "his," which the Hatter interprets over-technically. Yet the King's response is over-the-top and impossible—to threaten to behead someone if they act nervous is certain to make them nervous, of course.

Alice feels a strange sensation and realizes that she's **growing** again. The Dormouse notices the bench becoming tighter and tells her to stop. She retorts that he is growing too, but the Dormouse insists his kind of growing is normal, and skulks away from Alice. Meanwhile the Hatter is getting terribly nervous. The King orders him to give his evidence at once. The Hatter begins, saying that he is a poor man, and describes a particular tea party, and the thinness of his bread and the twinkling of the tea. The March Hare anticipates that he will soon be accused of something and proactively denies it.

Alice's growing is no longer determined by her eating and drinking or by some other catalyst object like the White Rabbit's gloves, her body suddenly grows of its own accord – this is the scary part of growing up for any child, the feeling of being out of control of your own body. Meanwhile, the animals such as the Doormouse are all anxious to avoid drawing attention to themselves while the Hatter becomes visibly nervous on the stand and the March Hare proactively defends himself against what seems like it will be a false implication from the Hatter to save himself—in other words, the very violent "justice" promised by the court warps the testimony of those in the court.

The Hatter continues describing the tea party in question. When he claims he can't remember what the Dormouse said, the King orders that he must remember or be executed. The Hatter says again that he is a poor man. The King says he is a poor *speaker*, to which there is a cheer from the guinea-pig section of the court and officers have to sit on the guinea-pigs to suppress the noise. The King is unimpressed with the Hatter's testimony and tells him to stand down and be gone before the Queen's officers can behead him.

The Hatter's difficulty in remembering and recounting the events of a particular tea party reminds us of Alice's own difficulties remembering. Just like nightmares tend to do, this dream world shows Alice her anxieties exaggerated. This time, she feels acutely the danger of forgetting and being removed from the rhymes and innocence of childhood when the Hatter is told that if he doesn't remember, he'll be killed. At the same time, those running the trial again turn to violence as the means of controlling the actions of witnesses (even if the witnesses themselves can't control those actions).

The next witness is the Duchess's cook. The cook carries with her a pepper pot and has the whole court sneezing. She refuses to give evidence, and the White Rabbit tells the King that he must cross-examine her. So reluctantly, the King asks the cook about the composition of tarts. The Dormouse interjects that the tarts are made of treacle and is ordered to leave, but in the flurry of his removal from the court, the cook disappears, so the White Rabbit calls the next witness. To Alice's complete surprise, her own name is called.

The cook and the Doormouse offer a moment of levity in the trial—the cook with her characteristic obstinacy (which shows the King's constant threats of violence to be all show and no actual bite) and the Doormouse's characteristic trait of seeing treacle as the only meaningful detail. The comedy of the situation also serves to make it more impactful when Alice is suddenly chosen as the next witness. As a witness, Alice will be not just a watcher of the trial. She will be part of it, experiencing its administration of "justice."

CHAPTER 12 - ALICE'S EVIDENCE

Alice forgets that she has been **growing** all this time, and as she hurriedly leaves her seat, she sends the jurors flying, which reminds her of an incident with some goldfish she once had, so she feels that the jurors must be replaced quickly before they run out of air. The King orders the jurors to be immediately replaced. In her panic, Alice has put the lizard juror in upside down. She puts him back and, though the jurors are in a great deal of shock, they rush to try to catch up with their slate writing.

Alice continues to play by the rules of the trial. Even though she knows that the jurors are useless as jurors—that they can't even remember their own names—it is important to her that they be in the right place (and right side up).

The King begins by asking Alice what she knows of this affair. Alice says she knows nothing. The King thinks this is very important and the jurors scribble frantically. The White Rabbit intercedes, commenting that the King actually means "unimportant." The King agrees, muttering the words "important" and "unimportant" to himself.

The King repeats the words "important" and "unimportant", considering which to use, even though they are opposites, showing that he really has no concept of meaning as Alice understands it. To him, a word that it only two letters different must be very similar.

The King has also scribbled something in a notebook – he calls for silence and announces that anybody more than a mile high must leave the court. He protests that Alice is a mile high but Alice refuses to leave. She says she will not abide by rules that people make up on the spot. The King tells the jurors to make a decision.

With the King's sudden new rule about height and the court, suddenly Alice is the subject of the arbitrary nature of the court. In response, she makes a major step: she refuses to obey the rules, having now recognized just how arbitrary the rules are, how much they are designed simply to maintain control and not to offer any kind of fairness.

But the White Rabbit has further evidence to show, in the form of a letter, which he takes to have been written by the Knave. He opens the letter and finds that the paper holds a set of verses, *not* in the Knave's handwriting. The King believes the knave must have imitated someone else's hand. The Knave insists he did nothing of the sort, and anyway, he protests, there is no signature. The King takes this to be a sure sign of guilt, and the Queen agrees. The crowd at the trial applauds.

The way things appear and sound is far more important in Wonderland than the meaning behind them, for example when the King suggests that the Knave's not *signing the letter proves his guilt, because an honest man would have put his name to it, he receives applause from the court because it* sounds *like an intelligent comment even though it is actually illogical.*

Alice sticks up for the Knave – she thinks they must first read the verses to see what they are about. So the White Rabbit reads the verses. They seem to be entirely unrelated to the case, but the King thinks they sound very important so he asks the jurors again to consider their verdict. Alice is now **big enough** that she is not scared to interrupt the King and proclaims that the evidence is meaningless.

Alice has spent the novella trying to figure out and play by the rules of Wonderland in order to understand it. But now as the trial reveals the full illogic of those running the court even as a character's life hangs in the balance, Alice asserts that there is no meaning to the poem read at the trial. It is unclear if she feels emboldened to make such a proclamation because of her great size, or if her size is a function of her gaining the understanding that Wonderland is meaningless and that she, as its dreamer, can see that meaninglessness.

The King ponders this idea, but senses that there is some meaning in it. He picks a phrase from the verses, about not being able to swim, and asks the Knave if this is true. The Knave, being a playing card, obviously cannot swim, and the King is satisfied. But then he picks out another phrase that seems to suggest that the Knave gave the tarts to someone. Alice finds another that suggests the tarts were returned. At this, the King spots the table of tarts in the center of the court and is convinced. He also finds another line about the "she" in the poem having a fit, which, he claims, doesn't "fit" the Queen at all.

The way the King and Alice pick apart the piece of evidence, which on the face of it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the Knave stealing the Queen's tarts, is reminiscent of a kind of literary analysis of a poem or a difficult piece of text. Each phrase can be fit to the situation at hand. The King fits each "I" and "she" and "they" to characters in the court but this connection is entirely invented. Working in such a way, the King could connect any *text to the circumstances of the trial, picking and choosing evidence that "fits."*

The King tells the jury to yet again consider their verdict. The Queen thinks the sentence should come before the verdict, to which Alice complains that she is talking nonsense. The Queen orders Alice's head to be cut off, but Alice, now quite a **giant**, has no fear and shouts "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" At this she tumbles into a fight with the cards and wakes up on the bank, as her sister brushes some fallen leaves from her face.

The Queens bloodlust comes out, wanting to perform the sentence before guilt or innocence is even decided upon. At this, Alice recognizes that the trial is a nonsensical sham. The Queen responds by trying to control Alice through threats, but Alice—now fully grown—responds to the threat by finally recognizing that all of Wonderland is a sham by telling the cards that they are just cards, refusing to play along any longer. She grows up above the nonsense of the King and Queen, both literally by continuing to grow and fill the court, and figuratively, as she realizes that she needn't be scared and the illusion of the dream is broken.,

Alice tries to tell her sister all about her adventures in Wonderland. Her sister listens kindly and then sends Alice off to tea, and is left thinking of Alice's dream until she herself falls asleep, and her own dream is full of little Alice's strange creatures. She keeps her eyes closed to keep the dream going because she knows that when she opens them, the familiar sounds of the countryside will return and the Mock-Turtle and the pig-baby will disappear. Lastly, she dreams of how Alice will **grow** into a woman and tell her stories to eager children just like her and perhaps remember fondly her Wonderland.

The novel ends with Alice's sister's perspective, someone not yet an adult but in a kind of in-between place between full adulthood and childhood such as Alice's. She represents the older version of Alice, she is motherly towards Alice, sending her off for her tea. She is young enough to enjoy Alice's dream, and yet while Alice was stuck in the dream and had to fight herself out, her older sister has to willfully hold on to it: she knows it will disappear when she opens her eyes. Further, Alice's sister's experience of the dream is suffused by a kind of nostalgia for childhood and not at all by the anxiety that Alice experienced in the dream. To Alice's sister the dream is a cute example of the pleasures of being a child. In this way, Alice's sister's thoughts confirm the concerns that Alice pondered through her adventures in Wonderland—that you really do change in life as you grow up, even as you stay the same person you also become another one, and this new person has only limited access to or understanding of who you were as a child.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Parfitt, Georgina. "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Nov 2013. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Parfitt, Georgina. "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*." LitCharts LLC, November 25, 2013. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/alice-s-adventures-in-wonderland.

To cite any of the quotes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Carroll, Lewis. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Bantam Classics. 1984.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Carroll, Lewis. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. New York: Bantam Classics. 1984.