Through the Looking-Glass

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LEWIS CARROLL

Charles Dodgson was the third child in his family. His father was a very conservative cleric for the Church of England who, though mathematically gifted and on the path to success, married his first cousin and became a country parson instead. Young Dodgson was bright and precocious; he supposedly read *Pilgrim's Progress* at age seven. He did experience a stutter that followed him throughout his life. He received a degree in mathematics from Christ Church at Oxford, where he'd remain employed in various capacities for much of his life. As the sub-librarian there, he met four-year-old Alice Liddell and her family. Though many believe that Alice Liddell is the titular Alice and was Dodgson's muse, Dodgson denied this later in life. The three *Alice* books became Dodgson's most famous works, even though he also published a number of books on mathematics and politics. He never married, but his surviving diaries and letters suggest that he had several romantic relationships, including, possibly, with Alice Liddell's older sister and her governess. Dodgson was also an avid photographer and often photographed young girls, something that, while normal by Victorian standards, has fueled questions about his sexual preferences in the years since his death in 1898. As Lewis Carroll, Dodgson is credited with creating the genre of nonsense literature and heralding the beginning of the "Golden Age" of children's literature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Charles Dodgson first came up with the idea for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on a boating trip with Alice Liddell and her siblings. He recited the story orally and later, at Alice's request, wrote it down and published it. *Through the Looking Glass*, which was published six years later, is much darker. This reflects several things that happened in Dodgson's life between the two novels: the Liddell family cut contact with Dodgson for unknown reasons, and Dodgson's father died unexpectedly in 1868. More broadly, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* poke fun at advances in mathematics and philosophy, as well as Victorian social mores and structures, specifically those concerning children. Many of Sir John Tenniel's illustrations overtly make fun of society or politics and in some cases, can be read as political cartoons. Finally, centering the story on Alice, a female protagonist, was and still is seen by many as support by Dodgson for Queen Victoria and female leadership in general, even as the novel takes issue with the society that Queen Victoria shaped.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Through the Looking-Glass is one of the original Alice novels; it follows *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In addition to the *Alice* novels, Carroll published several other works for children, most notably the poem *The Hunting of the Snark* and the novel *Sylvie and Bruno*. Edward Lear, who is best known for his limericks, is one of Carroll's most famous contemporaries and helped develop the genre of nonsense literature. This eventually made way for authors like Edward Gorey, Dr. Seuss, and Shel Silverstein. Due to both the immense popularity of Alice's stories and the fact that they've been in the public domain since 1907, the books have spawned a number of spinoffs and reimaginings. Gregory Maguire, whose interests lie in inventing backstories for classic villains (he wrote the novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, the source material for the hit musical *Wicked*), took on the Queen of Hearts' backstory in *After Alice*, while Melanie Benjamin delves into a semi-fictionalized version of Alice Liddell's life in *Alice I have Been*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There
- **When Written:** 1868-1871
- **Where Written:** Oxford, England
- **When Published:** 1871
- **Literary Period:** The "Golden Age" of children's literature
- **Genre:** Children's Literature; Literary Nonsense
- **Setting:** Looking-glass House and the giant chessboard surrounding it
- **Climax:** Alice reaches the eighth square and is crowned queen
- **Antagonist:** None of the beings Alice encounters are clear-cut antagonists; however, it's also possible to read all non-Alice characters as antagonists, as even those that try to help her only make things difficult or slow her down.
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited, though the narrator occasionally addresses the reader directly

EXTRA CREDIT

A Jack-of-All-Trades. Despite experiencing (but, according to most accounts, not enjoying) the fame from being a children's author, Charles Dodgson was skilled and successful in a number of areas. There are political ideas and mathematical theorems named after him, and he was a well-known photographer in his day. Though most of his photographs have

since been destroyed, he made portraits of such famous individuals as John Everett Millais (a painter), Alfred Tennyson (a poet), and Michael Faraday (a scientist).

An Exercising No-No. Alice's dismay and confusion when she runs with the Red Queen likely has as much to do with the fact that she's not going anywhere as it does with how the Victorians overwhelmingly viewed exercise, especially for women: in general, not favorably. At the close of the 19th century, this culminated in widespread hysteria over women contracting "bicycle face," which, simply, was a face red from exertion. Among other concerns, male doctors were afraid that an afflicted woman's face might stay that way.

PLOT SUMMARY

One cold November day, Alice lounges in the sitting room and plays with her black kitten, Kitty, while the mother cat Dinah cleans the white kitten, Snowdrop. Kitty is mischievous and plays with Alice's ball of yarn, unwinding it, so Alice scolds the kitten for this and for several other crimes. Alice threatens to send Kitty to Looking-glass House, which is the house she can see through the mirror above the mantel. Excitedly, Alice crawls through the mirror and looks around. She sees tiny living chessmen on the hearth, but the pieces don't seem to see Alice. The White Queen yells for her baby daughter, Lily, who's up on a table, so Alice picks the queen up to help her. This shocks the queen. Alice lifts the White King up too. Alice looks around and flips through a book. She realizes that the text isn't in a foreign language—since this is Looking-glass World, the text is backwards. She holds the book up to a mirror and is able to read a poem titled "**Jabberwocky**." Alice thinks it sounds pretty, but she can't make out what it's about. Realizing that she needs to get on with her exploration, Alice heads outside.

Alice sees a hill in the garden and decides to climb it so she can look around. No matter how hard Alice tries, the paths take her back to the house instead of to the hill. Talking flowers, a Tiger-lily and a Rose, stop Alice. The Rose tells Alice that the tree in the garden protects them with its bark by saying "bough-wough." Alice catches sight of the Red Queen in the distance. She's now taller than Alice. Alice decides to go speak to her and ignores the Rose when she suggests that Alice head in the opposite direction. Alice ends up at the house again and, frustrated, decides to head for the house. She finds herself on the hill in front of the Red Queen in a moment.

The queen imperiously asks Alice what she's doing here and gives her directions on how to properly carry herself. She insists that the hill is a valley, confusing Alice. Alice looks around and sees that the surrounding land looks like a chessboard, with brooks dividing the squares. Alice asks if she can play and says that she'd love to be a queen. The Red Queen allows Alice to join them as a pawn and says that when she gets to the Eighth Square, Alice can be a queen. Without warning, the Red Queen drags Alice along as they run. Alice is out of breath and confused—they're not going anywhere. The Red Queen insists that this is normal; a person must run if they wish to stay still. When Alice complains of thirst, the queen offers her a biscuit. It's extremely dry, but Alice takes it to be polite. Then, the queen tells Alice how to move across the board and disappears.

To get her bearings, Alice looks around and tries to identify major rivers or mountains. She runs down the hill and jumps over the first brook. She finds herself in a train car populated with animals. The Guard asks everyone for their tickets. Alice is the only one without a ticket and all the other passengers chide her for this. The Guard disappears and Alice hears an insect's voice in her ear. It quietly suggests jokes that she could make as the train leaps over a brook. Alice and the Gnat find themselves under a tree. The Gnat is the size of a chicken. They discuss different insects and their names, and the Gnat suggests that there's no purpose in having a name if an insect doesn't answer to it. It says that it'd be convenient if Alice lost her name, as her governess wouldn't be able to call her for lessons. The Gnat makes one final joke but disappears when Alice points out that the joke was terrible. Alice moves on and comes to a wood in which individuals forget all names. A Fawn appears and helps Alice through the wood. On the other side, the Fawn remembers its name and that it's supposed to be scared of humans, so it leaps away in fear. Alice cries of loneliness.

Alice finally reaches the identical men Tweedledum and Tweedledee. She remembers an old song about brothers named Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Alice asks how to get through the wood, but the brothers ignore her. They each extend a hand to shake and, not wanting to offend either of them, Alice takes both of their hands at the same time. They dance in a circle and then Tweedledee decides to recite the poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter." He ignores Alice's request for directions. The poem is about the titular characters tricking oysters so they can eat them, and when Tweedledee finishes, Alice tries to figure out which character was the better person. She hears a loud noise. Tweedledee leads her to the sleeping Red King and says that Alice isn't real; she's a character in the Red King's dream. This makes Alice cry, but she consoles herself by insisting that this is all nonsense. She makes a final plea for directions, but the brothers decide that they must fight over a broken rattle. They make Alice help them strap on their "armor"—linens and pillows—but before they can fight, a huge crow flies over and sends them running for cover.

The disheveled White Queen runs toward Alice in pursuit of her shawl. Alice helps the queen fix her hair and the shawl, so the queen offers to hire Alice as a maid. Alice refuses, as she's not interested in the compensation—jam every other day—but the queen insists that Alice would never get the jam anyway, as today isn't every other day. Alice is even more confused when

the queen tells her about remembering in both directions. To demonstrate how it works, the queen screams in pain before pricking her finger on a brooch. Alice follows the queen over a brook and then finds herself in a dark shop with a knitting Sheep. Alice tries to look at the things in the shop, but if she looks directly at something, she can't see it. The Sheep hands Alice a pair of knitting needles and Alice finds herself in a boat with the Sheep. The Sheep inexplicably yells "feather," but Alice doesn't know how to respond. Alice stops to gather beautiful **rushes**, but she doesn't notice that the rushes wilt as soon as she stows them in the boat. Suddenly, Alice and the Sheep are back in the shop and Alice agrees to buy an egg. The Sheep sets the egg down and Alice walks toward it, but it seems to get further and further away.

The egg turns into Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty is offended by everything Alice says, so Alice quietly recites the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" to herself. When Alice introduces herself to Humpty Dumpty, he insists that her name is stupid—it doesn't tell him anything about what shape Alice is. They discuss Alice's age and Humpty Dumpty insists that Alice should've stopped growing at age seven instead of allowing herself to reach seven and a half. Not wanting to argue, Alice compliments Humpty Dumpty's belt. He snarls that it's a cravat and was an un-birthday present. He tells Alice that un-birthday presents are better than birthday presents, as a person has more un-birthdays than birthdays. He declares that this is "glory," which he says means "a knock-down argument." Alice is perplexed, but Humpty Dumpty says that words mean whatever he wants them to mean. Alice asks Humpty Dumpty to help her decode "Jabberwocky." He gets through the first verse and then forces Alice to listen to a poem he wrote just for her. It's about fish and it ends abruptly.

Alice travels on, hears a crash, and sees lots of knights and horses running through the forest. The knights can't stay on their horses. She comes upon the White King, who explains that he sent all his horses and men except for two to help Humpty Dumpty. They see one of the king's messengers, Haigha, coming up the road. Alice happily plays a game with herself in which she lists silly things about Haigha that all start with H, and the king joins in. To her delight, when Haigha reaches the king, he pulls the foodstuffs out of his bag that Alice mentioned in her game. Haigha shares that the Lion and the Unicorn are fighting in the next town for the White King's crown, though the king assures Alice that the winner won't get his crown. Alice remembers a song about a fighting lion and a unicorn and the brown and white bread that stopped the fight. She follows the king and Haigha. They join the other messenger, Hatta, and the creatures' fight stops. The Unicorn is shocked to see Alice, as he thought children were just fabulous monsters. He shouts for the plum cake as the Lion joins the group. The Lion tasks Alice with cutting the cake, but she can't cut it. The Unicorn tells Alice to pass the cake around and then cut it. It separates into three pieces. Loud drums start up and Alice leaps over a brook to escape the noise.

When things are quiet again, a Red Knight rides up to take Alice prisoner. The White Knight appears, fights the Red Knight, and wins the battle—even though they both fall off many times. The White Knight offers to escort Alice to the Eighth Square. As they walk, the knight falls off many times and they talk about his love of inventing. His inventions, however, are convoluted and don't work very well. At the edge of the square, he tells her a poem about meeting a man sitting on a gate and then rides off. Alice steps over the brook and realizes that there's a big **crown** on her head.

Alice is thrilled to be a queen. She practices walking in the crown but finds it difficult. The Red Queen and the White Queen appear out of nowhere, scold Alice, and then invite each other to Alice's dinner party. Alice is perplexed and suggests that if it's her dinner party, then she should invite people, but the queens tell her that her manners need work. They begin to give Alice riddles, but Alice thinks that the riddles are nonsense. When the White Queen begins to yawn, the Red Queen tells Alice to sing the queen a lullaby. Both queens fall asleep. Their snoring turns into a song and Alice finds herself in front of a doorway that reads "Queen Alice." She can't figure out how to get inside, as there are no bells marked as being for her.

A creature tells Alice that they're not letting anyone else in, and an old Frog tells Alice to stop pestering the door. The door flies open and Alice steps in and takes a seat between the two queens. Seeing everyone in attendance, Alice is happy that the queens invited people—she wouldn't have known who to invite. A waiter brings out a Mutton, introduces it to Alice, and then takes it away. The Red Queen explains that Alice can't eat food that's been introduced to her. A waiter brings out a Pudding next and Alice cuts into it after being introduced. The Pudding scolds Alice and the Red Queen tells Alice to make a speech. Alice complies and says that most of the poetry she's heard today has been about fish and asks why that's the case. The White Queen recites a riddle about fish in reply but as Alice ponders the riddle, the queens lift her up to make another speech. Things begin to change rapidly: table settings turn into birds and guests greedily guzzle food. Alice sees the Red Queen's face in the soup tureen and then sees the queen on the floor and she's the size of a doll. She begins to shake the queen. She wakes up and realizes that she's holding Kitty. Alice happily recounts her dream to her cats, suggests that Snowdrop became the White Queen and Kitty became the Red Queen, and wonders if the dream was her own dream or if she really was in the Red King's dream.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Alice – The seven-and-a-half-year-old protagonist. Alice is a happy child, if a lonely one; the novel opens with her talking to her cats, Dinah, Snowdrop, and Kitty, and she's the only human who appears in the novel. She has an expansive imagination, her favorite phrase being "let's pretend." This leads Alice to fall asleep one November day and dream that she climbs through a looking-glass and into Looking-glass House and the world beyond, where a giant chess game is taking place. She travels through this strange Looking-glass Word, and because this is a dream, it reflects Alice's thoughts and anxieties about her real world. Loneliness and sadness plague her often, especially when individuals she likes and admires, like the Fawn, abandon her suddenly. She's also extremely concerned with figuring out who she is. Many of the beings she meets along her journey ask her questions about her name, who she is, and what would happen if she didn't have a name. Through all of this, Alice comes to the conclusion that she likes her name, that it's important to her in most cases, and that having a name is also helpful to others who wish to identify her. Alice's goal as she travels through Looking-glass World is to transform from a pawn into a queen once she reaches the Eighth Square. This represents Alice's desire to grow up and become an adult, something that shows up as other characters, especially Humpty Dumpty and the Red Queen, pick at Alice's manners and etiquette. In addition, Alice wants to be polite and so tries her best to comply with the rules that different characters give her. Alice is very adaptable, but she's often unsuccessful in interpreting what she's supposed to do. She also wants to make sense of what's happening around her, something that she finds extremely difficult—even when she tries to answer riddles, she often answers incorrectly or is teased, and if she starts an argument she inevitably loses. Upon waking, Alice is delighted by her dream and attempts to figure out if the dream was hers, or if she was a character in the Red King's dream.

The White Queen – One of the queens in Looking-glass World. Alice finds her extremely perplexing and not particularly queen-like. She spends the entire novel in a state of disarray, as she cannot keep track of her shawl and lost her hairbrush in the mess of her hair. Alice kindly tries to put the queen right, but though the queen appreciates Alice's help it seems to not make much of a difference. The White Queen introduces Alice to the idea that a person can remember in both directions—that is, remember the future and the past. As an example, she says that a man is currently being punished for a crime he hasn't committed yet, but when Alice asks what will happen if the man doesn't commit the crime, the White Queen offers a disturbing answer: that punishments are unequivocally good, whether someone committed a crime to deserve them or not. The White Queen can move very quickly around the chessboard and Alice sees her running hard at one point. She appears with Alice and the Red Queen once Alice reaches the Eighth Square to give Alice another lesson in logic, riddles, and how to carry herself as a queen. According to the Red Queen, the White Queen came from humble beginnings and so sometimes says silly things. Upon waking, Alice believes that her cat, Snowdrop, appeared as the White Queen in her dream, and that the White Queen was so disheveled throughout the dream because Snowdrop was in the middle of a bath.

The Red Queen – A snappy and authoritative queen in Looking-glass World. As a queen, she can move all around the chessboard quickly. Alice greatly admires the Red Queen at first, and tries her best to follow all of her rules regarding conduct and etiquette. The queen is the first to confirm for Alice that in Looking-glass World, things are opposite what they are in Alice's world. For example, one must run quickly to stay in one place. When Alice runs into the Red Queen in the Eighth Square, however, the Red Queen begins to look horribly dismissive and, in some cases, silly. She scolds Alice for not being able to perform math, for example, but the problems she gives are riddles rather than math problems—and in several cases, they don't have a single right answer. At the dinner party, the Red Queen continues to tell Alice how to behave properly and politely, but she does so rudely and makes Alice feel as though she can't do anything right. Alice loses her temper with the Red Queen when she sees the queen's head in a tureen of soup. When Alice wakes up, she decides that her mischievous cat, Kitty, became the Red Queen in her dream.

Humpty Dumpty – The egg-shaped individual from the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty." He sits high on a wall when Alice meets him. Humpty Dumpty is rude, imperious, and self-important. He insists that he can make words mean whatever he wants them to (though he pays them more for extra work) and he reprimands Alice for not being properly polite. Helpfully, he does agree to decode the first verse of the poem "**Jabberwocky**" for Alice, though more than anything, this is an opportunity for Humpty Dumpty to lord his knowledge and expertise over Alice. Humpty Dumpty takes major issue with the fact that Alice didn't stop growing up at age seven and allowed herself to age six months. He offers her riddles when Alice insists that she can't stop growing. As in the nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty falls off his wall after Alice leaves him, while the White King sends all his horses and men except two to help him.

The White King – The White King is a quiet and nervous king. Because he's a king, he's not very mobile on the chessboard, so Alice meets him in the house, when he's still the size of a chess piece, and then once along her journey. The king is very interested in memory and remembers things by writing them down. He wants to be helpful, so he sends his horses and men to help Humpty Dumpty when he falls off his wall. In almost all cases, however, the king isn't able to be especially helpful. Knowledge of the "Humpty Dumpty" nursery rhyme suggests that his men won't save Humpty Dumpty, and he tells Alice that he can't save the running White Queen from whatever's chasing her. Furthermore, despite being a king, the king seems

uncomfortable in his role, as though he's not very powerful. The Lion and the Unicorn successfully intimidate him without much effort.

The White Knight – A gentle but foolish older knight. Like all knights, he constantly falls off his horse and onto his head, though he assures Alice that he's a skilled rider. In addition to being a knight, the White Knight is also an avid inventor. He invents all sorts of things, from revolutionary ways to climb over a gate to desserts, but his inventions are overwhelmingly unsuccessful or more difficult than whatever they're trying to replace or solve. The White Knight also loves to be prepared for anything, so his horse wears spikes on its ankles to protect it from shark bites and he collects things that might be useful in a difficult situation. Despite finding him maddening and obnoxious, Alice is touched by the White Knight's kindness and the song he sings her.

The Gnat – The Gnat is, at first, a small voice in Alice's ear on the train, but it becomes the size of a chicken in the Fourth Square. The Gnat is a fan of bad jokes, most of which have to do with homophones, but the Gnat is inexplicably unwilling to make the jokes itself, and instead encourages Alice to make them. The Gnat also suggests that losing one's name can be an asset and that names are useless if a person or a being doesn't respond to their name. It disappears from sadness when Alice refuses to make one of its jokes.

Haigha – One of the White King's messengers. He is, according to the White King, an Anglo-Saxon messenger, and therefore exhibits Anglo-Saxon "attitudes"—that is, he dances oddly while he moves. Alice begins reciting an alphabet game when she learns Haigha's name in which she lists silly things about him beginning with H. Because of this, Haigha pulls several odd things beginning with H out of his bag, including ham sandwiches and hay. The illustrations and endnotes in the book reveal that Haigha is an incarnation of the March Hare from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Tweedledee – One of the twins that Alice meets in the Fourth Square. He and his brother, Tweedledum, are fat and in most ways, are identical in appearance and manner. Tweedledee recites "The Walrus and the Carpenter" to Alice and suggests that it's impossible to decide which character, the walrus or the carpenter, was the better person. He's a bit of a coward and isn't interested in fighting Tweedledum over the broken rattle, though he agrees to do so.

Tweedledum – One of the twins that Alice meets in the Fourth Square. He and his brother, Tweedledee, are fat and in most ways, are identical in appearance and manner. Tweedledum is quick to anger and becomes incensed when he discovers that Tweedledee broke his favorite new rattle. He insists that they duel over it and forces Alice to help both of them put on pillows, rugs, and linens as armor.

The Unicorn – A pompous and self-important unicorn in the Sixth Square who spends his time fighting with the Lion for the White King's crown. He likes bragging about his fighting prowess and making the White King uncomfortable by making snide comments about winning the crown. He's disgusted at first to meet Alice, as he thought that children were just "fabulous monsters," but he finds her intriguing after their introduction.

Hatta – One of the White King's messengers. When Alice and the reader meet Hatta, he recently got out of jail and is still sad about it. He cries, sips tea, and is silent unless he has to speak. The illustrations and endnotes in the book reveal that Hatta is an incarnation of the Mad Hatter from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The Fawn – A young fawn that travels through the forest in which travelers forget all nouns, including their names. Alice and the Fawn get through the forest together but on the other side, the Fawn remembers who it is and that it should fear a human like Alice. Alice is saddened when the Fawn runs away.

The Sheep – The White Queen turns into the Sheep in the Fifth Square. The Sheep is elderly and knits with 14 pairs of knitting needles at once. She continues to knit and shouts rowing terms as Alice rows along a river. She meanly laughs at Alice when Alice doesn't understand the rowing terms.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Snowdrop – Alice's white kitten. Dinah is giving her a bath when Alice falls asleep. She appears as the White Queen while Alice is dreaming in Looking-glass World, and Alice reasons that the White Queen is so disheveled in Looking-glass World because Snowdrop is bathing in the real world.

Kitty – Alice's black kitten. She finished with her bath just before the novel begins and so amuses herself by playing with Alice's ball of yarn. In Alice's dream Kitty appears as the Red Queen. Kitty is far more mischievous than her sibling, Snowdrop.

The Red King – The Red King spends the entirety of the novel asleep and snoring. Tweedledee and Tweedledum suggest to Alice that she's actually in the Red King's dream and that if they wake him up, Alice will disappear.

The Lion – A sleepy lion in the Sixth Square who spends his days fighting with the Unicorn for the White King's crown. He's easily annoyed and is always willing to start a fight with the Unicorn.

The Red Knight – The Red Knight fights the White Knight for Alice and loses. Like the White Knight, the Red Knight cannot stay on his horse for more than a minute or two.

The Pudding – A plum cake served at Alice's dinner party. Alice cuts a piece, even though it's not polite to do so after being introduced to the cake, so the Pudding chastises Alice.

Lily – A white pawn and the White Queen's baby daughter.

Because she's too young to play chess, Alice takes her place as a pawn.

Tiger-Lily – A lily in the garden outside of Looking-glass House that rudely tells Alice that Alice isn't a very pretty flower.

The Guard – The guard on the train between Second Square and Fourth Square. He hassles Alice for a ticket, which she doesn't have.

The Frog – An elderly frog who wears a yellow suit and rain boots. He gruffly scolds Alice for picking on the door to the hall in which her dinner party is taking place.

The Mutton – A roast served at Alice's dinner party that, because the Red Queen introduced it to Alice, Alice cannot carve and serve.

Dinah – Alice's adult cat. She takes her time bathing her kittens, Snowdrop and Kitty.

The Rose – A rude flower in the garden outside of Looking-glass House.

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.

YOUTH, IDENTITY, AND GROWING UP

Though written several years after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass* picks up a mere six months after Alice's first experience in a nonsensical, dreamlike world. Now "seven and a half, exactly," Alice falls asleep one November day while playing with her kittens, climbs through the mirror over the fireplace, and finds herself in Looking-glass House and the giant chessboard surrounding it. Once Alice gets her bearings and joins the chess game—first as a pawn, but with the goal of becoming a queen—she symbolically starts to come of age and eventually reaches a version of adulthood when she's crowned queen. However, Alice's journey makes it clear that navigating childhood on the way to adulthood is a lonely process, and the end goal—adulthood—is, at best, a questionable one.

Because *Through the Looking-Glass* is seven-and-a-half-year-old Alice's dream, it's possible to read Alice's struggles and anxieties in Looking-glass World as reflections of her anxieties about growing up in the real world. In many cases, *Through the Looking-Glass* suggests that being a child and growing up are lonely states of being. The novel opens with Alice talking to her cats, Dinah, Kitty, and Snowdrop. While the narrator mentions Alice's sister at several points in passing, Alice appears to be very much alone with the cats and, eventually, with the beings that spring into existence in her mind. Even when Alice does find herself in the company of other people, she remains lonely: in Looking-glass World, Alice feels unable to voice many of her thoughts to others in an attempt to remain polite and in others' good graces. The reader, for instance, is the only one privy to the fact that figuring out how to shake hands with Tweedledee and Tweedledum is an intensely difficult experience: what if she offends one by shaking the other's hand first? Even characters who insist they're there to help her, like the Gnat or the White Knight, don't provide much support and Alice is still effectively left to her own devices to navigate the chessboard and the larger project of growing up.

The novel also suggests that reckoning with one's rapidly changing identity is a key part of growing up, even (or especially) when others aren't much help in this process. At several points, Alice has to think critically about who she is and, more broadly, what the names of things are even for. When Alice and the Gnat discuss the names of different insects, the Gnat demands to know whether the insects in Alice's world respond to their names. Upon learning that they don't, the Gnat is shocked. Alice, however, suggests that there's more to a name than referring to an individual: a name, she proposes, will help others figure out who or what something is. With this, the novel suggests that identity goes two ways: it's both something personal to an individual, and it helps other people fit that individual into their conception of the world.

Similarly, Humpty Dumpty is derisive when he learns Alice's name: in addition to declaring it "stupid," he suggests that names must mean something. According to Humpty Dumpty, his name refers to his shape, while "With a name like [Alice], [she] might be any shape, almost." To him, "Alice" tells him nothing about who the child in front of him is. This episode in particular (especially when considered alongside Alice's experience in a wood in which travelers forget all nouns, including their names) suggests that childhood is a state of potential. A child can grow up to be anything or anyone, but the novel also suggests that the results of this potential aren't always positive. After Alice leaves the wood, for instance, the Fawn who helped her heartbreakingly remembers its own identity, and consequently that it's supposed to be scared of humans like Alice. The Fawn's experience of learning its name leads to fear and isolation, a turn of events that foreshadows Alice's unsatisfying reign as queen at the end of the novel. For both Alice and the Fawn, remembering their names represents a form of self-knowledge—but in this case, that self-knowledge closes doors, rather than opening them or giving Alice more power to interpret or move through Looking-glass World.

Though Alice wants to be a queen throughout the novel, actually becoming a queen is far less rewarding than she likely anticipated. Upon crossing into the Eighth Square, Alice discovers that there's a **crown** on her head, signifying her royalty—but it's not comfortable, and Alice struggles to figure

out how to move and balance with it. Further, Alice is denied all the food at a dinner party in her honor, and the party itself takes place under questionable circumstances: the Red Queen and the White Queen both insist that Alice is the one throwing the party, while Alice, upon arriving at the location of the party, can barely figure out how to get into the building. Taking the party as a metaphor for adulthood, Alice's experience suggests that while adulthood may look desirable to children, and while childhood may simultaneously seem anxiety-inducing and difficult, being a child might be better on a whole: upon waking, Alice happily resumes chatting to her cats with wonder and nostalgia about her time in Looking-glass World. With this, Carroll seems to suggest that part of the joy of being a child is dreaming about what adulthood might be like, without having to actually tackle the hardships and difficulties that come with the territory. Similarly, adults would do well to take adulthood less seriously and remember the joys of childhood at every opportunity.

ADULTHOOD AND THE ADULT WORLD

Nearly all of the people or creatures that Alice meets in Looking-glass World are adults, at least in some sense of the word. However, none of the adults that Alice meets are especially helpful. Instead, the adults seem caught up in pointless philosophical or logical arguments and silly rules, and in many cases, Alice seems more competent and mature than they are. Together, all of this implies that adults aren't nearly as competent as children might think they are, while Alice's brief stint as queen suggests that adulthood itself isn't all it's cracked up to be.

The Red Queen first introduces Alice to the fact that in Looking-glass World, things don't function in the way that Alice expects them to. This is Alice's first clue that the adult world isn't going to live up to her expectations, good or bad, and that part of reaching adulthood is having these expectations about the world dashed. Alice's interactions with the White Queen have much the same effect. When Alice runs into the disheveled queen in the woods, the White Queen matter-of-factly explains that she can remember in both directions—that is, she can remember the future and the past—and to demonstrate, the queen screams before pricking her finger and then expresses sadness that a man is being punished for a crime he hasn't committed yet. However, when Alice questions the ethics of this and asks what will happen if the man *doesn't* commit the crime he's currently being punished for, the White Queen brushes her off. Through her reaction, the White Queen suggests that the adult world she represents is impenetrable and unknowable to a child like Alice—even though Alice obviously has valuable insights about it.

In other cases, Alice—the only actual child in Looking-glass World—appears far more adult than any of her "adult" companions, suggesting that in important ways, children are actually more observant, polite, and competent than the adults around them. Both the White King and the Red King, for example, are ineffective kings. While the Red King spends the entire novel asleep, the White King fails to follow through and send all his horses and men to rescue Humpty Dumpty. The White Queen, meanwhile, spends the novel in complete disarray and is unable to keep track of her shawl—a fairly childish problem to have—while the White Knight cannot ride for more than a few yards without unceremoniously tumbling off of his horse. Instead, it falls to Alice to help these adults when she can. She retrieves and pins the White Queen's shawl back on and helps the White Knight back onto his horse—and at one point pulls him out of a ditch, which he fell into face-first.

As queen—which, for Alice, is a symbolic version of adulthood—Alice discovers even more evidence that suggests that adults aren't all as competent or as powerful as she might think, or might dream of one day being herself. To begin with, having the **crown** may make Alice queen, but it doesn't offer her any enlightenment as to how one *acts* like a queen. Moving through Looking-glass World as a queen is just as disquieting and difficult as it was when Alice was a pawn: the other queens jointly arrange for Alice to throw a party, something which Alice has no knowledge of; Alice struggles to figure out how to get to the party in the first place; and finally, she finds herself unable to figure out the rules and correct behavior once she does finally make it to the party. With this, Carroll suggests that adulthood really isn't that noble of a goal: it's just as confusing as childhood is and it doesn't provide any real benefits aside from simply getting to call oneself an adult. Adulthood, per *Through the Looking-Glass*, is little different from childhood—the stakes may be higher and there are certainly privileges that come with being an adult in the eyes of society, but everyone is still just trying to figure out how to navigate the world.

RULES AND ETIQUETTE

Through the Looking-Glass is framed as a chess game. Carroll includes a diagram and a list of moves in the introduction to the novel, and Alice's journey as a pawn more or less follows the moves laid out in the introduction. While framing the novel in terms of chess might suggest that Looking-glass World is built on a similar foundation of rules and etiquette, Carroll goes to great lengths to show that this isn't true: while some things in Looking-glass World are in reverse, for example, plenty more aren't. Other rules seem similarly arbitrary, are short-lived, or are very uncomfortable for Alice. In this way, the novel takes issue with the rules governing society as a whole and reminds the reader that the rules of the real world are, in many cases, just as silly as those at work in Looking-glass World.

By organizing *Through the Looking-Glass* around the motif of chess, Lewis Carroll creates the initial understanding that Alice's journey is going to be rational and predictable. Once

Alice joins the game of chess as a pawn, she moves as a pawn does: she begins on the Second Square and—as pawns can move two squares in their first turn—moves quickly to the Fourth Square, before proceeding as anticipated to the Eighth Square, where she becomes a queen. While not entirely essential to understanding the story, a basic understanding of the rules of chess allows the reader to better interpret certain characters' qualities or actions. Knights, for example, move in an L shape in chess, which explains why the White Knight continually falls off his horse—he literally cannot move in a straight line. Queens, meanwhile, can move anywhere on the board and as many squares as they'd like, which is why Alice runs into the Red Queen and the White Queen multiple times in various places. Similarly, the brooks that Alice crosses symbolize crossing over into a new square, which, in many versions of the novel (including the one used in this guide), is noted visually by a line break and a collection of small stars. However, despite offering the reader and Alice these touchstones that seem like they should give the story clear boundaries, the actual rules of play and etiquette that Alice encounters are far less clear. In many cases, Alice has a hard time understanding the rules she's subject to and struggles to follow them.

Though Alice has an argumentative, streak, she is, at heart, a polite child who wants to make others feel comfortable. But because the etiquette of this world is so unclear and even absurd, this ultimately proves extremely difficult, both for Alice and for those she encounters. For Alice, one of the most annoying things that keeps happening to her is that the beings she encounters ask her to sit and listen to them recite poetry. Alice feels unable to decline these requests and so hears such poems as "Haddocks' Eyes" and "The Walrus and the Carpenter"—poems that, though entertaining for the reader, do nothing for Alice but slow her down. With these poetry recitations in particular, the novel suggests that while politeness and etiquette may be systems designed to smooth social interactions, they can also very easily be co-opted to work only in one person's favor: if she wants to be polite, Alice is a captive audience.

Despite suggesting some obvious rules within the novel (Alice recognizes that she's in a chess game, for example, and suspects that things might be backwards since she's in Looking-glass World), Carroll ultimately makes it clear that these rules aren't especially useful to Alice, since they're limited in scope and applied inconsistently. Alice first discovers that things are backwards in Looking-glass World as she attempts to reach the top of the hill in the garden to look around. When Alice aims for the hill she inevitably ends up back at Looking-glass House; when she aims for the house, she reaches the hill. The Red Queen then introduces Alice to the idea that in order to stay still in Looking-glass World, one needs to run very fast. However, these and other rules only apply sometimes. Alice is, for the rest of the novel, able to aim for the Eighth Square and get there by walking. While these inconsistencies certainly make the case that rules and etiquette are silly and subjective, the way that Alice must struggle to adapt to whatever rules come at her also suggests a more far-reaching conclusion: in a frustrating world where rules and regulations might make little sense, being able to adapt is a useful skill that will serve anyone well, whether in Looking-glass World or in the real world.

SENSE, NONSENSE, AND LANGUAGE

While not as lighthearted as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass* nevertheless occupies the same silly, nonsensical world as its predecessor. Through wordplay, pointless battles, and the fantastical, dreamlike setting, *Through the Looking-Glass* makes nonsense the norm—while also suggesting that attempting to make sense out of nonsense is a normal, if often futile, endeavor.

From the moment Alice crawls through the looking-glass and into Looking-glass World, the novel asks that the reader—and, for that matter, Alice—suspend their disbelief. Looking-glass World is one in which flowers talk, nursery rhyme characters and chess pieces come to life, and sheep knit while inexplicably shouting rowing terms. It's a world in which it seems like anything is possible. This unpredictable chaos, however, doesn't stop Alice from trying to make sense of the nonsense happening around her. Importantly, Alice recognizes that she doesn't have the knowledge or the skills to understand the inner workings of Looking-glass World, so she makes sure to ask questions of everyone in an attempt to fit what she sees into a framework that makes sense. Despite these attempts—as when Alice tries to figure out whether the thing around Humpty Dumpty's middle is a cravat around his neck or a belt around his waist—Alice is overwhelmingly unsuccessful in interpreting what she sees, but in some ways, this is exactly the point. There's no good way to interpret the book's fantastical happenings or verbal nonsense—the job of the reader, and of Alice, is to take what happens in stride and enjoy it.

In many cases, Carroll uses nonsense to let readers in on jokes and poke fun at stuffy traditions or schools of thought that, upon closer inspection, look just as silly as the White Knight constantly falling off his horse. Anything, Carroll suggests, can look silly and contrived if one is willing to see it as such. Alice's conversation with Tweedledee and Tweedledum about the poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter," for example, pokes fun at circular philosophical arguments that have no one correct answer. Similarly, when the twins turn Alice's attention to the snoring Red King and suggest that Alice is just a dreamy figment of his imagination, Carroll gestures to some religious theories circulating in the Victorian era, most notably that all humans exist in God's dream. Situating this reference in a tale like *Through the Looking-Glass*, however, implies that while they

may be fun to think about, such theories shouldn't be taken too seriously.

At several points, Carroll makes fun of formal education and academic ways of knowing. The Red Queen refers to the dictionary as "nonsense," while Humpty Dumpty suggests that since Alice read the nursery rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" in a book, it's equivalent to a history of England. Most tellingly, Humpty Dumpty decodes the poem "**Jabberwocky**" for Alice. "Jabberwocky" is a poem that, by many standards, is complete and utter nonsense; it never defines exactly what the fearsome and fictional jabberwock is, or tells the reader what a bandersnatch or a tum-tum tree are, and about half of the words in the poem aren't even real words. However, the poem also follows a familiar format, rhyme scheme, and meter that make it, at the very least, fun on an auditory level to read or recite. Through the poem (and through the nonsensical novel as a whole), Carroll makes the point that literature should be enjoyable, nonsense or not.

Humpty Dumpty's imperious and self-important interpretation of "Jabberwocky," however, reads as a still-relevant critique of seriousness, scholarliness, and holding up intelligence and formality over anything else. Decoding the poem allows Humpty Dumpty the opportunity to lord his knowledge over Alice, but much of the poem's meaning remains a mystery and it seems like Humpty Dumpty might even be making up his interpretation altogether. With this in mind, it's important to remember that Lewis Carroll and a few contemporaries invented the genre of nonsense literature. Prior to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it was unthinkable that a talking sheep could exist outside of a simple morality tale—or, for that matter, that literature intended for children didn't need to have a "moral" to be meaningful or worth reading. With this, Carroll again makes the case that literature, whether it makes logical sense or not, should be fun—and that, if the reader so chooses, that can be one's final interpretation of a work.

SYMBOLS

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

RUSHES

While out paddling along the river with the Sheep, Alice catches sight of some gloriously beautiful rushes (a type of aquatic plant). The Sheep allows Alice to stop and cut rushes, but in Alice's happiness, she doesn't notice that the rushes she cuts begin to wilt immediately—instead, Alice notices only that the rushes that are a bit too far away for her to reach are the most beautiful. With this, the rushes come to represent the process of growing up. Specifically, the quickly expiring rushes speak to how quickly childhood passes and how individuals cannot always recognize the ways in which they're rapidly growing and changing, while the beautiful but unreachable ones point to the ways in which children idealize both adulthood and the next level of maturity.

ALICE'S CROWN

Upon reaching the Eighth Square, Alice discovers a large crown upon her head—she's now become a queen. However, the crown is big, awkward, and something that Alice has to get used to. This, combined with Alice's unsatisfactory experience as a queen, suggest that being an adult isn't as great as it might seem at first. Alice is just as lost in Looking-glass World as a queen as she was as a pawn, suggesting that the crown—the signifier of queendom, or of adulthood—is nothing more than a signifier. Adults, Carroll suggests, are just as lost in the world as Alice and other children are.

THE POEM "JABBERWOCKY"

Alice first encounters the poem "Jabberwocky" after she climbs through the looking-glass and into Looking-glass House. She initially thinks that it's written in a different language, but quickly discovers that it's just in reverse—holding it up to a mirror allows her to read it. As the poem comes up again and again in various points throughout the novel, it continually plays with the rules of Looking-glass World and, in general, proves the novel's broader point that literature or poetry only needs to be fun; it doesn't need to make sense. To illustrate this, even Alice remarks, upon reading it, that "It seems very pretty, [...] but it's rather hard to understand!" The narrator even notes that Alice has no real idea of what she's reading, but she can enjoy it nonetheless. Further, Humpty Dumpty's attempt to decode the poem doesn't do much to illuminate it—while he defines many of the words, the fact remains that about half of the words and all of the creatures in the poem are made up. In short, "Jabberwocky" encapsulates the idea that poetry or literature doesn't need to make strict sense to be entertaining; nonsense can be just as fun.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* published in 1998.

Chapter 1: Looking-Glass House Quotes

"It seems very pretty," she said when she had finished it, "but it's *rather* hard to understand!" (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't know exactly what they are! However, *somebody* killed *something*, that's clear, at any rate—"

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after arriving in Looking-glass World, Alice figures out how to read the poem "Jabberwocky" in a mirror and, according to the narrator, is unwilling to admit that, even though she can read the poem, she can't figure out what it means. "Jabberwocky" as a whole is one of the novel's best case studies in how to deal with nonsense in a fun way. The poem itself makes very little sense—as Alice notes here, it's easy enough to figure out that someone is killing the titular jabberwock, but more than half of the words are words that Lewis Carroll came up with himself and, therefore, make little sense without the help of Carroll's own interpretation. However, Alice's assessment—that the poem is pretty, but hard to understand—gets at the fun of "Jabberwocky": the poem is constructed in such a way as to be fun on an auditory level, even if a person has no idea what's happening. While attempting to make the poem make sense is a normal inclination, Carroll suggests that it's actually just as valid to decide that the poem is fun to recite and leave it at that; if a person so chooses, there's no need to dig deeper than that.

Chapter 2: The Garden of Live Flowers Quotes

"They're done up close, like a dahlia," said the Tiger-lily: "not tumbled about, like yours."

"But that's not *your* fault," the Rose added kindly. "You're beginning to fade, you know—and then one can't help one's petals getting a little untidy."

Related Characters: The Rose, Tiger-Lily (speaker), The Red Queen, Alice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

Out in the garden, Alice asks the talking flowers if there are other humans about. The flowers tell her about the Red Queen and the flowers underhandedly insult Alice's appearance and, in doing so, suggest that she's getting old. For Alice, this is an indication that growing up isn't actually all that great—in the eyes of the flowers, at least, she's "fading" and "untidy" now that she's seven and a half. The way that the Rose talks about Alice's more mature appearance also suggests that being an adult isn't so wonderful. Per the Rose, adults aren't beautiful or graceful—they're faded versions of the bright and interesting people they used to be when they were children.

"Where do you come from?" said the Red Queen. "And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time."

Alice attended to all of these directions, and explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way.

"I don't know what you mean by your way," said the Queen: "all the ways about here belong to *me*—but why did you come out here at all?" she added in a kinder tone. "Curtsey while you're thinking what to say. It saves time."

Related Characters: The Red Queen (speaker), Alice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

As the Red Queen demands that Alice explain what she's doing in Looking-glass World, she gives Alice instructions for how to properly conduct herself as she speaks. As she does this, the Red Queen makes Alice feel inferior and comparatively insignificant—in other words, the Red Queen is lording the fact that she's an adult while Alice is a child over Alice. This shows Alice that adulthood is actually something that will give her a lot of power, as she will—as the Red Queen does—be able to make the rules. However, the rules that the Red Queen gives Alice, and the reasoning for those rules, makes little logical sense. Curtsying while thinking doesn't actually save time; it's just something that the Red Queen decided is true. Because of this, the novel

suggests that adulthood is just as arbitrary and hard to figure out as childhood is; a person just has more power as an adult than they do as a child.

"Have a biscuit?"

Alice thought it would not be civil to say "No," though it wasn't at all what she wanted. So she took it, and ate it as well as she could: and it was *very* dry: and she thought she had never been so nearly choked in all her life.

Related Characters: The Red Queen (speaker), Alice

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

After a mad dash (which in Looking-glass World, enables a person to stay in one place), Alice is thirsty and the Red Queen offers her a biscuit (a cookie) to quench her thirst. In this situation, Alice takes the biscuit to be polite and for no other reason. This points to the way in which individuals like Alice, who are less powerful than the adults around them, aren't as protected by the rules governing politeness as adults might be. In order to be polite here, Alice has no choice but to take the biscuit, even if it's not at all what she wants and it doesn't do anything for her thirst.

The fact that the Red Queen offers Alice a biscuit to quench her thirst adds more evidence to Alice's understanding that in Looking-glass World, things are backwards—dry foods quench thirst, one runs to stay still, and so on. This shows that Alice is still trying to make this world make sense and see things logically, though this will later prove to be a futile endeavor. While these opposites may work in this early stage of the novel, this rule doesn't apply evenly throughout the novel, making the case that rules are arbitrary and don't always apply in the ways that people might expect them to.

"—the Sixth belongs to Humpty Dumpty—But you make no remark?"

"I—I didn't know I had to make one—just then," Alice faltered out.

"You *should* have said," the Queen went on in a tone of grave reproof, "'It's extremely kind of you to tell me this'—however, we'll suppose it said—"

Related Characters: The Red Queen (speaker), Alice

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

During the Red Queen's speech to Alice in which she explains what Alice will find during her journey across the board, she reprimands Alice for not thanking her for the information—something Alice had no idea she was supposed to do. This indicates that Looking-glass World functions differently from Alice's world, where she knows (as well as a seven-year-old can) how to be polite and properly speak to people. In this world, the stakes are much higher and Alice has no choice but to flounder, as she has no idea what the rules are or how they differ from the world she came from. With this, Carroll more broadly makes the point that rules in general are arbitrary, and he suggests that everyone should be willing to look at the ways in which the rules governing politeness and conversation actually don't make logical sense.

Chapter 3: Looking-Glass Insects Quotes

"It's something very like learning geography," thought Alice, as she stood on tiptoe in hopes of being able to see a little further. "Principal rivers—there are none. Principal mountains—I'm on the only one, but I don't think it's got any name. Principal towns—"

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Once Alice is left alone to begin her journey across the board, she stops to take stock of the land around her and get her bearings. The way that she speaks about figuring out how Looking-glass World is arranged suggests that Alice is still trying to make this world make logical sense, as a landscape might in Alice's world. The simple fact that there are no principal rivers or towns, and only one unnamed mountain, is an early indicator that this world is going to defy Alice's attempts to make it make sense. Instead, Alice will have to figure things out as she goes and learn how to be content with the fact that things in this place don't make sense. This world doesn't follow rules she's used to, and it's not easy to categorize things into easy or obvious categories. Instead, Alice will need to become comfortable

with the nonsensical nature of Looking-glass World if she intends to get through it and become a queen in the Eighth Square.

"Of course they answer to their names?" the Gnat remarked carelessly.

"I never knew them do it."

"What's the use of their having names," the Gnat said, "if they wo'n't answer to them?"

"No use to them," said Alice; "but it's useful to the people that name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?"

Related Characters: Alice, The Gnat (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Once Alice and the Gnat make it into the Fourth Square and off of the train, they discuss different insects and what the point is of having a name if a person or a creature doesn't answer to it. As far as the Gnat is concerned, a name exists so that the being in question can figure out who they are and in turn, respond to that identity when someone calls for them. Alice, on the other hand, suggests that a name and a person's corresponding identity isn't just useful to the individual in question. Instead, knowing a being's name allows others to figure out who and what that being is and, along with that, figure out who and what is a part of their world. Alice suggests a more communal use of names, while the Gnat implies that names are something that are only useful to an individual and others who wish to call that individual.

So they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the neck of the Fawn, till they came out onto another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. "I'm a Fawn!" it cried out in a voice of delight. "And, dear me! you're a human child!" A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveler so suddenly.

Related Characters: The Fawn (speaker), Alice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In the wood where travelers forget all nouns, including their names, Alice joins up with a Fawn and together they make it to the other side. The wood itself symbolizes the idea that childhood is a time of potential. The Fawn is the only other non-adult creature that Alice meets in this world, and having these two youthful beings wander through the wood in search of their identity on the other side suggests that wandering without fixed identity towards an unknown destination is a state unique to children. However, the Fawn's reaction on the other side suggests that gaining self-knowledge as a person moves through childhood can be full of joy and can also be full of terror. While it knows who it is, the Fawn also reaches a point of understanding its identity where it realizes that it shouldn't be friendly with someone like Alice. For Alice, losing this friend makes her feel even more lonely than she did before, as it reinforces that she's going to be alone most of the time as she makes her way across the board. Childhood, the novel suggests, may lead to self-knowledge, but it's also a fundamentally lonely time for many children.

Chapter 4: Tweedledum and Tweedledee Quotes

Alice did not like shaking hands with either of them first, for fear of hurting the other one's feelings; so, as the best way out of the difficulty, she took hold of both hands at once: the next moment they were dancing round in a ring.

Related Characters: Tweedledee, Tweedledum, Alice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

When faced with having to decide whether to shake Tweedledee or Tweedledum's hand first, Alice decides on a third course of action and shakes both at the same time. The fact that Alice worries about offending the brothers makes it clear that she's a child who wants to make others feel comfortable by being polite and doing everything in her power to not cause offense. When this choice inexplicably leads to dancing, it suggests that working so hard to be polite can be silly and nonsensical—it may be a noble goal, but it also is fundamentally silly when one looks purely at

the mechanics of handshaking and ignores the reasons or the goals behind it.

"I like the Walrus best," said Alice: "because he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters.

"He ate more than the Carpenter, though," said Tweedledee. "You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took: contrariwise."

"That was mean!" Alice said indignantly. "Then I like the Carpenter best—if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus."

"But he ate as many as he could get," said Tweedledum.

This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, "Well! They were *both* very unpleasant characters—"

Related Characters: Tweedledum, Tweedledee, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163-64

Explanation and Analysis

Following Tweedledee's recitation of the poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter," Alice tries to figure out which character was the better person, something that's difficult with the extra information that Tweedledee and Tweedledum give about them. With this, Carroll more broadly pokes fun at circular philosophical arguments that have no one correct answer. It's entirely possible to argue in favor of either the Walrus or the Carpenter, as Alice finds here. With this, Carroll seems to suggest that people shouldn't take these exercises too seriously, since there's no way to get them wrong, and there's no way to get them entirely right, either. While they may be fun to think about, they're also not going to provide anything that's especially useful or meaningful—the argument is an exercise, nothing more.

"Well, it's no use your talking about waking him," said Tweedledum, "when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real."

"I am real!" said Alice, and began to cry.

"You wo'n't make yourself a bit realler by crying, Tweedledee remarked: "there's nothing to cry about." [...]

"I know they're talking nonsense," Alice thought to herself: "and it's foolish to cry about it."

Related Characters: Tweedledum, Tweedledee, Alice (speaker), The Red King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

When Tweedledum and Tweedledee show Alice the sleeping Red King and tell her that she only exists in his dream, Alice begins to cry. That Tweedledum can make Alice cry by insisting she's not real shows how conflicted and unmoored Alice feels about her identity. She doesn't really know who she is, but she's fully of the opinion that she's real—and having that questioned is extremely uncomfortable for her, as she has to consider that there might be more to her identity than she previously thought. When she calms herself down by insisting that all of this is nonsense and not worth getting upset over, it shows how looking at something uncomfortable as though it's just nonsense can be a helpful way to move through the world and make sense of things. Through nonsense, difficult concepts can look far less terrifying than they might otherwise.

The possibility that Alice only exists in the Red King's dream is also a nod to some religious theories that were circulating in the Victorian era, specifically that all of humanity only existed in God's dream. By bringing this up, Carroll is able to suggest to readers that it's not worth taking that kind of a suggestion seriously—like many other things, it might just be nonsense and isn't worth getting upset over.

Chapter 5: Wool and Water Quotes

"Well, I don't want any *to-day*, at any rate."

"You couldn't have it if you *did* want it," the Queen said. "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam *to-day*."

"It *must* come sometimes to 'jam to-day,'" Alice objected.

"No, it ca'n't," said the Queen. It's jam every *other* day: to-day isn't any *other* day, you know."

Related Characters: The White Queen, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

When the White Queen offers to employ Alice as a lady's maid and offers compensation of jam every other day, Alice refuses but is very confused by what the queen says about the schedule on which the maid would receive jam. Alice is trying to look at things logically (in the way that things work in her world), where receiving something every other day means exactly that. In the White Queen's world, however, she can take words literally, so today isn't every other day and jam day will never arrive. While this may make sense if someone is intent on looking at these words literally, the queen also ignores the way that language actually works. By playing with language in this way, Carroll encourages the author to think critically about how language functions and how it, like manners and etiquette, often doesn't make much sense when considered like this.

"The prettiest are always further!" she said at last, with a sigh at the obstinacy of the rushes in growing so far off as, with flushed cheeks and dripping hair and hands, she scrambled back into her place, and began to arrange her new-found treasures.

What mattered it to her just then that the rushes had begun to fade, and to lose all their scent and beauty, from the very moment that she picked them? Even real scented rushes, you know, last only a very little while—and these, being dream-rushes, melted away almost like snow, as they lay in heaps at her feet—but Alice hardly noticed this [...]

Related Characters: Alice (speaker), The Sheep

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

On the river with the Sheep, Alice stops the boat to pick beautiful scented rushes (water plants) and doesn't notice that the ones she picks fade immediately. The rushes are a symbol of childhood and, specifically, the way that children like Alice overwhelmingly look to the future and idolize it (as Alice looks ahead to the rushes out of reach and thinks that they're more beautiful), while also not noticing that they're quickly passing through and leaving behind stages of childhood (as represented by the fading rushes). With this, the novel suggests that childhood is a state in which an individual is constantly changing and growing, always while looking forward to the future—while the proverbial faded rushes of childhood aren't apparent to that individual until much later.

Chapter 6: Humpty Dumpty Quotes

"My *name* is Alice, but—"

"It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently. "What does it mean?"

"*Must* a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "*my* name means the shape I am—a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost."

Related Characters: Humpty Dumpty, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

When Alice meets Humpty Dumpty, Humpty Dumpty is quick to inform her that her name is stupid because the name "Alice" doesn't tell him anything about what Alice looks like or who she is. As far as Humpty Dumpty is concerned, names are descriptions of visual qualities, not just a way to refer to someone. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that while Humpty Dumpty assures Alice that his name refers to his egg-like shape, his name really means no such thing—while the original "Humpty Dumpty" nursery rhymes were posed as riddles in which a listener had to come up with what Humpty Dumpty was (the answer being an egg), *humpty* can refer to an upholstered pouf while *humpty dumpty*, thanks to the nursery rhyme, is sometimes used to refer to something broken beyond repair. As in many other instances throughout the novel, the nonsensical nature of this argument encourages the reader to see their conversation as fun and interesting rather than logical.

"Seven years and six months!" Humpty Dumpty repeated thoughtfully. "An uncomfortable sort of age. Now if you'd asked *my* advice, I'd have said 'Leave off at seven'—but it's too late now."

"I never ask advice about growing," Alice said indignantly.

"Too proud?" the other enquired.

Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. "I mean," she said, "that one ca'n't help growing older."

"*One* ca'n't, perhaps," said Humpty Dumpty; "but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven."

Related Characters: Humpty Dumpty, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Humpty Dumpty and Alice argue about whether she can or should have stopped growing at age seven, rather than aging another six months. Taken in terms of the entire novel, the fact that several adult characters take issue with the fact that Alice has aged six months since her trip to Wonderland suggests that childhood is a magical and ideal time that, in a perfect world, wouldn't end. Physically growing is, of course, not something that people can do much to stop, but the novel makes the case that childlike wonder is something that all people should aspire to experience, regardless of age.

The argument about whether or not Alice could stop is, again, nonsensical and, for that matter, not possible. Humpty Dumpty's imperious nature allows him to lord his adult "wisdom" over Alice, however, and makes it sound as though this is something that she should take seriously. Though there's no way to know what "proper assistance" is, it's possible that Humpty Dumpty is again advocating for dreams like this in which Alice and others can exist in a childlike state of fun and nonsense, rather than an adult world where a person needs to be mature and sensible.

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

Related Characters: Humpty Dumpty, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

After explaining what an un-birthday is to Alice (it's all the days of the year on which it's not that person's birthday), Humpty Dumpty declares that when he uses the word "glory," he means that his reasoning is inarguable. This perplexes Alice, as she's come from a world in which "glory" isn't the word one uses to talk about an unassailable argument. With this, the reader sees that Alice is wading deeper into a world where the rules don't always make logical sense. The way that Humpty Dumpty speaks is pompous, but he also suggests that language can be more fun and flexible than what Alice gives it credit for.

"As to poetry, you know," said Humpty Dumpty, stretching out one of his great hands, "*I* can repeat poetry as well as other folk, if it comes to that—"

"Oh, it needn't come to that!" Alice hastily said, hoping to keep him from beginning.

"The piece I'm going to repeat," he went on without noticing her remark, "was written entirely for your amusement."

Alice felt that in that case she really *ought* to listen to it; so she sat down, and said "Thank you" rather sadly.

Related Characters: Humpty Dumpty, Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

As Humpty Dumpty prepares to recite a poem for Alice, Alice feels she has no choice but to sit and listen, even though she doesn't want to hear. Alice's belief that she has to stay and listen in order to be polite shows clearly how someone like Humpty Dumpty can manipulate the rules of etiquette and politeness to work in their favor—if Alice wants to be polite and not offend Humpty Dumpty, who is easily offended, she does have to stay and listen attentively and in the way that Humpty Dumpty wants her to. With this, Carroll suggests that etiquette doesn't always work to serve everyone. It's easy for one person to abuse those rules to get what they want at the expense of someone who, like Alice, doesn't have as much power, since she's a child in a world of adults.

Chapter 7: The Lion and the Unicorn Quotes

"I always thought they were fabulous monsters!" said the Unicorn. "Is it alive?"

"It can talk," said Haigha solemnly.

The Unicorn looked dreamily at Alice, and said "Talk, child."

Alice could not help her lips curling up into a smile as she began: "Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too? I never saw one alive before!"

"Well, now that we *have* seen each other," said the Unicorn, "if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?"

Related Characters: Alice, Haigha, The Unicorn (speaker), The White King, The Lion

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

When Alice meets the Unicorn, both the Unicorn and Alice are shocked—they each thought the other was a "fabulous monster," not a real thing. The delight that both Alice and the Unicorn experience as they find out about the other's existence speaks to how wonderful it can be to learn new things about the world, something that's a major part of growing up. That the Unicorn is actually a magical creature also makes the point that this sort of thing doesn't have to make sense to be fun and instructive. Even if the Unicorn isn't real, Alice will still be able to take this experience and use it throughout her life as she meets others who surprise her or teach her new things.

Chapters 9-10: Queen Alice; Shaking Quotes

So she got up and walked about—rather stiffly just at first, as she was afraid that the crown might come off: but she comforted herself with the thought that there was nobody to see her, "and if I really am a Queen," she said as she sat down again, "I shall be able to manage it quite well in time."

Related Characters: Alice (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Alice tumbles into the Eighth Square and discovers a large crown on her head and then sets about practicing how to walk in it. The fact that the crown—which is a symbol of adulthood—isn't especially comfortable or intuitive to wear suggests that adulthood might eventually be the same way for Alice. Her experience with the crown suggests that adulthood takes practice and experience to get used to, just like anything else, and that adults aren't all as self-assured or naturally confident as a child like Alice might think they are. Adults must practice moving through the world just like anyone else, which suggests to Alice that adulthood is actually not all that different from childhood. Everyone, children and adults alike, are just trying to figure out how to make it through the world.

Everything was happening so oddly that she didn't feel a bit surprised at finding the Red Queen and the White Queen sitting close to her, one on each side: she would have liked very much to ask them how they came there, but she feared it would not be quite civil.

Related Characters: The White Queen, The Red Queen, Alice

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

As Alice sits after practicing walking in her crown, the Red Queen and the White Queen appear out of nowhere to join her. That Alice isn't surprised about their appearance suggests that, over the course of her journey across the chessboard, she's come to a better understanding of the way that things work in Looking-glass World: she knows now that things will happen for apparently no reason, and that there won't often be a logical explanation for why. This doesn't, however, mean that Alice isn't still curious about how these things happen. The novel suggests that this is a natural part of being human, and that wanting to make sense of happenings in the world is par for the course. However, when Alice doesn't feel that she can ask the queens how they got there, it shows how etiquette can keep a person from being able to effectively figure out how their world works. Etiquette, Carroll suggests, may exist to help people interact with each other, but it's not always the best way to figure out how things actually work.

"What impertinence!" said the Pudding. "I wonder how you'd like it, if I were to cut a slice out of *you*, you creature!"

It spoke in a thick, suety sort of voice, and Alice hadn't a word to say in reply: she could only sit and look at it and gasp.

"Make a remark," said the Red Queen: "it's ridiculous to leave all the conversation to the pudding!"

Related Characters: The Red Queen, Alice, The Pudding (speaker), The White Queen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

During Alice's dinner party, the Red Queen tells her that she can't eat any food that she's been introduced to. To prove this point, the Pudding chastises Alice when Alice cuts into it anyway. This speaks to the consequences of not adapting to the rules and regulations of a given locale: Alice is scolded for her poor behavior, even though, as far as she's concerned, her behavior isn't actually poor at all. It's perfectly sensible to cut into pudding in Alice's world, and it's unthinkable to her that she shouldn't do the same in Looking-glass World.

Then, the Red Queen's admonishment that it's ridiculous to let the Pudding do all the talking is ridiculous in its own right—a talking pudding is arguably more ridiculous than not being able to respond to someone's admonishment. This makes the case again that nonsense is a natural and intrinsic part of this world, and it's something that Alice will have to accept and deal with if she wishes to do well in her reign as queen.

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: LOOKING-GLASS HOUSE

The narrator explains that what's going to happen is all the fault of the black kitten, Kitty. The white kitten, Snowdrop, is busy—her mother, Dinah, is washing her face—but Kitty amuses herself by playing with Alice's ball of yarn and unwinding it. Alice kisses and scolds Kitty and then takes the kitten back to her chair to wind up the yarn again. As she works, Alice tells Kitty that she's been looking out the window and watching boys gathering wood for the bonfire tomorrow. She loops some yarn around Kitty's neck, which results in Kitty trying to play and again sending the ball of yarn to unravel across the room.

Alice's observation about the boys gathering firewood is a reference to Guy Fawkes Day, a UK holiday in November. This situates the story as taking place in early November, six months after Alice's first foray into Wonderland. Talking to her kittens like this suggests that Alice is pretty alone right now and doesn't have many people to talk to. Childhood is, for her, a lonely affair.

Alice scolds Kitty more. She threatens to put Kitty out in the snow and then lists Kitty's faults. She says that Kitty cried while Dinah was washing her face and then Alice imagines that Kitty objects by insisting that Dinah's paw went into her eye. Alice tells Kitty to close her eyes next time. She accuses Kitty of pushing Snowdrop away from the saucer of milk and then of unwinding all her yarn. Sternly, Alice says that she'll punish Kitty for all of these crimes on Wednesday. She becomes introspective and wonders what would happen if adults saved up all of her punishments. She reasons that she'd either go to prison or be made to go without dinner, which she wouldn't mind.

With Kitty, Alice is able to play at being an adult. She can experiment with how to best punish Kitty for her mischief and then think about how it might feel if she were in Kitty's position. This shows that Alice is already starting to grow up, as she's able to take these complex ideas and think about how they apply to her in different situations. Scolding Kitty specifically about being unhelpful during her bath is a very adult thing to do—getting children to bathe can be a struggle for plenty of parents.

Alice chatters happily about how pretty the snow looks and how all the trees and fields must be sleeping until summer. She then asks Kitty if she can play chess. Alice laments that she almost won the last game and says that they should pretend that Kitty is the Red Queen. In an aside, the narrator notes that Alice's favorite phrase is "let's pretend," but few others in her life find it as charming as she does. Alice tries to convince Kitty to fold her arms to look like the Red Queen, but the kitten refuses. As punishment, Alice holds the kitten up to the looking-glass and threatens to send it into Looking-glass House.

Alice shows here that she has an expansive imagination and has no problem dreaming up fantastical happenings. In this instance, however, Alice is entirely in charge of what's going on. This is in direct opposition to how Alice feels for much of her time in her dream of being in Looking-glass World, where Alice often feels alone and out of control. In this instance, Alice almost feels more adult since she is the one in control.

Alice tells Kitty about Looking-glass House. Its drawing room looks just like Alice's drawing room, but she can't see all of it and wants to know if they actually have fires in winter there. She says that there are books, but the words are backwards. Alice wonders if they'd give Kitty milk in Looking-glass House, and if milk there is good to drink. She notes that if the door to the drawing room is open she can see down the hallway of Looking-glass House, but she suspects that everything beyond the hall is very different from what's at the end of her house's hallway. Excitedly, Alice suggests that they pretend they can get through the mirror. She crawls onto the fireplace mantel and pushes through the glass.

At this point, Alice believes that Looking-glass World must follow a set system: it's a mirror world so, of course, things are backwards and opposite of what they are in Alice's world. This conclusion shows first that Alice wants to make sense of the world around her, and then that Alice is going to enter Looking-glass World expecting to find systems in place that are easily discernable. Those systems make Alice feel more comfortable and in control in a new world.

In the Looking-glass room, Alice is delighted to see a blazing fire. The pictures on the wall seem to be alive, and the clock on the mantel has a face and smiles. She notices that the room isn't as neat as the other room and notices that there are chessmen on the hearth, walking two by two. In a whisper, Alice notes that she can see the Red King and the Red Queen, as well as the White King and the White Queen. The pieces seem not to hear or see Alice. A white pawn on the table begins to squeal. The White Queen cries that her baby, Lily, needs help and in her haste, she knocks the White King into the cinders. Wanting to be helpful, Alice lifts the queen and puts her down by Lily.

In this scene with the normal-size chessmen, Alice gets to play the role of a god and move the figures around without them knowing that she's there. This idea will come up again later, and it refers to a religious theory circulating in the Victorian era that humans exist in God's dream—in this situation, Alice gets to feel as though she's truly the one in charge. Keep in mind for later that being the god is comfortable for Alice, while possibly being the subject of another god later isn't as easy to swallow.


The White Queen gasps in surprise and sits next to Lily to catch her breath. She shouts at the White King to "mind the volcano" and come up to the table normally. Alice watches for a moment as the king struggles to climb and finally decides to help. She picks him up gently but, since he's covered in ash, decides to dust him. The king's mouth and eyes grow wide and round and the sight is so funny that Alice nearly drops him as she laughs. She puts him down. The king remains flat on his back and, fearing that he needs to be revived, Alice looks around for water to throw on him. She finds only a bottle of ink.

The way that Alice modifies her behavior as to keep the White King comfortable shows that she's a sensitive child who wants to care for others by being kind and polite. This suggests that Alice is an individual who will try to follow the rules and regulations wherever she is so that she and others can be comfortable and know how to behave—but this desire will prove difficult to act on in Looking-glass World.

When Alice returns to the table with the ink, she listens to the White Queen and the White King discussing what happened. The king declares that he'll never forget the horror of what happened, but the queen points out that he'll forget if he doesn't "make a memorandum of it." The king pulls out a giant memorandum book (a notebook) and a huge pencil and begins writing. Alice grabs the end of the pencil and writes that the White Knight is sliding down the fireplace poker. The king struggles until finally he bursts out that he needs a thinner pencil.

The White King and Queen propose here that a person can only remember something if they make a conscious effort to do so. Alice's mischievous choice to grab the pencil and write for the king shows how easy it can be for others to manipulate memories, even if the way to do that is silly and nonsensical—or, in this case, not something that even really registers with the king.

Alice notices a book on the table. She flips through it, but thinks it's in a foreign language. After a minute, she realizes that it's a Looking-glass book and, if she holds it up to a mirror, she'll be able to read it. She does and reads the poem "**Jabberwocky**." The poem tells the story of a young boy slaying a Jabberwock and the boy's father praising him for it, but the language is unintelligible. When she's done reading, Alice declares that the poem seems pretty, but hard to understand. The narrator notes that she's unwilling to confess that she doesn't understand it. She tries to figure it out, but realizes that she needs to explore the rest of the house before she goes back. She floats down the stairway and steps into the garden.

Alice's assessment of "Jabberwocky"—that it's pretty, but apart from the broad strokes, is unintelligible—is an encapsulation of how "Jabberwocky" functions in the novel. It exists to show Alice and the reader that something doesn't have to make sense to be recognizable or be fun. Alice and the reader can enjoy the poem without knowing what a Jabberwock looks like or what all the nonsense words mean, and the fact that it's fun can be the final interpretation of the poem.

CHAPTER 2: THE GARDEN OF LIVE FLOWERS

In the garden, Alice decides to climb to the top of a nearby hill so she can see better. The path twists and turns and Alice finds that it consistently returns her to Looking-glass House. Frustrated, she declares that she's not going back yet and tries even harder to keep to a straight line. She fails and tries again. This time, she passes some beautiful flowers. She speaks to one of the flowers and says that she wishes the flowers could talk. Tiger-lily says that flowers *can* talk when there's someone worth speaking to. Alice asks if all the flowers can talk and several others pipe up.

Alice's struggle to get to the hill is her first indication that Looking-glass World doesn't function in the same way that Alice's does—clearly she's doing something wrong, even if she doesn't know what yet. The talking flowers reinforce this, while also flattering Alice by suggesting that she's someone worth talking to. By deigning to speak to Alice, the flowers indicate that children are possibly better conversational companions than adults are.

A Rose and the Tiger-lily discuss that while Alice might be the right color for a flower, her face isn't very nice and her petals don't curl enough. To change the subject, Alice asks the flowers who cares for them. The Rose says that the tree in the garden protects them. It can bark and say "Bough-wough," which, according to a daisy, is why its branches are called boughs. The daisies begin shouting. The Tiger-lily tries to silence them, but Alice steps in and threatens to pick the daisies if they don't stop. In an attempt to placate the rude flowers, Alice asks how they can speak, since she's never heard flowers speak. The Tiger-lily tells her to feel the ground. It's hard, and the lily explains that most garden beds are too soft, so the flowers sleep all the time. This makes sense to Alice.

The insults of the Rose and the Tiger-lily indicate that even if Alice may be the right kind of conversation partner in some regards, she's still not perfect. This can be read as a suggestion that Alice isn't yet a fully formed person; she's still a wild child and hasn't yet completed her transformation as she grows up into adulthood. When the Tiger-lily's explanation of hard and soft garden beds makes so much sense to Alice, it shows again that Alice desperately wants to make sense of this world and at this point, is willing to see most anything as sensible.

Several flowers insult Alice again. Alice ignores this and asks if there are more people in the garden. The Rose says that there's one other person in the garden, but she's redder and has "nine spikes." The Tiger-lily says that the other person's petals are neater than Alice's, and the Rose kindly says that Alice is starting to fade but it's nothing to be ashamed of. The Red Queen appears in the distance. She's now a half-head taller than Alice. Alice decides to go meet the queen and ignores the Rose when she suggests that Alice walk the other way. Alice heads for the queen but soon loses sight of her and ends up back at the house.

The nine spikes that the Rose mentions refers to the Red Queen's crown. When the Rose then says that Alice is starting to fade, it suggests that Alice is growing up and getting too old—the joyful innocence of childhood is starting to disappear, but it's not something that Alice should worry about too much. This makes Alice uneasy and it shows that growing up is an uncomfortable experience for children, especially when the fact that they're growing and changing is pointed out.

Annoyed, Alice decides to walk in the opposite direction. It works: she finds herself in front of the Red Queen in a minute. The queen briskly asks Alice her business and tells her how to properly stand and carry herself. Alice stumbles through her story and does her best to follow the queen's instructions as she says that she just wants to see the garden and the hill. The queen interrupts and says that this is a wilderness and the hill is actually a valley. Alice, surprised, says that that's nonsense. The Red Queen says that she's heard nonsense on par with the dictionary. Alice curtseys as requested and walks with the queen to the top of the hill.

When Alice succeeds in meeting her target by aiming for something else, it indicates that the rules of Looking-glass World do make sense: in order to achieve a goal, a person must do the opposite. This is supported more by the queen's suggestion that they're in a wilderness (when it's actually a manicured garden) and that they're in a valley as they stand on a hill. Alice's attempts to comply with the queen's rules show that she wants to please and follow directions.

From the top of the hill, Alice sees that the land is divided up into squares with small brooks and hedges. Alice says that it looks like a chessboard and, excitedly, says that a huge chess game is taking place all over the world. She says that she'd love to join and won't mind being a pawn, but she'd like to be a queen. The Red Queen says that Alice can play as the White Queen's pawn, since Lily is too little to play. She says that Alice will start in the Second Square and when she reaches the Eighth Square, she'll be a queen.

Alice's desire to be a queen is representative of children's desire to grow up and become adults. In this sense, Alice's coming journey across the chessboard is a symbolic journey towards adulthood, as signified by graduating from a pawn to a queen. Getting to experiment with growing up in this dream suggests that this is likely something that troubles Alice in her waking life.


Without warning, Alice and the Red Queen begin to run. The Red Queen shouts for Alice to run faster but strangely, the landscape never changes as they race along. Alice is exhausted but finally, the queen stops. Alice sits to catch her breath. She looks around and says that they've been under the same tree the whole time. The Red Queen insists that this is normal here and when Alice explains that movement gets a person somewhere in her world, the Red Queen is derisive. Alice complains of thirst, so the queen offers her a biscuit. Alice doesn't want it but accepts it to be polite. It's extremely dry. The queen begins measuring the ground and asks Alice if the biscuit quenched her thirst. Confused, Alice doesn't answer.

The fact that the Red Queen and Alice don't get anywhere when they run provides more evidence that Looking-glass World does indeed function logically in the reverse of Alice's world, as does the queen offering Alice a cookie to quench her thirst. Alice's confusion and the sense that she's already lost in this world indicates that she's going to need to work harder if she wishes to adapt to the way that this world works and make it through without too much trouble. Her discomfort more broadly speaks to how uncomfortable it can be to be in the process of growing up and constantly changing.


The Red Queen explains that she's going to give Alice directions. As she walks, the queen says that, since Alice is a pawn, she gets to move two squares in her first move. She'll end up in the Fourth Square quickly and she briefly explains what Alice will find in each square. In the Eighth Square, they'll both be queens. Alice curtseys. The queen gives Alice some final advice on etiquette and disappears.

The way that the queen frames Alice's journey continues to suggest that Looking-glass World operates on an easy-to-understand system. While this is comforting for Alice at this point, she'll soon discover that this is wrong: Looking-glass World is far more nonsensical than the Queen implies and, in that way, it does mirror Alice's real world, which she doesn't always understand.

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING-GLASS INSECTS

Alice stands on tiptoe so she can see as much of this world as she can. She reasons it's like learning geography and looks for principal rivers, towns, or mountains. There aren't any. Alice notices creatures making honey and thinks that they're bees, but realizes that they're elephants. As she thinks of how huge the flowers must be she decides to go look, but feels suddenly shy. Reasoning that she wants to get into the Third Square more than she wants to see the elephants, she runs down the hill and jumps over the first brook.

Standing up to look around and likening this to learning geography shows that Alice is very interested in thinking logically about the world around her. When she's able to head for the next square and jump over the brook, it shows that the system that the Red Queen introduced her to earlier won't hold true for the rest of the novel—per the queen's logic, Alice should've headed in the other direction.

Alice finds herself in a train car. The Guard pokes his head in the window and demands tickets from everyone. Everyone but Alice pulls out tickets that are as big as they are, and both the Guard and the passengers chide Alice for not promptly presenting her ticket. Scared, Alice says that there wasn't a ticket office where she came from. The Guard and the passengers chastise her. Alice thinks that there's no use in speaking and, to her surprise, everyone in the carriage chastises her in their thoughts. The Guard studies Alice with a telescope, a microscope, and then opera glasses. He declares that she's going the wrong way and leaves.

Since pawns in chess move two squares in their first move, Alice finds herself on a train moving quickly through the next square. The Guard's heckling introduces Alice to the fact that as she continues along, she's going to come across all sorts of rules and systems that she has no knowledge of but is going to be asked to follow anyway. This more broadly mirrors how adulthood might feel for Alice, as adults can be just as lost in the world as children can be.

The passengers around Alice are actually animals. They lament that she should know where she's going and should know how to get a ticket, even if she doesn't know her name or the alphabet. A hoarse voice begins to say that Alice needs to change engines, but it chokes and stops. Alice thinks that it was a horse speaking. A small voice in her ear quietly says that she could make a joke about "horse" and "hoarse." As passengers try to give Alice advice, the tiny voice in her ear continues to suggest jokes. Finally, Alice tells the voice to make the jokes itself. It sighs unhappily, confirms that Alice is a friend, and admits that it's an insect. Alice wants to know if it stings, but feels that this is a rude question.

Alice's belief that it'd be rude to ask about information she needs shows that there are limits to how useful etiquette is for someone like Alice—if she's going to be polite, she can't ask an impertinent question like this, even if she'd really like to have the information for her own use. The Gnat's joke suggestions mirror the expectations put on adults to properly perform at all times, while Alice's rejection of these suggestions reminds the reader that she's still a nonconforming child.

The engine screams, a Horse explains that they're going to jump over a brook, and as the carriage rises straight up, Alice finds herself sitting under a tree with the Gnat. She realizes that this is who she's been talking to. The Gnat is as big as a chicken, but Alice finds that she's not scared. She admits that she's afraid of the insects in her world and offers to share some of their names. The Gnat asks if the insects respond to their names and suggests that there's no use in having a name if a being doesn't respond to it. Alice proposes that the names are useful to other people.

Alice's lack of fear points to the fact that she is an adaptable person who is able to go with the flow, something that will serve her well throughout her life. When she and the Gnat discuss names, Alice suggests that names matter because they allow people to make sense of the world around them. While she's more interested in putting together how her world works, the Gnat is more interested in piecing together individuals' identities.

Alice begins listing insects. She lists the horsefly, so the Gnat points to a rocking-horse-fly in a bush. It lives on sap and sawdust. Alice lists the dragonfly and again, the Gnat points out a snap-dragon-fly, which eats mince pie. When Alice lists the butterfly, the Gnat draws her attention to a bread-and-butter-fly at her feet. It eats weak tea with cream, and the Gnat says that they often die when they can't find tea.

The insects that the Gnat points out are all made up, but they're bright and fun to think about—until he notes that the bread-and-butter-fly often dies when it can't find food. This shows that nonsense can be fun, but it can also allow a person to think about uncomfortable truths, such as the ubiquity of death and how nonsensical those deaths can be.

After a moment of silence, the Gnat confirms that Alice doesn't want to lose her name. Carelessly, the Gnat suggests that it'd be convenient if she lost it, as Alice's governess wouldn't be able to call her for lessons. Alice says that the governess would just call her "Miss," but the Gnat says that if the governess said that, she could *miss* her lessons. He wishes that Alice had made the joke. Alice asks why and points out that the joke was bad. The Gnat begins to cry and sighs itself into nothing.

The Gnat's jokes primarily work with homophones, or words that sound the same but mean different things. This shows how flexible language can be when one fixates on the sounds that words make more than their meaning. This encourages readers to think more playfully about language, what it can do, and what kind of wordplay and nonsense is possible when one thinks about it like this.

Alice gets up and walks to a field with a dark wood on the other side. She reminds herself that she has to get to the Eighth Square and realizes that this must be the wood where things have no names. Alice chatters to herself about what it would be like to lose her name and be renamed until she reaches the edge of the wood. Under the trees, she can't remember her name, what trees are called, or where she is. A Fawn walks by and seems fearless. Alice calls out to the Fawn, but it backs away and stares at her. The Fawn asks what Alice calls herself, and Alice answers that she's not sure. The Fawn says that it'll tell Alice its name further on; it can't remember here.

This wood represents the potential for children to grow up to be anything. In the wood, with no knowledge of their names or where they are, Alice and the Fawn have the ability to become anything on the other side—Alice could, as she suggests, come out with a new name. This again elevates childhood over adulthood, as it indicates that children are more flexible and more adaptable than adults are with fixed identities.

Alice puts her arms around the Fawn's neck and together, they walk through the wood. In the open field beyond, the Fawn joyously remembers its name and then, in a panic, realizes that Alice is human and races away. Alice feels horrible, but she comforts herself with the fact that she now remembers her name. She comes to a road through the next wood and follows it. At the second signpost, she sees two signs pointing the same direction that read “To Tweedledum's House” and “To the House of Tweedledee.” Alice wonders if they live in the same house and decides to stop and ask them how to get out of the wood. As she comes around a corner, she comes face to face with Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

For Alice and the Fawn, learning their names isn't as positive as it might be for someone else: though Alice does now remember her name and, therefore, knows better who she is, she also lost the only friend she has in this world. For the Fawn, learning that Alice is human means that it's now terrified and just as alone as Alice is, something that's potentially less comfortable than it was to be nameless but in the company of someone else while in the wood.

CHAPTER 4: TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE

Tweedledum and Tweedledee are identical fat men and they stand with their arms around each other's shoulders. Alice can tell them apart because one has "Dum" embroidered on his collar and the other has "Dee" on his. She supposes that they must have "Tweedle" at the back of their collars but as she starts to move around them to look, Tweedledum says that she should pay if she's going to treat them like waxworks. Tweedledee says that she should speak. Alice apologizes and remembers an old song about Tweedledum and Tweedledee, in which the brothers fight over a rattle but forget their fight when a big crow flies too close. The brothers say that they know what Alice is thinking about but it's not true.

When Tweedledum and Tweedledee immediately chastise Alice for not being polite, it again suggests that Alice will have to try much harder to figure out how to operate in this world without offending anyone—there's little evidence that Tweedledee and Tweedledum looked like they were actually alive until they spoke, after all. This essentially sets Alice up to fail as she moves through Looking-glass World and tries to figure out how to properly conduct herself, especially when the brothers then tell her that the song is inexplicably wrong—everything she knows is, apparently, not correct.

Politely, Alice asks the best way through the wood. Tweedledum and Tweedledee grin at each other. Alice thinks they look like schoolboys, so she points at Tweedledum and says, “First Boy” and then “Next Boy” to Tweedledee. They snap to attention, but Tweedledum reprimands Alice for not greeting them and shaking hands. Keeping one arm around the other, the brothers each hold out a hand for Alice to shake. Not wanting to offend either brother by choosing one over the other, Alice grabs both hands at the same time. They dance in a circle and Alice hears music.

When politeness doesn't work for Alice, she resorts to mischief—a reminder that even if she's getting older, she's still very much a child. When she deliberates over whose hand to shake first so that she doesn't offend anyone, it illustrates again how hard Alice is trying to do the right thing and make everyone feel comfortable—though often at her own expense.

Tweedledum stops dancing and the music stops. He and Tweedledee drop Alice’s hands and Alice awkwardly tries to think of how to begin a conversation. She asks if they're tired. The brothers thank her for her concern and then Tweedledee decides to recite “The Walrus and the Carpenter” for Alice, since it's the longest poem he knows. They ignore Alice's request for directions.

It's worth noticing that Tweedledum and Tweedledee aren't *being polite when they ignore Alice's request for directions. When Alice decides to stick around and listen to the poem anyway, it shows that the onus is on her to be polite—adults like Tweedledum and Tweedledee can get away with this kind of behavior, since Alice is comparatively powerless as a child.*

“The Walrus and the Carpenter” tells the story of a Walrus and a Carpenter walking along the shore. They invite oysters to walk with them. The old oysters refuse, but many young oysters happily follow. The group walks about a mile and then they sit on a low rock. The Walrus announces that it's time to talk, but he agrees to let the oysters catch their breath. The Walrus calls for bread, pepper, and vinegar so they can all eat. The oysters fearfully confirm that they're not going to be eaten. The Carpenter and the Walrus cut bread and lament that they tricked the oysters. The Walrus sobs as the Carpenter suggests that they all head home. The oysters don't answer—the Walrus and the Carpenter ate all of them.

The behavior of the young oysters in the poem shows how vulnerable children can be in an adult world—the draw of being treated like an adult, as symbolized by the invitation to walk with the Walrus and the Carpenter, is enough to put the young oysters in a dangerous position. Symbolism aside, the poem is still silly and nonsensical—but regardless, it's still fun for the reader, even if it's not doing anything useful for Alice in terms of helping her navigate this world.

After this recitation, Alice says she likes the Walrus because he was sorry for the oysters. Tweedledee points out that he ate more than the Carpenter. Alice switches and says that she then likes the Carpenter better, but Tweedledum says that the Carpenter still ate as many oysters as he could. Alice says they were both bad, but stops when she hears something that sounds like a train. Tweedledee says it's just the Red King snoring and invites Alice to come look at him. They wonder what he's dreaming about and Tweedledee says that the king is dreaming about Alice—if he woke up, she'd disappear. Alice points out that Tweedledee and Tweedledum would disappear too, but they don't answer.

Alice's attempt to figure out which character was the better person pokes fun at philosophical arguments that have no one correct answer—it's possible to argue that either character is the better one. Alice's inability to come to a decision, combined with this conversation's inclusion in a children's book, suggests that people shouldn't put so much stock in these philosophical arguments. It doesn't matter, really, which answer one chooses, as there's no single correct answer.

Tweedledum tells Alice that she's not real, which makes Alice cry. Alice thinks this is all ridiculous and suggests that if she weren't real, she wouldn't be able to cry. Tweedledum contemptuously says that Alice's tears are fake. Alice tells herself that the brothers are talking nonsense and calms down. She again asks for directions out of the wood and asks if it's going to rain. Tweedledum opens up an umbrella and announces that it won't rain under his umbrella, but it *might* rain outside.

This conversation about the Red King's dream draws on the idea that humans exist in God's dream. Now that Alice is the subject who's only alive in someone else's dream, it's very anxiety inducing for her. As with the philosophical argument, the novel again makes the case that it's not worth getting too worked up about—there's no proving it either way, and it just makes Alice sad.

Alice is ready to give up when Tweedledum grabs her, points to a white object, and chokingly asks if she sees it. She says that it's just an old, broken rattle. Tweedledum begins to rage as Tweedledee tries to close the umbrella around himself. Tweedledum calms down suddenly and asks his brother if he agrees to a battle. Tweedledee does, so the brothers skip away and return with a collection of blankets, rugs, and linens. They make Alice help them button and tie everything onto them. They agree to fight for two hours until dinner and then warn Alice to stand back so they don't hit her. She tries to shame them into giving up, but they ignore her. It starts to get dark quickly and the brothers realize it's a crow. They run away and Alice notices a shawl flying.

When Tweedledee and Tweedledum's fight is cut short by the crow, as in the song Alice mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it suggests that Alice is actually the one in charge here (and not the Red King). She can think about nursery rhymes like this and then see them come true before her very eyes. That it's nursery rhymes and songs that come to life suggests children have a degree of imaginative control over their worlds.

CHAPTER 5: WOOL AND WATER

Alice catches the shawl and sees the White Queen running toward her. Alice helps the queen put her shawl back on and, as the queen repeats "bread-and-butter," Alice tries to make conversation. She asks if she's addressing the White Queen, but the queen laments in reply that she wouldn't call this "a-dressing." Not wanting to argue, Alice asks for guidance so she can help. She notices that the queen's clothing and hair are very untidy and offers to straighten the queen's shawl. Alice gently puts the queen's clothes back in order and laughs when the queen offers to hire her as a lady's maid for twopence per week and jam every other day.

In this instance, Alice looks far more adult than the White Queen does—losing articles of clothing like this is usually something that's more common for children to do than adults. When Alice has to act like the adult, it suggests that adults are actually not as competent as children like Alice might think—they need help too, and may be just as lost in the world as someone who's young like Alice.

Alice turns down the job and says she doesn't like jam. The White Queen points out that Alice can't have the jam anyway—she can only have jam tomorrow and yesterday, but never today. Alice is confused, but the queen kindly explains that when one lives backwards, as she does, one can remember in both directions. Even more confused, Alice asks what the queen remembers. The White Queen says that now, there's a messenger who's being punished. His trial begins next week and he'll commit the crime last. Alice asks what happens if the messenger never commits the crime, and the queen says that'd be great. They argue about the purpose of punishment and the queen suggests that punishments are even better when a person hasn't committed a crime.

That the queen can remember in both directions (and not just the future, as one might suspect given the rules the Red Queen laid out for Looking-glass World) is another indicator that Looking-glass World doesn't function like Alice thinks it should: the rules don't apply evenly and instead they apply in every direction at various times. The argument about the purpose of punishment starts to pick at Victorian beliefs about how to raise and punish children. Alice has a far more sensible view of punishment than the queen does, suggesting that children can have a more defined sense of right and wrong than the adults in charge.

Before Alice can suggest that they've made a mistake in their logic, the White Queen starts screaming that her finger is bleeding. The queen explains that she's going to prick it on her brooch. The queen's shawl flies open and though Alice tries to save the day, the White Queen catches the brooch and pricks her finger. Calmly, the White Queen says that it should all make sense to Alice now and when Alice asks why she's not screaming, the queen says she already did that.

This scene suggests that the logic of Looking-glass World is actually more straightforward than previously acknowledged, even if it still doesn't make sense to Alice: The progression of events makes perfect sense in a world that functions backwards. However, that this doesn't apply across the board still means that Alice struggles to figure out how things work and when they work this way or not.

The sky begins to get light and Alice observes that the crow flew away. She says she's glad, and the White Queen moans that she wishes she could be happy. Alice remembers that she's actually very lonely and starts to cry. The White Queen tells Alice to consider anything to stop crying. She asks how old Alice is and then admits that she's 105 years, 5 months, and 1 day. Alice laughs and says she can't believe things that are impossible. The queen declares that Alice needs practice. Her shawl flies off again and the queen races after it across a brook. Alice follows.

Alice's insistence that she can't believe impossible things makes it clear that while she may be an imaginative child, her imagination still has limits—she's not entirely comfortable accepting the nonsensical nature of this world unquestioningly, even if this world is a figment of her imagination. In other words, she's still trying to make this world make logical sense, something that the novel suggests is a futile endeavor.

Alice asks if the White Queen's finger is better but, as the queen answers, Alice finds herself in a dark shop with a Sheep knitting behind the counter. The Sheep asks Alice what she'd like to buy. Alice says she wants to look around before she makes a decision. The sheep points out that Alice can look in many directions, but she can't look all around unless she has eyes in the back of her head. Alice turns to study the shelves. They seem to be full of interesting things but when Alice looks directly at a shelf, it's always empty. In pursuit of something bright, Alice "chases" the object to the top shelf and right through the ceiling. The Sheep tells Alice to stop making her dizzy and Alice notes that the Sheep is knitting with 14 pairs of needles.

The Sheep's insistence on semantics and the literal meaning of looking all around shows that in this situation, Alice isn't the one who's being the most logical and literal—part of understanding how language works is understanding that it can mean something more than what the words themselves mean on the surface. This is another case in which Alice will need to work hard to adapt in order to get along with this Sheep and make it through this portion of the chessboard.

The Sheep hands Alice a pair of knitting needles and asks if Alice can row. Alice begins to answer but discovers that the needles have turned into oars and she and the Sheep are in a little boat. The Sheep shouts, "Feather!" but Alice, perplexed, doesn't answer. Her oars occasionally get stuck and the Sheep continues to shout "Feather!" and says that Alice will soon catch a crab. This thought delights Alice, but hearing "Feather" over and over again begins to annoy her. She points out that she's not a bird, but the Sheep calls her a goose.

"Feather" is a rowing term that refers to holding the oars parallel to the water while they're above the water—and if a rower feathers too soon, they'll "catch a crab," or get the oar stuck. Alice doesn't understand this, so readers familiar with the terminology can laugh at her expense. Again, language can be expansive and mean many different things, which allows for all sorts of jokes depending on what a person does or doesn't know.

Alice notices beautiful scented **rushes** ahead and asks if they can stop and pick some. The Sheep insists it has nothing to do with whether or not the boat stops. Alice stops rowing and the boat drifts into the rushes. She begins to pluck the rushes but realizes, to her annoyance, that the prettiest rushes seem just a little further away than she can reach. The narrator notes that Alice doesn't notice that the rushes in the boat wilt and melt almost immediately. She rows on until one oar gets stuck and won't move. The oar sweeps Alice off her seat, but Alice manages to sort herself out. The Sheep compliments her on catching a crab. Alice cautiously says she would've liked to see the crab, but the Sheep just laughs at her.

When the most beautiful rushes are those that are furthest away, it symbolizes how children idealize adulthood and think that the future looks far brighter than their present—while the wilting rushes in Alice's boat stand for how it's so hard for anyone to tell in the moment that they're getting older and changing. The rushes more broadly represent childhood and the way that children, in Carroll's view, don't necessarily know how good they have it until they're already adults and it's too late to go back.

The Sheep asks Alice what she wants to buy and suddenly they're back in the dark shop. Alice asks for an egg and the Sheep explains that they sell two for less money than one, but Alice has to eat them both if she buys two. Alice decides to buy one and gives the Sheep money. The Sheep says that she never puts things in other people's hands, sets the egg on a shelf, and walks away. Alice walks toward the egg but the shop seems to expand. She notices branches and crosses a little brook.

The Sheep's price system is just as silly as anything else in the novel. Alice has to make a choice about whether to argue or whether to go with it. Choosing to go with it suggests that Alice is getting better at adapting, while her lack of fear or suspicion as the shop expands supports this and shows that she's open to experiencing these kinds of strange occurrences.

CHAPTER 6: HUMPTY DUMPTY

As Alice approaches the egg, it gets bigger until she realizes that it's actually Humpty Dumpty sitting high on a wall. When she gets close, Alice remarks out loud that he looks like an egg. He doesn't answer, so she thinks he's a doll until he says that he's offended to be called an egg. Alice tries to turn her statement into a compliment by insisting that she said that he *looked* like an egg and that he's pretty. Humpty Dumpty says that some people have no sense. It seems as though he tells this to a tree, so Alice softly recites the poem "Humpty Dumpty" to herself and declares that the last line is too long. Humpty Dumpty snaps at her to stop talking to herself and to state her name and her business instead.

When Alice recites "Humpty Dumpty," just as she remembered the song about Tweedledum and Tweedledee, it suggests that this recitation is going to have a similar effect—the nursery rhyme will come true and Humpty Dumpty will fall off the wall. This again suggests that Alice has more control over this experience than she might think, even as Humpty Dumpty insists that Alice is silly and doesn't know how to properly interact. His behavior suggests that he's using his adult status to lord over Alice and make her feel inferior and less powerful.

Alice offers her name but before she can say anything else, Humpty Dumpty says her name is stupid and asks what it means. Alice asks if it has to mean anything, and Humpty Dumpty responds that it does. His name refers to his shape, while "Alice" doesn't tell him anything about Alice's shape. Not wanting to argue, Alice asks why he's sitting alone. Humpty Dumpty takes this as a riddle and says that there's nobody with him. He asks her for a better riddle. She asks if he thinks it'd be safer to be on the ground. This annoys him because it's easy, and he starts to say that the king promised him something. Alice finishes his sentence that the king will send horses and men but Humpty Dumpty accuses her of eavesdropping.

Alice's confusion when Humpty Dumpty asks for riddles suggests that it's possible that Alice doesn't know the origins of the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme: it was originally a riddle, and the answer was an egg. Again, Alice's lack of knowledge means that she's left scrambling to figure out how to act. Humpty Dumpty's insistence that Alice's name isn't descriptive enough shows that he has definite ideas of how names work and what they must do—even though "Humpty Dumpty" doesn't actually mean egg-shaped; it's nonsense.

Alice says that she read it in a book and Humpty Dumpty responds that a book is a "History of England." Humpty Dumpty offers to shake hands with Alice to prove that he's not proud. His smile gets bigger, making Alice wonder what would happen if the edges of his mouth met in the back. Humpty Dumpty insists that they go back two conversation subjects but, when Alice can't remember it, he asks her how old she said she was. Alice says that she's seven years and six months, which Humpty Dumpty says is wrong—she never *said* that. Alice explains that she thought he was asking how old she is, but he snaps that if he meant that, he would've said that. Humpty Dumpty says that Alice should've stopped growing at seven. Alice indignantly says that "one can't help growing older," but Humpty Dumpty says that *two* can.

This conversation about semantics means that Alice has to think more literally about language—she needs to not take language to what she suspects it means and instead must think about what exactly Humpty Dumpty is asking. Through this, Lewis Carroll shows the reader what language can do and demonstrates the different ways that it can function. Humpty Dumpty's displeasure with the fact that Alice is getting older falls in line with the rest of the characters' displeasure: it suggests that Alice is already past a childhood prime and is becoming less free and interesting as she ages.

Alice decides that it's her turn to choose a subject, so she compliments Humpty Dumpty's belt. She deliberates out loud as to whether it's actually a belt or a cravat and realizes that she seriously offended Humpty Dumpty. He snarls that he's offended, but after Alice apologizes, he explains that it was an un-birthday present from the White Queen and the White King. Puzzled, Alice asks what an un-birthday present is. When Humpty Dumpty explains that it's a present given to someone when it's not their birthday, Alice declares that she likes birthday presents best. To prove that Alice is wrong, Humpty Dumpty makes Alice do the math and makes the point that in a year, there are 364 possible days for un-birthday presents, but only one for birthday presents. He says that this is "glory."

Alice's mistake about the cravat is very understandable—but Humpty Dumpty's offense shows that even when a mistake is understandable, that doesn't mean that it's not benign. With this, the novel suggests that Alice will have to pay closer attention and do whatever she can to stay on top of whatever etiquette rules she comes across in the moment. It's not enough, Humpty Dumpty suggests, to do her best and try to be nice. Instead, Alice needs to somehow know how to properly behave in order to be in the clear—something that's impossible to do, setting Alice up to fail even more.

Alice asks what Humpty Dumpty means by "glory." He says that he means it's a good argument and, when Alice points out that "glory" doesn't refer to a good argument, Humpty Dumpty says scornfully that words mean what he wants them to mean. Alice asks if he can do this, but Humpty Dumpty's answer makes no sense. After a moment of silence, Humpty Dumpty says that verbs are proud and have tempers, but he can make them do anything. He declares, "Impenetrability!" and explains that it means that he's done with the subject and wants to know where Alice is going. Alice remarks that this is a lot of meaning for one word, and Humpty Dumpty says he pays words extra when he makes them work so hard.

Humpty Dumpty has a far more playful and interesting view of what language can do than Alice does in this instance: as long as he pays his words fairly, he suggests, he can make them do and mean anything. This is, of course, not actually true if Humpty Dumpty wants anyone to understand him without having to constantly explain himself, but it shows again that words and wordplay can be fun and entertaining.

Alice asks Humpty Dumpty if he could decode "**Jabberwocky**" for her. She recites the first verse and he begins to work through it and explain that *brillig* refers to 4:00 p.m., while *toves* are a cross between a badger, a lizard, and a corkscrew. He introduces her to portmanteau words like *slithy* (lithe and slimy) and *mimsy* (flimsy and miserable). When they get through the first verse, Alice explains that she read the poem in a book and mentions that Tweedledee recited an easier poem to her earlier. Humpty Dumpty insists that he's also good at reciting poetry and is going to recite one that was written just for Alice. Feeling that she has no choice but to listen, Alice sits down sadly.

Keep in mind that all the words that Humpty Dumpty is decoding for Alice are words that Lewis Carroll made up—they're all nonsense. This means that while Humpty Dumpty's interpretation is necessary if a person wants to interpret the poem, it's also possible that Humpty Dumpty is making up even more nonsense, as there's no way to confirm that these words mean what Humpty Dumpty says they do. Again, however, this doesn't take away from how delightful the poem is on an auditory level.

Humpty Dumpty intones that he's telling Alice his poem in winter; in summer, she might understand; and in the fall, she should write it down. Alice interrupts through this until Humpty Dumpty scolds her. The poem proceeds and the narrator and some fish exchange messages. The fish refuse to do what the narrator wants them to, so the narrator gets a kettle and fills it. The narrator shouts for a messenger to wake up the sleeping fish, but ends up going to their door. The narrator finds the door locked, so they push and kick and try to turn the handle. Humpty Dumpty pauses here and Alice asks if that's the entire poem. He says it is and dismisses her.

Alice's sense that she has to sit and listen to the poem shows again that, in order to be polite, Alice cannot do what she wants to do and instead, must make those around her happy and comfortable at her own expense. When the poem makes no sense and especially when it ends so abruptly, the novel makes the case again that literature and poetry don't have to make sense to be fun—but there are still things that make nonsense more comfortable or accessible, such as a clear ending, which this poem doesn't have.

Alice cheerfully bids Humpty Dumpty goodbye and extends her hand. He disdainfully offers her a single finger to shake and says that she's just like other people with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, all in the same place. Alice insists that switching around her facial features wouldn't look nice, but Humpty Dumpty shuts his eyes and ignores her. She begins to walk away, talking to herself about how unsatisfactory her meeting with Humpty Dumpty was. She hears a heavy crash that shakes the forest.

Saying that Alice is just like everyone else again suggests that Alice is growing up and becoming boring—possibly, if Alice were younger, she'd be more willing to entertain the possibility of rearranging facial features and having that be something interesting and worth considering. At seven and a half, Alice is now at the point where she knows how the world works and isn't willing to change it too much.

CHAPTER 7: THE LION AND THE UNICORN

Alice sees soldiers running through the wood and hides behind a tree. The soldiers all trip and fall, and their horses don't do much better. Alice finds a clearing and the White King there, busy writing in his memorandum book. In a delighted tone, he says that he sent all his soldiers and is thrilled when Alice says that she saw them. He notes that he sent all the horses but two, as two are in play in the game. The king says that he's also missing his two messengers and asks Alice to look up and down the road in case they're coming. Alice says that she sees "nobody" on the road, and sadly, the king says that he wishes he could see "Nobody."

Knights in chess move in an L shape, which is why these soldiers fall off their horses—they very literally cannot move in a straight line because of what they are. All of these horses and men running towards the crash (which was presumably Humpty Dumpty falling off his wall) suggests that the nursery rhyme again came true: Alice is still very much in control of this narrative, even if she's not entirely sure of it.

Alice continues to look up the road and she exclaims that she can see someone coming slowly and skipping oddly. The White King says that the messenger is an Anglo-Saxon messenger and his behaviors are "Anglo-Saxon attitudes." The messenger's name is Haigha. Alice can't help herself. She begins saying that she loves Haigha "with an H" because he's happy, hates him because he's hideous, and feeds him ham sandwiches and hay. She struggles to come up with a town that begins with H and the king, seemingly unaware that he's joining in Alice's game, says that Haigha lives on the hill. The White King says that he has two messengers so that he has one to come and one to go. The other's name is Hatta.

While not a nursery rhyme or a song, per se, the game that Alice plays to remember Haigha's name might function in the same way. The fact that it's a game reinforces the motif of chess and games in general and adds more credence to the possibility that Alice's nonsensical musings are going to come true once Haigha gets closer, given that the chess game has proceeded thus far in the same way that the introduction laid out. In this sense, Looking-glass World does follow a logical pattern, but again, it's not applied evenly.

Alice doesn't understand why the White King needs two messengers. He says impatiently that he needs one to fetch and one to carry. Haigha arrives, out of breath, and when the king says that Alice loves him with an H, his movements become even more absurd. The king asks for a ham sandwich, which Haigha produces from a pouch around his neck. The king eats it and asks for another, but Haigha says he only has hay left. The king accepts the hay and remarks that there's nothing like a snack of hay when he feels faint. Alice suggests that cold water might be better, but the king says he wasn't talking about what's best.

As expected, Haigha produces items that Alice spoke of while playing her game. That Alice seems unaware that she has this power to dictate how life proceeds in Looking-glass World suggests that she still feels like a child who's not in control of her surroundings, even if she is in her own dream. That she feels out of control suggests again that childhood is anxiety-inducing and is, at times, hard for everyone to get through.

The White King asks Haigha who he saw on the road and he is pleased to hear that Haigha saw nobody. He asks Haigha what he saw in the next town over. Haigha says that he's going to whisper it, which makes Alice sad—she wants to know what he saw. To her surprise, Haigha shouts in the king's ear, "They're at it again." Shocked, the king threatens to punish Haigha. Alice asks who's at it, and the king explains that the Lion and the Unicorn are fighting for his crown. They all run to watch and, as they go, Alice mutters an old song about a lion and a unicorn fighting for the crown, eating white and brown bread, and receiving plum cake before being chased out of town with drums.

Alice's recitation of the song about the Lion and the Unicorn should mean that Alice is going to come across an actual Lion and a Unicorn, eat bread and cake, and then hear drums—language, in this case, can make these seemingly unrelated and nonsensical things come true. The King and Haigha's ineptitude again suggests that adults don't have everything figured out just because they're adults.

Alice asks if the winner gets the crown, a suggestion that shocks the White King. She quickly finds that she's out of breath, but the White King refuses to stop. They finally reach a big crowd surrounding the fighting Lion and Unicorn. They join Hatta, who's drinking tea and eating buttered bread. Haigha whispers to Alice that Hatta just got out of prison, so he's hungry and thirsty. He asks how Hatta is and how prison was, but Hatta cries and refuses to speak. The king finally demands that Hatta tell them how the fight is going. With a gulp, Hatta says that each fighter has been down about 87 times. Alice asks if they'll bring the bread around soon, which Hatta confirms. The Lion and the Unicorn sit down and pant and the king calls for a break for refreshments.

When the White King is shocked by the suggestion that the winner might get his crown, it shows that Alice is again trying to be too literal—in this instance, she needs to be less serious and less literal about how she interprets what the king says. However, it's worth noting that until the king clarifies, there's no reason to believe that the winner wouldn't get the crown. The reasoning here doesn't make sense, which makes the king's anxiety about the fight make even less sense.

Haigha and Hatta carry around trays of white and brown bread. Alice takes a piece but finds it very dry. The White King says that the Lion and the Unicorn won't fight more today, so he commands that Hatta get the drums. Alice watches silently and then notices the White Queen running in the distance. The king says that someone is probably chasing her and when Alice expresses concern, the king insists that he can't help. He opens his memorandum book to make a note and asks how to spell "creature."

The White Queen, as a chess queen, can move as many squares as she'd like in any direction, while the king has to stay pretty still. This is why he can't rescue her and, for that matter, wouldn't be of much help since she's far more mobile and looks like she could escape anything.

The Unicorn saunters by the White King, eyes his crown, and suggests that he did the best this time. The king nervously chastises the Unicorn for stabbing the Lion. The Unicorn insists it didn't hurt the lion and catches sight of Alice. He stares at her with disgust and asks what "it" is. Haigha eagerly introduces Alice as a big and "natural" child. The Unicorn admits that he thought children were "fabulous monsters" and asks if Alice is alive. Haigha says that Alice can talk. With a smile, Alice says that she thought that unicorns were fabulous monsters. The Unicorn asks if they can agree to both believe in the other's existence.

Again, the White King's nervousness when the Unicorn eyes his crown suggests that there's something funny here—there's no reason to be so uncomfortable if he's never actually going to lose his crown. The exchange between Alice and the Unicorn speaks to the power of learning about individuals who are different, whether those individuals are fantastical or not. This skill and openness will be useful to anyone at any stage of life.

The Unicorn shouts for the White King to grab the plum cake. The king talks Haigha through pulling a plum cake, a dish, and a knife out of his bag. The Lion joins, looking sleepy. He asks what Alice is and excitedly, the Unicorn says that Alice is a fabulous monster. The Lion asks that "Monster" pass around the plum cake and demands that the king and the unicorn sit down so they can share fairly. The king is clearly uncomfortable as the Lion and the Unicorn argue over who won and who will win in the future.

Some scholars believe that the Lion and the Unicorn are metaphors for a fight for the British crown in the Victorian era, offering another example of Lewis Carroll touching on contemporary goings-on to make a point that it's not worth taking any of it too seriously. The fight in the novel also appears pointless and like it's going to continue, suggesting again that it's futile to worry about it.

The White King tries to change the subject, but the Lion ignores the attempt and notices that Alice is struggling to cut the cake. Alice saws at the cake and laments that the pieces won't separate. The Unicorn grouses that Alice doesn't know how to deal with Looking-glass cakes and instructs her to pass it around first and then cut it. Alice thinks this sounds silly, but does as she's told. The cake divides itself. The Unicorn and the Lion argue over who got the bigger piece, but the drums begin and drown everything else out. Alice leaps over a brook and watches the Lion and the Unicorn get up as though to fight.

By doing what she's told when the Unicorn tells her how to cut the cake shows that after a while in Looking-glass World, Alice is learning to adapt to what this world throws at her and understands that she needs to follow the instructions of those around her. When the drums start, it again follows the song that Alice recited when she learned about the Lion and the Unicorn and suggests that Alice is still in control of what's happening in her dream.

CHAPTER 8: "IT'S MY OWN INVENTION"

The racket gradually dies. Alice lifts her head and sees that she's totally alone, but the dish from the plum cake is next to her. She decides that she wasn't dreaming, unless everything is part of the same dream. She hopes that she's not in the Red King's dream and considers waking him up, but she hears shouting and sees a Red Knight riding toward her to take her prisoner. He tumbles off his horse. Alice is concerned, but he mounts again. A White Knight rides in, falls off, and they argue about who has the right to take Alice. They agree to fight for her and observe the rules of battle.

That Alice is still considering whether or not she's in the Red King's dream suggests that these kinds of theoretical exercises are fun and worth considering—they're just not worth losing sleep over. When the knights agree to the rules of battle, it shows again that there is some logic that guides this world. Everyone is playing by the rules, even if those rules aren't immediately apparent to an outsider like Alice.

The knights hit at each other and Alice escapes behind a tree. She watches to see if she can figure out what the rules are. They're odd rules: if a knight lands a blow, the victim falls off; if he misses, *he* falls off. The narrator says that Alice misses that a rule is that they must fall on their heads. The battle ends when both knights fall off in this way. They shake hands and the Red Knight rides off. The White Knight declares that it was a glorious victory. Alice isn't sure, but says that she doesn't want to be a prisoner—she wants to be a queen. The knight says that she will be once she crosses the next brook. He's going to escort her and then head back to finish his turn.

Alice's attempts to figure out what the rules are shows that she's still trying to make logical sense of what she sees in Looking-glass World, even as her experiences thus far have made it clear that this is often not a good use of her time. The Knight's explanation that he's going to accompany Alice to the edge of the square and then turn back again plays into the idea that he's a knight who moves in an L shape: he has to make a turn in order to finish his move.

Alice helps the White Knight out of his helmet. Without his helmet, she sees that he has a very gentle face. He's dressed in ill-fitting tin armor and has a box strapped to his shoulders, but it hangs upside-down and open. The knight happily says that he invented the box to carry sandwiches and clothes, and he carries it upside-down so the rain doesn't get in. Alice notes that the things fell out and the lid's open. The knight looks upset and pulls off the box as though to toss it, but he hangs it on a tree. He explains that he did it so that bees could make a beehive in it. Alice points out that he already has a beehive hanging on his saddle. The knight doesn't refute this, but she says that it hasn't yet attracted bees.

The way that the White Knight talks about his inventions makes it clear that thinking about things can be fun and rewarding, even if those things are nonsense or ineffective—but pointing this out, as Alice does, is sometimes a pedantic and unwelcome habit that actually stifles creativity. In this situation, Alice again seems as though she's the adult and the White Knight, though older, is a child in need of adult guidance. This shows that adults don't have everything figured out, while kids may be better able to grasp the world around them.

The White Knight gestures to the mousetraps he has on his saddle to protect the beehive from mice. He explains that he plans for everything and points out that his horse wears spikes around its ankles to protect it from shark bites. The knight asks if he can take the dish from the plum cake and they struggle to shove it into his bag. The knight asks Alice if her hair is fastened. With a smile, Alice says that it's stuck on in the normal way. The knight nervously declares that that isn't enough with the wind so strong and says he has a plan for keeping it from falling off: train it like a vine to climb a stick so it's growing up and can't fall down. Alice thinks this sounds uncomfortable.

The White Knight's contingency plans, especially the spikes to ward off sharks, look extremely childish: in this situation, Alice looks even more like an adult, as she's able to calmly and logically note that there are no sharks to be found (though, it's worth noting that, given what Alice has experienced thus far, it wouldn't be that far outside the realm of possibility to come across sharks—Alice is possibly acting too stodgy and old and stifling her imagination).

Alice stops often to help the White Knight back on his horse. She asks if he hasn't ridden much, which offends him. He insists that he's had loads of practice and begins to expound on how to properly ride, falling off several times in the process. Annoyed, Alice says that this is ridiculous and the knight needs a wooden horse on wheels. The knight thoughtfully says that a wooden horse sounds wonderful.

Helping the White Knight back onto his horse is one of the most obvious ways that the novel suggests that Alice is more adult than the adults around her. However, the White Knight's speech on how to ride properly reads similarly to Humpty Dumpty's need to lord his knowledge over Alice, even if it was nonsense.

The White Knight tells Alice about his latest invention: a way to get over a gate. He says he'd do it by putting his head on the gate, standing on his head, and swinging his feet over. Alice points out that this might be difficult, but this makes the knight look sad. Changing the subject, Alice compliments the knight's helmet. He invented it and he tells Alice about another helmet he invented. It looked like a sugarloaf, so he didn't have far to fall. Another knight stole it. At this, the White Knight looks so sad that Alice tries extra hard to suppress laughter. The knight tells her how he got that helmet back and how it got stuck, saying that it was stuck on his head as fast as lightning. He brushes Alice off when she points out that he's referring to a different kind of fastness.

Especially since Alice spends most of this exchange trying not to laugh, it reminds the reader that language and creativity can be fun and humorous—even if, in practice, suggestions like the White Knight's are wildly out of touch with reality. However, being able to consider these possibilities, the novel suggests, makes life richer. People who try to suppress this kind of thinking (like Alice, in this case) are shutting themselves off from a world in which anything can happen—a world that Carroll suggests is most present for children.

As the White Knight says this, he falls off headfirst into a ditch. He continues to talk about fastness as Alice drags him out of the ditch by his feet. Alice asks how he can keep talking in such a state, which surprises the knight—he declares that his mind works no matter where his body is, and he invents more when he's upside-down. He shares that the smartest thing he's ever done was inventing a new pudding during the meat course at dinner. Alice is impressed, thinking that the pudding was cooked by the time they were ready for dessert, but this isn't the case. He never cooked the pudding but it's still clever: it's made out of blotting paper, gunpowder, and sealing wax.

This pudding in particular speaks to the vastness and the possibility of imagination: with enough imagination, it's possible to create all sorts of things that don't work in the real world, but are still glorious ideas in the abstract. This again suggests that children who think this way have the better end of the deal, as they're able to see the magic in thinking about impossible or silly things, while adults are too caught up in reality and deny themselves the fun of thinking imaginatively.

Alice and the White Knight reach the end of the wood and the knight says he needs to leave her. Alice is deep in thought about the unappetizing pudding, which makes the knight think she's sad. He offers to sing her a long but beautiful song. The name of it is "Haddock's Eyes." Alice tries to act interested and asks if that's the name of the song. This annoys the knight; the name is "The Aged Aged Man." Alice tries to recover from this blunder, but the knight says that the song is called "Ways And Means," but it really is "A-sitting On A Gate." Alice is thoroughly confused, but watching the knight sing moves her. Though the knight insists he made up the tune, Alice recognizes it as being the tune of a popular song.

In this exchange, the White Knight appears much more like Humpty Dumpty than he has thus far: he speaks very literally about the poem's title but in this case, this makes it impossible to actually figure out what the poem is called. This indicates that while this kind of nonsense can be funny, it can also make it much harder to understand what's going on in a way that can make things difficult.

The White Knight sings of coming upon an old man sitting on a gate. He asked the man how he makes his living. The man talked about selling mutton pies made out of butterflies, but the knight thinks about how to secretly dye his beard green. He hits the man and asks again how he makes a living. The man makes oil and again, the knight thinks of something entirely unrelated, so he shakes the man and asks his question again. This time, the man says that he turns haddocks' eyes into buttons and digs for buttered rolls, and says he'll drink to the knight's health. The knight hears this and thanks him. Addressing the reader, the knight sings that now, whenever he makes a mistake like putting a shoe on the wrong foot, he remembers the man on the gate.

Just as with the other poems that characters have recited for Alice, this poem makes little logical sense—there are no butterflies in mutton pies, and fish eyes aren't ever used as buttons. However, the poem still rolls off the tongue in a satisfying way and it's charmingly silly, making it fun to recite (or in Alice's case, listen to). This shows once again that a poem or a book need not make logical sense in order to be worth reading. It just needs to be fun.

The White Knight turns his horse away, points Alice in the right direction, and asks her to wave him off. Alice does as she's told and thanks the knight for his song. When he's gone, Alice leaps over the brook into the Eighth Square and flops down on a soft lawn. She realizes there's something on her head. She lifts it off and sees that it's a golden **crown**.

Getting the crown symbolizes Alice's shift to a version of adulthood. Being surprised by it suggests that adulthood is something that catches people by surprise, and the people who find themselves wearing the proverbial crown are often, as Alice is, still just children.

CHAPTERS 9-10: QUEEN ALICE; SHAKING

Alice is thrilled. She scolds herself in an imperious tone and says that it's not queen-like to loll on the lawn. She gets up and walks stiffly, feeling somewhat uncomfortable with the **crown** and worried it'll fall off. She decides to practice and, if she really is a queen, she'll be fine. The White Queen and the Red Queen suddenly appear next to her. She wants to ask them how, but the question seems improper to Alice. Instead, Alice starts to ask if the game is over. The Red Queen interrupts her sharply and says to only speak when she's spoken to. Alice argues that if everyone abided by that rule, nobody would say anything. The queen deems this ridiculous and remembering that Alice questioned if she was really a queen, says that there's an examination to be a queen.

Deciding that she needs to practice with the crown makes it even clearer that adults don't have everything figured out—as an adult, Alice has to figure things out just like the other adults in her life and in her dream. When she thinks that asking the queens how they arrived would be impertinent, it shows again that the laws of etiquette keep Alice from gathering important information. It keeps Alice in the dark at the expense of keeping the queens comfortable.

Concerned, Alice insists that she just said "if," which makes the Red Queen and White Queen exchange looks and shudder. The White Queen moans that Alice said more than that, and the Red Queen tells Alice to tell the truth and write everything down. Alice attempts to clarify her intention, but the Red Queen scolds that she needs to mean something, just as a joke needs to mean something. She says that children are more important than jokes and she says this is something that Alice can't deny, even if she tried to "with both hands." When Alice points out that she doesn't deny things with her hands, the Red Queen says that this is the point. The queens remark that Alice has a temper and just wants to deny something.

The Red Queen's insistence that jokes need to mean something is silly given the fact that this statement appears in this novel, where few jokes make sense but are still funny. This makes her insistence even funnier, especially given that her tone is so severe and serious as she scolds Alice about making jokes make sense. When the queen gives Alice directions as to how to be a proper queen, it indicates that Alice wasn't properly prepared to become a queen, just as it's hard to prepare to be an adult in the real world.

The Red Queen invites the White Queen to Alice's dinner party later. The White Queen invites the Red Queen in turn. Alice suggests that if it's her party *she* should invite people, but the Red Queen insists they gave her the opportunity but that Alice hasn't had lessons in manners yet. Alice says that she learns math in lessons, not manners. To this, the queens give Alice addition and subtraction problems that Alice can't solve or follow, and then begin giving her "math" problems that are riddles. They ask what she gets when she divides a loaf by a knife—bread and butter. Alice attempts to solve what would happen if they took a bone from a dog, but she gets it wrong—the dog's temper would remain, according to the Red Queen, since if the dog left, it'd leave its temper behind.

Alice's assessment of how one learns manners could explain why she's missing things, especially since she seems decidedly less charmed by the queens' attempts to teach her how to be a queen. Giving her the riddles allows the queens to feel more superior and, besides, the riddles are fun for the reader to puzzle out as they go—but for Alice, they make her feel even more lost and alone as she tries to figure out how she's supposed to make this whole queen thing work.

Alice thinks that this is all nonsense. The Red Queen and the White Queen moan that Alice is hopeless at sums. Alice asks the White Queen if she can do sums, which offends the queen. She says she can do them slowly, but she can't subtract and can read words all of one letter. The Red Queen asks Alice how bread is made. Alice thinks she knows this one, so she says that one starts with flour. The White Queen interrupts and asks where Alice picks the flower. Alice says that it's ground, and the White Queen asks how many acres of ground. The queens declare that Alice must be feverish after thinking and they rapidly fan her head.

Bringing up the flour/flower joke hearkens back to Alice's conversations with the Gnat—nobody is purposefully trying to make a joke here, but the effect is still humorous, if frustrating for Alice. Alice's frustrations again speak to the difficulty of being an adult in the world: Alice can't figure out how she's supposed to act, though she knows that she's missing something. Adults, the novel suggests, don't know as much as children think they should.

The Red Queen asks Alice how to say "fiddle-de-dee" in French. Alice declares that "fiddle-de-dee" isn't English and offers to give the French if the queen can tell her what language it's in, but the queen severely says that queens don't make deals. They then ask Alice for the cause of lightning. Alice starts to say that thunder causes lightning, but when she changes her answer, the Red Queen tells her she needs to deal with the consequences of her incorrect answer. The queens then discuss how days work in Looking-glass World: they experience multiple days at a time and multiple nights, which makes the nights warmer and colder. Alice tries to participate in this riddle, but she thinks that it has no answer.

Especially here, when Alice gives an answer to the lightning riddle and then tries to change her answer, the novel suggests that the stakes are higher in adulthood—though the Red Queen doesn't tell Alice what the consequences are, Alice has to deal with them in a way that she didn't have to when she's gotten answers wrong throughout the rest of the novel. When Alice recognizes that the discussion of days and nights is a riddle, it shows that she is learning how to think more in line with how Looking-glass World operates.

The White Queen says that Humpty Dumpty saw "it" when he showed up with a corkscrew looking for a hippo. The White Queen says that there are only hippos in the house on Thursdays. Alice starts to say that Humpty Dumpty came to punish the fish, but the White Queen interrupts and goes on about how she forgot her name in a thunderstorm. Alice privately thinks that remembering one's name in an accident is useless, but she doesn't want to hurt the queen's feelings. The Red Queen explains to Alice that the White Queen wasn't brought up well and so she says foolish things. She invites Alice to pat the White Queen on the head, but Alice is too afraid.

The exchange about Humpty Dumpty makes little sense. Alice again shows that she wants to understand when she suggests that he came to punish fish, just as in the poem that he recited for her, but when the queens don't listen to her or acknowledge that she spoke, it shows that this kind of analysis isn't welcome in Looking-glass World or, possibly, in the adult world more broadly.

The White Queen complains of being sleepy and puts her head on Alice's shoulder. The Red Queen instructs Alice to give the sleepy queen her nightcap and sing her a lullaby. Alice insists that she can't; she doesn't have a nightcap and doesn't know any lullabies. The Red Queen sings a lullaby and says that Alice needs to sing to both of the queens. The queens fall asleep with their heads on Alice's lap. Alice thinks this is the strangest thing that's ever happened to her. The snoring begins to turn into a tune and suddenly, the queens vanish and Alice finds herself in front of a door. She reads "Queen Alice" at the top and on either side of the arched doorway, there are bells marked for visitors and servants.

The queens falling asleep reads much more like a childish occurrence than an adult one, showing again that Alice is the most adult character even if she is a child. Recognizing that what's happening is strange suggests that Alice is starting to come out of her dream and see the nonsensical nature of her dream for what it is. As Alice begins the process of waking up, she begins to regress and return to a childlike state.

Alice decides to wait until the song ends and then ring the bell, but she can't figure out which bell to ring. She thinks that there should be one for the queen. A creature opens the door, pokes its head out, and tells her that they won't let her in for two weeks. Alice knocks and rings until an old Frog hobbles over and asks what's going on. Alice wants to know where the servant is who answers the door. The Frog is confused and asks what the door has been asking. When Alice expresses confusion, the Frog says that he speaks English and she should understand. Alice says that she knocked at the door and the Frog says she shouldn't do that. He kicks the door and tells Alice to leave it alone, and then it will leave her alone.

Alice's inability to figure out how to get into the building where (presumably) her dinner party is taking place shows again that the rules of the adult world don't make logical sense. The Frog's attempt to help Alice isn't helpful at all, since she doesn't understand what he's getting at. No matter what the Frog says, having a language in common doesn't mean that two individuals will be able to understand each other—this entire novel is proof of that, since Alice spends most of the novel in the dark about what's going on.

The door suddenly flies open and Alice hears someone singing that Alice invited everyone to dine with her, the Red Queen, and the White Queen. Other voices join in the chorus. The voice sings the second verse and Alice steps into the room. Everyone stops singing. She notices about 50 guests and thinks that she's glad the queens invited them; she wouldn't have known whom to invite. Alice takes a seat at the head of the table between the queens. The Red Queen explains that Alice missed two courses and it's time for the joint. A waiter puts a leg of mutton down. The Red Queen introduces Alice to the Mutton, which bows. Alice offers the queens a slice, but the Red Queen says it's rude to cut anyone she's formally met. Waiters carry the Mutton away.

At this point, Alice's experience of adulthood is being totally at a loss as to what to do—as far as she knows, mutton is for cutting and eating and food doesn't speak. In this situation, Alice is up against all sorts of rules and regulations that she's never heard of, which makes her experience as an honorary adult even more anxiety inducing for her. With this, the novel suggests that having the crown doesn't make Alice an adult in the way she thinks an adult should be: she's still just as lost, if she's not even more lost than she was before entering the Eighth Square.

Waiters bring out a pudding. Alice asks that the Red Queen not introduce her to it, but the Red Queen sulkily introduces Alice to the Pudding anyway. She commands that the waiters take it away. As an experiment, Alice asks for the Pudding back and cuts a slice for the Red Queen. The Pudding scolds Alice and she stares at it in shock. The Red Queen tells Alice to respond. Everyone at the table stops talking as Alice says that every poem she's heard today had something to do with fish. She asks why everyone loves fish here. The Red Queen suggests that the White Queen tell Alice a riddle about fish.

Alice's speech in response to the Red Queen's scolding notably makes little sense given what she's been asked to do—that is, speak to the pudding. Asking about the fish is a perfectly logical thing for Alice to do, but the queens' response to Alice's query suggests again that there's really no use in trying to make Looking-glass World make logical sense. Instead, Alice needs to understand that everything is going to be a riddle, if she can understand it at all.

The White Queen recites her riddle. It begins by saying that catching and cooking the fish is easy, but then says that it's almost impossible to take the dishcover off of the fish. She asks whether it's easier to take the cover off the fish or figure out the riddle. While Alice thinks about it, the Red Queen raises a toast to Alice. Guests begin greedily eating the roast and gravy, and the Red Queen tells Alice to give a speech. The queens reprimand Alice, who obediently stands to speak.

The way that the guests greedily dig into the feast shows again that adults aren't as beholden to rules as Alice, as a child, may have been led to believe—like children, they can be greedy and selfish. Alice's obedience speaks to the fact that she's still a child in many important ways. She wants to please, even if it doesn't make sense how she's going to make a speech under these circumstances.

The Red Queen and the White Queen push on either side of Alice, lifting her up in the air. The White Queen screams that something is happening and, suddenly, the candles grow and the table settings turn into odd birds and fly around. Alice sees the Red Queen's face in the soup tureen and, fed up, pulls the tablecloth off and dumps everything onto the floor. She turns on the Red Queen, who is now doll-size. Alice grabs the queen and threatens to shake her "into a kitten." Alice shakes the queen and the queen begins to transform into something short, round, and soft.

The mayhem here makes it very clear that adulthood isn't all that great—per this scene, it's one big mess that makes little sense, and is obnoxious and frustrating besides. Losing her temper with the Red Queen and shaking her allows Alice to finish the process of waking up and returning to a childish state where she can use her imagination and make sense of her experience with wonder and delight.

CHAPTERS 11-12: WAKING; WHICH DREAMED IT?

The Red Queen turns into Kitty and Alice wakes up. Alice scolds the kitten for waking her up and tells Kitty that she was in her dream. Kitty purrs at Alice as Alice digs through her chessmen for the Red Queen. She asks Kitty to confirm that she turned into the Red Queen, but Kitty refuses. Alice kisses Kitty anyway. She turns to Snowdrop, still in the middle of a bath, and asks when Dinah will be done. She suggests that the White Queen was so unkempt in her dream because Snowdrop was getting a bath. Alice asks Dinah if she turned into Humpty Dumpty. She then tells Kitty that she heard lots of poetry about fish and asks for Kitty's opinion: whose dream was it, Alice's or the Red King's? Kitty ignores Alice and the narrator asks the reader for their opinion.

Now that Alice is awake and back in her world, she's able to try to make sense of her dream without getting criticized for it—but, as in her dream, it's impossible to make total sense of a dream like this, even if the cats are logical suspects for the Red and White Queens. This attempt—and the attempt to figure out if the dream was Alice's dream or the Red King's—reads again as something that, like many of the philosophical questions posed by the novel, is fun to think about but not something to take too seriously. Punting the question to the reader encourages them to take this lesson and apply it to their own life.

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