

## **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**

One of the most well known books ever written for children is *Alice in Wonderland*. It was written well over one hundred years ago in England yet remains remarkably popular all over the world. Just as fairy tales like Cinderella began as tales told by storytellers, so did *Alice in Wonderland* begin as a series of stories told by Lewis Carroll to Alice Liddell and her two sisters. Eventually, just as the most well known fairy tales were written down and published in books, so did Lewis Carroll write down his stories into what we now know as *Alice in Wonderland*. It is imaginative, crazy, funny, clever, and wild all at the same time.

### **LEWIS CARROLL**

Lewis Carroll's real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. He spent most of his life at Oxford University, England, teaching mathematics. Apparently he wasn't a great teacher; his classes were known to be dull and boring. Although we know him best as the author of the Alice books, he also wrote books about mathematics.

### **THE CREATION OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND**

*Alice in Wonderland* began as a story told on a boat trip. Lewis Carroll and his friend, the Reverend Robinson Duckworth, took the three Liddell girls out on the Thames River on July 4, 1862. The three girls were Lorina, age thirteen, Alice, age ten, and Edith, age eight. Carroll wrote about the expedition in his diary and later added a note that it was then that he had told the story of Alice's adventures underground. Alice so enjoyed the story that Carroll decided to write it down for her. (Remember that this was before typewriters or computers.) He finally presented her with *Alice's Adventures Underground* on November 26, 1864. The book was beautifully, handwritten with illustrations by Lewis Carroll, himself.

Before Carroll gave the book to Alice, he showed it to some friends who felt he should publish it. So he revised the book, changed parts, added parts, and found John Tenniel to do the illustrations. The book we know today, *Alice in Wonderland*, came out in 1865. It was a huge success.

### **A UNIQUE POINT OF VIEW**

*Alice in Wonderland* has a unique standing in the category of whimsical, nonsense literature. It was a marked contrast to the vast amount of strict, moralistic Victorian children's literature from that time in history. As a work of fiction, *Alice* lacks the conventional story line that we normally associate with a coherent, unified tale. In some ways *Alice* is a series of disconnected episodes. In fact, *Alice* is told in the form of a dream.

Because Carroll chose a dream as the structure for his story, he was free to make fun of and satirize the multitudes of standard Victorian didactic maxims in children's literature. *Alice* lacks a morally good heroine and meaning; instead of Carroll's making an ethical point about each of her adventures, *Alice* parodies the instructive, solemn verse, which filled Victorian children's books. Conventional rationality is replaced by the bizarre, fantastic irrationalities of a dream world. Her adventures are not ordered; they are disordered. They are shifting and unpredictable, and there is always the menace of

Gothic horror laced with the fantasies. Indeed, Alice's dream sometimes has the aspects of a nightmare. It can be seen as a path to overcoming fear, in order to find joy and laughter.

Fantasy challenges our imaginations and asks us to create possibilities. Fantasies show us how to open doors, as Alice opened the door to Wonderland. Strange scenes, such as the Mad Tea Party, can raise questions about what is sanity and what is the significance of time. The chaos of nonsense can prompt one to laugh spontaneously and freely or to stiffen and look for rules to follow. We learn about fantasy by hearing and reading fairy tales, through the imaginative visual and performing arts, and through creating our own representation of a fantasy. Also, we can learn about ourselves by exploring how we feel or would react to an unpredictable adventure.

As you read the book or watch the ballet of *Alice in Wonderland* consider these questions.

- Is it a fairy tale? Why?
- Which character did you like the best? Why?
- Select a character and say what the character represented in *Alice*.
- What feelings did you have when Alice enters Wonderland? Why?
- Was one scene particularly funny or strange to you? Why?
- Was it difficult to follow the story line? Why?
- Have you had dreams that didn't make sense? Why do we dream?
- There are many ballets that tell the story of a fantasy adapted from literature. Can you name two? (*Choose from: Sleeping Beauty, Nutcracker, Copellia, Cinderella and more*)

## **SYNOPSIS OF THE BALLET**

### **Prologue**

Alice's sister is reading a history lesson to Alice. Alice is bored and daydreaming about a world more interesting than the world of grown-ups. As she falls in and out of sleep, she sees a White Rabbit.

### **The Rabbit Chase**

Alice chases the White Rabbit to a rabbit hole and falls into a dark Chamber. She sees a door and a tart that says "Eat ME". It causes her to grow so tall that she can no longer fit through the door. She cries a pool of tears and finds she has shrunk enough to go through the door. She finds herself in the nonsensical world of *Wonderland* in a curious garden.

### **The Garden**

Upon entering the garden, Alice is met by dancing garden fairies, butterflies and flowers.

Alice next encounters a curious caterpillar. She is mesmerized by the movement and changes taking place before her very eyes. Alice sees the White Rabbit again and follows once more as he takes her further into the garden.

### **The Mad Hatters Tea Party**

The White Rabbit leads Alice to the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. She meets the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Sleepy Dormouse. Their peculiar etiquette makes her long more and more for the real world, rules, and predictability. She then meets the Cheshire Cat who quickly appears and disappears, adding to the feel of unreality and mystery. In confusion, Alice stumbles through the forest into the garden of the Queen and King of Hearts.

### **A Bizarre Game of Croquet**

The cards are painting roses red. As Alice watches, the Queen of Hearts appears. She is angry with the cards and orders their heads to be chopped off! She then sees Alice and invites her to a croquet game where flamingos are the mallets, cards are the hoops, and hedgehogs are the balls! Her flamingo won't cooperate so Alice kicks it through the hoop. This infuriates the Queen who orders her head to be cut off. Afraid and confused, Alice runs as she is chased by the Cards, Queen and King. She sees the White Rabbit and Cheshire Cat and follows them.

Awake, she finds herself in the same place under the tree with her sister. Was this all a dream?

### **Activities For Teachers in the Classroom:**

#### **POETRY**

Carroll includes poetry in his fantasy of *Wonderland*. You can have students read the poem from the book about the mouse and discuss the characteristics of Carroll's poem.

#### ***The Mouse's Long Tale***

Activities:

- Warm-up: Read a simple sentence to the class in a monotone. Read it again adding different rhythmic patterns to your voice each time. Vary the speed, tone, or energy level of your voice. Clap the rhythmic patterns. Discuss which patterns are more interesting and why.
- Invite students to form a circle. One at a time, have each student speak their own name in a rhythmic pattern of their choice. Ask the group to echo each person.
- Have each student speak their name and clap the rhythmic pattern. Encourage them, to explore different patterns. Again, have the group echo their pattern.
- Have each student add a movement pattern to their rhythmic pattern. Encourage them to use different body parts. Again, echo the rhythm and the movement.
- Invite students to get in pairs. Give each student pair a simple sentence about a character in *The Alice in Wonderland*. Students create a rhythmic and movement pattern to their sentence.
- Have the pairs take turns being the "orchestra" (clapping the rhythm) and the "dancer", dancing the rhythm.
- Discuss other rhythmic patterns that are a part of daily activities. Examples: the rhythm of the school bus, brushing teeth, eating, walking to class, running to class, watching television, skipping rope, bouncing a ball, etc.

## OTHER LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Ask each student to write a poem about Alice's adventure in one of the scenes.
- The class can divide into groups and make finger puppets or sock puppets that look like one of the characters. Each group can act out a scene from *Wonderland*.
- Color the pictures of Alice and the other characters that are enclosed. Write a sentence on the page that describes something the student remembers about the character.
- Have each child draw one of the characters from the ballet, and tell the group why he/she picked that character.
- Have small groups of students research the use of dreams in literature. Can they find poems, children's stories, or other literature that refers to dreams.
- Engage students in a conversation based on a dream. Did the dream include well known people or recent events? Did people look or act the same as in everyday life? Did events take place in a logical or sequential order?
- Students write a story of a dream, real or pretend. Ask them to write about people, places and events in the dream. Ask them to describe what happened to themselves and others. Describe how they felt when they awoke.
- Illustrate a scene from their dream.
- Working in groups, act out a part of their story with movement only-no voices.
- Closure: Ask students to share their dream stories with the class. Let the students take the stories home and share them with their parents. Ask the parents to share a dream.
- Discuss some of the characters that Alice meets along her journey.
- Describe how they move, focusing on the use of adjectives. List the descriptions on the board. Try to move in the same way.
- Each child is to transform themselves into an animal or creature from the story and create a movement sentence as that animal. Begin with a still shape representing a sleeping animal, add 8 traveling motions (walk, skip, twist, turn, crawl, slither, etc.) and add an ending shape (arriving "home").
- Ask children which animal was their favorite to perform. Which was their favorite to watch? Which was easier to perform? Which was harder? How did tempo change affect the animal?
- Follow-up activity:  
Choose a piece of music for the animals to move to. When the music is played, all the animals come to life at the same time. When the music stops, animals freeze in a shape.

Web sites with lesson plans:

- Victorian era: [www.victorianstation.com/queen.html](http://www.victorianstation.com/queen.html)
- Alice in Wonderland-Grade 3:  
[www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrs/lessons/3.htm](http://www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrs/lessons/3.htm)
- Teach Poetry all grade levels: [www.poetryteachers.com](http://www.poetryteachers.com)

- Interactive Adventures of Alice: [www.ruthannzaroff.com/wonderland/](http://www.ruthannzaroff.com/wonderland/)
- Lewis Carroll as taught in K-12: [www.lewiscarroll.org](http://www.lewiscarroll.org)