

# Alice in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll



## About the author

Lewis Carroll, whose real name was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, was born in 1832, the third of eleven children. Charles was a clever boy, educated first at home and then later at Rugby School, a well known English boarding school, where he was not very happy. In 1851 he went to study at Oxford. There he won a lectureship in mathematics from which he was able to earn a living. As a young man, he wrote funny and satirical poetry and short stories. In 1856, he published his first piece of work, a poem, under the name of 'Lewis Carroll'. That same year, he took up photography, and he also met the new Dean of Christ Church and his family, who became close friends of his. He spent a lot of time with the mother and the children, Ina, Alice and Edith, who he photographed. They used to go out on the river for picnics and on one such expedition in 1862, Dodgson told them a story. Alice Liddell begged him to write it down. The story became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and was immediately very successful. In 1871, Dodgson published *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice Found There*. He died suddenly of pneumonia in 1898.

## Summary

Alice is a little girl who is sitting under a tree with her sister one sunny day. She is starting to feel bored when she sees a white rabbit and follows the rabbit down a rabbit hole. When she arrives at the bottom of the very long hole, her adventures start. First she drinks something from a bottle and changes size. Next she meets some animals who talk and she joins in a strange kind of race with them, where everyone is the winner. Then there is a rather rude caterpillar, who teaches Alice to control her

size, and a smiling cat that can vanish when it wants to. As Alice continues to explore this strange world, she meets a duchess with a baby that changes into a pig and she takes part in a very strange tea party. Finally she meets the King and Queen of Hearts. The Queen is a strange woman, who always wants to cut off the heads of the animals and people around her. Then the Knave of Hearts has to stand trial for stealing some tarts. When Alice is told to leave the trial room because she is getting too big, she refuses. She begins to fight the cards, but suddenly she wakes up. It was all a dream after all!

**Chapters 1–2:** One day Alice is sitting under a tree. She sees a white rabbit and follows it down a rabbit hole. After landing on the ground, she follows the rabbit and arrives in a room. Alice sees a table, on which there is a small key that unlocks a small door. She opens the door and sees a beautiful garden, but she can't go in because she is too big. Alice then drinks from a small bottle labelled 'DRINK ME' and she shrinks. Now she is small enough, but she can't reach key, which is on the table again. She then discovers a cake that says 'EAT ME' and she eats it. The cake makes Alice grow very tall. She cries and makes a pool of tears. The White Rabbit comes into the room and drops his white hat. Alice holds it in her hand and it makes her shrink again. She swims through the pool of tears, and finds a mouse. They get out of the water and meet many birds and animals.

**Chapters 3–4:** The birds and animals are cold and wet, so a Dodo suggests running a Caucus Race. Half an hour later, the race ends and everyone wins. Alice gives out chocolates as prizes. Alice misses her cat, Dinah, but when she talks about it, the birds and animals go away. The White Rabbit appears again and thinks that Alice is Mary Ann, his housemaid, so he tells her to fetch his white hat. Alice goes into his house, and she finds a bottle. She drinks from it and grows so big that the White Rabbit can't get into the house and she can't get out. A cake is thrown through the window and Alice eats it, gets small again and runs out of the house. She runs into a wood and sees some mushrooms. There is a large green caterpillar on top of one of them.

**Chapters 5–6:** The Caterpillar is not very friendly and asks Alice difficult questions, which make her angry. Alice wants to get bigger, so the Caterpillar shows her two types of mushrooms, one kind to make her bigger and the other to make her smaller. Alice eats from both and

## Alice in Wonderland

reaches her normal height. She continues walking through the wood again and comes to a little house. She eats from the brown mushroom and becomes very small again and goes into the house. Inside, she meets an ugly woman, the Duchess, with a baby. Near the fire there is a cook and a Cheshire cat with a big smile. Alice is worried because the cook throws plates, cups and spoons at the Duchess and the baby. The Duchess tosses her baby up and down and before she leaves she throws the baby to Alice. To Alice's surprise, the baby turns into a pig, so she lets it go off into the woods. The Cheshire Cat tells her about the Mad Hatter and the March Hare and disappears. Alice decides to go to the March Hare's house. When she arrives, she sees that it's bigger than the Duchess's house and she eats some more mushroom to grow again.

**Chapters 7–8:** Alice joins the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and a mouse at a mad tea party. She thinks they are so impolite and they play so many jokes on her that she feels insulted and leaves. Then she finds a door in a tree, goes through it and finds herself once again in front of the small door that leads to the garden. She shrinks and walks through the door. In the garden, Alice comes across three cards painting white roses red because the Queen of Hearts hates white roses. When the Queen and the King arrive, she orders her men to cut off the gardeners' heads. The Queen condemns them and other people to death, but nobody ever loses their heads. Alice meets the Cheshire Cat and when the King sees it he asks the Queen to order her men to chop off the Cat's head. The Cat vanishes and then Alice meets the Duchess again.

**Chapters 9–10:** Everyone goes into a house for a trial. The Knave of Hearts is accused of stealing some tarts. The White Rabbit calls the witnesses. The first witness is the Mad Hatter, and the second one is the cook. Neither of them can help with the case at all. Next comes Alice, who is growing taller and taller all the time. The King asks her to leave the room, but Alice is not afraid of them because they are only cards. Suddenly, Alice's sister wakes her up. Alice has been asleep for a long time and it was all a dream. Both girls go back home for tea.

### Background and themes

**Growing and adulthood:** Alice's adventures parallel the journey from childhood to adulthood. She encounters a number of new situations in which she needs to show adaptability in order to succeed. At the beginning she

cannot restrain from crying, but by the end she is self-possessed and able to face the baffling Wonderland logic. Alice's experiences in Wonderland are similar to those of children who have to try to make sense of the real world controlled by adults and the rules they make.

**Identity:** The story also reflects some of the confusions of growing up, during which children have to come to terms with who they are. Alice struggles with the importance and instability of personal identity. She is constantly ordered to identify herself by the creatures she meets, but she herself has doubts about her identity as well. Alice keeps getting either very big or very small (children, of course, get bigger all the time). At first this seems to happen by chance and she is upset by it. But the caterpillar helps her to take control of her changing size, and she is then more comfortable in her strange environment.

### Discussion activities

#### Before reading

- Pair work:** Tell students to look at the picture on the front of the book and answer the following questions in pairs: *Who is the girl in the picture? What does she look like? Where is she? Who are the woman and the man in the picture? What is the woman doing? How does the girl feel? What do you think will happen in the story?*
- Find and discuss:** Write the following words on the board: *a white rabbit, a strange bird, a cat, a tree with flowers, an angry woman, a table, cups and plates.* Ask students to find these things in the pictures in the book. Then get them to make a list of ten other things they can see in the pictures. Get feedback from the whole class and then have a class discussion: *What is going to happen in the story?*

#### Introduction

#### After reading

- Pair work:** Ask students to answer the following questions: *Who wrote Alice in Wonderland? When did he write it? How was Alice in Wonderland different from other stories for children? Do you think you are going to like it? Why?*

#### Chapters 1–2

#### While reading (after Chapter 1)

- Discuss:** Get students to discuss the following questions in small groups: *Why did Alice follow the rabbit? Do you think this was a good idea? Why can't Alice get through the little door into the garden? Why does Alice drink from the bottle that says 'DRINK ME' and why does she eat from the cake that says 'EAT ME'? How does Alice feel after all these changes? What do you think is going to happen next?*

# Alice in Wonderland

## After reading

- 5 **Write:** Ask students to imagine they are Alice. Tell them to remember in pairs what has happened to her since she followed the White Rabbit. Encourage them to discuss how she feels. Get feedback and then asks students to write a page of Alice's diary about her experience so far.

## Chapters 3–4

### Before reading

- 6 **Research:** Get the students to find out what a 'dodo' is using the Internet or books.

**While reading** (page 7, after 'let's have a race – a Caucus race.')

- 7 **Pair work:** Put students in pairs to discuss the following questions: *What normally happens in a race? Do you often race? Are you good at racing? Why/why not? What do you get when you win a race? How could a Caucus race be different from normal races?*

### After reading

- 8 **Write and ask:** Write 'Why does the Dodo want to have a race?' on the board and elicit the answer (Because all the animals want to get warm). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 3 and 4. Check their work as they do this. Now have students stand up and mingle, asking and answering each other's questions.

## Chapters 5–6

### Before reading

- 9 **Guess:** Get students to look at the pictures in Chapters 5 and 6 and ask them to describe in pairs what they can see and guess what strange things will happen to Alice. *Will she change size again? Will she meet friendly people or animals? Will she feel afraid?*

**While reading** (after Chapter 5)

- 10 **Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following: *Is the caterpillar good or bad to Alice? Why/why not?*

### After reading

- 11 **Check:** Ask students if the predictions they made in activity 9 were correct.
- 12 **Write and guess:** Write 'The Caterpillar showed Alice a white mushroom and a black mushroom.' on the board. Elicit the mistake from the class (one white and one brown). Now ask students to choose a sentence from Chapters 5 and 6 and rewrite it changing one word. Students mingle reading out their sentences so that the others can guess which word is wrong.

## Chapters 7–8

### Before reading

- 13 **Discuss and guess:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What normally happens at a tea party? What do people eat and drink? What time do people have tea parties? How long do people stay?* Now remind students that everything is very strange in Wonderland. Ask them to guess what might happen at the tea party in small groups. Get feedback from the whole class.

**While reading** (after Chapter 7)

- 14 **Check:** Ask students to check to see if the predictions they made in activity 13 were right or wrong.

### After reading

- 15 **Write:** Divide the class into two groups, A and B, and ask one group to look at the illustration on page 22 and the other to look at the illustration on page 27. In pairs, students write a description of the picture and what is happening, but making five changes. Now put a student from group A with a student from group B and have them read their descriptions to each other and spot the mistakes.

## Chapters 9–10

### Before reading

- 16 **Discuss:** Ask the students to discuss what normally happens at a trial in small groups: *Who is normally at a trial? Why are they there? What questions do people ask? What happens at the end of a trial?*

### After reading

- 17 **Role play:** Put students in pairs to role play a conversation between Alice and her sister. Alice tells her all about the trial and her sister asks her a lot of questions.