

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (adapted by Alice Gerstenberg)

ABOUT THE STORY

Alice is a young, sensible, intelligent girl, who lives with her family in London. One day she is sitting by a river when she sees a white rabbit. She follows it down a hole and finds herself in a fantasy land. The story describes her journey through the land, and the different characters she meets, who are all quite strange. In the extract below, she meets the Mad Hatter (a character who wears a very big hat) and his two friends, the March Hare and Dormouse, who are having a tea party.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) was an English author, born in 1832. As well as writing stories and poems, he was a mathematician and photographer. His best known works are the books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and the nonsense poems *Jabberwocky* and *The Hunting of the Snark*. Much of his work focuses on word play, logic and nonsense, and is a style of writing called literary nonsense. His pen name is itself a play on words: the Latin for Charles Lutwidge is Carolus Ludovicus, which then in English again is Carroll Lewis and then Lewis Carroll.

Act 2

The March Hare's garden, showing part of the Duchess' house. On a small platform there is a tea table, set with many cups, continuing into wings to give impression of limitless length. The March Hare, Hatter, and Dormouse are crowded at one end. Alice sits on the ground where she has been dropped from the sky. Finding herself not bruised she rises and approaches the table.

March Hare and Hatter No room! No room!

Alice There's plenty of room! [*She sits in a large armchair at one end of the table.*]

March Hare I am the March Hare, that's the Hatter, and this is the Dormouse. Have some food?

Alice I don't see any food.

March Hare There isn't any.

Alice Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it.

March Hare It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited.

Alice I didn't know it was your table; it's laid for a great many more than three.

Hatter Your hair wants cutting.

Alice You should learn not to make personal remarks; it's very rude.

Hatter Why is a raven like a writing-desk?

Alice Come, we shall have some fun now! I'm glad you've begun asking riddles. I believe I can guess that.

March Hare So you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?

Hatter Your hair wants cutting.

Alice Exactly so.

March Hare Then you should say what you mean.

Alice I do; at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know.

Hatter Not the same thing a bit! Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!

March Hare You might just as well say that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!

Dormouse You might just as well say that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!

Hatter It is the same thing with you. [*Takes out his watch, looks at it uneasily, shakes it, holds it to his ear.*] What day of the month is it?

Alice The fourth.

Hatter Two days wrong. I told you butter wouldn't suit the works!

March Hare It was the best butter.

Hatter Yes but some crumbs must have got in as well; you shouldn't have put it in with the bread-knife.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

duchess (line 1): a lady with a high social position, just below a princess

platform (line 2): a raised structure

wings (line 3): the far left and right part of a stage

bruised (line 7): with marks on your body caused by hitting yourself on something

civil (line 11): polite

laid (line 18): when a table is prepared for a meal

remarks (line 21): a few words that give the facts or your opinion about someone or something

rude (line 22): not polite

raven (line 23): a large bird with shiny black feathers

riddle (line 25): a question that seems impossible or silly but has a clever or funny answer

breathe (line 38): to take air into your lungs through your nose or mouth and let it out again

the works (line 46): watch mechanisms

crumbs (line 48): very small pieces of food, e.g. bread or cake



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Before reading

1a Look at the titles of Lewis Carroll's four most famous works. Do you think they are books or nonsense poems?

- 1 *Jabberwocky*
- 2 *The Hunting of the Snark*
- 3 *Alice in Wonderland*
- 4 *Through the Looking-Glass*

1b Read the *About the author* section to check your answers.

2 Most of Lewis Carroll's work is a style called literary nonsense. Complete the definition with the words in the box.

don't • meaning • normal • sense • words

In literary nonsense, some parts of the story make (1) while other parts (2) make sense. For example, it may include invented (3), but there are also (4) words. This is to make sure that the story/situation is logical and has (5)

3 In the extract, Alice meets and speaks to the Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse, who are having a tea party. In pairs, discuss these questions.

- 1 What do you think a hatter, a hare and a dormouse are?
- 2 What is a tea party?
- 3 What is strange about this situation?

While reading

1 Read the extract. Circle the correct words to complete the sentences.

- 1 When Alice arrives she is/isn't hurt.
- 2 There is lots of/isn't much room at the table for Alice.
- 3 There is/isn't any food on the table.
- 4 The Hatter/The March Hare asks Alice a riddle.
- 5 Alice gives/doesn't give the answer to the riddle.
- 6 The Hatter thinks there is a problem with his watch/the butter.

2 Read the extract again and answer the questions.

- 1 Why does the March Hare think Alice is rude?
.....
- 2 Why does Alice think the Hatter's comment about her hair is rude?
.....
- 3 Why isn't the Hatter's watch working properly?
.....

3 Think about the definition of literary nonsense in Before reading, exercise 3. Work in pairs. Find things about the scene that you think make sense and things that you think don't make sense. Make notes in the columns below.

Makes sense	Doesn't make sense
There is tea on the table	A hare and a dormouse are having a tea party

After reading

1a A major theme in *Alice in Wonderland* is wordplay. Work in groups. Read these sentences from the text and match them to the correct meaning.

- 1 I see what I eat. a I eat everything that I can see.
- 2 I eat what I see. b When I eat, I open my eyes.
- 3 I like what I get. c If I get something, I always like it.
- 4 I get what I like. d If I want something, then I will get it.

1b Now read the riddle from the excerpt: *Why is a raven like a writing-desk?* Do you think the hatter gives an answer? Can you think of an answer?

1c Work in the same group. Read some more riddles. Can you guess the answer?

- 1 What comes down but never goes up?
- 2 What goes up but never comes down?
- 3 What has hands but cannot clap?

2 Work in pairs. You are now going to create your own short scene of literary nonsense. Think of an everyday situation and two characters, and then invent one or two things about the situation that don't make sense.

Situation:

Characters:

Things that don't make sense:

.....

3 Write a short, simple scene where the two characters meet. Include the things that don't make sense. Use one or two of the riddles from above or your own ideas.