

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT ADAPTED BY
Lindsay Price

FROM THE ORIGINAL BY
Lewis Carroll



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Alice is back in Wonderland and looking to become Queen. This adaptation is a fantastical physical journey for both actor and audience.

Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator, and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

Alice returns to Wonderland and things are even more confusing than her trip down the rabbit hole. Alice participates in a life-sized chess game to become queen. She must interact with talking flowers, a White Queen who walks backwards and cries before she pricks her finger, a Red Queen who runs in place, and there's no way to figure out Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Will Alice make it to the eighth square?

Characters

Alice [W]

White Queen [W]

Red Queen [W]

White King [M]

White Knight [M]

Red Knight [M]

Humpty Dumpty [A]

Tweedledum & Tweedledee [A]

Haiga & Hatta [A]

Lion [A]

Unicorn [A]

Wonderland Ensemble Who Also Play:

Flowers: Tiger-lily, Violet, Rose, Daisies (3), Larkspur

Passengers: Guard, Goat, Horse, White Paper, Beetle

The Wood

Sheep

The Curiosities in the Shop

All the King's Horses and All the King's Men

Waiter

Themes

Childhood to adulthood, individuality, self-image, happiness, memory, quests, chaos and order

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ When do you think childhood ends?
- ★ Is it better to be a kid or an adult?
- ★ Do you want to be a grown up? Why or why not?
- ★ What rules do you think adults have to follow?

- ★ How do the rules that adults have to follow differ from the ones kids have to follow?
- ★ What makes you an adult?
- ★ How do you define chaos and order in your life?

Pre-Read Activities

Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a short poem as their source material. The point is to have students work quickly.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: To make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the poem into a scene. They don't have to use the words of the poem, but the scene must be connected to the poem. Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » What characters can be derived from the poem?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the poem?
 - » What conflict can be derived from the poem?
- ★ The scene should be less than one minute. Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.

- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Adaptation Exercise: *Through the Looking-Glass*

- ★ As a class, read a section from the original *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* text. It is suggested that you read Chapter Four: Tweedledee and Tweedledum.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: To make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will have a copy of the original section. Their first task is to identify characters, locations, and possible lines of dialogue.
- ★ Next, groups are to discuss, decide, rehearse, and come up with a one-minute section of a scene. This is an exploration, rather than an assessed assignment. How do you adapt? What are the challenges?
- ★ After groups present, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Research Project: Author

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of the original novel, Lewis Carroll.
 - » Who is Lewis Carroll? What is his real name?
 - » What is his background?
 - » When did he write *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*?
 - » Did he write any other novels?

- » Was he a “successful” writer?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they’ve learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? A quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they learned.

Choral Poem

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a short poem.
- ★ Each group will present their poem in unison.
- ★ Have students discuss what vocal changes they could apply to their poem to give variety to the presentation. For example:
 - » Speed, volume, pitch, emotion, tone, dividing up the text between different voices
- ★ Say to students: Make sure you understand everything you’re saying! Define any unfamiliar words.
- ★ Students will rehearse and present.

Chaos and Order Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss words and images that demonstrate how they feel about the concepts of chaos and order. What does each mean?
- ★ Groups will then create a tableaux series of three different images that visualize both chaos and order. They must incorporate both in the same image.
 - » This might require some class conversation and modeling. What are some situations that demonstrate both chaos and order?
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Have those watching reflect on what they see in other groups. Which images resonate with them?

- ★ Have a discussion about what it means to deal with chaos in everyday life.

Nonsense Dream

- ★ In groups, students will create a one-minute nonsense dream.
- ★ The dream must include nonsense language, characters who do things that don't make sense, a backwards moment, and a story with nonsense elements (e.g., circular plot, repetition, changes for no reason).
- ★ Groups will present and then discuss afterward. How easy/hard was it to create something that purposefully didn't follow the rules of reality or logic?

Growing Up Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss words and images that demonstrate how they feel about the phrase "growing up."
 - » Alternatively, you could have a class discussion to come up with a list of words, and then groups can choose three words from the list to create their images.
- ★ Groups will then create a tableaux series of three different images that visualize "growing up."
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Have those watching reflect on what they see in other groups. Which images resonate with them?
- ★ Have a discussion about what it means to "grow up."

Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of impossible things. Some questions to think about:
 - » Do you believe in the impossible?

- » Do you believe anything is possible? Do you resist going outside your comfort zone?
- » What stops you from doing things?
- » Are you a rule follower? Why or why not?
- » Does society need certain rules? Why or why not?
- » Are there rules you are expected to follow that don't make sense to you?

Backwards Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene that takes place in a school.
- ★ Once they have decided on their scene, tell groups they have to present it backwards, from last line to first. And, if they can do so safely, they should also move backwards.
- ★ Discuss the experience afterward. Was it interesting or frustrating?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Through the Looking Glass*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What is the Red Queen's first line?
3. How many impossible things does the White Queen believe before breakfast?
4. Identify a nonsense word in the Jabberwocky section.
5. Who is the first flower to talk?
6. What is the garden marked out like?
7. What pawn does Alice become?
8. Who does the fourth square belong to?
9. Finish this sentence: "Language is worth a _____ pounds a word."
10. What poem do Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee want to recite to Alice?
11. Who is the Red King dreaming about?
12. What is the rule about jam?
13. What is an un-birthday present?
14. Who says, "Give me a ham sandwich!"?
15. What are the Lion and the Unicorn fighting for?
16. What is the wind as strong as?
17. Who gives Alice the proper examination to be a queen?
18. What does Alice shake the Red Queen into?
19. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen to use an ensemble to help tell the story? What is the theatrical purpose of the Wonderland Ensemble? Cite the text to support your answer.
2. How does the playwright describe the set? How would you choose to visualize the story through set design?
3. The setting notes suggest that all set pieces be “abstract and reusable.” In your opinion, how will that help the audience understand the world of the play?
4. In your opinion, why does the playwright use unison speaking as a technique?
5. Analyze the transition from the real world to Wonderland. The script uses chaos in the lines, and contrasts the fast movement of the ensemble with the slow movement of Alice. How do you think this would work on stage?
6. How is the game of chess used to visualize the themes of the play?
7. How many nonsense words are there in the Jabberwocky section? What is the purpose of nonsense language in the play?
8. Analyze Alice’s use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
9. How would you costume the Red Queen?
10. Analyze the language of the flowers. How would you physicalize them based on their language?
11. Compare and contrast the language of the Red Queen and the White Queen.
12. Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee tell Alice that the Red King is dreaming of her, and if he wakes up, she’d be nowhere like a blown out candle. What is significant about this moment?
13. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Through the Looking Glass*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about becoming an adult? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is going to happen next to Alice?
4. In your opinion, why did the original author of the novel choose to send Alice to a place called Wonderland?
5. Compare and contrast your own personal feelings about growing up with what happens in the play.
6. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?
- ★ What is Alice's identity? How does it compare to yours?

Post-Read Activities

Adaptation Compare and Contrast

- ★ In the pre-read section, you adapted a section of the original text into an original scene. Now, compare and contrast your adaptation with how the playwright adapted the same moment.
 - » What are the similarities and differences?

- » Infer why the playwright made some of the choices he did with his version of the scene.

Modern Adaptation

- ★ Divide the class into groups. Each group will make a modern version of a moment in the play.
- ★ How would they adapt the situation, the characters, and the outcome for the 21st century? What is the modern version of Wonderland? What modern game would you use to demonstrate the themes of the play other than chess? What would Alice be like as a character?

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Set Design

- ★ Students, individually or in groups, will discuss and decide how they would design the set for this play. Based on the themes in the play, what colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour set rendering or write a two-paragraph description of the set.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.

- » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
- » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
- » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process of writing and adapting Through the Looking Glass. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

Why did you choose to adapt the original text?

It had been on my radar to adapt *Through The Looking Glass* for the stage for quite some time. First, I had such a great time adapting *Alice In Wonderland*. The world of Wonderland is so “mad,” it is impossible not to be creative and theatrical when working on it. And second, *Looking Glass* automatically works as a companion piece to *Alice*. What finally prompted me to start on the adaptation is that a school wanted to do *Alice* but was really looking for a full length. A play is born!

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The trick with adaptation is that you can't take one form and plunk it untouched into another. Books do not perform the same function as plays, nor should they. The job is to find the theatrical images and actions within the book.

Alice's journey is inherently theatrical — she has a purpose and motivation, she wants to be Queen and she pursues that action. The themes of the book — chaos and order — are extremely theatrical images. Therefore the ensemble in the play is always moving in either the circles of chaos or the straight lines of order.

What doesn't work theatrically are the vast number of poems in the book such as *Jabberwocky* and *The Walrus and the Carpenter*. Initially I tried to keep as many of the poems in as possible, using them as scene transitions, for example. But after a workshop of the piece I found myself cutting quite a bit. They didn't perform the same

function in theatre as they did in the book. What I really got out of the poems is how much Alice hates them! That was definitely something to play with.

What was it like to see the play performed?

Amazing! *Through the Looking Glass* is a wonderful physical experience for actors. There's no standing in the background do-nothing roles. There are flowers to play, beetles and pieces of paper, lions and unicorns, all the king's horses and all the king's men. The play is a whirlwind of movement as Alice is propelled from one chess square to the next in her quest to be Queen. It's fun to watch.

What engages you about playwriting?

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than being distanced from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!