

ALICE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT ADAPTED BY
Lindsay Price

FROM THE ORIGINAL BY
Lewis Carroll



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Alice is a theatrical adaptation of the original novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. The story follows Alice as she follows the white rabbit down the rabbithole, and journeys through the strange and sometimes "mad" Wonderland.

Background

This adaptation of *Alice* was written for and premiered at West Ferris Secondary School in North Bay, Ontario, Canada.

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 follows the white rabbit down the rabbithole into Wonderland, where she has numerous experiences with strange characters. Doors talk, mushrooms make her grow and shrink, a caterpillar gives advice, she's mistaken for a serpent, a baby turns into a pig, the Mad Hatter and March Hare are always at tea time, and the Queen of Hearts continually cries, "Off with her head!" The Cheshire Cat says everyone in Wonderland is mad, and therefore Alice must be too. Has Alice lost her head? Even at the end of the play when Alice is back at home, it's not entirely clear.

Characters

ALICE: Female. A young, practical, serious girl.

WHITE RABBIT: Flustered and twitchy. Never sits still.

CHESHIRE CAT: Played by three actors. Smooth talking and gliding walk, slinky cat with a slow-moving tail.

QUEEN OF HEARTS: Shifts between regal/aggressive. Takes charge but not in a good way.

CATERPILLAR: Acts superior. Never rushes.

PIGEON: Anxious and high-strung.

DUCHESS: Harsh. Superior. Always thinks she's right.

MAD HATTER: Childlike. Eccentric. Believes his world.

MARCH HARE: Childlike. Direct.

DORMOUSE: Childish. Sleepy and apathetic.

KING OF HEARTS: Kind but a little clueless. Not bright. Not a good leader.

COOK: Direct. Irritable.

FOOTMAN 1: Pompous.

FOOTMAN 2: Lazy. Weary.

LACKEY: Repeats everything Footman 1 does.

CARDS (3): Agitated, anxious, not completely responsible. Followers.

KNAVE: Weak. Uneasy.

KEY: Wants attention. Sees nothing wrong with a talking object.

BOTTLE: Wants attention. Sees nothing wrong with a talking object.

CAKE: Wants attention. Sees nothing wrong with a talking object.

DOORS (4): Insolent. Sees nothing wrong with a talking object.

JURY: As many as you want. Followers, no independent thought.

Themes

Identity, growing up, following vs. breaking rules, logical vs. illogical

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Do you miss being a young child? Why or why not?
- ★ Does your body ever frustrate you? What was puberty like for you?
- ★ Do you believe everyone has a bit of “madness” in them? Why or why not?
- ★ Are there rules that adults tell you to follow that make no sense?
- ★ Are you a logical or an illogical person?
- ★ Are you looking forward to being an adult? Why or why not?
- ★ What does it mean to “grow up”?
- ★ If someone asked you, “Who are you?” What would you answer?
- ★ How would you define your identity?

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

Alice Adaptation Exercise

- ★ As a class, read a section from the original *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* text. It is suggested that you read Chapter Five: Advice from a Caterpillar.
- ★ 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 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

- ★ 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 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*?
 - » 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? Will you create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they learned.

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 tableau 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.”

Growing Up Scene X2

- ★ In groups, students will create a scene for a group of friends, all of whom are five years old. What do the characters do? What language do they use? What happens in the scene? Where are they? How do they react to each other? How do they react to their surroundings?
- ★ Next, groups will take the same scene, only this time the characters are teenagers. How does the story change when the ages of the characters change? What do the characters do in the same situation as teenagers? What language do they use? What happens in the scene? How do they react to each other? How do they react to their surroundings?
- ★ Discuss the differences between the scenes. What was it like to play young characters? What changes did you make to the scene to reflect the change in age? What was easy and what was difficult about the changes?

Growing Up Reflection

- ★ Write a reflection about your perspective on growing up. Consider the following questions:
 - » What do you think will happen when you leave school?
 - » Do you think you will change as an adult?
 - » What aspects of being an adult are important to you?
 - » What aspects of being an adult are not important to you?
 - » Do you think adults know more than teenagers?
 - » What do you see in adults that you hope never happens to you?

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, 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?

Breaking Rules Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of breaking rules. Some questions to think about:
 - » Do you believe in the adage "rules were meant to be broken"?
 - » 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?

Who Are You? Scene

In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene that addresses the question "Who are you?" It doesn't have to answer the question; it is merely the students' interpretation of the question, and how they define their identity.

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 *Alice*, 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 happens when Alice drinks out of the “Drink Me” bottle?
3. What does the Pigeon accuse Alice of being?
4. What does the baby turn into?
5. What is the role of the Cheshire Cat?
6. Is the Cheshire Cat trustworthy?
7. Who falls asleep at the tea party?
8. In your opinion, why is a raven like a writing desk?
9. What gender is Time?
10. What does the Queen yell?
11. What colour are the cards painting the roses?
12. In the croquet game, what animal is the ball?
13. In scene 8 who is on trial?
14. What is rule 42?
15. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In the introduction, the playwright states that “this version of Alice in Wonderland is inspired by the Cheshire Cat’s observation that Alice must be mad, otherwise she wouldn’t be in Wonderland.” In your opinion, how is this theatricalized in the play?
2. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen to represent the Cheshire Cat with three actors?
3. How does the playwright describe the set? How would you choose to visualize the story through set design?
4. In the first scene, the playwright chose to present the “down the rabbit hole” moment without dialogue. In your opinion, how would this impact the staging?
5. In your opinion, why is Alice pushed into situations where her identity is questioned?
6. How does the playwright visualize Alice “growing” and “shrinking”? Would you stage these actions the same way? Why or why not?
7. How is the ensemble used in the adaptation? What makes this use theatrical?
8. What role does imagination play in the presentation of the play?
9. What is the significance of the line, “Who are YOU?”
10. What is the significance of the line, “I can’t explain MYSELF, I’m afraid, sir because I’m not myself, you see”?
11. 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?
12. How would you costume the Queen of Hearts? Use the text to support your answer.
13. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why did the author change the original novel name to just *Alice*?
2. In your opinion, why did the original author of the novel choose to send Alice to a place called Wonderland?
3. What is the playwright trying to say about childhood? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Based on Alice's journey, what is the story trying to say about identity? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. What is going to happen next to Alice?
6. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with identity with what happens in the play.
7. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?
8. The adaptation of the story was published in 1995, while the original was published in 1856. Does the adaptation feel modern? What elements do not? Explain your answer.

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?
- ★ What is Alice's identity? How does it compare to yours?
- ★ Do you have anyone in your life who questions who you are?
- ★ If the Caterpillar asked you the question, "Who are YOU?" how would you answer?
- ★ Is Alice mad? Why or why not?

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 to 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.

Research Project

- ★ Have students research the rules of Victorian etiquette and the monarchy.
- ★ Then have them compare and contrast how characters in the play deal with rules.
 - » How does the Queen of Hearts compare and contrast to Queen Victoria?
 - » What is Lewis Carroll saying about the monarchy?

Reflection

- ★ Have students compare and contrast their own journey from childhood to adolescence with what Alice has to go through. Use examples from the script.
- ★ Another option: Have students compare and contrast their personal experience with identity struggles to what Alice has to go through. Use examples from the script.

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.

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?

Growing/Shrinking Scene

- ★ In groups, using the concept of growing and shrinking, create an original scene on the topic of change and dealing with change.

Character Physical Action

- ★ As a class, discuss the personality traits of Alice, the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, and the Queen of Hearts. Create a list of traits for each character.
- ★ Ask students: How do we physicalize personality? Use one character as a model.
- ★ For example, the Queen of Hearts is described as shifting between regal/aggressive. How do regal people stand? How do aggressive people stand? How do they move? How do they gesture?
- ★ Divide students into groups and give each group a character, without letting the other groups know.
- ★ Each group, using the personality trait list for their character, must discuss and decide upon a stance, a walk, and a gesture for this character.

- ★ Each group will present. Each person in the group will enter the space with their walk, take a stance, gesture, and then walk off.
- ★ Those watching must guess the character simply by looking at the physical action.
- ★ Ask students: Why do we need to give characters a specific physical action?

Compare and Contrast

- ★ Have students compare and contrast between two of the following:
 - » The original novel
 - » The play adaptation by Lindsay Price
 - » The Disney cartoon
 - » Another adaptation of your own choosing
- ★ What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing and adapting Alice. 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 this novel?

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is one of my favourite books. I have an old worn out copy that has been through many readings. When I had the opportunity to adapt something for a school, *Alice* was at the top of my list.

Is there anything you cut that you wished could have stayed in the play?

I knew I had a time limit (in terms of how long the play could be) and I wanted the play to hit well under that limit because of the potential set and costume changes. When I went into the writing process I was already approaching the adaptation with a lean framework so I wouldn't have to cut down the line.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The original novel has so many imaginative and far from reality elements, mostly centred around Alice growing and shrinking multiple times. I knew, because I was writing for a high school, that there was no room for special effects. Everything had to be done practically. Everything had to be done with actors executing the effects. It's one thing to come up with ideas for those moments, it's another thing altogether to have actors try to execute on those ideas. Timing is something that you can't ever fully realize on the page, you have to try it out in three dimensions. When what you've written works, it's amazing. But more often than not, you have to go back to the drawing board and try something new. That's the creative process.

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

Every character has their moments. I'm a big fan of creating characters who, even though they may have a short time on stage, they really make an impact. But if I had to choose one moment, I love the interaction between the cards and Alice. They have such a different energy than Alice. My favourite character as a playwright is the Cheshire Cat because it plays really well to have three actors create such an otherworldly personality.

What was it like to see the play performed?

It's awesome! When I directed the premiere we went far away from the visuals in the Disney cartoon and that was so much fun to play with. I loved seeing the costume and set elements come together.