

## Discussion Questions for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll

(Some questions taken or adapted from [http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/alice\\_in\\_wonderland.html](http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/alice_in_wonderland.html))

1. Did you enjoy the books? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Have you read either book before? If you have not, did the books mirror the image you had from popular culture?
3. Alice is well known even among people who have not read the books. There have been many movies and many TV shows with Alice parodies or references. Some examples of well-known ideas from the books include “going down the rabbit hole,” a white rabbit with a watch, the Cheshire Cat who can disappear bit by bit until only his smile is left, the riddle “why is a raven like a writing desk,” “curiouser and curiouser,” the eating of the mushroom and other items to alter one’s size, the Walrus and the Carpenter, and the cry, “Off with their heads!” Why is Alice such a popular cultural icon?
4. Did anything in the books surprise you?
5. Traditionally, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* are considered stories for children. What do you think?
6. Since their publication, some readers have found material in Carroll’s book unsuitable for children. Are parts of the Alice books unfit for or harmful to children today?
7. Alice Liddell, the model for Carroll’s heroine, was a young child when these stories were first told. Although a child in the story, Alice often exhibits mature characteristics, and the adult characters often exhibit childish behavior. Do you consider these books to be an adult’s view of childhood, or a child’s view of adulthood?
8. Alice rarely speaks nonsense and rarely enjoys it when it is spoken to her. In fact, her speech and manners are as proper as those of any Jane Austen heroine. How is Alice’s perception of the world changed when confronted with the world and characters of nonsense?
9. The Cheshire Cat suggests that everything Alice experiences in Wonderland is a dream or the result of madness. Besides the obvious absurdities in imagery, what other aspects of these books mimic a dream state?
10. “Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.” This play on the proverb “Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves” is a good example of Carroll’s word play. Often these word plays end up with a nonsensical locution, but at other times, they create a completely different, often subversive, meaning. Did you like the word play?
11. Throughout her adventures, Alice grapples with her identity. What philosophical issues about identity does Alice raise?
12. Alice usually exhibits a passivity to the incomprehensible events around her. However, at critical times, she learns to assume control of her circumstances. What message does that send to the reader?
13. What is the significance of the mushroom that Alice eats during her adventures?
14. Let’s assume that in Lewis Carroll’s original telling of these stories, he viewed himself as a teacher/mentor to Alice Liddell. How do the ways in which the fictional Alice adapts to her shifting and unusual circumstances translate into meaningful lessons for a child of Alice Liddell’s age?

15. If the Caterpillar from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were to give advice to Tweedledee and Tweedledum from *Through the Looking-Glass* on how to solve their differences without having “a bit of a fight,” what might the Caterpillar advise?
16. What role does fantasy and imagination play in our lives?
17. Some favorite passages to read aloud:

*[from chapter III, after Alice and some animals get wet in the tears she shed when she was a giant]*

[Alice] felt sure she would catch a bad cold if she did not get dry very soon.

“Ahem!” said the Mouse with an important air, “are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please! ‘William the Conqueror, whose cause was favored by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much accustomed to usurpation and conquest. Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria –’”

...

“How are you getting on now, my dear?” it continued, turning to Alice as he spoke.

“As wet as ever,” said Alice in a melancholy tone: “it doesn’t seem to dry me at all.”

*[from chapter VI]*

[Alice] was a little startled by seeing the Cheshire Cat sitting on a bough of a tree a few yards off.

The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought; still it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.

“Cheshire-Puss,” she began timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider. “Come, it’s pleased so far,” thought Alice, and she went on, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where –” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you walk,” said the Cat.

“ – so long as I get *somewhere*,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

Alice felt that this could not be denied, so she tried another question. “What sort of people live about here?”

“In *that* direction,” the Cat said, waving its right paw round, “lives a Hatter; and in *that* direction,” waving the other paw, “lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they’re both mad.”

“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”

“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the Cat, “or you would not have come here.”

*[from chapter IX]*

“When we were little,” the Mock Turtle went on at last, more calmly, though still sobbing a little now and then, “we went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle – we used to call him Tortoise –”

“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn’t one?” Alice asked.

“We called him Tortoise because he taught us,” said the Mock Turtle angrily; “really you are very dull!”

18. Are there any questions you would like to ask?