1. Read the text

Charles L. Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, lived from 1832 to 1898. He is best known as the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but actually he was many other things besides. For example, he was a mathematician, photographer and inventor, too. It is said that he was a shy man who supposedly stuttered – but not when he was talking to children.

It was when he was entertaining children that his most famous book was born. Carroll was in a rowboat on the River Thames with three daughters of a friend of his. The girls were captivated by the fantastical story he told them centered on a bored girl named Alice and her adventures underground. In fact, one of the girls in the boat was named Alice and she begged Carroll to write the story down for her, which he gladly did.

He was also encouraged by another writer of the time, George Macdonald, who read the story to his children to see if they enjoyed it. Macdonald’s children reportedly loved it and the family encouraged Carroll to have the story published.

Carroll’s book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* came out in time for Christmas 1865 and was a big success. The story features not only his great imagination but also the research he did on the different animals in the story. The first edition of the book sold out very quickly. People say that even Queen Victoria read it, but nobody can prove if this is true. Another rumor is that Queen Victoria loved the book so much that she wanted Carroll to dedicate his next book to her. However, his next book was about mathematics and that’s probably not what the Queen had meant. Again, nobody really knows whether or not this story is true.

What we do know is that *Alice in Wonderland* (as it is usually called) has never been out of print since 1865. In fact, experts say that by the time Carroll died, this book was the most popular children’s book in England.
Its popularity spread around the world. It has been translated into more than 175 different languages; there are more than 100 different versions of the book, almost 30 films (the first one in 1903!), about 10 TV versions, a musical and a ballet! There are even video games, theme park rides and, of course, Alice merchandise such as t-shirt, hats, cups, etc.

One reason for the book’s popularity is because it can be interpreted in so many different ways by each generation. This is obvious if you look at pictures of the different Alices from 1865 until today. Just as her clothes and appearance change to match the fashion of the times, so do the interpretations. The story was written during the Victorian Era, but there is nothing in the story that anchors it to that time. Walt Disney made an animated version of Alice in 1951 and the most recent movie came out in 2010. Directed by Tim Burton and starring Jonny Depp, the movie is a loose, modern interpretation of Carroll’s book and is sometimes called a “dark” adaptation.

The heroine also makes the story timeless. You could compare Alice to Astrid Lindgren’s Pippi Longstocking. Both of the girls are curious, brave and adventurous. They are able to take care of themselves even in dangerous and unknown situations. And their parents? They’re not around; they play no role in the adventures. Alice and Pippi are in control and are their own authorities.

So what is the book about? To make a long story short: Alice falls down a rabbit hole and ends up in Wonderland. There she meets talking animals (caterpillar, rabbit, mouse…), strange creatures (bodiless grinning cat, playing cards…) and even some people (hatter, Queen, Duchess…). She also encounters various challenges, such as her body growing one minute and shrinking the next, or another time she finds herself disagreeing with a cruel queen. At the end of the story – Nope, you’ll have to read it and find out for yourself!

2. Writing a characterisation

One of the things that makes Alice in Wonderland so entertaining is the odd cast of characters. Choose one of the characters presented below and write a short characterisation based on the picture and the text excerpts given here. Describe the character’s appearance, actions and what others say about him/her/it.

Tips for characterisations:

• Use the present tense.
• In literary texts you say “character” (not person/people).
• Read carefully and mark words and phrases that give you information about the character.
A 150-year-old story: *Alice in Wonderland*

- Use text references and give examples when you write your characterisation.
- Start with outward features and move inward.

**Direct characterisation:**
The narrator or character in the text directly tells the reader what the person is like. This often includes appearance.

**Indirect characterisation:**
The reader has to find out what a character is like by what this character does, says, thinks or feels. This is also called “reading between the lines”.

**Useful words and phrases for characterisations**

**Adjectives:** main / prominent / individual / dominant

*And don't forget all kinds of descriptive adjectives for the character's appearance!*

**Nouns:**
trait / characteristic / personality / feature / component / attitude / emotion / feelings / reaction / nature
portrayal / method / sketch / description / impression / portrait / picture / details / intention / need / desire / gesture

**Verbs:**
to present / to give a rough sketch / to describe / to present / to portray / to characterise / to depict / to convey / to reveal / to uncover / to disclose / to point out / to provide / to create / to give a detailed analysis / to notice / to observe / to demonstrate
a) The Caterpillar

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid\(^1\), sleepy voice.

“Who are YOU?” said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I–I hardly know, sir, just at present– at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

“What do you mean by that?” said the Caterpillar sternly. “Explain yourself!”

“I can’t explain MYSELF; I’m afraid, sir,” said Alice, “because I’m not myself, you see.”

“I don’t see,” said the Caterpillar.

“I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,” Alice replied very politely, “for I can’t understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.”

“It isn’t,” said the Caterpillar.

“Well, perhaps you haven’t found it so yet,” said Alice; “but when you have to turn into a chrysalis\(^2\) – you will someday, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you’ll feel it a little queer\(^3\), won’t you?”

“Not a bit,” said the Caterpillar.

“Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,” said Alice; “all I know is, it would feel very queer to ME.”

“You!” said the Caterpillar contemptuously\(^4\). “Who are YOU?”

Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar’s making such VERY short remarks, and she drew herself up and said, very gravely\(^5\), “I think, you ought to tell me who YOU are, first.”

“Why?” said the Caterpillar.

Here was another puzzling question; and as Alice could not think of any good reason, and as the Caterpillar seemed to be in a VERY unpleasant state of mind, she turned away.

“Keep your temper,” said the Caterpillar.

“Is that all?” said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could.

“No,” said the Caterpillar.

Alice thought she might as well wait, as she had nothing else to do, and perhaps after all it might tell her something worth hearing. For some minutes it puffed away without speaking, but at last it unfolded its arms, took the hookah out of its mouth again, and said, “So you think you’re changed, do you? […] What size do you want to be?” it asked.

“Oh, I’m not particular as to size,” Alice hastily replied; “only one doesn’t like changing so often, you know.”
"I DON'T know," said the Caterpillar.
Alice said nothing: she had never been so much contradicted in her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.
"Are you content now?" said the Caterpillar.
"Well, I should like to be a LITTLE larger, sir, if you wouldn't mind," said Alice: "three inches is such a wretched height to be."
"It is a very good height indeed!" said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).
"But I'm not used to it!" pleaded poor Alice in a piteous tone. And she thought of herself, 'I wish the creatures wouldn't be so easily offended!'
"You'll get used to it in time," said the Caterpillar; and it put the hookah into its mouth and began smoking again.
This time Alice waited patiently until it chose to speak again. In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom, and crawled away in the grass, merely remarking as it went, "One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter."

1 languid – dreamy, relaxed; 2 chrysalis – cocoon; 3 queer – strange; 4 contemptuously – disapprovingly, disrespectfully; 5 gravely – seriously; 6 keep your temper – stay calm; 7 wretched – terrible; 8 offended – insulted
b) The Mock\(^1\) Turtle

Then the Queen left off, quite out of breath, and said to Alice, “Have you seen the Mock Turtle yet?”

“No,” said Alice. “I don’t even know what a Mock Turtle is.”

“It’s the thing Mock Turtle Soup\(^2\) is made from,” said the Queen.

“I never saw one, or heard of one,” said Alice.

“Come on, then,” said the Queen, “and he shall tell you his history.” […]

They very soon came upon a Gryphon, lying fast asleep in the sun. (If you don’t know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture.) “Up, lazy thing!” said the Queen, “and take this young lady to see the Mock Turtle, and to hear his history. […]

They had not gone far before they saw the Mock Turtle in the distance, sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock, and, as they came nearer, Alice could hear him sighing as if his heart would break. She pitied him deeply.

“What is his sorrow?\(^3\)” she asked the Gryphon, and the Gryphon answered, very nearly in the same words as before, “It’s all his fancy\(^4\), that: he hasn’t got no sorrow, you know. Come on!”

So they went up to the Mock Turtle, who looked at them with large eyes full of tears, but said nothing.

“This here young lady,” said the Gryphon, “she wants for to know your history, she do.”

“I’ll tell it her,” said the Mock Turtle in a deep, hollow tone: “sit down, both of you, and don’t speak a word till I’ve finished.”

So they sat down, and nobody spoke for some minutes. Alice thought to herself, “I don’t see how he can ever FINISH, if he doesn’t begin.” But she waited patiently.

“Once,” said the Mock Turtle at last, with a deep sigh, “I was a real Turtle.”

These words were followed by a very long silence, broken only by an occasional exclamation of “Hjckrrh!” from the Gryphon, and the constant heavy sobbing\(^5\) of the Mock Turtle. Alice was very nearly getting up and saying, “Thank you, sir, for your interesting story,” but she could not help thinking there MUST be more to come, so she sat still and said nothing.

“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!” […]

And he went on in these words:

“Yes, we went to school in the sea, though you mayn’t believe it–”

“I never said I didn’t!” interrupted Alice.
“You did,” said the Mock Turtle.
“Hold your tongue!” added the Gryphon, before Alice could speak again. The Mock Turtle went on.
“We had the best of educations – in fact, we went to school every day–”

1. mock – fake, pretend; 2. mock turtle soup – soup made from parts of a calf, e.g. head, hooves and tail; 3. sorrow – sadness, trouble; 4. fancy – idea, imagination; 5. sobbing – crying
c) The Queen of Hearts

A large rose-tree stood near the entrance of the garden: the roses growing on it were white, but there were three gardeners at it, busily painting them red. Alice thought this a very curious thing, and she went nearer to watch them […].

“Would you tell me,” said Alice, a little timidly¹, “why you are painting those roses?”

Five and Seven said nothing, but looked at Two. Two began in a low voice, “Why the fact is, you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a RED rose-tree, and we put a white one in by mistake; and if the Queen was to find it out, we should all have our heads cut off, you know. So you see, Miss, we’re doing our best, afore she comes, to—“ At this moment Five, who had been anxiously looking across the garden, called out “The Queen! The Queen!” and the three gardeners instantly threw themselves flat upon their faces. There was a sound of many footsteps, and Alice looked round, eager to see the Queen. […]

Last of all this grand procession², came THE KING AND QUEEN OF HEARTS. Alice was rather doubtful whether she ought not to lie down on her face like the three gardeners, but she could not remember ever having heard of such a rule at processions; ‘and besides, what would be the use of a procession,’ thought she, ‘if people had all to lie down upon their faces, so that they couldn’t see it?’ So she stood still where she was, and waited.

When the procession came opposite to Alice, they all stopped and looked at her, and the Queen said severely “Who is this?” She said it to the Knave of Hearts, who only bowed and smiled in reply.

“My name is Alice, so please your Majesty,” said Alice very politely; but she added, to herself, “Why, they’re only a pack of cards, after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!”

“And who are THESE?” said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rose tree; for, you see, as they were lying on their faces, and the pattern on their backs was the same as the rest of the pack, she could not tell whether they were gardeners, or soldiers, or courtiers, or three of her own children.

“How should I know?” said Alice, surprised at her own courage. “It’s no business of MINE.” The Queen turned crimson with fury³, and, after glaring⁴ at her for a moment like a wild beast, screamed “Off with her head! Off—“

“Nonsense!” said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent. The King laid his hand upon her arm, and timidly said, “Consider, my dear: she is only a child!”
The Queen turned angrily away from him, and said to the Knave “Turn them over!”
The Knave did so, very carefully, with one foot.
“Get up!” said the Queen, in a shrill, loud voice, and the three gardeners instantly jumped up, and began bowing to the King, the Queen, the royal children, and everybody else.
“Leave off that!” screamed the Queen. “You make me giddy.” And then, turning to the rose-tree, she went on, “What HAVE you been doing here?”
“May it please your Majesty,” said Two, in a very humble tone, going down on one knee as he spoke, “we were trying—”
“I see!” said the Queen, who had meanwhile been examining the roses. “Off with their heads!” and the procession moved on, three of the soldiers remaining behind to execute the unfortunate gardeners, who ran to Alice for protection. [

“Get to your places!” shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and people began running about in all directions, tumbling up against each other; however, they got settled down in a minute or two, and the game began. Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in her life; it was all ridges and furrows; the balls were live hedgehogs, the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and to stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches. [

The players all played at once without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs; and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious passion, and went stamping about, and shouting “Off with his head!” or “Off with her head!” about once in a minute. [

The Queen had only one way of settling all difficulties, great or small. “Off with his head!” she said, without even looking round.

1 timidly – shyly; 2 procession – parade; 3 crimson with fury – red with anger; 4 to glare – to look at angrily; 5 giddy – dizzy; 6 to execute – to kill