Alice in Wonderland

School Show Study Guide

Wells Fargo Center for the Arts
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INTRODUCTION

The origins of “Alice In Wonderland” go back to July 4, 1862. W. H. Auden once said that the date, July 4, “is as memorable a day in the history of literature as it is in American history.”

It was on that “golden” day in July of 1862 that Alice Liddell and her two sisters were on a rowboat expedition with the Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgeson, later to be known as Lewis Carroll. To keep the girls amused, Dodgeson invented stories about Alice’s adventures – especially underground. Alice was so enthralled by the tales that she begged Dodgeson to write out the adventures for her – which, happily, he did.

There has been much written about Lewis Carroll and the symbolic as well as psychoanalytic content in his stories. * But the reality is that Carroll was simply a gifted storyteller and understood well the kinds of nonsense and fantasy that would be most amusing to a child.

It is in this spirit that we have adapted and re-imagined some of Carroll’s zany characters and parts of his dreamy tale, “Alice In Wonderland,” – a tale in which an adolescent Alice is searching for her identity and pushing back at the people in her world who insist they know what’s best for her. Our version takes Alice on a journey of giving up old comforts and taking on new challenges; working through typical adolescent moments of anxiety, ambivalence and confusion about growing up. In the end, her self-esteem is affirmed and dreams of a rosy future are intact.

This Study Guide is designed to assist you in knowing in advance the various components of our play and to offer suggestions for discussion and/or projects and activities both before and after attending the production. We hope it will be helpful and you will feel free to tailor and adapt our suggestions to suit the age range and needs of your students.

*i.e. “the Annotated Alice” with an Introduction and Notes by Martin Gardner. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc./Publisher New York
Here is a story for anyone who is— or ever has been— on the daring adventure of growing up! It’s a curious story— some say it’s a tale that requires lots of courage and bravery.

This particular story is about a girl named Alice. It takes place on a day in which she wants very much to be quite grown up— even though she just turned eleven and is totally confused about who she is, how she should behave, why everyone gets to tell her what to do and what not to do, and why she shouldn’t dawdle and daydream.

Sometimes she feels as though she can’t do anything right. Just this morning, for instance, her mother warned her, for the umpteenth time, to “be polite.” “Well” thought Alice, “That’s rude! I’m always polite. And how many times does she have to tell me!”

Following this little prologue, our play begins with a musical opening number. It is an afternoon in early spring. Alice is sitting under the shade of a tree with her cat, Dinah on her lap and a pile of schoolbooks beside her. She is feeling a bit sleepy, but trying, dreamily, to review her lessons for a mystery quiz tomorrow.

Just as she turns to Chapter 3 in her Social Studies Book, she notices a rather handsome rabbit scurry past, and then disappear in a hole near her tree. “That’s curious,” she thinks. “I wonder where that rabbit hole leads… I wonder… Hmm.” And before she knows it, she follows that handsome rabbit to see for herself.

Down, down, round and round. And then, to her surprise, she sees her mother — looking more like a Queen, all dressed in her favorite color, red. And her Social Studies teacher is there too! And Head Master — And her father! Well, some things never change. They are still ordering her around — telling her, “Don’t whine, don’t muss, don’t yell, don’t fuss!” And complaining that, “She’s too curious…” “She’s always dawdling, always daydreaming.”

She crosses her arms grumpily and says, “Why must I listen to everyone’s orders? I’m on my own journey — searching, dreaming, discovering....” And then after a few more spins, she lands with a gentle thump.

But where? Where in the world is she? She stands up, brushing leaves off her skirt when she sees the rabbit she had followed. He is running past her, wearing a white vest and top hat and carrying a lovely pair of gloves.

And so the play continues with the following scenes and events to mark Alice’s journey towards self-discovery.
Scene 1 – Down the Rabbit Hole

Alice looks around and sees doors, including a small one that leads to a lovely garden. But she’s too big, so in the hopes of shrinking she drinks from a bottle that says “Drink Me” in spite of warnings from voices that surround her. She does shrink, but now is too small to reach the key, so she bursts into tears that form a fast running river for small creatures like herself and a mouse that appears alongside her. When Alice mentions her cat, Dinah, the mouse scurries off. The water eventually goes down, but Alice is alone, and lonely once again.

Scene 2 - Rabbit’s House

Rabbit, running late as usual, sees Alice and demands that she get his gloves and fan. She does so, but when she sees a “Drink Me” bottle, she drinks once again hoping to get bigger, which she does and now is stuck in Rabbit’s House. This causes much humorous havoc, until pebbles being thrown at her turn into small cakes, which make her small again, so she escapes and runs as fast and far as she can.

Scene 3 – Caterpillar

Alice finds herself in a meadow, with mushrooms. A Caterpillar sits on top of one of them and questions her. She admits that she’s confused, would like to be more grown up and is tired of having to follow rules. When Caterpillar suggests that being grown up involves following rules, being responsible and making good choices, Alice claims that she always makes good choices. Caterpillar puts her the test by luring her to places and things, which in the end, Alice resists. With that, Caterpillar gives her the information she needs to grow to a better size.

Scene 4 – Alice Meets the Duchess

Alice hears a Fish Footman and a Frog Footman announce an invitation for the Duchess to play Croquet with the Queen. After a brief encounter with the Duchess, Alice continues her journey, now beginning to want to find her way home.

Scene 5 – Alice and the Cheshire Cat

Alice wends her way down a path when she hears a loud “Meow.” She is hopeful that the Cheshire Cat (a rather large puppet) will be able to tell her which way to go. His answers are vague, but when she does politely ask for help, he makes a suggestion and then disappears – except for his grin.
Scene 6 – Mad Hatter’s Tea Party
Alice arrives the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party just in time for Tea. March Hare and Dormouse are also there but not polite or hospitable. Alice stands her ground throughout the banter and in the end, gains an insight into her own behavior and once again, politely asks for help. They lead her towards the White Rabbit who leads her to the door she wanted to go through when she first arrived.

Scene 7 – The Queen’s Garden
Now in the beautiful garden, Alice meets two Cardsmen who are Gardeners for the Queen. They are terrified because they planted a white rose tree instead of the red one the Queen requested, so they are trying to quickly paint the white roses red. Alice bravely defends the Gardeners and suggests that the Queen should try being more kind and less of a bully. The Queen is intrigued, agrees to change her ways and invites Alice to play croquet. Alice says she needs to find her way back, but the Queen suggests that it’s always best to move forward.

Scene 8 – Keep Opening Doors
In a delightful song, sung by Alice and other zany characters, Alice gains some insights to her behavior, her values and her good sense of self.

Scene 9 – From Dream to Reality
At the end of the song, Mother wakes Alice. Alice insists that she was not asleep but on an adventure. She describes some of the details; her mother listens patiently and then assures Alice that she and Father are always there to support her. When Mother suggests that it’s dinnertime and Alice must be hungry, Alice says that surprisingly she’s not so hungry, then reaches into her pocket and finds one of the leftover cakes from Rabbit’s house. Hmmm? Now that’s curious.

Scene 10 – Finale: It’s Good To Grow Up As Me!
Alice and other characters sing Finale, reviewing Alice’s enchanted journey, the many changes she experienced and the conclusion that it’s good to be home, that growing up may have its ups and downs but it’s certainly good to be free to be grow up true to oneself!
Discussion and Activities After Seeing “Alice In Wonderland”

In the opening number Alice is complaining about everyone in her “world” telling her what to do and what not to do, while the people in her world complain that Alice spends too much time dawdling and daydreaming.

• Ask students if they have ever had this conflict between being a child and being a grown up. Perhaps they can think of a specific time or story.
• Share the story aloud.
• Write the story in a notebook or journal.
• Draw a picture to show what happened.
• Write a poem about it.

When Alice sees the door she wants to go through, she drinks something even though she doesn’t know what it is or what will happen, and even though some voices tell her she shouldn’t do that.

• Invite discussion about eating or drinking substances that might be harmful.
• Ask students to share stories about eating or drinking something even though they were not supposed to do so. (these also can be oral, written, drawn or set to poetry).
• Discuss what might be meant by the line “Don’t trade today for tomorrow….be more particular.”
• Discuss wanting something so badly that you might do something foolish to get it.

When Alice meets Mouse in the water she is happy to finally have company, but she is insensitive and says something that is frightening or hurtful to Mouse, so she is once again all alone.

• Invite discussion about being sensitive to the needs of others. Give some examples.
• Ask students to share examples and anecdotes.
• Discuss the rewards of sensitivity and support of a friend.

When Alice gets “stuck” or trapped in Rabbit’s House, she is far bigger than Rabbit, but still frightened by him.

• Discuss the term, “intimidation” – and what it is to be intimidated by those who seem to have authority
• This may be a good springboard for discussion about respect for authority, but also the wisdom to be informed and to know that no matter what your age, you can try to reason, question and challenge rules or policies that are not reasonable.
• Share stories or look for examples of this concept in newspapers and magazines in current events.
Alice meets up with Caterpillar who challenges her claim that she makes “good choices.” He tempts her to pass through his “door” where he can make all her troubles go away.

- Again, this is a good launch for discussion, especially with older students, to question anyone who makes promises to “make troubles go away” by smoking, drinking or following that person’s lifestyle.
- Ask for examples; other interpretations of what caterpillar is suggesting.
- Ask for students’ opinions on Alice’s rejection of Caterpillar’s temptations.
- Younger students may want to draw a picture about how this scene made them feel. Older students can write a poem or write their own story.

Alice’s journey takes her to the Duchess’s house, which is totally disorganized, noisy and confusing. This makes her decide that she is lost, confused and really should find her way “home.”

- Ask students to share stories about being lost or confused about something; What did that feel like? What did they do about it?
- Why, in students’ opinion, did “home” seem to offer some comfort to Alice?
- How did Cheshire Cat help Alice work through a few of her confusions and then move on?

Alice arrives at the Mad Hatter’s just in time for tea but is not made to feel very welcome. Here we see Alice begin to assert herself and eventually wins over the favor of the zany characters in the scene, who in the end are helpful to her.

- There are many interesting topics to be gleaned from this scene including patience, kindness, inclusion (of outsiders) and not being judgmental.
- Have students do a creative writing assignment about unusual characters in a wacky situation.
- Some students may enjoy coming up with their own riddles or plays on words in the way the Mad Hatter did at his Tea. (“Yes, it’s always teatime and we’ve no time to wash things…” etc.)

When Alice finally finds the doorway to the beautiful garden she finds herself confronted by a bullying Queen.

- Discuss Alice’s bravery in confronting the Queen and defending the Gardeners. Ask for situations in the schoolyard or other places where someone is bullying someone else.
- Discuss what students can do to transform the culture of peer/sibling abuse to create an environment of kindness in their classroom or home.
- Evaluate classroom rules to see if they include anti-bullying concepts such as kindness, respect and creating a community of learners.
- Discuss the roles of bullies, targets and witnesses.
- Discuss the difference between reporting and tattling (i.e. reporting is getting someone out of trouble; tattling is getting someone into trouble.)
- Discuss the importance of reporting bullying (including oneself) to a trusted adult.
After Alice leaves the Queen’s garden she (and others) sing a song that sorts out some of the things she has discovered on this journey. She realizes that she thought she was lost, but was really just struggling with some ways to grow. And that she’s doing many things right, but needs to keep opening doors, keep reaching for a star and all will be well.

- Discuss what it means to feel good about yourself, to have good self esteem.
- Discuss the fact that everyone has strong points, good ideas, and the ability to be kind, generous and supportive of others.
- Encourage students to make a list of what they like about themselves; about ways they might grow and improve themselves. Discussion can follow, but respect the wishes of those who want to keep their thoughts or lists private.
- Have students draw a picture of what it “looks like” to feel good about “me.”

When Alice wakes up and finds herself back home, she sings about her enchanted journey and how she has grown from that adventure.

- Discuss the fact that Alice now feels it’s good “to be totally free to grow up as me!” What, in your opinion does she mean by that?
- Ask students to discuss their thoughts on how Alice felt when she realized that her parents, teachers and others in her world are there to help and guide her rather than just boss her around?

Talk About reactions and impressions after seeing “Alice In Wonderland”

- What do you remember most about the play?
  - Who was your favorite character and why?
  - What made you happy? What made you sad?
  - What was exciting? What was scary? Funny?

Music, Costumes and Acting

- How did the music make you feel in different parts of the play? Can you give examples of different feelings in different parts? (For example: When different characters surround Alice and sang “Don’t Drink the Drink you see if it isn’t your own…” Or when Caterpillar tried to lure Alice into eating “the forbidden fruit” etc)

- Did the music help you to know what was happening or going to happen? How?

- How did the music help you know the difference between Caterpillar’s character and the Mad Hatter’s Character? How were they different?

- What did the costumes and set pieces tell you? How and why? Talk about use of color, i.e. silly combinations for Mad Hatter, Duchess; Strong Red for Red Queen etc. Hand masks & wigs for Footmen etc. Talk about zany color and design combinations for Alice’s dream scenes, and more realistic colors for reality scenes.
How did you know what the characters were feeling? (Talk about acting out the parts of the story – saying things the way the person in the story would say them, reacting to what’s happening in the play as an actor, movement according to what’s going on etc)

Teachers’ Guide to Creative Drama

Introduction
One of the most exciting ways to prepare students of all ages to view live theatre, participate in a theatre production or bring an academic concept or lesson to life is to give them the experience of what it feels like to be an actor or to be in a given situation or circumstance. Creative Drama provides an excellent vehicle toward fulfilling this objective. There are many exercises that are easy to implement and encourage using the students’ whole instrument, including imagination, voice, movement, senses and emotions. The entire class or group participates at the same time so there is little opportunity for self-consciousness to inhibit creativity.

Following are some simple exercises, suitable for all age groups. No prior drama experience is required of students (or teachers!) Exercises can be done in the classroom if desks can be moved to the side. This can be accomplished quietly and efficiently by making a game of it. A sample scenario might be to encourage students to imagine an earthquake fault line under the room. It is the students’ responsibility to move the desks to the side of the room to reinforce the walls. This must be done silently so the fault line will not be disturbed. [Note: If it is not possible to move the desks, however, most exercises can be done with students standing behind or near their desks. If desks can be moved, do the following with students in a large circle]

Warm-Up Exercises

Freeze and Move
Using a percussion instrument (small drum or tambourine) or a piece of lively music, ask students to move while the music plays and freeze when it stops. Ask students to move isolated parts of their body (i.e. “now just move your leg, now your head, etc.”) If you are using a drum, it can be made more interesting to vary the speed of the movement by changing the tempo of the beat.

Simple Stretches
Lead students in stretching their bodies. The use of visual images or characters helps make stretching fun. For example, tell students to reach for a silver thread hanging from an imaginary cloud above their head. Tell them to hold on tight and imagine they are swinging high above the neighborhood. Sometimes the strings might disappear. Students should then drop, loosely. Repeat this several times. Students can then stretch out wide like a big tree, swivel like a snake, stretch their necks long like a giraffe’s, make their bodies small, like a tiny mouse, etc.
Grooming The Senses

In place, encourage students to isolate each sense and focus on it. For example, tell them to close their eyes and listen attentively, first to sounds in the room, then sounds in the hallway. Finally have them send their hearing out as far as it will go. Ask them to share what they have heard. A similar exercise can be done with sight. Ask them to look around the room, noticing colors and shapes. Ask them to see each object and then have each object see them. Turn to a partner and see the partner and have each partner see them. Ask students if they can tell the difference between being the see-er and the seen and what each feels like. To practice heightening the sense of touch you can pass around a paper bag with an object in it. Have each student feel and describe it without the sense of sight. Students can be encouraged to experiment with smell and taste in the lunchroom and at home.

Movement

A Mirror Exercise

To help students focus, lead the class in a simple “follow the movement” exercise to slow, pleasant music. Make simple movements with your arms, head, face and legs. Encourage students to mirror these movements at the same time you are making them. Then, if you can arrange students in a circle, choose one student to leave the room and one student to lead the class in simple slow movements. The student chosen to leave is now invited back to try to guess who is the leader. A more advanced version of this exercise involves grouping students in pairs and having them mirror each other in turn. Music is helpful here. Remind students that the face moves too and that laughter and giggling can be mirrored also.

Sound

Sound Effects Story: Pick a simple story that has many opportunities for added sound effects (i.e. stories in cities, bad weather, haunted houses, etc.). This story can be made up in advance, improvised on-the-spot or read from a book. Practice with the group, encouraging students to make the sound of the wind using their voices, doors slamming using their feet, etc. Then control the volume of the sound using a wand, a pencil or any conductor like object. When your hand is high, the sound is loud, when your hand is lowered the sound diminishes and then stops. Use this volume control tool throughout the story. For added excitement, tape the story and play it back for students – they love to hear their voices. And knowing that they will be taped will heighten motivation and focus.

Creative Drama Resource List

Development through Drama
By: Brian Way
Humanities Press 1967

Games for Actors & Non-Actors
By: Augusto Boal
Routledge, 1992

Impro
By: Keith Johnstone
Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1981

Improvisation for the Theater- a Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques
By: Viola Spolin
Northwestern University Press, 1963
This study guide is designed to assist teachers, parents and group leaders in preparing students for the presentation. It also offers suggestions for discussion, art and values tie-in activities following the program. It is our hope that the material suggested in this guide will be tailored to the age and interests of your students and presented in a nurturing and supportive classroom, recreation or home setting.

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