

The Alice Sound



**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE
TO THE *ALICE* BOOKS**

The Alice Sound

BOOK RESOURCE



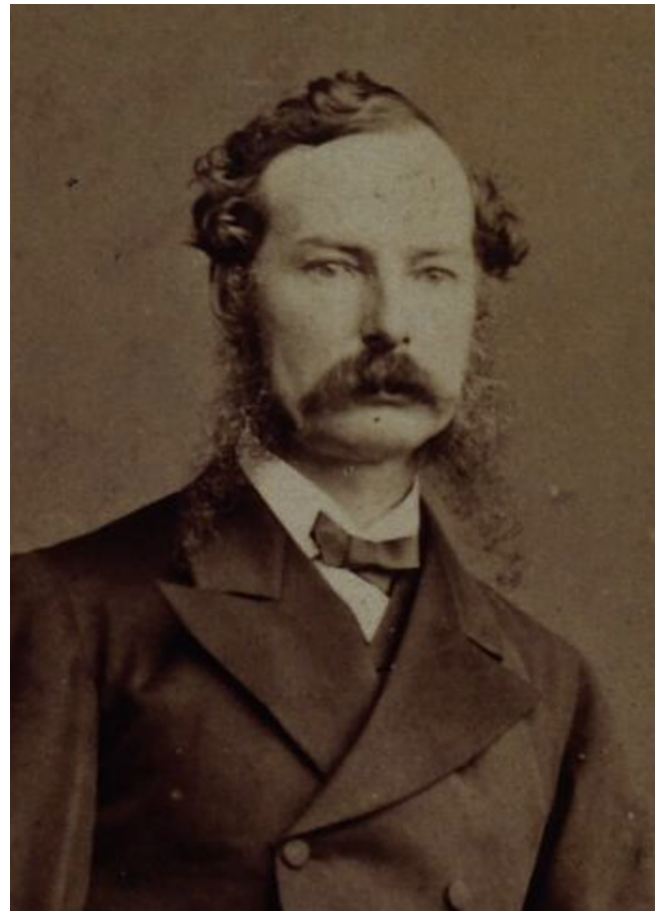
LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE ALICE BOOKS

WHO WROTE THEM?

The *Alice* books were written by a man born almost 200 years ago in 1832, named Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Like many people, Dodgson chose to publish the books and other material he wrote under another name. The name he chose was **Lewis Carroll** (and that's how we'll refer to him here).



Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was his first published work of fiction.

Carroll's main work was as a maths teacher at Oxford University. He had lots of different interests including theatre and photography. When Carroll got interested in it, photography was very new, and he was one of the first people to get very good at it. He liked all kinds of other gadgets too: he owned both a microscope and a telescope, not to mention a mechanical frog! He also invented plenty of gadgets of his own including a special kind of teapot and a nyclograph which was a machine for quickly writing down ideas in the dark!

But the *Alice* books aren't just made up of words. There are also over 90 pictures which are really important, and these were produced by **John Tenniel**. He was very famous and respected – a lot of his work was for a weekly magazine with lots of cartoons and caricatures called *Punch*.

The Alice Sound

BOOK RESOURCE



LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

HOW DID THEY COME ABOUT?

Lots of well-known books for children start life as stories made up on the spot to entertain listeners, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is perhaps one of the most famous books to have developed in this way. Carroll would often go out on trips with friends of different ages and would often entertain guests with funny and fantastical stories. He was good friends with the family of Henry George Liddell, the head of the Oxford college where Carroll lived and worked.

In the summer of 1862, there were lots of trips to various places and on one particular day (4 July) Carroll, took the three Liddell sisters – Alice, Lorina and Edith – out on a rowing trip with his friend Robinson Duckworth. During this outing one of the things they did was to tell a story which had lots of questions, comments and suggestions from the girls. Duckworth was a really good singer, so there were plenty of songs woven into the story.



The middle sister, Alice, liked this story so much that she asked Carroll to write it down for her. He agreed. He put lots of time and energy into it – he not only wrote the words but also drew all the pictures and gave it to Alice for Christmas in 1864. What a Christmas present! Fun chats between friends can turn into amazing things!

You can see this first ever manuscript version in the British Library today (and it's online here: <https://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=86825520-a671-11db-a264-0050c2490048&type=book>)

As Carroll was working on this gift for Alice, he started thinking about making it available to other children too, and, having asked his friends what they thought of the story, decided he would publish it. He didn't think his own drawings were good enough to be shared widely and it was at this point that he asked John Tenniel to do the illustrations that would be published. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* then appeared a year later in **1865**.

The book did so well and Carroll had so many more ideas that he wrote another *Alice* book – *Through the Looking Glass* and *What Alice Found there* which was published with illustrations by Tenniel in **1871**.

And even then they hadn't quite had enough! Carroll decided to rewrite the first book for very young readers and *The Nursery Alice* appeared, quite a bit later, in **1890**. This one is important because it's the first one with coloured pictures.

The music Paul Rissmann produced was based on the two published books: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and these are the one's we'll focus on here.

The Alice Sound

BOOK RESOURCE



LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

WHAT HAPPENS IN THESE BOOKS AND WHY IT MIGHT BE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU KNOW

In both books the main character, Alice, does something incredible – whether it's falling down a rabbit hole or going through a mirror – to get her somewhere amazing. She meets a whole range of unusual, intriguing and sometimes quite unpleasant people. She does all kinds of strange things from swimming with a mouse and meeting a unicorn to running – without moving!

As we'll see below, there have been hundreds of different versions of the stories. Sometimes the two books are brought together, sometimes new characters are included and sometimes stuff gets left out (Paul had to do a bit of that to avoid making music 14 hours long!)

Here's what happens in Carroll's books that Paul has used in his music:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice is sitting by the river with her sister one day when she sees a white rabbit – wearing a jacket and waistcoat – run past. She follows him and jumps down the rabbit hole after him. At the bottom of the hole, she finds herself in a strange world where animals talk and act like humans. She also finds that she grows and shrinks in size, depending on what she eats and drinks. She meets a Duchess who has both a baby that turns into a pig and a Cheshire Cat with a huge grin who can vanish into thin air and then suddenly reappear. Alice goes to a mad tea party with the Hatter, March Hare and Dormouse, then finds herself at a game of croquet with the Queen of Hearts and her servants – who are all a pack of playing cards. The game stops when everyone is called to court for a trial. The judge at the trial is the King of Hearts and the aim is to find out who has stolen some tarts that the Queen made. When Alice is called as a witness, she says that she finds the trial ridiculous and shouts that they are just a pack of cards. She wakes up and finds herself back next to her sister... we discover that the whole adventure has been a dream.



The Alice Sound

BOOK RESOURCE



LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There

On a cold winter day Alice is at home, by the fire. Looking up, she sees the looking-glass above the fire with its mirror-view of the room. She climbs up to look closer and the glass seems to melt so that she can pass through. On the other side, she isn't in exactly the same room – it's untidy, with chess pieces which seem to be alive scattered across the floor. Alice heads out into the garden where she meets a group of flowers and then the Red Queen, who takes her to the top of the hill where she can see that the countryside is laid out like a giant chessboard. Alice is in a game of chess and the Queen explains to her that she can be a pawn, get to the end of the board, and become a queen herself. Alice takes a train with some strange animals through to the fourth square where she meets the brothers Tweedledum and Tweedledee. She also meets the White Queen, who is friendly but not easy to understand. She follows the White Queen into the next square where she meets a sheep, who helps her to the sixth square. She meets more strange characters including Humpty Dumpty and sees a whole range of fight and battles – some of which get pretty noisy! She finally crosses into the eighth square, where a crown appears on her head. Alice has made it and become a queen! There is a party to celebrate but in the middle of it, she pulls the cloth from the table and wakes up back at home by the fire.



The Alice Sound

BOOK RESOURCE



LSO London
Symphony
Orchestra

Queen Mary
University of London

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BOOKS ONCE THEY WERE PUBLISHED?

The *Alice* books were quickly translated into other languages and there are now hundreds of translations so people right around the world – from Bradford to Beijing and Hong Kong to Hungary – can read and enjoy them.

As well as translating them, people quickly started doing other things to and with the books. This could be something really simple like colouring in the black and white illustrations or copying them onto envelopes or pottery tiles. People started acting out scenes from the books – we know that children across the world were doing this in Carroll's lifetime.

The books were so popular that people, including Carroll, started using the characters to sell other things, from biscuit tins to music to play at home.

Many of the people who used and interacted with the books were themselves really talented people. The *Alice* books have inspired other illustrators and writers but also artists, filmmakers, animators, games designers, musicians, and many more. Some of the greatest painters, film directors and composers have produced versions of the books or been inspired by them to create new works – people like Salvador Dali, Jonathan Miller, Annie Liebowitz, and Dorothea Tanning. Alice is one of not that many book characters that people pretty much anywhere can instantly recognise.

There are always new things to add or discover or think about (what is Alice's sister's name for example?!) This is still happening all the time today, and Paul's music is a great example. The books are old but they are still really fresh, relevant and interesting to people now.

Were you paying attention? Answer the following questions to find out!

1. In what year was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published?
2. What is the name of the second Alice book?
3. What is important about *The Nursery Alice*?
4. Name 2 people that Alice meets in Wonderland.
5. What accessory for her head does Alice get at the end of *Looking-Glass*?
6. If you could create a new version of the *Alice* books, what would it be?