

EXTENDED ESSAY- ENGLISH B1

# TED ANKARA COLLEGE

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Research Question: In what ways the concept of main theme 'growing up' is given in the novel 'Alice in Wonderland'?

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this extended essay is to look deeper into the main theme in Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*. The aim is to answer the question how the concept of growing up is persuaded in the novel. Giving a full analysis of the protagonist Alice Liddell and the other characters in Wonderland do this. Also by analyzing the main antagonist the Queen of Hearts and the King of Hearts, the role of social pressure on growing up is also explained. Purpose of the journey through Wonderland is explored and explained in terms of growing up in a society like Victorian Period in England. So the link between the Wonderland and growing up is conveyed in this essay. The essay explores how the author uses language, motifs, and symbols in order to answer the research question. In the novel language has a great role to describe the Wonderland and its madness. Also motifs and symbols are also supports the main theme growing up. Though in the novel there are many motifs and symbols used, only the ones, which are supporting the main theme, growing up, is studied in this essay.

By explaining each motifs and symbols, and characters which supporting the main theme, and the society pressure on children, the struggle of puberty is expressed. Struggle of puberty is an important theme since the novel is written 1865 in England, still in many societies today it is current.

240 words

## INTRODUCTION

In Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*, the main theme growing up is persuaded; especially the relation between growing up and society pressure is mainly discussed. The novel takes place in England during Victorian Era, however, today the problem about society pressure and identity crisis is still found throughout in the societies. Parents are pushing their children faster to the world, which the children are not prepared for. This is the main cause of the identity crisis; most of the time elder want the younger to shape according to their own or society's' ideals. The protagonist Alice Liddell is a child who is experiencing both physically and mentally changes which every child experiences during puberty. Alice, even though she is described as a smart young lady in the novel, cannot determine who she really is. In order to determine her identity she creates a world of madness, the Wonderland, and escapes from the reality. In the novel Alice is also described as a curious, innocent young girl who is forced to grow up earlier than she needs to be . Moreover, the author later on described the character Alice as "What wert thou, dream- Alice, in thy foster-father's eyes? How shall he picture thee? Loving, first, loving and gentle: loving as a dog (forgive the prosaic smile, but I know of no earthly love so pure and perfect), and gentle as a fawn: ...and lastly, curious—wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood when all is new and fair, and when Sin and Sorrow are but names—empty words, signify nothing!" She is forced to be an adult. That is the main reason for her trip to the Wonderland. The author makes the reader distinguish Alice before her trip down the rabbit hole and after. In the novel it can be clearly observed how Alice changes, grows up, during the trip. The author creates

several events to show how she changes psychologically. Not only the events but also the writer create unreal creatures, and uses symbols and motifs.

The novel takes place in England during the Victorian Era, which is also criticized by the author. In the novel it has been clearly represented that the society pressure has a great influence on people in the community, especially the younger ones can easily get affected mostly during the puberty. For example Alice has been affected by the Victorian era and she was acting like two people even when she was above ground. It shows that because of the pressure of the society she is forced to be someone else. "For this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people! Why, there's hardly enough of me left to make one respectable person!"(Carroll, 12) According to the novel growing up does not only mean to become an adult but having the strength to speak up against the authority, to have own opinions and the ability to look at things from different perspective.

In the novel Carroll creates an opposite world, the Wonderland, where normal things above ground is counted as 'non sense'. In contrast in Wonderland what is normal is said to be 'abnormal' or 'madness' above ground. It suggests that Alice was so confused above ground, the real world she belongs to, so she dreamt about a place where things are different but not exactly opposite of the things above ground. Madness is defined as a state of wild or chaotic activity in Oxford dictionaries; it is used to define unexplainable and unreasonable behavior of human or animals. The words 'mad, madness, non sense, curious, confusing' is

repeated several times in the novel, used as motifs, in order to support the main theme and stand on the differences between two worlds. Moreover some events such as Alice's crying, size change, appearance and disappearance of white rabbit etc. is also used as motifs in the novel, to emphasize on significant events and to support the theme growing up.

#### **I. MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS USED TO SUPPORT THE THEME GROWING UP:**

Repetitive structures, contrasts, some events and literary devices are used as motifs in the novel, in order to develop the main theme. In the '*Alice in Wonderland*', the author uses motifs to support the theme growing up. The role of language in these motifs are so significant, for example the author creates new words and expressions in the novel and uses it as a motif through it. It creates a sense of possibility of everything in the Wonderland. " 'Curiouser and curiouser!' cried Alice (she was so much surprised , that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English) "(Carroll,13). The author suggests that in Wonderland there are no boundaries. There is no limitation in words or feelings. However, in above ground word peoples' feelings are being pressed and words are chosen specifically in contrast in under ground world there is no specific rule for anything. The author chooses the words attentively in order to support the major theme. Throughout the novel some words such as mad, madness, curious, confusing and non sense is repeated frequently. For instance when Alice have troubles explaining or understanding something, she describes it as confusing, curious and non sense. " 'Well! I 've often seen a cat without grin,' thought Alice; 'but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!' "(Carroll, 51) It

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suggests that she is not ready to grow up yet. However, in later sections of the novel, Alice becomes more mature and more sane, uses these words less, which indicates that she had become an adult.

**a) Language:**

Through the novel language plays a great role in expressing the main theme and ideas. Another example is the poetry and the rhyme used in the novel. At the beginning and at the end of the novel, a poem is used to support the main theme. The one at the beginning describes the scene, a summer afternoon and three Liddell girls are mentioned. ‘The dream-child moving through a land of wonders wild and new,’(Carroll,3) Only one of them is mentioned as a ‘dream child’ ,which suggests that Alice is a special young girl in the society. For that reason the reader can assume that she is the main protagonist in the novel from the beginning. At the end of the novel another poem is used to make a mysterious closure. The initial letters of each line in this poem is ‘Alice Pleasance Liddell’ which suggests that the poem is written for her. The poem suggests that time passes and even the memories die, there is a constant change in the nature. It suggest the continuity of life, that she has to grow up and became a responsible young lady in the society. The first poem described the sunny afternoon and the last poem describes the autumn. For that reason two poems connects with each other. Than the poet concludes the poem with a question ‘’Life, what is it but a dream?’’ (Carroll, 208) which connects with the main theme and make the reader give a thought to the distinction between the unreality and reality. Growing up does not only mean to grow in age or size but also means to gain the critical thinking skill, different perspective and point of view. The poems as an entrance and closure made the novel more

interesting to read. Also the dream motifs are used in the poems which suggests that Alice will discover herself at the dream state.

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The affect of language can be seen in the chapter where Alice meets with Humpty Dumpty in the Wonderland. Humpty Dumpty is an important character in English 'Nursery Rhyme', which is used for traditional poems and songs for young children. The character is used before in English literature and also used in the novel. He uses rhymes when he is speaking with Alice.

#### **b) Characters:**

Another motifs used apart from the language is the animals, people and the creatures living in the Wonderland. These extra ordinary characters are exaggerated versions of characters living above ground. It shows that Alice needs to have her own identity in order to survive in the society. One of the most important and the most significant character is Cheshire cat. " '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 wouldn't have come here.' Alice didn't think that proved it at all: however, she went on: 'And how do you know that you're mad?' "(Carroll, 49) Through the novel, animals and the creatures in Wonderland symbolize a certain kind of person above ground or an idea which is supported above ground. For instance in the Wonderland The Mad Tea Party represents the upper class of the society above ground, reality. It is a clear

reference to people who claims to be a member of upper class. In reality at Tea Parties manners are really important so everyone needs to act

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properly, and be serious. However, at Wonderland the Tea Party is named as 'Mad', opposite of the reality. At the Mad Tea Party members are acting more relaxed, which suggests that people are less concerned about social manners under ground. It can be said, for a young girl it will be easier to discover herself and find her own identity. On the other hand, there are characters, which play a role as a represented of an idea, such as Cheshire cat. It represents Plato's philosophy and idea of madness of under ground.

**c) Crying:**

Another significant motif in the novel is Alice's crying. Especially at the beginning of her journey through the Wonderland she was crying more often due to the frustrations she have. It shows even she is acting more mature than she is, still a children who is confused and stuck between the childhood and the adulthood. Alice gave her an advise when she cries at the beginning of the novel and strongly says that she is not a small children anymore, but her crying also suggests that how she is afraid of the changes happen surrounding of her as well as the changes with her. This suggests that she is facing problems and frustrations that all child goes through during puberty, however facing them all by herself leads her to grow up earlier and make her trip down the rabbit hole.

**d) White Rabbit:**

To represent abstract ideas and theories symbols, such as characters, figures and objects, are used through the novel. There are many symbols in Wonderland however there are three main symbols for supporting the theme growing up. Firstly, the white rabbit symbolizes the curiosity of a child especially during puberty. Also it

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can be viewed as a leading guide for Alice from beginning to the end of her journey. The white rabbit is described with a pocket watch through the journey. The watch symbolizes that Alice have a limited time for self-discovery and growing up. She needs to hurry up for her journey through under ground. “ ‘Who am I , then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I’ll come up: if not , I’ll stay down here till I’m somebody else’ -but, oh dear!’” cried Alice, with sudden burst of tears, ‘I do wish they *would* put their heads down! I am so *very* tired of being all alone here!’ “(Carroll,16) It shows at the beginning of the journey, than disappears and appears again later on when Alice was about to give up on her journey. From another perspective, the white rabbit is symbolizing the adulthood; it shows how hasty the adulthood is. It carries a pocket watch even though time is not an important aspect in the Wonderland.

#### **e) The Garden:**

Secondly, the Garden underground is another symbol for supporting the theme growing up. The Garden may symbolize the Garden of Eden. The tree symbolizes wisdom in the Bible, and the apple on the tree symbolizes the adulthood. In the novel a rose tree is used to symbolize the wisdom and the adulthood. Alice has a desire to enter to the garden, however she is also scared to enter. It shows her desire to enter to the adulthood, yet she is not ready to leave childhood.” Alice thought this a very curious

thing, and she went nearer to watch them, and, just as she came up to them, she heard one of

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them say ‘Look out now, Five! Don’t go splashing paint over me like that!’ “(Carroll, 60)

**f) Size Change:**

Lastly, size change is used as a symbol for growing up both mentally and physically in the novel. When kids are growing up they have both mental and physical obstacles, and more of the time it frustrates them. Since they are growing up they want to know whom they are, trying to transform from childhood to adulthood. When Alice fell down the rabbit hole, she notices a small door, which she cannot pass and a potion on table, which is labeled with ‘Drink Me’. Since her curiosity brings her down the rabbit hole, she wanted to see what it is so she drank the potion, which started the size change. Those size changes described as ‘frustrating’ in the novel, and it represents changes in their body and how they try to discover it. Alice cries in the beginning of the novel when she experiences the first size change, than drowns in her own tears. It also represents that she needs to go through those changes alone, because of the society that she belongs in. After the first size change she drinks another potions to enter the Wonderland. Those several size changes may represent that in order to enter the Wonderland and survive through under ground she should gain different perspectives and by potions she learns to things for a different point of view. Alice’s dream is over when she finally gained the strength to speak up against the Queen of Hearts, queen of

the Wonderland. She had grown in size at the courtroom, without consciousness and that saved her life.

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Which shows that Alice is finally ready to leave the dream, return back to above ground and became an adult. She had gained the strength and self-confidence, which is a really important aspect of becoming a grown up member of the society. She had experienced a lot in under ground so she may feel stronger about herself in above ground. The experiences she had through the Wonderland made her more mature and strong, she had survived.

## **II. THE SOCIETY PRESSURE**

The Victorian Era begins with Victoria became queen in 1837, and ends in the year of her death, in 1901. During this period England had experienced several changes due to the Industrial Reform. So by that reform number of middle classed people increased. Also their norms, values, lifestyles and moralities are changes due to the reform. The change in the society also affected the literature; Lewis Carroll has processed it in novels, such as Alice in Wonderland.

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In the novel, the author strongly criticizes the Victorian Era and how people are affected by it. The main antagonist for Alice is the Queen and the King of Hearts. However, since it is reflecting England during 1840's, the Queen of Hearts symbolizes the authority in the Wonderland. In the novel it has been emphasized that the most important aspect of being an adult is to have own opinion about the things and gaining different perspectives. Also gaining the courage to speak up against the authority when it is necessary. These aspects make a person grown up and a member of a society. At those times in England, people were under pressure. It is really difficult for one to find his/her identity. For Alice, at very young age, she had been thought so many things. That is why she is having problems with finding her identity. "But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?'" (Carroll, 15) Moreover, during the period in England women have a stereotypical role in the society. The author also emphasizes the female role in the society by creating the character Alice. Stereotypically women were seen, as they are required to provide their husbands with clean home, food ready for them and raise their children. It is also known that especially after the marriage women have no rights or privileges in the society. So for young ladies, such as Alice, finding her own identity may be a hard journey. Through the novel, Alice has seen as a stereotypical women figure several times. When she was under ground she was carrying a plum cake, than she divided the cake for animals there; however, she did not ate any. "I say, this isn't fair!" cried the Unicorn, as Alice sat with the knife in her hand, very much puzzled how to begin. 'The Monster has given the Lion twice as much as me!' 'She's kept none for herself, anyhow,' said the Lion. 'Do you like plum-cake Monster?'" (Carroll, 176) Clearly

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shows that Alice have been influenced by the society she belongs to in above ground world. Also she accepts the values, norms and lifestyle she had seen since she was born. Despite that, since she is a curious child, she also wants to question these values and norms before she accepts them.

Alice's adventure in Wonderland thought her these important aspects of growing up, than she broke the dream and woke up. After the size change in court room it is possible to assume that she is now gained a new perspective, ready to return reality and stand up on her feet. The deck of cards symbolizes the followers of Queen Victoria. The deck of cards are instilled with fear, and manipulated. It clearly shows that how easily people can be controlled by fear. "Two began, in a low voice, 'Why, the fact you see, Miss, this here ought to have been a red rose tree, and we puts white one by mistake; and, if the Queen was to find out, we should all have our heads cut off, you know. So you see, Miss, we're doing our best, before she comes, to-'" (Carroll, 61) In the novel the Queen is the only power on society, she can do anything to anyone and no one will go against her. "The players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarreling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs; and in 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"(Carroll, 65). The followers are represented as deck of cards, which shows that they are not unique, they are all in same size and shape, and they do not think or question what the authority says.

## CONCLUSION

*Alice in Wonderland* is a great novel, which describes the journey of a young girl during puberty and shows the process of self-discovery and growing up. While showing the steps of adulthood the author uses different characters and motifs and symbols in order to create a different but not opposite world of reality. As Alice falls down the rabbit hole, the things that are important above ground lose its importance and value, which is a conflict of reality and dream.

The journey takes place during the state of dream yet she cannot wake up before she finds out who she really is. The journey represents a self discovery process which everyone goes through; However she is grown up in a society where everyone accepts the roles they have been given and afraid to speak up against the power. So she created Wonderland as a way of escaping from reality and finding herself. Alice had learned something from everyone in under ground world. Even they act and talk insane, they each helped her to break the wonderland dream.

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At the end of the novel The Queen of Hearts becomes doll-sized and Alice grows bigger, which thought Alice to be not afraid to speak up against the power if it is necessary.

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