

## Alice in Wonderland: Nonsense and Logic in Literature

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'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogroves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe. (Carroll, 1871)

### INTRODUCTION: IT'S ALL NONSENSE

Ah, the verse of nonsense. What does this stanza mean? Many scholars have toiled over its meaning, and it has been studied by many generations of students. The above is the first stanza of a mere seven stanza poem written by Lewis Carroll. It is found nestled in the first third of the story *Through the Looking-Glass*. Very simple, very unobtrusive yet glaringly complicated and calling for attention. Why is this poem so important? What has caused us to tear it from its story and study it repeatedly, to deconstruct it, looking for the meaning that fits our conscience? It merely comes down to the fact that we cannot stand to accept that something is not supposed to make sense. We are rational people and, therefore, we know that if a brilliant writer such as Carroll wrote this, it must mean something profound. Why else would he write it, after all? If you ask any literature scholar or any literature teacher about the meaning of "Jabberwocky," the general consensus is the same. Many speak of the beast and the battle and the love of a father and son.

We are forcing meaning out of something that is nonsense. In fact, Lewis Carroll is usually the first name mentioned when referring to the "School of Nonsense." If it is nonsense, why are we trying to make sense of it? The answer is in fact because it isn't truly nonsense. There is deep meaning found in the lines waiting to explode to the reader. That is, of course, if the reader takes time to absorb and accept something more than the mere words, but rather the meaning of the whole.

It is this type of analysis that I wish to explore in this unit. A curriculum unit on nonsense is in fact a journey through logic and making sense of the senseless. Authors like Lewis Carroll weren't simply writing gibberish because they had nothing else to do. No, in fact, they wrote these verses to generate discussion and make the reader use logic to decode the message. Every single word has a meaning and when put together, a deep understanding of a message is found.

This unit will focus on the literature of nonsense. We will look at various sources and determine the purpose of study for a classroom. We will also take the opportunity to explore language and the written word. The unit is designed to be taught in a Language Arts classroom in grades six to eight with emphasis on Reading/Writing Workshop.

### OBJECTIVES

The following objectives correlate to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. A description of each one follows to make it easier to correlate your related district or state objectives. Each objective is from the English Language Arts and Reading for grade 8. TEKS 110.24 (1) The

student listens actively and purposefully in a variety of settings. The student is expected to: (A) determine the purposes for listening such as to gain information, to solve problems, or to enjoy and appreciate; (B) eliminate barriers to effective listening; (C) understand the major ideas and supporting evidence in spoken messages; and (D) listen to learn by taking notes, organizing, and summarizing spoken ideas.

TEKS 110.24 (3) The student listens to enjoy and appreciate spoken language. The student is expected to: (A) listen to proficient, fluent models of oral reading, including selections from classic and contemporary works; (B) analyze oral interpretations of literature for effects on the listener; and (C) analyze the use of aesthetic language for its effects.

TEKS 110.24 (8) The student reads widely for different purposes in varied sources. The student is expected to: (A) read classic and contemporary works; (B) select varied sources such as plays, anthologies, novels, textbooks, poetry, newspapers, manuals, and electronic texts when reading for information or pleasure; (C) read for varied purposes such as to be informed, to be entertained, to appreciate the writer's craft, and to discover models for his/her own writing.

TEKS 110.24 (11) The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts. The student is expected to: (A) offer observations, make connections, react, speculate, interpret, and raise questions in response to texts; (B) interpret text ideas through such varied means as journal writing, discussion, enactment, and media; (C) support responses by referring to relevant aspects of text and his/her own experiences; and (D) connect, compare, and contrast ideas, themes, and issues across text.

TEKS 110.24 (12) The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of texts (genres). The student is expected to: (E) understand literary forms by recognizing and distinguishing among such types of text as myths, fables, tall tales, limericks, plays, biographies, autobiographies, tragedy, and comedy; (H) describe how the author's perspective or point of view affects the text.

TEKS 110.24 (15) The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms. The student is expected to: (A) write to express, discover, record, develop, reflect on ideas, and to problem solve; (D) write to entertain such as to compose humorous poems or short stories; (H) produce cohesive and coherent written texts by organizing ideas, using effective transitions, and choosing precise wording.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

### **Comedy in the Classroom**

Comedy is a universal language. There need be no words for a comedic gesture to incite laughter. The idea that a single word or gesture can make most everyone laugh is something intriguing. The act of laughing is also contagious. One person can get going with a good belly laugh, and it can spread to everyone around. Literature has so many outlets of comedy. I am interested in exploring comedic literature and how to use it in the classroom.

Beginning with nonsense comedy will lead students into other forms of comedy. I would like to explore comedy in children's literature as well as in classic literature. This unit will aim to explore a variety of texts such as plays, short stories, poems, and novels that all contain elements of nonsense humor. Finding ways to expose students to comedy and have it be meaningful to them is something I would enjoy mastering.

We will explore the question, "What is nonsense comedy?" How does an author go about writing something that will be found humorous to his readers? By developing this unit, I am hoping to create a more enjoyable reading experience for all students. I encounter so many students who either hate to read or can never find anything interesting to read. I would like to have the tools in hand to show my students that literature can be fun and there is a whole world of

comedic literature out there that is engaging and captivating. By exploring nonsense comedy, low-level readers will see that not all literature studied in a classroom has to be tragic. There are light-hearted fun things to read. In addition, for the advanced-level readers, studying nonsense comedy is a study of linguistics and logic. These students can be encouraged to analyze literature on a different level.

### **Lewis Carroll**

The life of Lewis Carroll is actually quite different than the life you would expect of a comedic author of one of the world's greatest children's books. To start with, his proper name is Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. Dodgson was born January 27, 1823, as the third in a family of eleven children. His father was an active clergyman in the Anglican Church, who was known very much for his conservative point of view. Dodgson followed in his father's footsteps and became a Reverend himself. However, he always questioned his placement in the church and never felt fully comfortable in this leadership role. The majority of his adult life was spent in a quasi-teaching position at Oxford University, his father's alma mater. He was granted this stay under the premise that he would remain unmarried with the intent to proceed to holy orders. The latter of the two never happened.

In 1862 Dodgson took a rowing trip with three young girls. These were the daughters of Dean Liddell who was his mentor at Oxford. Dodgson had a great love for these girls and a special connection with the youngest, Alice. It was during this rowing trip that he first told the story of a girl named Alice and her underground adventures. Alice was so impressed and excited by the story that she begged him to write it down for her. Over the next year he did just that and changed the title from *Alice's Adventures under Ground* to the more common *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In 1865 the first printing of the book took place and was a grand success. It is here that we first see the name Lewis Carroll. Dodgson decided to use a pseudonym for this work in hopes of keeping his true name separate and unattached. In fact, it is known that whenever someone would ask Dodgson if he was Lewis Carroll, he would deny any relation or association with the name. "This pseudonym was a play on his real name, *Lewis* was the anglicized form of *Ludovicus*, which was the Latin for *Lutwidge*, and *Carroll* being an anglicized version of *Carolus*, the Latin for *Charles*" ("Lewis Carroll," *Wikipedia*).

Other works by Lewis Carroll include *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, *Sylvie and Bruno*, and *The Hunting of the Snark*. In addition to these literary works, Dodgson wrote other articles and works relating to mathematics and logic, one aptly titled *Symbolic Logic*. In all truthfulness Dodgson was a well respected logician and that is where much of his influence came from. In addition to being an accomplished author, Dodgson was also a skilled photographer.

In January of 1898 Dodgson died of bronchitis. Although his life was complicated and sprinkled with controversy in some areas, he will forever be loved and treasured as the man who brought us *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the famous poem "Jabberwocky."

This unit will use *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a teacher read-aloud. Each day the teacher will read a chapter or so of the book and the students will simply listen to the story unfold. This unit is designed to work with Reading/Writing Workshop, as mentioned later, and, therefore, a full study of the book is not needed. A teacher read-aloud of this story allows the students to listen to the words and language without getting fixated on the spelling and decoding of the words. The journal responses for the story will be more related to the story line rather than the semantics.

### **References to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland***

Later in this unit the students will be creating an illusion journal in which they catalog various references they find to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Here I have provided a few references that have occurred to me to help as a starting point in this journey. This section is also meant to illustrate how far and wide this novel has reached.

#### ***Alice Sculpture in New York City's Central Park***

There is a wonderful bronze sculpture in Central Park of New York City depicting Alice and all the characters in the novel. Children are welcome to climb on it and take pictures. Surrounding the sculpture are plaques in the concrete with various quotes from the story. I've been to the sculpture and can say there is something magical about sitting in Alice's lap. A picture and description of the sculpture can be found at

[http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/historical\\_signs/hs\\_historical\\_sign.php?id=6416](http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=6416).

#### ***Alice's Shop***

The shop is located in Oxford as part of the Christ Church College where Carroll was a professor of mathematics. The window and shop is referred to more in the second novel *Through the Looking Glass*. A description of the shop may be found at the following web address:

<http://194.68.145.1/oxford/litera/01/andi.htm>.

#### ***Jurassic Park Movie Reference to the White Rabbit***

In *Jurassic Park* the computer code that Nedry used to take out the security system is referred to as the "White Rabbit Object." This would refer to the idea that once you follow the white rabbit, you will be taken to a different dimension and place, from which returning to your home will be difficult. The audio and video on this clip isn't the clearest; however, if you listen, you will hear Samuel L. Jackson's character refer to the computer virus as the "White Rabbit Object." To view this clip on YouTube click the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Awj5uXn754>.

#### ***Stained Glass at Oxford***

"Some of the characters that Lewis Carroll invented for his Alice in Wonderland stories are featured in this window and gave him his inspiration. Watch Harry Potter carefully and you can glimpse the window in the dining hall of Hogwarts academy" (Barnett). Find the picture at the following link: <http://gallery.nen.gov.uk/image58665-.html>.

#### ***The Matrix Movie Reference to the White Rabbit***

In the movie *The Matrix* there is a reference to following the white rabbit. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice is constantly seeing the white rabbit scurry from place to place. By following him she ends up falling down the rabbit hole and her adventure begins. In *The Matrix* Neo is awakened by his computer. The computer tells him to "follow the white rabbit". When he has visitors at his door he sees that one of the women has a tattoo of a white rabbit on her shoulder and he decides that she is the one to follow. Although no explicit mention is given to Carroll's story, for fans of the novel, it is known where the reference came from. To see this clip of the movie connect to the YouTube video at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ravcpOVEDHo>.

#### **Edward Lear**

The name Edward Lear is synonymous with nonsense limericks. In fact, he and Lewis Carroll are the two most celebrated nonsense writers of English. Most famous for his book *The Owl and the Pussycat*, Edward Lear is one of the foremost authors of nonsense verse. He published several books containing nonsense lyrics such as *Laughable Lyrics*, *Nonsense Alphabets*, *Book of Nonsense*, and *The Scroobious Pip*. A recently published book in an easy to read format that

contains illustrations is titled *Poetry for Young People: Edward Lear*. Born in 1812 as the 20<sup>th</sup> child of Ann and Jeremiah Lear, Lear always had a love of art and drawing. He was first published at the age of 19 with *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae*. He was known to briefly give drawing lessons to Queen Victoria.

In addition to his artwork, Lear had a fascination with words and their sound. He loved inventing words for the sake of a challenge. Although most lyrics are five lines, Lear's varied in length. It is thought that he wrote as many lines as would fit beneath the illustrated picture, not bothering with traditional poetic rules and norms. One of his most recognizable poems is titled *The Scroobious Pip*, completed posthumously in 1952. Clearly relying on the use of invented words, the poem tells the story of the scroobious pip and his encounter with many other creatures who cannot discern what type of creature he is. His only response is "Chippetty Flip; Flippety Chip;/ My only name is the Scroobius Pip" (Edward Lear Home Page, 2008). Edward Lear's limericks do not have the traditional punch line of most jokes. "They are nonsensical because of their circularity, their absurdity, their misappropriations, and neologisms, and their parody of logic, but not because of the form itself" ("Literary Nonsense," *Wikipedia*).

A traditional limerick is defined by *Dictionary.com* as "a kind of humorous verse of five lines, in which the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme with each other, and the third and fourth lines, which are shorter, form a rhymed couplet." This definition should be presented to students as the formal way of writing a limerick. But it should also be noted that Lear went against this tradition. One of Lear's common works is *A Book of Nonsense*, published in 1846. The book is full of four line limericks with corresponding illustrations. There are over one hundred limericks each with the same pattern. The first one demonstrates the rhyming and simple pattern of all that follow:

There was an Old Man with a beard,  
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!-  
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,  
Have all built their nests in my beard!' (Lear, *Complete 3*)

An activity for the students is to have each student write his or her own limericks. An illustration can be provided for inspiration or the student can draw a totally new illustration to accompany the limerick. Limerick writing is a simple way to get students writing and thinking about nonsense comedy in relation to this unit. Middle school students are especially adept at coming up with nonsense. This will be one of the lessons included later in this unit. As an additional writing activity, the students can write nonsense stories, such as Lear's "The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World" or "The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple." These stories are more the length of a short story and incorporate elements of nonsense, such as the names of the creatures, while still maintaining enough logic to keep the reader engaged. Both of these stories can be found in *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*. A very popular Lear addition is "Nonsense Alphabets." Here Lear gives a short four-line explanation of each letter of the alphabet which in turn become limericks in and of themselves. Again asking the students to create their own nonsense alphabet allows the students to embrace the idea of nonsense literature while challenging them to be creative and original.

Using Lear's work as a study in verse and in language can be a very rewarding task. His ability to use words in various contexts and in fact to invent words that seem very logical to the common eye is something Lear crafted carefully. To study Lear means to study both his words and his images. He was skilled at creating nonsense images that went along with his verse. Reading Lear's verse and viewing his art is a journey into another space and time, one that we often don't get to travel reading contemporary literature.

## Dr. Seuss

Although Dr. Seuss was not from the original era of the Nonsense School, his work was undoubtedly influenced by this thought. His work is very patterned and structured yet incorporates many invented words that are his trademark, i.e. *sneetches*, *lorax*, and *wocket*. Much like Carroll, his work is loved by children and has, in fact, shaped our thought of what children's literature should be. Unlike Carroll's work, Seuss's work was intended for younger children to read independently. Many young children are known to have learned to read using Dr. Seuss books. Dr. Seuss is many times associated with the idea of nonsense and the invented lyric. However, much like Carroll's work, as a whole piece, it makes sense and tells a story. That is what we love about both of these authors.

Theodor Seuss Geisel was born in March of 1904 to a father who loved animals and a mother who loved books. His German family owned a brewery which caused problems for Geisel as a young boy because other kids would make fun of him. Geisel's first love was drawing. He recognized that this brought him happiness and he felt quite good at it. Interestingly, he only took one art class and dropped out before completing the course. The art teacher said he was not following the rules of art and, therefore, was not a good artist. Geisel enjoyed breaking the rules and he was very much known for his exaggerated depictions of various animals and creatures. He spent four years at Dartmouth and was the editor in chief of the school newspaper. He contributed many comics to the paper during his time there. However, one night he was caught throwing a party with alcohol and was asked to resign as editor due to violating the prohibition law. It was at this time that he began using the pseudonym Dr. Seuss so he could still get his work published. Later he would use this name for all his children's books as well as the name Theo LeSieg for works he wrote but didn't illustrate ("[Dr. Seuss](#)," *Wikipedia*).

Geisel did attend Lincoln College at Oxford with intentions to earn a Ph.D. in literature. He never did complete those plans and moved back with his parents. He sent in his cartoons to the *Saturday Evening Post*. Much to his surprise he received a reply and a check for twenty-five dollars for each of his cartoon illustrations. It was then that Geisel knew exactly what he wanted to do. Although his published work received some criticism for being unconventional, it was the response of a twelve year old boy that inspired him to pursue his dreams. The boy simply wanted an autograph, but to Geisel this meant the world to him because it showed that his work was loved by children.

Geisel went on to write children's books and is best known for these, though he wrote and illustrated numerous political cartoons and advertisements. Some of Geisel's best known works include *The Cat in the Hat*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*, and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*.

An interesting fact about Geisel can be described in the following quote from Wikipedia.

In May 1954, [Life](#) magazine published a report on [illiteracy](#) among school children, which concluded that children were not learning to read because their books were boring. Accordingly, Seuss' publisher made up a list of 400 words he felt were important and asked Dr. Seuss to cut the list to 250 words and write a book using only those words. Nine months later, Seuss, using 236 of the words given to him, completed [The Cat in the Hat](#). This book was a *tour de force*—it retained the drawing style, verse rhythms, and all the imaginative power of Seuss' earlier works, but because of its simplified vocabulary could be read by beginning readers. ("[Dr. Seuss](#)," *Wikipedia*)

## Shel Silverstein

Shel Silverstein is best known for his published books of poetry for children. His most read titles include *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *A Light in the Attic*, and *Falling Up*. One of the glaring

differences with Silverstein is that his work consists mainly of poetry and not of novels, unlike the other authors in this unit. Although he did write a couple of short books, they do not contain nonsense verse and, therefore, will not be a focus of study for this unit.

Silverstein, who was born in 1932, has a background which is quite varied and unusual. He got his start writing jokes and cartoons for *Playboy* magazine. It wasn't until later in his career that he decided to write for children. In addition to his well known children's books, Silverstein also wrote scores for several motion pictures and wrote several albums.

Silverstein's poems do not contain traditional writing for what most consider appropriate for children. "Because of the controversial subjects in Silverstein's writing for children, he has not received many prizes for children's literature" (MacDonald, 6). It's not that his work is necessarily vulgar or inappropriate; it is merely that his work has underlying themes of disillusion with parents, authority, school and other areas where children are supposed to do what they are told because they are told to.

An interesting fact about *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic* is that more than twenty years after publication the books still remain only in hardback, almost as if it is meant to be a treasured classic passed from generation to generation and heralded on the bookshelf as an important piece of literature.

A common theme found in both works of Shel Silverstein and Roald Dahl is the idea of criticism of adults and the notion of siding with children. Later in this unit Dahl's work will be explored, but I am specifically referring to the use of adults as mean, controlling, and somewhat ineffective in the character's mind. These situations can be found in *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. In Silverstein's poem he portrays adults many times as the opposite of fun. Such poems from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* that encircle this theme are: "I'm Making a List," "Listen to the Mustn'ts," and "Stonetelling."

Silverstein has a few references to both Carroll and Lear in some of his poems. He makes reference to *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* in one poem titled, "Alice." It is a six-line poem that refers to the situation in which Alice is drinking from a bottle which isn't labeled poison and also eating a cake of unknown contents. His main theme is that you never know what can happen unless you try. Alice is trying the various items and as a result she gets bigger and smaller and unexpected things happen. "Alice's willingness to undertake the adventure, to change, is contrasted in Silverstein's poem with those who are too timid or perhaps too complacent to try anything new" (MacDonald 53). In other of Silverstein's poems it is apparent that the children have no connection to the parents and, therefore, they are dispensable, much like the lack of connection Alice has with her parents. The poem "How Not to Have to Dry the Dishes" from *A Light in the Attic* refers to "they" as the oppressors of the children. This unidentified "they" can be traced back to Edward Lear's limericks in which he often referred to "they" as the authorities over the children who insist that the children do the chores and act justly (MacDonald 91). In some of Silverstein's poems he uses what some could classify as limericks. They are four to eight lines long and usually describe weird people and strange happenings in a silly manner. Silverstein can also be linked to Dr. Seuss in his use of nonsense words and rhyme. For instance, the poem "The Gnome, the Gnat and the Gnu," from *Falling Up*, celebrates the silent *g* by using it in as many forms as possible.

Although Shel Silverstein is not one of the authors that is directly connected to nonsense literature, his work does exemplify the idea of seemingly random thoughts placed strategically together. His work can be used easily in a unit of this topic because his poems are short and quick to reference. In addition, he has the added element of illustration, much like Edward Lear's limericks. This adds a second dimension to his work. This unit does not suggest that Silverstein's

work is a glaring example of nonsense literature; it simply suggests that his works add a nice addition to the study in a way that is quiet and unobtrusive.

### **Roald Dahl**

Roald Dahl is a loved children's author. What may not be known to many is that he is also a writer of adult short stories often referred to as macabre. It is perplexing how an author can write frightening short stories for adults and then turn and write humorous novels for children. No matter the way, Dahl was able to do just that. Dahl was born in Wales in 1916 but both parents were from Norway. In many ways he felt a stronger connection to Norway than to England. To Dahl's dismay and that of his mother, the traditional English school used corporal punishment to discipline the children. This was sure to have an influence on Dahl to develop distaste for authority. Many of Dahl's children's books look at authority as a figure to be reckoned with and not one to respect. There are many aspects of Dahl's life that would surprise his readers. From living in East Africa to surviving a plane crash, he certainly had an affinity for adventure.

All of Dahl's children's books offer some form of fantasy. However, for this unit we are focusing on the nonsense element in literature. Dahl certainly offers a bit of that as well. The most obvious of these is *The BFG* published in 1982. When the BFG speaks he often mixes words and incorrectly uses grammar. The result is quite nonsensical. Dahl's other works, though not absolutely considered nonsense, do incorporate elements of this literary style. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* has the Oompa-Loompas whose form of communication is through whimsical song which is meant to be commentary on the behavior of the young guests. *James and the Giant Peach* asks the reader to believe that a peach can grow the size of a tree, house gigantic insects, and ultimately become an airship that takes the characters on a trans-Atlantic journey.

In the end Dahl isn't considered one of the foremost authors of nonsense literature. However, his work does exhibit hints of the style and certainly can be used as an addition to the study of this unit.

### **Reading/Writing Workshop**

This unit is designed to be used with reading/writing workshop in grades six to eight. This method of teaching uses independent choice as its main focus for encouraging young readers. The idea with workshop is to teach a small mini lesson, then encourage the students to go off for independent reading. During that time the students will be reading a novel of choice and applying the skill just learned in the mini lesson. The teacher uses this time to conduct on-on-one conferences. At this time the teacher and student discuss the reading, and work through any struggles the student may be having. The writing workshop portion is conducted much the same, except the students are writing in notebooks instead of reading. The premise of this program is that when students are given independent choice for reading and writing, it becomes less of a task or requirement and more of a choice on the student's part.

Using *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in this type of setting will allow students to see that comedy in literature does exist and is quite interesting. Ideally, there will be several copies of Carroll's work in the classroom for students to refer to. Inexpensive novels may be found at Dover Publishing Company. Refer to the references page of this unit for more information.

Because Workshop is designed to allow independent choice in reading and writing, a full class study of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is not done. However, the teacher will present the entire text to the class as a read-aloud. In addition, small lessons on limerick, nonsense authors, and creative writing will be done to tie the unit together. The students will have full choice to read any of the texts or works by the authors studied in this unit. The students may, in fact, have their first exposure to these authors through the study of this unit.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this unit is to study Nonsense literature and the authors who contributed to the style. Nonsense literature forces the reader to look beyond the printed word and examine the meaning of the language. The main focus of study is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. By reading this story, students will not only be exposed to a great piece of literature but also have the background knowledge to understand various aspects and references to this text in all other forms. The authors studied include Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, and Roald Dahl. Each of the authors has contributed in some way to the genre of Nonsense literature. By studying the works of these authors the reader can get a full understanding of this comedic style of writing. Beyond any other objective, this unit strives to bring humor into the classroom. To allow students to see that literature can be funny and entertaining is a lesson that won't soon be forgotten.

## LESSON PLANS

### Lesson 1: "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

**Objective:** To introduce students to the Nonsense school of literature and expose them to one of its most famous poems. (TEKS 110.24 (8)).

**Purpose:** By reading the poem without any prior explanation, the students will have an opportunity to decipher the meaning on their own accord.

**Materials:** "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

**Activity:** Without any background or explanation, the students will read the poem and attempt to decipher and explain its meaning. It will lead into an introduction and subsequent unit of Nonsense verse specifically focusing on Lewis Carroll. The teacher will describe what Nonsense literature is and how it has affected other genres of literature. A brief discussion of the authors and works mentioned in this unit will take place. The purpose is to give a general overview of Nonsense literature and the authors who have contributed to the style.

**Assessment:** Students will have small group discussions of what they interpreted the poem to mean. Then we will have a whole class discussion with the teacher giving commonly known interpretations of the poem.

### Lesson 2: Limericks and Edward Lear

**Objective:** Students will read, interpret and write limericks. (TEKS 110.24 (12), TEKS 110.24 (15)).

**Purpose:** The limerick is for the most part an unused part of literature in the classroom. However, with the subject of this unit being Nonsense, a study of limerick is essential. Studying limerick is also a great way to tie in poetry to the lesson.

**Materials:** *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, or any book containing limericks and stories by Edward Lear. Prints of his limericks are also acceptable.

**Activity:** Students will be shown several limericks from Edward Lear. A brief discussion of limerick and interpretation of Lear's limericks will be had. The students will then be asked to write a few original limericks corresponding to some of Lear's illustrations. An extension of this activity is to have students write original short stories in the form of Nonsense using Lear's work as a guide.

**Assessment:** Students will be assessed on following the format of limerick and connecting the subject to an illustration from Lear. If students wrote short stories, they too will be assessed on use of invented word along with the story's use of created character and interest to the reader.

### **Lesson 3: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**

**Objective:** To understand Nonsense literature from one of the foremost authors of the genre. (TEKS 110.24 (1), TEKS 110.24 (3)).

**Purpose:** This story has far reaching influences on literature, media and pop culture. By reading the story, students will have the foundation of having read a timeless tale that is rich in linguistics and logic.

**Materials:**

*The Annotated Alice* by Lewis Carroll.

Various copies of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (Having several versions allows the students to see different interpretations in illustrations.)

**Activity:** This will be the culminating lesson in this unit. A complete teacher read-aloud of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* will be done. The teacher can decide how much time to devote to the reading each day. While the read-aloud takes place, the teacher and student can discuss various aspects of the story including vocabulary, symbolism, political commentary, dream analysis, and fairy tales/fantasy. Discussion and insight into the story can be taken from the notes in the margins of *The Annotated Alice*. A special emphasis should be placed on the meaning of Nonsense literature and how it is exemplified in this story. Journal writing and response after each read-aloud will be assigned. Keeping with the free topic encouraged by Workshop, a specific response will not be required. The students will only be asked to write any thoughts and a reaction to the day's reading.

**Assessment:** The class discussions of the book will act as assessment. Engagement and commentary from the students is what is desired.

### **Lesson 4: Writers Notebook and Illusion Notebook**

**Objective:** Allow students to explore and discover references to the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (TEKS 110.24 (11), TEKS 110.24 (15)).

**Purpose:** The more students see various references and mentions of the story, the more they will see how large an impact this novel has had on our society in all aspects.

**Materials:** One spiral notebook.

**Activity:** Students will write down any mention or reference to an Alice in Wonderland character or event. As students read novels, watch TV, go to the movies or listen to the radio, they will be listening and looking for something familiar from the novel. This activity should take place for a set amount of time, perhaps the duration of the study of the book with an additional two weeks afterwards. At the end of the set time students will review their notebook and share with the peers. The teacher can even make a game or challenge of it to see which student can find the most references within the designated time. In addition to Alice references, students will write daily in the notebooks with thoughts, comments, and questions about the story. This should take place during and after the teacher read-aloud. An additional writing activity is to allow students to write an extended story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. After the story has been completed, students can write an additional chapter to the story or begin a new story and adventure for Alice.

**Assessment:** The teacher will review the notebooks periodically with a final assessment at the end. The hope is that students will become more aware of the impact this story has had on other media in our society. Students will also become more proficient writers by writing and responding in the notebook daily.

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## Supplemental Resources

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