

# Alice's aggression



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The fantasy world of “ Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” mimics reality, a world where as people mature from children to adults, they become more verbally aggressive. In the real world, adults often grow more confident as they grow older and more mature. They become wiser and learn some lessons in life. Adults also gain a mastery of their language and learn to assert themselves through language. This is what happens in Wonderland as Alice matures. As Alice’s confidence in her verbal abilities soars, so does her verbal aggressiveness. The adults in Wonderland (the king and queen) are extremely hostile and use aggressive language to assert their power and control over the other characters. The king and queen, in particular, use threats of physical violence to display aggression. Their constant cries of “ Off with her head!” and “ I’ll have you executed,” make the other characters tremble with fear. In fact, the king and queen’s authority relies on this ability to strike fear into the others. The king and queen also use aggressive tones in their voice and aggressive body language to strengthen the power of their speech. In the trial chapter, the king’s words are often delivered “ angrily” or “ sharply.” The queen is able to strike fear into the Hatter simply by staring hard at him (379). However, the king and queen are only powerful when the other characters take their threats of violence seriously. The cook in the trial undermines the king’s power because she doesn’t fear him. The cook is called as a witness and the king demands that she give her evidence. The cook replies, “ Shan’t,” which causes the king much anxiety and gives him a “ melancholy air” (381). The white rabbit also does not seem to fear the king. The rabbit interrupts the king’s speech and corrects his choice of words. This undermines the king’s verbal authority and causes him to second-guess himself. The rabbit corrects the king “ in a very respectful

tone,” but here also, body language plays a very important role. The rabbit’s delivery, while respectful in tone, includes “ frowning and making faces at him as he spoke” (382). The realization that the king’s threats are idle, coupled with the rabbit’s confidence in his own linguistic ability, give him the confidence to stand up to the king. Alice matures in Wonderland and becomes less of an “ insider” by learning the nuances of the language spoken there. This leads her to become more confident in her ability to communicate. She learns to assert herself through language and becomes more verbally aggressive in order to establish her own power. This is what enables Alice to resist the queen. Although Alice is also astute enough to realize that the king and queen’s threats of violence are not real, it is her confidence in her ability to communicate which gives Alice the courage to speak up and oppose the queen. This newfound courage, coupled with Alice’s physical growth, spurs her to defy authority. Yet, has Alice’s confidence truly soared, or is her verbal aggressiveness merely learned behavior? Alice seems to be imitating the example set before her by the other aggressive characters. Alice has adapted to the verbally aggressive ways of Wonderland for the sake of survival. Despite her large size and her confident language abilities, Alice is still a child at heart. And children, as every parent knows, are apt to defy authority every now and then. When Alice childishly declares to the court that they are “ nothing but a pack of cards,” the pack jumps upon her as if to attack her (384). And although Alice is much larger than all of them, she still “ gave a little scream, half of fright, half of anger” (384). The other characters still hold authority over Alice, as she is afraid of them. But Alice may have a good reason to be afraid, as this is the first time any of the characters has used physical violence against her,

not just verbal aggressiveness. Because of this, I believe that it is Alice who frees herself from Wonderland to escape the threat of physical harm. She returns to the safe world of childhood where rules still exist to help children feel secure and (most) people don't act aggressively until they grow up.

Sources: Carroll, Lewis, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." A Custom Edition of Classics of Children's Literature, Fourth Edition. Ed. John W. Griffith and Charles H. Frey. Bloomington: Prentice-Hall, 1996, 333-385.