



ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 49 minutes

Starring: Mia Wasikowska as Alice, Johnny Depp as Mad Hatter, Helena Bonham Carter as Red Queen, Anne Hathaway as White Queen, Matt Lucas as Tweedles, Crispin Glover as Stayne, the Knave of Hearts

Director: Tim Burton

Themes: Dreaming big, fulfilling a calling, tackling impossible tasks, not letting others run your life, good vs. evil, courage, loyalty, mercy, nonconformity

Cautions: Fantasy violence, murderous threats and battle scenes. A wild animal bloodies Alice after having its eyeball plucked out. Another mythical beast is decapitated (a sip of its blood from a vial sends Alice home). Other grotesque moments include severed fingers added to a potion and gray, nondescript heads bobbing in a moat. Stayne comes onto Alice, but is rebuffed. A caterpillar smokes a hookah. Language includes an exclamation of “good lord” and several uses of the British profanity “bloody.”



Story Summary

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* books never resonated with Tim Burton. In his opinion, they simply followed a lost girl as she encountered one odd character after another. So when Burton got the chance to direct his own interpretation of the story, he insisted on framing Alice's journey differently in order to give audiences a stronger emotional connection.

Here, Alice Kingsleigh is a 19-year-old dreamer chafing at the expectations of family, friends and 19th century Victorian society. She misses her late father, a visionary businessman who would patiently listen to his 6-year-old daughter describe a recurring dream about a dark hole, a grinning cat and a blue caterpillar. These days, however, most of Alice's dreaming is done *for* her. For example, she arrives at a formal garden party, unaware that she's the guest of honor about to receive a prearranged marriage proposal from a stuffy young lord. Ugh! Just as he pops the question and all eyes turn to her, Alice glimpses a white rabbit carrying a pocket watch, chases it into the woods and tumbles into a seemingly bottomless burrow.

Upon landing in a room lined with locked doors, Alice must shrink, grow and shrink again in order to enter Underland, a lush world inhabited by talking flowers, animals and insects, including a caterpillar who presides over a sacred scroll. The scroll is a pictorial calendar with an important date looming: Frabjous Day. That's when Underland's savior will use the vorpal sword to slay the Jabberwocky and end the Red Queen's oppressive reign. That champion is Alice Kingsleigh ... or is it?

Alice insists she's not the slaying

type, and tries in vain to awaken from this bizarre dream. Out of nowhere, armed guards seize her new friends, and a hulking, doglike beast called the Bandersnatch chases Alice, leaving deep claw marks in her arm before she manages to escape. Amid all the commotion, the prophetic scroll falls into the hands of the Red Queen's scheming aide, Stayne, who convinces the monarch to hunt down the girl prophesied to undo them.

Stayne's search leads to a forest tea party that has, like much of the outlying kingdom, gone to wrack and ruin. It's hosted by the Mad Hatter, a crazed patriot hiding the shrunken Alice in a teapot until the coast is clear. Once alone, the kind Hatter—playfully wacky and poetic, yet prone to funks during which he slips into a choleric brogue—takes the girl for a walk. He explains the darkness in Underland and how Alice can help them restore the noble White Queen to her throne. But the haberdasher's history lesson is cut short. As the evil queen's guards close in, the Hatter flings miniaturized Alice to safety and gives himself up.

Suddenly, Alice's desire to return home is replaced by a sense of purpose: rescue the Hatter. Once behind the castle walls, she returns to normal size ... and then some. Alice finds the charmingly demented Hatter, but can't free him. Instead, armed with the eye of the Bandersnatch, Alice ventures into the beast's lair and makes peace with it in order to retrieve the vorpal sword and take it to the White Queen. The Hatter and his comrades brace



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for their beheading, only to be emancipated to rise up against the Red Queen. Still, the wicked ruler's deadliest weapon, the fire-breathing Jabberwocky, threatens to tip the scales.

All eyes turn to Alice. "You cannot live your life to please others," the White Queen warns, all the while hopeful that Alice will accept the challenge. "The choice must be yours, because when you step out to face that creature, you will step out alone." Torn, Alice does step out, vorpal sword in hand, and lops off the dragon's head. Order is restored to Underland. Sweet farewells ensue, and Alice returns to London self-assured enough to chart her own course.

Before You Watch

At one point the Hatter quotes from Lewis Carroll's classic poem *Jabberwocky*. You might enjoy reading that work together before watching the film. Look for it online at jabberwocky.com/carroll/jabber/jabberwocky.html.

Bible Bookmarks 1 Sam. 17:55-18:9; 1 Kings 12:1-15; Dan. 3, 5:18-20; Matt. 17:20; Luke 1:26-38; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Rom. 6:19-23; Gal. 5:22-26; Eph. 5:25-33, 6:10-18; Col. 3:19

Talking Points

1 If you could visit the vivid world of Underland, where would you spend most of your time exploring, and with which of the locals? Why?

2 Do you think Hamish would have been a good husband for Alice? Why or why not? (Read about God's desire for husbands in Col. 3:19, Eph. 5:25-33.) How did you feel when he said, "It would be best to keep your visions to yourself. When in doubt, remain silent."? Do you feel free to share *your* dreams?

3 How do you think the room full of locked doors—including Alice's frustration at being either too big or too small to pass through—symbolizes the awkwardness of adolescence? Then ask your teen, "Is there a door you need to walk through that's forcing you to change in uncomfortable ways?" Prepare to spend time exploring that.

4 What do you think of Alice's father's advice, "The only way to achieve the impossible is to believe it *is* possible." Discuss accomplishing the seemingly impossible on a supernatural level (Matt. 17:20; Luke 1:26-38).

5 After meeting Absolom, our heroine apologizes for being "the wrong Alice," feeling (as she did at her engagement party) unable to live up to others' expectations of her. Ask your teen, "Can you relate to Alice's frustration?" If the answer is yes, be willing to ask, "Have I said or done anything to contribute to that?" Encourage honesty and respect, perhaps alluding to similar tension you felt as a teen.

6 Stayne asks the Red Queen, "Your majesty, is it not better to be feared than loved?" What do you think, and why? Consider how biblical rulers such as Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3, 5:18-20); David (1 Sam. 17:55-18:9) and Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1-15) might have answered that question.

7 The Hatter tells Alice sadly, "You're not the same as you were before. You were much more *muchier*. You've lost your muchness. ... Something's missing." What did he mean? Just as Paul warned the early church in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Romans 6:19-23, we Christians can lose our spiritual "muchness" at times by forgetting who we are and failing to live in the Spirit. Has that ever happened to you? Read Galatians 5:22-26 to see how our muchness should look to others.

8 Members of the bulbous-headed Red Queen's court secretly wore prosthetics of pronounced body parts. Why do you think they did that? Then ask, "How do people in our culture do essentially the same thing?"

9 What changed Alice's mind and turned her into a dynamic participant in Underland's grand adventure? Why is it critical that a person catch God's unique, heroic vision for his or her own life rather than simply being *told* who they are or what they should become? Has God called you to slay a Jabberwocky? What is it?

10 Absolom tells Alice, "The vorpal sword knows what it wants. All you have to do is hold onto it." Similarly, we're not expected to vanquish evil ourselves, but simply hang onto Christ as we step with Him into the unknown (Eph. 6:10-18, 2 Cor. 12:9-10). Have you ever experienced a personal victory you knew was God's doing, not yours?

Follow-Up Activity

Before Alice could confidently face the Jabberwocky, she needed to remind herself of her identity in the context of family. If you've never done so, construct a family tree together. It can be an informal chart, or you can use any number of tools available online. Go back as far as you can. Help your teen see that he or she is part of something much bigger than they realize, and that the heroic decisions they make in life—large and small—will strengthen your family's legacy.

Just for Fun

Making a period film totally authentic is no easy task. In the opening scene, Alice's father dreams of establishing trading posts in Rangoon, Bangkok and Jakarta. But in the 1800s, Jakarta was known as Batavia. Renamed Djakarta in 1942, the Indonesian capitol didn't become Jakarta until 1972. Oops! —by Bob Smithouser

