

**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lesson Three**

Level: Grades 6-12

Most Victorian books for children were meant to teach a serious lesson. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll changed all that. The book's humor, lack of a moral, and respect for its child heroine were refreshingly different and helped make it a huge success. Carroll included several parodies in *Alice*. Parodies are humorous poems written in the style of serious poems or songs by other writers. In chapter seven, The Mad Hatter recites "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat" a parody of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

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**Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat** by Lewis Carroll

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!  
How I wonder what you're at!

Up above the world you fly,  
Like a tea tray in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!  
How I wonder what you're at!



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Alice recites the parody poem "Father William" to the Caterpillar in chapter 5. "Father William" was inspired by "The Old Man's Comforts And How He Gained Them" by Robert Southey. This was the poem that inspired Lewis Carroll's parody poem "Father William." Read the two poems and then answer these questions. What do you think Robert Southey's poem's moral or lesson might be? How is Carroll's version similar to Southey's poem? How are they different? Does Carroll's version have a moral or message?

**Father William** by Lewis Carroll

'You are old, father William,' the young man said,  
'And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly stand on your head -  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?'

'In my youth,' father William replied to his son,  
'I feared it would injure the brain;  
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,  
Why, I do it again and again.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'as I mentioned before,  
And have grown most uncommonly fat;  
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door -  
Pray, what is the reason of that?'

'In my youth,' said the sage, as he shook his grey  
locks, 'I kept all my limbs very supple  
By the use of this ointment - one shilling the box -  
Allow me to sell you a couple.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'and your jaws are  
too weak  
For anything tougher than suet;  
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and  
the beak -  
Pray, how did you manage to do it?'

'In my youth,' said his father, 'I took to the law,  
And argued each case with my wife;  
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my  
jaw, Has lasted the rest of my life.'

'You are old,' said the youth; one would hardly suppose  
That your eye was as steady as ever;  
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose -  
What made you so awfully clever?'

'I have answered three questions, and that is enough,'  
Said his father; 'don't give yourself airs!  
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?  
Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!'

'That is not said right,' said the Caterpillar.  
'Not quite right, I'm afraid,' said Alice timidly;  
'some of the words have got altered.'  
'It is wrong from beginning to end,'  
said the Caterpillar decidedly, and  
there was silence for some minutes.



## **The Old Man's Comforts And How He Gained Them**

by Robert Southey

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,  
The few locks which are left you are grey;  
You are hale, Father William, a hearty old man,  
Now tell me the reason I pray.

In the days of my youth, Father William replied,  
I remember'd that youth would fly fast,  
And abused not my health and my vigour at first  
That I never might need them at last.

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,  
And pleasures with youth pass away,  
And yet you lament not the days that are gone,  
Now tell me the reason I pray.

In the days of my youth, Father William replied,  
I remember'd that youth could not last;  
I thought of the future whatever I did,  
That I never might grieve for the past.

You are old, Father William, the young man cried,  
And life must be hastening away;  
You are chearful, and love to converse upon death!  
Now tell me the reason I pray.

I am chearful, young man, Father William replied,  
Let the cause thy attention engage;  
In the days of my youth I remember'd my God!  
And He hath not forgotten my age.

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### **Interested in knowing more about Victorian children's books?**

The Rosenbach has a great example in its collection called *Little Princes: Anecdotes of illustrious children of all ages and countries*. You can read about it more here:

<https://rosenbach.org/blog/royal-record/>