

CHAPTER 11

the act of reading | dialogue with the text

What is **DIALOGUE**? What is a **TEXT**?

In every act of reading, you engage in a **DIALOGUE** with the **TEXT**.

- In **DIALOGUE** we talk *with* someone or something. When you talk with your friend, you have a **DIALOGUE**. When you talk with your parents, you have a **DIALOGUE**. When you talk with your dog, you have a **DIALOGUE**!

dialogue =

from the Greek: *dialogos*

dia = two

logos = word

- How do we define a **TEXT**?

Most of us think of a **TEXT** as a book. A **TEXT** can also be anything else we see or hear. We talk about a *movie* as a **TEXT**. We can talk about a song as a **TEXT**. We can also talk about a **TEXT** as *anything* we choose to look at or think about.

- If we go to the Grand Canyon, and we talk about what we see, we can think of the Grand Canyon as a **TEXT** we analyze.
- If you look at a picture, a photograph, an advertisement, you can think about those as **TEXTS** that you analyze.
- Even if we think about an idea, like love, we can look at love as a **TEXT** we analyze, as Diane Ackerman does in “Modern Love.”

When you read, you talk with a book, you
have a dialogue with that book?

yes!

the *text* talks to you
you talk to the *text*

the *text* talks *with* you
you talk *with* the *text*

from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*¹

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice "without pictures or conversation?"

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There was nothing so VERY remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so VERY much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!" (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually TOOK A WATCH OUT OF ITS WAISTCOAT-POCKET, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.

Lewis Carroll
Alice in Wonderland

¹In **fiction**, or **imaginative writing**, the author is free to abandon reality and write using only his or her imagination. A **fiction** will usually tell a story.

When you read *Alice in Wonderland*, you just about hear the **TEXT**, the book, talk to you, telling you all about Alice and her lazy afternoon with her sister just before she falls down that famous rabbit hole that begins her great adventures. And what do you say back to the text, to the book? Read this opening paragraph from *Alice in Wonderland* again, then have a dialogue with this text. What are all the thoughts you have while reading this text? Write them down, whatever they are. There are no wrong answers. We'll give you an example, writing down some of the ideas we have while reading this text.

I can picture Alice sitting by a riverbank, stretched out on the grass under a tree, while her sister sits beside her. It looks very inviting. I wouldn't get bored. I'd just take a nap. But Alice got bored. Even her sister's book bored her because it didn't have any pictures or conversation in it. If I were bored, I'd just lie back in the sunshine and take a nice long nap. But Alice isn't just bored. She looks around for something to do. Something will happen to Alice, and I want to read on. Who knows? Maybe if I took a nap I would dream the whole book of Alice in Wonderland!

See? When we read, we listen to the book, and we talk with the book. We hear what the text says to us, and we think about that. That's our dialogue with the text. Most often, that dialogue doesn't take place out loud, it takes place silently, in our thoughts. When we see a movie, we have a dialogue with that film. We think about it. When we see something beautiful, the ocean, a great mountain, we take it in, and we think about it, and we have a dialogue with it. When we read a good book, we think about it. That's our dialogue with the text. The text is alive! When you read, you read a living language that speaks to you.

In your dialogue with this excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland*, think especially about what images strike you. What images do you remember from the text? Perhaps some images seem particularly amusing or funny. Have your own dream-images ever been anything like the images in *Alice*? You might also think about other books you have read that *Alice* reminds you of. Have you ever read anything like *Alice in Wonderland*?

analysis

What is **ANALYSIS**?

What can **ANALYSIS** do for us?

Once we have a dialogue with a text, we are ready to **ANALYZE** that text. That **ANALYSIS** will help us to form a **THESIS**, which will lead us to write a well-formed essay.

from dialogue —————> to analysis

THINKING about the text *is* ANALYSIS

- **ANALYSIS** is all about thinking. And, of course, how do we think? We think in words, we think in language, and we think in images.
- When we **ANALYZE** something, we take it apart, we look at it, we think about it.

When you *think about* what to wear today, you **ANALYZE** your wardrobe.

- What clothes fit the season?
- What colors would you like to wear today?
- What pants or skirt might go with what shirt or top?
- What shoes would look the best?

When you *think about* whom you like and whom you don't like, you **ANALYZE** your friends.

- One friend might be smart but not be a nice person.
- Another friend might be fun but not be so smart.
- Another friend might like the things you like. You have a lot in common.
- Another friend might be okay, but their family is terrific.
- Another friend might be a little dangerous in their impulses. It might be good to be careful.
- Another friend might be a bad gossip, spreading bad impressions.

When you *think about* that girl/guy you met last night, you **ANALYZE** your love life.

- You might like someone, but they're not available.
- You might like someone, but you don't know if they like you.
- You might like someone who has given you signs they like you.
- You might like someone, but your best friend doesn't have a good feeling about it.

When you *think about* your life, you **ANALYZE** your life.

- What should you pick as a major?
- What kind of career do you want?
- Should you get married? Have kids?
- How can you realize your goals?
- How can you best understand your parents or your family?
- How can you heal the argument you had with your brother?

When you think about why your car won't start, you **ANALYZE** your car.

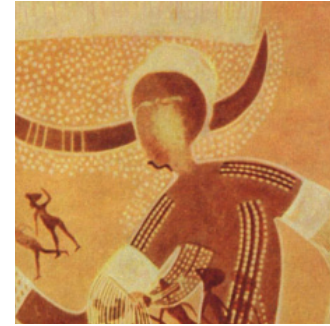
Your car won't start. To **ANALYZE** the problem, we take the car apart. We take out the alternator. We look at it. It's ok. We take out the starter motor. We look at it. It's ok. We take out the ignition system. Ah. It got cracked. In this case, we won't write an essay. We'll fix the car. We'll replace the ignition system.

Chapter Review: Dialogue with the Text

In **DIALOGUE** we talk *with* someone or something.

A **TEXT** can be anything we see or hear. It can also be anything we choose to look at or think about.

ANALYSIS is all about thinking. We think in words, we think in language, and we think in images. When we **ANALYZE** something, we take it apart, we look at it, we think about it.



Exercises for Chapter 11:

I. YOUR THOUGHTS

- a. This selection from *Alice in Wonderland* is the first piece of **imaginative** literature we have read so far. It's clearly not realistic—unless you have seen a rabbit somewhere at some time pulling a watch out of its pocket. The essays we have read so far, by N. Scott Momaday, Jack London, and Diane Ackerman, we call *expository writing*. We call *Alice in Wonderland* imaginative writing, or **fiction**. Do you prefer one or the other, expository writing or fiction? Or do you like both equally? Write a paragraph in which you express your feelings about these two kinds of writing.

- b. Imagine that, like Alice, you sit by a riverbank. Imagine that a white rabbit stops right in front of you, takes a watch out of its waistcoat pocket and looks at the time. Imagine that the rabbit turns to you and says, "Oh, no. I'm late."
 1. How might you interpret this **image** of the white rabbit and his pocket watch? What might you say that it means?

 2. Write out a dialogue you might have with this strange white rabbit.



II. LEWIS CARROLL'S ART

a. Each of the following from the *Alice in Wonderland* selection could be a separate sentence. Write down the **SIMPLE SUBJECT** and **SIMPLE PREDICATE** of each sentence.

1. Alice was getting very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

2. Once of twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

3. It had no pictures or conversation in it. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

4. Suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

5. She ought to have wondered at this _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

6. I shall be late! _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

7. The Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat pocket. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

8 Alice started to her feet. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

9. It flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat pocket or a watch to take out of it. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**

10. She ran across the field. _____
SUBJECT **PREDICATE**



b. Adjectives

In the brief excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll uses only a few adjectives. List five of them.

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

c. Passive Verbs / Active Verbs

Lewis Carroll uses verbs with great skill. At the beginning of the story, he uses more **PASSIVE THAN ACTIVE VERBS**. When the White Rabbit shows up, **ACTIVE VERBS** take over: "...a White Rabbit with pink eyes **ran** close by her."

List three **PASSIVE VERBS** from the story *before* the White Rabbit shows up.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

d. List five **ACTIVE VERBS** from the story *after* the Rabbit shows up.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



- e. Why do you think Lewis Carroll uses **passive verbs** before the white rabbit shows up, while he uses mostly **active verbs** after the white rabbit shows up?

III. YOUR EXPERIENCE

- a. Look around the room. Pick out some person(s) and/or some object(s) in the room. Using your imagination, come up with a few sentences about the people and/or objects. Create an unrealistic situation, as Lewis Carroll did in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Example: When I walked into the cafeteria, the first chair I passed by said, “Sit down.” I looked at that chair suspiciously. “It’s ok,” the chair said to me, “sit down.” When I sat down on the chair, the chair on the other side of the table said, “No, don’t sit there. Sit here.” Then another chair chimed in. “No, no. Sit here. Sit here.” It was so crazy I went up the block to a little restaurant where the chairs all kept to themselves, and I had a very nice, quiet lunch.



- b. Lewis Carroll is a great storyteller who creates imaginative fiction. Think of something fantastic that happened to you—it could be fantasy, but it doesn't have to be—and describe that event as though you were writing fiction. You could write about a dream you had.
- c. Think about a text: a book you've recently read or a movie or TV show that you've recently seen. You could even choose an interesting text message or recall the first time you saw the Grand Canyon. Engage in a dialogue with that text.
- d. Read the following brief fiction:

Sally & the Falling Sky

My friend, Sally, came rushing through the unlocked front door into my house. Her breath came quick and hard.

“What's up, Sally?” I asked her.

“The sky is falling, that's what's up. Isn't that enough?”

“Sally! The sky is *not* falling. Are you living in an old fairy tale? What's it called, *Chicken Little*? Are you Chicken Little all of a sudden?”

“Look,” Sally said, holding out her hand. In it, she held a blue object, irregularly shaped, transparent, and not quite like anything I'd ever seen.

“Where did you get that?”

“On Delaney Street. I was on my way to get some ice cream and boom, this fell right in front of me. It's a piece of the sky! Have you ever seen the likes of it?”

Very hesitant to take it from the hand she held out to me, but very excited to see what it was, I let Sally pass it over into my hand. It was incredibly soft. It was not just warm but radiant. It seemed to float up from my hand at the same time as it seemed to rest easily, steadily in my palm. It moved around a little bit, giving me an odd sensation of peace and calm. Could it be the sky was falling? Could it be I held a piece of the sky in my hand? If I did, what should I do?

Write out a brief **dialogue** with this fictional text, *Sally & The Falling Sky*. How do you respond to this text? Do you think it's ridiculous? Do you think it's funny? Do you think it's charming? What does this text make you think of? What do the **images** make you think of? What do you think of this text?



- e. Read through your own **dialogue with the text**, *Sally & The Falling Sky*. Take some idea from your dialogue with this text and formulate a **THESIS** for an essay based on that idea. (For example, you might write an essay with this **THESIS**: *When we look up at a clear sky, we often feel peaceful, and when the narrator of Sally & The Falling Sky held a piece of the sky in her hand, she felt peaceful. Blue is a peaceful color.*)

IV. ACTIVE READING

- a. Lewis Carroll tells his story in what we call a third person **POINT OF VIEW**, but we see it all mostly through Alice's eyes. Make a list of things that Alice sees or thinks.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- b. Look up five words from *Alice in Wonderland* that you don't know. Write the definitions below.

WORD	DEFINITION
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____





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- c. List five things in *Alice* that had a strong effect on you. These may be images, particularly good sentences, something funny, some description, some idea. In short, tell us what you think makes for good writing.

- d. How does the setting in *Alice in Wonderland* differ from the setting in:

- Momaday's "The Way to Rainy Mountain"

- or -

- Jack London's "The Story of an Eyewitness: The San Francisco Earthquake."

