CHAPTER V. Advice from a Caterpillar

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

'Who are you?' said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.'

'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar sternly. 'Explain yourself!'

'I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, sir' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'

'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.

'I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly,' Alice replied very politely, 'for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.'

'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; 'but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?'

'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,' said Alice; 'all I know is, it would feel very queer to me.'

'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are you?'

Which brought them back again to the beginning of the conversation. Alice felt a little irritated at the Caterpillar's making such very short remarks, and as the Caterpillar seemed to be in a very unpleasant state of mind, she turned away.

'Come back!' the Caterpillar called after her. 'I've something important to say!'

This sounded promising, certainly: Alice turned and came back again.

'Keep your temper,' said the Caterpillar.

'Is that all?' said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could.

'No,' said the Caterpillar.

Alice thought she might as well wait, as she had nothing else to do, and perhaps after all it might tell her something worth hearing. For some minutes it puffed away without speaking, but at last it unfolded its arms, took the hookah out of its mouth again, and said, 'So you think you're changed, do you?'

'I'm afraid I am, sir,' said Alice; 'I can't remember things as I used—and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes together!'

'Can't remember what things?' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, I've tried to say "How doth the little busy bee," but it all came different!' Alice replied in a very melancholy voice.

'Repeat, "You are old, Father William,"' said the Caterpillar.
Alice folded her hands, and began:—

'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 might 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 Caterpillar was the first to speak.
'What size do you want to be?' it asked.
'Oh, I'm not particular as to size,' Alice hastily replied; 'only one doesn't like changing so often, you know.'
'I don't know,' said the Caterpillar.

Alice said nothing: she had never been so much contradicted in her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.

'Are you content now?' said the Caterpillar.
'Well, I should like to be a little larger, sir, if you wouldn't mind,' said Alice: 'three inches is such a wretched height to be.'

'It is a very good height indeed!' said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).

'But I'm not used to it!' pleaded poor Alice in a piteous tone. And she thought of herself, 'I wish the creatures wouldn't be so easily offended!'

'You'll get used to it in time,' said the Caterpillar; and it put the hookah into its mouth and began smoking again.

This time Alice waited patiently until it chose to speak again. In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom, and crawled away in the grass, merely remarking as it went, 'One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.'

'One side of what? The other side of what?' thought Alice to herself.

'Of the mushroom,' said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.

Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. However, at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand.

'And now which is which?' she said to herself, and nibbled a little of the right-hand bit to try the effect: the next moment she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had struck her foot!

She was a good deal frightened by this very sudden change, but she felt that there was no time to be lost, as she was shrinking rapidly; so she set to work at once to eat some of the other bit. Her chin was pressed so closely against her foot, that there was hardly room to open her mouth; but she did it at last, and managed to swallow a morsel of the lefthand bit.

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'Come, my head's free at last!' said Alice in a tone of delight, which changed into alarm in another moment, when she found that her shoulders were nowhere to be found: all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.

'What can all that green stuff be?' said Alice. 'And where have my shoulders got to? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can't see you?' She was moving them about as she spoke, but no result seemed to follow, except a little shaking among the distant green leaves.

As there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to them, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in any direct ion, like a serpent. She had just succeeded in curving it down into a graceful zigzag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be nothing but the tops of the trees under which she had been wandering, when a sharp hiss made her draw back in a hurry: a large pigeon had flown into her face, and was beating her violently with its wings.

'Serpent!' screamed the Pigeon.

'I'm not a serpent!' said Alice indignantly. 'Let me alone!'

'Serpent, I say again!' repeated the Pigeon, but in a more subdued tone, and added with a kind of sob, 'I've tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them!'

'I haven't the least idea what you're talking about,' said Alice.

'I've tried the roots of trees, and I've tried banks, and I've tried hedges,' the Pigeon went on, without attending to her; 'but those serpents! There's no pleasing them!'
Alice was more and more puzzled, but she thought there was no use in saying anything more till the Pigeon had finished.

'As if it wasn't trouble enough hatching the eggs,' said the Pigeon; 'but I must be on the look-out for serpents night and day! Why, I haven't had a wink of sleep these three weeks!'

'I'm very sorry you've been annoyed,' said Alice, who was beginning to see its meaning.

'And just as I'd taken the highest tree in the wood,' continued the Pigeon, raising its voice to a shriek, 'and just as I was thinking I should be free of them at last, they must needs come wriggling down from the sky! Ugh, Serpent!'

'But I'm not a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a—I'm a—'

'Well! What are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent something!' 'I—I'm a little girl,' said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.

'A likely story indeed!' said the Pigeon in a tone of the deepest contempt. 'I've seen a good many little girls in my time, but never one with such a neck as that! No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!'

'I have tasted eggs, certainly,' said Alice, who was a very truthful child; 'but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.'

'I don't believe it,' said the Pigeon; 'but if they do, why then they're a kind of serpent, that's all I can say.'

This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two, which gave the Pigeon the opportunity of adding, 'You're looking for eggs, I know that well enough; and what does it matter to me whether you're a little girl or a serpent?'

'It matters a good deal to me,' said Alice hastily; 'but I'm not looking for eggs, as it happens; and if I was, I shouldn't want yours: I don't like them raw.'

'Well, be off, then!' said the Pigeon in a sulky tone, as it settled down again into its nest. Alice crouched down among the trees as well as she could, for her neck kept getting entangled among the branches, and every now and then she had to stop and untwist it. After a while she remembered that she still held the pieces of mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, nibbling first at one and then at the other, and growing sometimes taller and sometimes shorter, until she had succeeded in bringing herself down to her usual height.

It was so long since she had been anything near the right size, that it felt quite strange at first; but she got used to it in a few minutes, and began talking to herself, as usual. 'Come, there's half my plan done now! How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! However, I've got back to my right size: the next thing is, to get into that beautiful garden—how is that to be done, I wonder?' As she said this, she came suddenly upon an open place, with a little house in it about four feet high. 'Whoever lives there,' thought Alice, 'it'll never do to come upon them this size: why, I should frighten them out of their wits!' So she began nibbling at the righthand bit again, and did not venture to go near the house till she had brought herself down to nine inches high.
1. Caterpillar thought Alice was ---.
   a. courageous  
   b. confused  
   c. sentimental  
   d. depressed

2. Which word best describes the pigeon?
   a. energetic  
   b. hopeful  
   c. commanding  
   d. infuriated

3. Which of the following is not an effect of Alice’s changing sizes?
   a. Alice argues with a pigeon.  
   b. Alice finds a small house.  
   c. Alice looks like a serpent.  
   d. Alice offends a Caterpillar.

4. Write a simile that can be found in Chapter 5.

5. Complete the chart to summarize one of the main events that took place in Chapter 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>who</th>
<th>what</th>
<th>when</th>
<th>where</th>
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6. What makes Lewis Carroll’s “You Are Old, Father William” a parody of “The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them?”

7. Why is Chapter 5 titled “Advice from a Caterpillar?”

   “I have tasted eggs, certainly,” said Alice, who was a very truthful child; "but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know."

   "I don't believe it," said the Pigeon; "but if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent: that's all I can say."

   Explain the viewpoints of Alice versus the Pigeon.

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   . . . all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.
   . . . . her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a serpent.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>who</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>what</td>
<td>wants to be her normal size and see the beautiful garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>when</td>
<td>immediately</td>
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<tr>
<td>where</td>
<td>Wonderland</td>
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<td>how</td>
<td>First Alice meets a Caterpillar who tells her the mushroom he is sitting upon has both shrinking and growing powers. Alice eats some, and her neck grows super long. She confronts a pigeon who thinks she is a serpent. After arguing, Alice figures out how much of each part of the mushroom to eat to become her normal size. She sets off to find the garden only to run into a small house.</td>
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6. What makes Lewis Carroll’s “You Are Old, Father William” a parody of “The Old Man’s Comforts and How He Gained Them?”
   Carroll follows the structure of the original poem but adds humor. The following are examples of humor:

   - William becomes uncommonly fat.
   - William can stand on his head. ~ It won’t hurt his brain because he doesn’t have one to hurt.
   - William can turn back-somersaults by using special limbering ointment.
   - William can eat goose bones and beaks because his jaw is strong from arguing legal cases with his wife.
   - William can balance an eel on his nose. (The reader doesn’t know why because William won’t answer any more questions. He’s already answered three.)

7. Why is Chapter 5 titled “Advice from a Caterpillar?”
   The Caterpillar told Alice where she could get food that would change her into the size she wanted to be. (The mushroom had both shrinking and growing capabilities.)

8. Read the following passage from Chapter 5.
   "I have tasted eggs, certainly," said Alice, who was a very truthful child; "but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know."
   "I don't believe it," said the Pigeon; "but if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent: that's all I can say."

Explain the viewpoints of Alice versus the Pigeon.
   Alice describes things by names, and the Pigeon describes things by what they do.
You Are Old, Father William
By Lewis Carroll (1865)

"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 might injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
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"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!"

The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them
by Robert Southey (1799)

"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 abus'd 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 hast'ning away;
You are cheerful and love to converse upon death; 
Now tell me the reason, I pray."

"I am cheerful, 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."

[Image of an old man and a young man conversing, illustration by William Heath Robinson]
Up until 1891, American publishers could reprint British books without getting permission from the UK publishers and authors. As a result, several US publishers issued copies of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* using Tenniel illustrations. In 1899, McManus created new illustrations. When the copyright ran out, many publishers issued reprints of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* with new illustrations. Nine illustrations of Alice getting advice from the Caterpillar are included on the next pages for discussion.

1. Which author makes Alice appear the youngest? the oldest?
3. List details the book has about the physical appearance of the Caterpillar.
4. Which details are from the text and which are from the imaginations of the illustrators?
   - coloring
   - arms
   - hat and clothing
   - size
   - glasses
   - type of pipe
   - location of the Caterpillar
5. How are all the illustrations alike? How are they different?
6. Which illustrator makes the Caterpillar appear friendly? scary?

Have students complete the next page to compare two illustrations. You may wish to use one set of illustrations (Alice with the Caterpillar or Alice with the Growing Neck) for an example, and have students complete the comparison chart using illustrations from the other set.
Constructive Response ~ Comparing Illustrations

Complete the chart to compare two illustrations.

1st Title

Meaning

Tone

Beauty

2nd Title

Meaning

Tone

Beauty

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7 Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).
Her eyes met those of a large blue caterpillar.

Bessie Pease Gutmann - 1907
Harry Rountree - 1907
Gertrude Kay - 1923
John Tenniel - 1865

Lewis Carroll's Illustration - 1865
If you like this unit, you might also like some of the following book units found at Teachers Pay Teachers:

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- Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes Book Unit
- Woods Runner Book Unit
- The Hundred Dresses Book Unit
- Esperanza Rising Book Unit
- Out of My Mind Book Unit
- The BFG Book Unit
- James and the Giant Peach Book Unit
- Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief Book Unit
- Call It Courage Book Unit
- Freak the Mighty Book Unit
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