

# Down the Rabbit Hole

Design a Clay Carousel Figure Based on an Animal in Literature

ART AND LANGUAGE ARTS

GRADES: 6-12

## BASED ON



Attributed to the Dentzel Company; possibly Salvatore Cernigliaro (1879-1974)

United States *Rabbit Carousel Figure*, ca. 1910

Basswood and paint, 57 ¼ x 50 x 13 in. (146.1 x 127 x 33 cm)

Courtesy of the Barbara L. Gordon Collection



Benn Pitman (1822-1910), designer

Adelaide Nourse Pitman (1859-1893), carver

Elizabeth Nourse (1859-1938), painter

*Bedstead*

1882-1883

American black walnut and painted panels

110 x 59 ¼ x 85 in. (279.4 x 149.9 x 215.9 cm)

Gift of Mary Jane Hamilton in memory of her mother Mary Luella Hamilton, made possible through Rita S. Hudepohl, Guardian

Accession No: 1994.61

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will participate in a discussion about the *Rabbit Carousel Figure* and other wooden carousel carving produced by America's Dentzel Company.
- Students will share their personal memories of the joys and fears of being a young child, including their first ride on a merry-go-round.
- Students will read about the White Rabbit and March Hare and other anthropomorphic animals in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, published in 1865.
- Students will summarize two chapters of the novel with a partner, noting how Carroll uses humor, distortion, dialogue and personification to advance the plot.
- Students will make a clay carousel figure based on a character from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

## CONCEPT

In this lesson, students will learn about the carved figures featured in carousels of the early 1900's, including this *Rabbit Carousel Figure*. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll's protagonist follows the White Rabbit into a deep rabbit hole, discovering a surrealistic world of bizarre characters. After reading this fictional story, students will use polymer clay to create a carousel figure based on a character from the story.

## MATERIALS

Polymer Clay, Air Dry Clay OR Low Fire Clay

Acrylic Paints

Basic Clay Tools

Thin Wire (24-28 gauge) and Wire Cutters for armature

Aluminum Foil

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* book or eBook

Illustrations by Sir John Tenniel from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865 edition)

## VOCABULARY

**Carousel**– an amusement ride comprised of a revolving circular platform; sometimes called a merry-go-round or round-a-bout. Contains rows of seats in the shape of horses or other animals mounted on posts, which may move up and down by gears to the tunes of music.

**Menagerie Figure**- any carousel animal other than a horse

**Relief Carvings**- forms projected from the flat surface of the carved figure

**Armature**- a structure which supplies stability to a sculpture

**Polymer Clay**- a type of hardenable modeling clay- such as Fimo Soft, Sculpey and Premo!

**Pseudonym**- fictitious or pen name used by an author

**Anthropomorphism**- attributing human characteristics to an animal or object often achieved through a figure of speech called personification

**Protagonist vs. Antagonist**- the main character or central figure. The antagonists are the other characters in the story who may cause conflict

## PROCEDURE

1. Display an image of the *Rabbit Carousel Figure* for the class. Lead a discussion about this piece using the following questions: a) What do you see in this picture? b) How do you think the object was made? c) When do you think it was made? d) Is it a functional piece of art? Explain your answer.
2. Provide additional information about the work:

## CLASS EXPERIENCE

This *Rabbit Carousel Figure* was created in 1910 by the Dentzel Company; possibly by head-carver Salvatore Cernigliaro (1879-1974). The object is about 57 X 50 X 13 inches and was carved in basswood, a relatively soft wood good for carving. In 1870, German immigrant Gustav Dentzel established the Dentzel Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Gustav died in 1909 and was succeeded by his son, William. The company closed upon the death of William in 1928. (Show a brief video of a craftsman carving a carousel horse at the Sandusky Merry Go Round Museum by going to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbx\\_fE2d58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbx_fE2d58) )

3. Ask students "Did you ever ride a merry-go-round or carousel?" Provide time for them to share their childhood memories. Ask, "Is this a pleasant or scary memory?" During the discussion, ask students if they ever rode a menagerie carousel figure, meaning "a non-horse figure" such as the *Rabbit Carousel Figure*. Go to [https://www.carouselworld.com/dentzel?lightbox=image\\_23cq](https://www.carouselworld.com/dentzel?lightbox=image_23cq) to display Dentzel menagerie animals. (You can also play carousel music from the National Carousel Association under archives/music at <http://carousels.org/NCAarchives.html> ).
4. After learning about the unusual animals depicted in carousels, students will read about the anthropomorphic characters featured in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Charles L. Dodgson, an English mathematician known better by his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll. Carroll's somewhat frightening and often illogical tale chronicles the adventures of seven year old Alice, who follows the White Rabbit into his underground hole into Wonderland. The protagonist is based on a real child, Alice Liddell, the daughter of Carroll's boss, the Dean of Christ Church College at Oxford. At the encouragement of Alice, Carroll wrote the imaginative story he had told her into a text entitled *Alice's Adventures Underground*, which was later published in 1865 as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.
5. The teacher will divide the class into pairs. Each group will read and then summarize the events that occur in two chapters. Students will describe the characters that Alice meets and the conversations she has with them. Students will also describe how Alice works through problems and seems to mature through her dialogue with these characters.
6. As students read the story, have them chart the unusual characters Alice meets along her journey, including: a talking caterpillar, smiling Cheshire cat, a Mad Hatter and March Hare, the Eaglet, the Duck, the Dodo, the Lory, the Fish and Frog Footman, the Pig Baby, the Dormouse, Flamingo Mallets, Hedgehog Balls, and the King and Queen of Hearts.
7. As a class, discuss how Carroll uses the genre of nonsense fiction to introduce his characters, advance the plot and symbolize Alice's transition from childhood to adulthood. Also discuss the recurring theme that weak, young or vulnerable characters can overcome the strong.
8. Ask students to use a pencil to sketch their favorite animal character from the story. Have them transform the sketch into a three dimensional carousel figure using polymer or air-dry modeling clay (classroom) or low fired clay (art room). Sculpture teachers who have the proper tools and ventilation may ask students to use basswood or foam to carve animals, instead.
9. Small polymer clay sculptures will be made by stretching clay from the package until soft, and then rolling desired shapes for the animal. Polymer clay will blend easily just by joining and stretching colors together. A light-weight base for the carousel animal can be constructed using a semicircle of aluminum foil and a thin, yet sturdy piece of wire for the carousel pole. Students can twist two or three thinly rolled pieces of polymer together to create a decorative design to cover the pole. Cover the base with a thin layer of polymer and then add small loops and lines to create a pattern. To provide strength and save polymer clay, have students make an armature for the animal from foil and wire.
10. Polymer clay should be baked at 275 degrees for about 30 minutes to harden. (See specific directions for the brand you select) Baked polymer clay, air-dry clay or kiln fired clay can

be painted with acrylic paint and then sealed with a high-gloss spray.

## ASSESSMENT

- Students will receive a formative assessment based on their contribution to the class critique of the *Rabbit Carousel Figure*. With a partner, students summarized two chapters of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for the class, noting the anthropomorphic characters Alice meets and the conversations they share.
- A two-part summative evaluation will also be made. First, a paper quiz will ask students to explain the stylistic devices Carroll uses to advance his plot, including his use of humor, distortion, dialogue or personification. The summative assessment of the completed carousel figure will be based on craftsmanship (neatness and durability), creativity (use of line, color, shape, pattern and texture) and fidelity to Carroll's character. (Did the student convey the character's personality through art?)

## NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Visual Arts

Standard 4 Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Level III (Grade 5-8) Benchmark 2. Understands the historical and cultural contexts of a variety of art objects

Level IV (Grade 9-12) Benchmark 1 Knows a variety of historical and cultural contexts regarding characteristics and purposes of works of art

### Language Arts

Standard 6 Uses skills and strategies to read a variety of literary texts

Level III (Grade 6-8) Benchmark 1 (fiction, fantasies); Benchmark 4 (Understands elements of character development -interaction with other characters

Level IV (Grades 9-12) Benchmark 1 (fiction, British literature); Benchmark 7 (Understands the effects of author's style and complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work (dialogue; symbolism, personification)

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Science students can research one of the seven biomes: marine, temperate forest, tropical rainforest, tundra, desert, taiga and grassland, and then create a class carousel based on the plants, animals and insects that inhabit it.
- Lewis Carroll was a respected mathematician at Christ Church College in Oxford. Do you think his "play" on logic appears in *Alice's Adventures of Wonderland*? Read more about Carroll's puzzles, games and math at <http://www.lewiscarroll.org/carroll/math/>.
- In 1865, *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* was published in England. Carroll died of pneumonia in 1898. In 1870, Gustav Dentzel established the Dentzel Carousel Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He died in 1909, but his son William kept the business running until his death in 1928. Social studies students can create a two-tiered timeline of important historical events that occurred in America and England from 1865 to 1928.
- After learning how the Dentzel craftsman carved carousel figures, visual art students can view another intricately carved object from the Cincinnati Art Museum collection, *Bedstead*, (ca. 1882-1883), designed by Benn Pitman, carved by his wife, Adelaide Nourse Pitman and painted by Elizabeth Nourse. Challenge art students to design a bedstead for Alice, based on her dreamlike adventures in wonderland. (For more details about the Pitman bed, go to <http://discoveringthestory.com/goldenage/bed/background.asp>)

## RESOURCES

### Carousels

Carving a Carousel Horse (Photos) <http://spokanecarrousel.org/CarveAHorse-Intro.html>

Carousel Terminology <http://horsehints.org/CarouselTerms.htm>

Dentzel Animals <https://www.carouselworld.com/dentzel>

How to Carve a Miniature Horse <http://taylortinkerings.com/HandCarvedCarouselHorse.html>

Merry Go Round Museum-Carving a Horse [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbx\\_fE2d58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTbx_fE2d58) )

National Carousel Association <http://carousels.org/index.html>

Tim Gorka- Carver at Carousel Works <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV8uke7nr2U>

### Literature

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland- eBook <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11/11-h/11-h.htm>

AIW Resources <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/resources/analysis/character-descriptions/>

Lewis Carroll [https://www.biography.com/people/lewis-carroll-9239598?\\_escaped\\_fragment\\_ =](https://www.biography.com/people/lewis-carroll-9239598?_escaped_fragment_=)

Sir John Tenniel Illustrations for AIW (1865) [www.gutenberg.org/files/114/114-h/114-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/114/114-h/114-h.htm)

Summary of AIW by Chapter <http://www.novelguide.com/alice-in-wonderland/index>

### Making Clay Animals

Bunny and Hare with Modeling Clay <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szfwBuv6cr8>

Carousel Unicorn with Polymer Clay [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_nemlvAarM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_nemlvAarM)

Make a Wire/Foil Armature <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufFun1yWh1Q>

Sallie Wakley Sculpting a Hare in Clay [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XOWsV\\_2IHk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XOWsV_2IHk)

Sculpting Rabbit Head in Polymer Clay <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2DduMQ4sXk>



Attributed to the Dentzel Company; possibly Salvatore Cernigliaro (1879-1974), United States  
*Rabbit Carousel Figure*, ca. 1910

Basswood and paint, 57 ¼ x 50 x 13 in. (146.1 x 127 x 33 cm)

Courtesy of the Barbara L. Gordon Collection





Benn Pitman (1822-1910), designer  
Adelaide Nourse Pitman (1859-1893), carver  
Elizabeth Nourse (1859-1938), painter

*Bedstead*  
1882-1883

American black walnut and painted panels  
110 x 59 ¼ x 85 in. (279.4 x 149.9 x 215.9 cm)

Gift of Mary Jane Hamilton in memory of her mother Mary Luella Hamilton, made possible  
through Rita S. Hudepohl, Guardian

Accession No: 1994.61