

The Mock Turtle's Story

by **Lewis Carroll** from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written in 1865. Alice, the main character, explores a very strange land with many odd characters. In this passage, Alice has been taken by the Gryphon, or griffin, to meet the Mock Turtle.

'When we were little,' the Mock Turtle went on at last, more calmly, though still sobbing a little now and then, 'we went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle--we used to call him Tortoise--'

'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' Alice asked.

'We called him Tortoise because he taught us,' said the Mock Turtle angrily: 'really you are very dull!'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself for asking such a simple question,' added the Gryphon; and then they both sat silent and looked at poor Alice, who felt ready to sink into the earth. At last the Gryphon said to the Mock Turtle, 'Drive on, old fellow! Don't be all day about it!' and he went on in these words:

'Yes, we went to school in the sea, though you mayn't believe it--'

'I never said I didn't!' interrupted Alice.

'You did,' said the Mock Turtle.

'Hold your tongue!' added the Gryphon, before Alice could speak again. The Mock Turtle went on.

'We had the best of educations--in fact, we went to school every day--'

'I've been to a day-school, too,' said Alice; 'you needn't be so proud as all that.'

'With extras?' asked the Mock Turtle a little anxiously.

'Yes,' said Alice, 'we learned French and music.'

'And washing?' said the Mock Turtle.

'Certainly not!' said Alice indignantly.

'Ah! then yours wasn't a really good school,' said the Mock Turtle in a tone of great relief. 'Now at ours they had at the end of the bill, "French, music, and washing--extra."'

'You couldn't have wanted it much,' said Alice; 'living at the bottom of the sea.'

'I couldn't afford to learn it.' said the Mock Turtle with a sigh. 'I only took the regular course.'

'What was that?' inquired Alice.

'Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with,' the Mock Turtle replied; 'and then the different branches of Arithmetic-- Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.'

'I never heard of "Uglification,"' Alice ventured to say. 'What is it?'

The Gryphon lifted up both its paws in surprise. 'What! Never heard of uglifying!' it exclaimed. 'You know what to beautify is, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said Alice doubtfully: 'it means--to--make--anything--prettier.'

'Well, then,' the Gryphon went on, 'if you don't know what to uglify is, you are a simpleton.'

Questions

1. What are two ways that Alice's schooling was similar to the Mock Turtle's?
2. Why does Alice think that the Mock Turtle would not have wanted to learn washing at the bottom of the sea?
3. Alice probably learned reading and writing in school. What did the Turtle learn instead?
4. The Mock Turtle says the branches of arithmetic he learned were "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision." What branches of arithmetic do human children learn?