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# The Hunting of the Snark

**Lewis Carroll** · *1876 · original English text*

A crew of ten odd persons, led by the Bellman, sails to a distant island to hunt a Snark. The ship carries a Baker, a Butcher, a Barrister, a Banker, a Beaver, and others, all of whom begin with B. Carroll's nonsense poem in eight 'Fits' is both a comic adventure and a puzzle, since no one is sure what a Snark is, and some of them are Boojums.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

## What is a hunt for something that no one can describe, and what happens when the hunter finds it?

Carroll gives a list of the signs of a Snark and a warning about one kind of Snark, the Boojum. He never says what the hunt means. The crew's quirks and the Bellman's rules are a joke on the way people take instructions seriously, and the ending is both a joke and a shock. Readers have found in the poem a satire, an allegory, or a pure nonsense, and the poem allows all three.

KEY CHARACTERS

**the Bellman**
*The leader of the crew, who gives the rules.*

**the Baker**
*The crew member who forgot his name.*

**the Butcher**
*A hunter who is afraid of the Jubjub.*

**the Beaver**
*A hunter who becomes the Butcher's friend.*

**the Barrister**
*A lawyer who dreams of a trial.*

**the Banker**
*A man who meets the Bandersnatch.*

Grades 6–8

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

### The Landing

FIT THE FIRST

*The Bellman lands his crew on the island and cries, 'Just the place for a Snark!' He says that what he says three times is true. The crew are introduced, among them the Baker, who has forgotten his name.*

- The Bellman's rule is that what he tells you three times is true.
- The Baker's forty-two boxes are a joke on luggage.
- The Butcher and the Beaver begin the poem as enemies.

02

### The Bellman's Speech and the Baker's Tale

FITS THE SECOND AND THIRD

*The Bellman, praised for his wisdom, owns a map with no land on it and gives the signs of a Snark. At the mention of Boojums, the Baker faints. When he wakes he tells of his uncle's warning.*

- The blank sea-map suits the crew perfectly.
- Some Snarks are Boojums, says the Bellman, and the Baker faints.
- The Baker says that if he meets a Boojum he will softly and suddenly vanish away.

03

### The Hunting and the Beaver's Lesson

FITS THE FOURTH AND FIFTH

*The crew prepare to hunt, and the Butcher is afraid of the Jubjub bird. They seek the Snark with thimbles and forks, and the Butcher and the Beaver make friends.*

- The Bellman's alarm at the Baker's news is comic.
- The Butcher's fear of the Jubjub is a running joke.
- The song of the Jubjub cements the friendship.

04

### The Barrister's Dream

FIT THE SIXTH

*The Barrister, tired of arguing that the Beaver's lace-making is wrong, falls asleep and dreams of a trial.*

- The dream is a satire on the law.
- The bellowing in the dream grows louder.
- The Bellman wakes him with a bell.

05

### The Banker's Fate

FIT THE SEVENTH

*The Banker, newly courageous, goes ahead and meets a Bandersnatch. The Bellman decides to leave him to his fate.*

- His new courage is remarkable to the others.
- The Bandersnatch is a creature of speed.
- The Bellman's concern is for the time lost.

06

### The Vanishing

FIT THE EIGHTH

*The Baker goes off alone. At the end the others find only that he has softly and suddenly vanished away, for the Snark was a Boojum.*

- The Beaver's excited cry begins the chase.
- The Baker's vanishing is the poem's one great event.
- The ending is abrupt.

Nonsense | The Hunt | The Unknown | Rules and Logic

## What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. Carroll made up many of the words. Notice how you understand them anyway.
2. Each Fit has its own comedy. See how each advances the hunt.
3. The poem has been read as satire and allegory. Decide what you think.
4. Look at the ending. What does the Boojum stand for?

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