

THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS ADAPTED BY
Laramie Dean
FROM THE NOVEL BY
L. Frank Baum



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is a theatrical adaptation of the original novel by L. Frank Baum. It follows the story of Dorothy who finds herself in Oz after a cyclone and must go through a series of adventures to find her way home.

Background

This adaptation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was written for and premiered at Hellgate High School in Missoula, MT.

Playwright Bio

Laramie Dean earned his BFA in acting at the University of Montana before moving across the country to work on his PhD in playwriting at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Since then he has performed, written, and directed numerous plays, including *Othernatural*, a one-man show, which was performed at Stage Left's Left Out Festival in New York City and again at Missoula's own Crystal Theatre. Laramie is currently enjoying his dream job as the Theatre Director at Hellgate High School. For the past several years he has been commissioned by the Montana Repertory Theatre to compose plays for their Educational Tour: *The Gorgon Sisters* in 2014, *Bronte to the Future* in 2016, and *Morgan and Merlin* in 2018. He was also recently commissioned by Storytree Theatre to write *Ladies Among Lions*, a play about the heroines of Shakespeare.

Synopsis

Dorothy lives in Kansas with her Uncle Henry, Aunt Em, and dog Toto. In the middle of a cyclone, Dorothy finds herself and her house lifted in the air and carried for hours. The house lands in an unfamiliar but beautiful place - The Land of Oz, which has been cut off from the civilized world and where witches and wizards exist. In fact, Dorothy's house has landed on and killed the Wicked Witch of the East, leaving only her silver shoes. The Witch's death has freed the Munchkins, who she had enslaved. It has also angered her sister, the Wicked Witch of the West, who wants the silver shoes in order

to gain power over all of Oz. The Good Witch of the North gives the silver shoes to Dorothy. All Dorothy wants is to get home but the only way is for her to follow the yellow brick road to get to the Emerald City and ask the Wizard of Oz for help. Along her journey, she meets a Scarecrow who is looking for a brain, a Tin Woodman who is looking for a heart, and a Lion who is looking for courage. All three join Dorothy on her journey to the Emerald City. Once there, the Great and Terrible Oz tells them they must kill the Wicked Witch of the West before he will help, but the Wicked Witch of the West comes for them first. She sends her wolves, crows, and winged monkeys. The Tin Woodman fights the wolves, the Scarecrow fights the crows, but they are no match for the winged monkeys. They seize the Tin Woodman and drop him on sharp rocks, pull all the straw out of the Scarecrow, cage the Lion, and bring Dorothy to the Wicked Witch of the West. She tells Dorothy that she will harm the Lion unless she hands over the silver shoes. When the Witch casts a killing spell on the Lion, Dorothy accidentally invokes the power of the silver shoes, rendering the spell useless. When the Witch throws a fireball at the Lion, Dorothy grabs a nearby bucket of water and throws it over the Witch. The water melts the Wicked Witch of the West. They rescue the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman and return to Oz expecting help. But the Great and Terrible Oz is revealed to be a little old man from Omaha. Everyone is devastated that they won't get their wish. However, they realize that the Scarecrow has been smart all along - brains don't give you intelligence, experience does. And the Lion has been gaining confidence in himself, which is where courage comes from. And the Tin Woodman may not have a heart, but he has always been kind-hearted with love for his friends. A balloon is supposed to take Dorothy and the Wizard back home, but Toto escapes and the Wizard leaves without her. However, Dorothy had the power to return home all along with her silver shoes. But then she wouldn't have met any of her new friends. Dorothy wishes on the shoes and finds herself back at home with Uncle Henry and Aunt Em.

Characters

DOROTHY GALE: Female. A young girl from Kansas.

TOTO: Any Gender. Dorothy's dog.

SCARECROW: Male. A man stuffed with straw. No brains (he says).

TIN WOODMAN: Male. A man made of tin. No heart (he claims).

COWARDLY LION: Male. A talking lion. No courage (or so he believes).

WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST: Female. A powerful, terrifying sorceress with one eye.

WIZARD OF OZ: Any Gender. A humbug unable to actually perform wizardry.

GLINDA: Female. A powerful sorceress, beloved and respected.

NARRATORS: Ten actors who tell the story of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and perform as several characters, locations, props, and special effects.

Themes

The importance of home, identity, inner strength, personal growth, and friendship.

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does home mean to you?
- ★ How would you define yourself? Who are you?
- ★ What is your best inner trait?
- ★ What do you feel is missing in your life?
- ★ How far would you go to find this missing thing?
- ★ How would you define friendship?
- ★ How far would you go for a friend?

Pre-Read Activities

Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a poem as their source material, something short. The point is to have students work quickly.

- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation Definition: To make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the poem into a scene. They don't have to specifically use the words of the poem, but the scene does have to be connected to the poem. Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » What characters can be derived from the poem?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the poem?
 - » What conflict can be derived from the poem?
- ★ The scene should be less than one minute. Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully, there will be differences! This will show students that there is not one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz Adaptation Exercise

- ★ As a class read a section from the original *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. It is suggested that you read the first chapter, "The Cyclone."
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation Definition: To make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will have a copy of the original section. Their first task is to identify characters, locations, and possible lines of dialogue.

- ★ Next, groups are to discuss, decide, rehearse, and come up with a one-minute section of a scene. This is an exploration, rather than an assessed assignment. How do you adapt? What are the challenges?
- ★ After groups present, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully, there will be differences! This will show students that there is not one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Research Project

- ★ The story and the play specifically mention that the storm that carries Dorothy and her house away is a cyclone.
- ★ Divide students into groups and assign each a different storm to research: cyclone, tornado, hurricane, typhoon.
- ★ Each group must then come up with a physical theatrical demonstration of their storm. How would they represent the storm on a stage without any special effects?

Research Project

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of the original novel, L. Frank Baum.
 - » Who is L. Frank Baum?
 - » What is his background?
 - » When did he write *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*?
 - » Did he write any other novels?
 - » Was he a “successful” writer?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they’ve learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? Will you create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they learned.

Objective, Obstacle, Tactic

- ★ *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* had characters with specific objectives, obstacles in their way, and they tried different tactics to get what they wanted.
- ★ Have students in pairs improv a scene in which there is an objective, obstacle, and tactic. For example:
 - » Partner A wants the last cookie (objective).
 - » Partner B will discourage the other from getting the cookie (obstacle).
 - » Partner A will try to overcome the obstacles to get the cookie (tactics).
 - » Try the scene again, but this time they both want the cookie!
- ★ Try different scenes with the following objectives
 - » To convince
 - » To get revenge
 - » To show love
 - » To cheat

Character Characteristics Original Scene

- ★ It is common knowledge that in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Scarecrow wishes for a brain, the Tin Woodman wishes for a heart and the Lion wishes for courage.
- ★ Have students create scenes in which Brains, Heart, or Courage is the theme. How would you demonstrate these concepts in a scene?

Friendship Reflection

- ★ Write a reflection about the friends in your life. Consider the following questions:
 - » Are friends important to you? Why or why not?

- » Who are your friends? Why are you friends?
- » How far would you go for a friend? Explain your answer.

Friendship Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of friendship.
 - » How would you demonstrate what it means to be “friends?”
 - » How would you demonstrate how far you would go for a friend?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students will read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it’s being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can’t highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions.

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What is Dorothy’s last name?
3. What colour are the Wicked Witch of the East’s shoes?

4. What does the Good Witch of the North place on Dorothy's forehead?
5. In the Country of the East, what is the favourite colour?
6. What is the one thing the Scarecrow is afraid of?
7. What is the name of the Munchkin girl the Tin Woodman fell in love with?
8. Who are the monstrous beasts with bodies like bears and heads like tigers?
9. How does the Wizard appear before the Lion?
10. What do the wolves decide to do once they confront Dorothy and the others?
11. What can the owner of the Golden Cap do?
12. Who does the Wicked Witch of the West hurt to get Dorothy to give up the shoes?
13. How does Dorothy defeat the Witch?
14. Where was the Wizard of Oz born?
15. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. How is the ensemble used in the adaptation? What makes this use theatrical?
2. In your opinion, why does the playwright use an ensemble in this way? What effect would this choice have on a production of the play?
3. Identify significant words and phrases for Dorothy. Does she repeat any words? What words does she use? How does word choice define her character?
4. What role does imagination play in the presentation of the play?
5. Based on the Wicked Witch of the West's language, how would you costume this character?
6. Analyze the Lion's use of humour. Why has the playwright chosen to present this character this way?

7. What is the significance of the line, "There's no place like home"?
8. What is the significance of the line, "Feelings give me strength. They brought me to my friends"?
9. Most of the scenic elements in the play were created by stage cubes. What effect would this have in a production of the play?
10. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the story called *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*? Why is the focus on Oz as opposed to Dorothy?
2. In your opinion, why did the original author of the novel set the bulk of the story in a magical land?
3. What is the playwright trying to say about friendship? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is going to happen next to Dorothy?
5. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with how far you would go for a friend with what happens in the play.
6. What is the moral of this story? Do you agree with how that moral is presented?
7. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Is the Wizard a bad man?

- ★ Do you feel the same way about “home” that Dorothy does when she says, “There’s no place like home”?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?
- ★ The adaptation of the story was published in 2020, while the original was published in 1900. Does the adaptation feel modern? What elements do not? Explain your answer.

Post-Read Activities

Adaptation Compare and Contrast

- ★ In the pre-read section, you adapted a section of the original text into an original scene. Now, compare and contrast your adaptation to how the playwright adapted the same moment.
 - » What are the similarities and differences?
 - » Infer why the playwright made some of the choices he did with his version of the scene.

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Set Design Description

- ★ The play adaptation uses a minimal set design, choosing just ten blocks to create location.
- ★ Based on the text, have students write a description of how they would create a set design for the play. What would be their vision for the set design?

Compare and Contrast

- ★ Have students compare and contrast between two of the following:
 - » The original novel
 - » The play adaptation by Laramie Dean
 - » The 1939 movie starring Judy Garland
- ★ What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Rewrite Adaptation

- ★ Now that students know the story, have them rewrite it and change the location of "Oz."
- ★ How would the story change if Oz was:
 - » An underwater land
 - » New York City
 - » Mars
 - » Ancient Greece
 - » A unique place of your choosing
- ★ Divide students into groups and emphasize that they must adhere to the definition of adaptation: To make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter.
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present their new version of the story.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.

- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Playwright Process

Playwright Laramie Dean talks about his process writing and adapting *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

Why did you choose to adapt this novel?

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was my favorite book when I was a kid. My mom made sure I had a copy of the book and I read it over and over, then started making my own versions, little books made with notebook paper that I'd illustrate and then staple and put on the bookshelf. As soon as I had the chance I decided to adapt it for my own students, who were mostly only familiar with the film version, and we had a great time comparing and contrasting (those shoes are silver!).

Is there anything you cut that you wished could have stayed in the play?

Before I decided to do a readers' theatre-esque version, I had written a prologue scene where the four witches of Oz come together to divvy up the country and discuss things like, oh, how, just maybe, enslaving entire quarters of the country isn't such a cool thing to do. That was kinda fun, but there wasn't room for it when I started my revision.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Keeping track of who said what and when, and who of the Narrators was playing which character. I made a spreadsheet. Spreadsheets, I've discovered, can solve many problems.

What changes, if any, were made during rehearsals?

I changed my mind about which Narrator was playing which character occasionally. The biggest change was that we added a lot of blocking and physical theatre choices that I hadn't written into the original script. The Kalidah scene changed fairly dramatically once we started messing around during rehearsals and figured out how the Narrators were actually going to become these tiger-headed bear monsters. We ended up discovering some old, hideous, hand-made masks from a billion years ago in our prop room (I'd never seen them before) and they worked quite nicely. I mean, hideously.

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

Anything with the Wicked Witch. She's my favorite in any version of the book or film! And she was so much fun to write for. She actually only appears in a single chapter in the book, and I knew that people would expect more of her (and the book really needed a central antagonist), so I did a lot to keep her off stage physically to raise the anticipation of actually seeing her by the end of Act One while allowing the actor to use her voice and to stay somewhat present by doing things like speaking through the Crows.

I also love the scene where Dorothy and the Lion are trapped in the Castle, and Dorothy is lamenting helping free her friends from their various torments because now they're worse off than they were before. And the Lion says, "And where would I be? Too afraid to come out and join? I'd rather be here, with you, than hiding and afraid and the way I used to be." I love that.

What was it like to see the play performed?

So much fun! We weren't able to have a set that year since our space was super occupied, which was why we used the blocks painted with the bright colors of Oz, but I was very excited to try something so minimal, since it's very theatrical, and allows the audience to focus more on the words and the story. The shirts we used to costume the Narrators were also very bright and fun; that's what I remember the most, those ten excited kids in their bright tee-shirts pretending to be all these different bizarre characters and having a great time.