

# **The Wizard of Oz**

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide  
prepared by Kimberly Elliott

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*Oz is that place, ten minutes before sleep, where we bind up our wounds, soak our feet, dream ourselves better, snooze poetry on our lips, and decide that mankind, for all it is snide and mean and dumb, must be given another chance come dawn, and a hearty breakfast.*

—Ray Bradbury

Grim, moralistic tales were neither L. Frank Baum's strength nor his goal. Rather, in *The Wizard of Oz* and more than sixty books (most written for children), he strove to set young readers free to play in the magical lands he mapped with his words. With publication of *The Wizard of Oz* in 1900, Baum revealed his vision for a new kind of children's book: "'Wonder Tales,' in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf, and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale."

While Baum's "Wonder Tales" are not entirely free of messages (or dwarfs, for that matter), they are affirming of children—their curiosity, resilience, spunk, and humor—rather than reformatory in nature. A self-proclaimed "rather stubborn illiterate" who didn't like teachers or soldiers much, Baum teaches a non-preachy lesson in self-discovery in *The Wizard of Oz*. The rainbows we seek turn out to be close at hand, within ourselves, in our backyards; we spend our lives struggling to get to the end of the rainbow, not realizing that the gold is inside. Finding the gold inside ourselves remains as important today as it was in 1900. While Baum intended his stories "solely to pleasure children of today," his work allows us—and the children of many generations to come—to marvel at the wonders without and, along with the Cowardly Lion, Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and Dorothy, begin to appreciate the wonders within. After all, home is where the heart is, and there is no place like home.

## **focus: living in the rainbow**

Dorothy discovers that her heart's desire is at home in Kansas; it's not "over the rainbow," she has it all along.

### **questions for students**

- Where would you tell Dorothy's friends to look for what they want?
- Does the Wizard really have what they want?
- Is it possible to have what you want/need and just not realize it? Explain your answer.
- Do you ever want to be somebody else, or feel mad at yourself because you can't do something someone else can? Explain your answer.

- Do you feel more like the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Woodman, the Scarecrow, or Dorothy?
- What did you observe about the way each character behaved?
- Did the Tin Woodman act like he had a heart before the Wizard “gave” him one?
- Did the Cowardly Lion behave courageously before the Wizard gave him the medal?
- Did the Scarecrow ever have any good ideas before the Wizard gave him his diploma?
- What do you think these three characters share that affects how they see themselves?
- How can self-confidence be like a magic wand?
- How could you “be a wizard” and help a friend who felt bad about her/himself?
- If you feel bad about yourself in some way, how can you be your own “wizard”?

## **focus: to go where no one's gone before: making your own oz**

### **activity**

Ask students to make up their own land.

### **directions**

- Give your land a name and draw a map of it. Is it on earth, is it on another planet, or is it somewhere else entirely?
- If your imaginary land is on earth, find a world map and locate where it is.
- What is the climate of your land like?
- If your imaginary land is on another planet, what is the climate like there?
- What kinds of creatures live in your imaginary land?
- What grows there?
- What do the creatures who live there eat?
- Do the creatures who live there work? What do they do?
- What do the creatures who live there do for fun?
- Make a list of ten things you'd need to know about the land and its creatures before you could visit there.
- Create a model of your imaginary land. Use a cardboard box, scraps of paper, pieces of empty toilet paper and paper towel rolls, paste, paint, and whatever else you can think of. When your model is finished, share it with someone else who has made an imaginary land. Talk to them, finding out as much as you can about their land.
- Draw, or paint, some pictures of your land.
- Make up a story about your land.

## some magic flights of fantasy and fantastic journeys

### travel agency: school or local library

*The Enchanted Hair Tale* by Alexis de Veaux

*The Search for Delicious* by Natalie Babbitt

*Oaf* by Julia Cunningham

*The Time-Ago Tales of Jahdu* and *Time Ago Lost: More Tales of Jahdu* by Virginia Hamilton

*In Shadowlands* by Mitsumasa Anno

*Ellsworth and the Cats from Mars* by Patience Brewster

*The Wizard's Tears* by Maxine Kumin and Anne Sexton

*The Magic Honey Jar* by Susi Bohdal

*The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine* by Donald Barthelme

### activity

There are several editions of *The Wizard of Oz*, illustrated by different artists. Look through a few different volumes.

- Which illustrator's pictures do you like best? Why?
- Draw your own pictures of Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, the Witches, the Flying Monkeys, etc.

### activity

Have students read, or read with them, some of Frank Baum's other tales of Oz. Then, give them the following assignment:

- Choose a character, or several characters, from any of Frank Baum's stories and make up your own adventure for them. Write a story, play, or song about the adventure.

### activity

Have students read, or read with them, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Ask them to compare the character of Alice with the character of Dorothy. Pose the following series of questions.

- How are Alice and Dorothy alike?
- How are Alice and Dorothy different?
- Is one girl more adventurous than the other? Explain your answer.
- Does one girl have more "common sense"? Explain your answer.
- Which character do you like better? Why?
- Which character would you rather be? Why?
- Which character would you rather have as a friend? Why?

## focus: the man behind the man behind the curtain (a library scavenger hunt)

### activity

L. Frank Baum was a fascinating man. Have students go to the library and try to find out the answers to these questions.

1. L. Frank Baum's first book was:
  - a. *The Wizard of Oz*
  - b. *Baum's Complete Stamp Dealers Directory*
  - c. *Ozma of Oz*
  - d. *Brave Janet Reachfar*
  
2. L. Frank Baum's first name was:
  - a. Linus
  - b. Larry
  - c. Lyman
  - d. Lloyd
  
3. L. Frank Baum wrote books under the name(s) of:
  - a. Louisa May Alcott
  - b. Edith Van Dyne
  - c. Captain Hugh Fitzgerald
  - d. Lewis Carroll
  
4. Baum worked as a/n:
  - a. Actor
  - b. Traveling salesman
  - c. Store owner
  - d. Newspaper editor
  
5. What was the name of Baum's house in Hollywood?
  - a. The Emerald Castle
  - b. Ozcot
  - c. The Witch's Den
  - d. Kansas
  
6. Was Baum a successful author right away?
  
7. Who published *The Wizard of Oz* first?

## follow-up

...for after students have attempted to find, or have found, answers...

## activity

Have students read, and/or read with students, *Ozma of Oz*.

## activity

Have students read *Brave Janet Reachfar* and compare the young protagonist with Dorothy.

## questions for students

- What is “stamp dealing” and are you interested in that?
- What is a pen name?
- Why would L. Frank Baum use one or more pen names?
- Choose a pen name for yourself.

## activity

Try to find a book to read by Edith Van Dyne or Captain Hugh Fitzgerald. Do you like these books as much as you like the “Oz” books?

## question for students

- Which of L. Frank Baum’s careers do you most interesting?
- Would you like to have your own theatre troupe?
- What kind of plays would you do? Explain.
- If you were a store owner, what kind of store would you have?
- What would be good and bad about being a traveling salesman?

## activity

Have students make their own newspapers. They can get articles and cartoons from members of their family and friends. And they can write their own editorials on a topic that is important to them.

## activity

Think of five other things you would like to know about L. Frank Baum, and find these out, too. One book that may help you find these answers, and more, is a very interesting biography entitled: *L. Frank Baum, Royal Historian of Oz* by Angelica Shirley Carpenter and Jean Shirley.

## **focus: censorship**

### **activity**

Pose the following questions about censorship to students, using the career of L. Frank Baum as a starting point.

- What does “censorship” mean?
- Were any of L. Frank Baum’s books ever censored? If so, why?
- Do you think that L. Frank Baum’s books should have been censored? Why?
- Is there ever a good reason for a book to be censored?
- If you think there are good reasons for censorship, what book(s) should be censored, and why?
- Find out a book that has been censored, or banned from bookshelves, and the reasons why. Do you think this book should have been banned? Explain your answer.

## **activities and questions for younger students**

Use the following questions and activities to explore *The Wizard of Oz*.

### **lions and tigers and monkeys—oh, my!**

#### **activity**

With students, look at some picture books of lions and domestic cats. Use the following questions to initiate a discussion about lions.

- What are lions like?
- Where do they live?
- Are most lions cowardly?
- Are lions and pet cats related?
- Do both lions and pet cats purr? Why do they purr?
- Why does a lion, or a pet cat, flick its tail?

#### **activity**

Show a videotape of lions and pet cats moving. To music, have students make up a lion, and a cat, dance using many lion moves: jumps, stretches, pounces, etc.



### **activity**

Show a videotape of monkeys, and share some monkey picture books. Pose the following questions to begin a discussion of real vs. “flying” monkeys. Have some “real monkey food” around to snack on: bananas, naturally.

- What kinds of creatures can fly?
- Do monkeys have wings?
- Can monkeys fly?
- What are some things you know that real monkeys do?
- Can you pretend that you’re a flying monkey?
- Can you pretend that you’re a real monkey?

### **activity**

Have a wide variety of inexpensive materials on hand and ask students to make their own Cowardly Lion, Tin Woodman, Flying Monkey, or Scarecrow costumes. All students should receive awards for the costumes they make—scariest, most creative, funniest, most “realistic,” etc.

## **the wonderful world of oz (and the stage)**

### **activity**

Work with students on illusion and lighting. Use the following two activities to initiate a discussion of the make-believe land of Oz, and to prompt a simple discussion of stage lighting.

Have students cut out circles of white paper, and color the circles green with crayons. Put the circles of paper on flashlights, turn off the lights, and shine against walls.

Get some clear green plastic and make “Oz Glasses” using the plastic and some tape. Have students hold the glasses up to their faces and examine things: snow, their hands, pizza. Ask students the following questions:

- What is the world like with these “Oz Glasses” on?
- Would you like, or dislike, wearing these glasses all the time?

## **crows: beware!**

### **activity**

Look at some picture books of farms, fields, and crops with students. Find Kansas on a map, and talk about the kinds of crops produced in Kansas. Eat some foods that contain “Kansas crops” for a snack. Then, pose the following questions:

- What do real scarecrows do?
- What are they made out of?
- Where do they appear?
- Have you ever seen one?

### **activity**

Help students make their own small scarecrows using scraps of material for the body, buttons, yarn, glue, newspapers, etc. Students may then choose to put their scarecrow outside in a garden when summer comes or put it near a plant inside (if they don't have a garden or are worried that it will be damaged). Popsicle sticks may be used to hold scarecrows upright.

## **opinions and emotions: all the color of the rainbow**

### **activity**

Make a rainbow of reactions to *The Wizard of Oz*. Have students tell you what they thought was really good or bad, scary, funny, beautiful, sad, about *The Wizard of Oz*. Have them draw a picture of the scene their comment involves on a strip of brightly colored paper. Write a brief summary of each student's comment on their drawing. When students have completed their drawings, and comments have been written down, tape the drawings up in an arch (roughly in sequential order), and discuss each student's comment and drawing.

### **activity**

In block corner, have students think about *The Wizard of Oz* and then build a variety of Oz-related buildings: an Emerald City, a witch's castle, a farm, etc.

## activity

In a carpeted area, using voice instruction and appropriate music, have students move like the Tin Woodman and Scarecrow. The Tin Woodman is working in the forest (cutting down a tree, lifting, using a wheelbarrow) when rain slowly starts to fall from the sky. It falls too fast for him to make it home in time. Students must grind to a halt and freeze until someone comes along to give them oil.

As scarecrows, they hang on their poles until the support suddenly breaks and sets them loose. They tumble to the ground and try to skip, hop, and jump; they are full of straw and are very limp and light indeed. Some crows come along and the scarecrows try to chase them, but can't: their feet are too big and they trip! The scarecrows finally hammer their poles back together and hop up to scare the crows away.

## miscellaneous questions for students

- Are witches real?
- What was the most exciting part of the play?
- What part of the play made you laugh the most?
- Which character would you like to be? Why?
- What part of the character's life would you enjoy the most?
- What part of the character's life would you dislike?
- How many of the more than 32 *Oz* books did L. Frank Baum write?
- Was the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz* an instant success?
- What does "there's no place like home" mean to you?