



G.S. Night at the Movies

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The Wizard of Oz – see sample attached
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Sample Learning Guide: The Wizard of Oz

ETHICAL EMPHASIS --- Trustworthiness, Respect, Caring.

Age: 5+; Not Rated; Musical; 1939; 101 minutes; B & W and Color; Available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Description: A Kansas farm girl is caught in a tornado and knocked unconscious. She awakens far from home in a magical land with witches, wizards, little people, and other fantastic characters. The movie describes her efforts to get back home. The film is adapted from the popular children's book by L. Frank Baum.

Benefits of the Movie: "The Wizard of Oz" is a classic musical, beloved by children and their parents for generations. The film is perennially popular because it explores many of the issues and fears that children ages 5 - 12 must confront as they mature. Secondary school history teachers can use the story as an allegory to the debate during the late 1800s over whether the U.S. should adopt bimetallism and use silver as well as gold to support for the currency.

Featured songs include: "Over the Rainbow," "Munchkin Land," "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead," "Follow the Yellow Brick Road," "If I Only Had a Brain/a Heart/the Nerve," "If I Were King of the Forest," "The Merry Ole Land of Oz."

Possible Problems: MINOR. Younger children may be frightened by the wicked witches and their minions.

Helpful Background:

People love this film because it touches on important questions, fears, and desires of children. Home is the center of a child's life. But children know that somewhere beyond the safety of home there is a world that is exciting and colorful, yet frightening. What if home is destroyed or the child is suddenly taken away from home before he or she has grown up? Will the child survive? Will he or she ever be able to find the way back?

What about relationships with grownups? Adults are all powerful to a young child but a child soon learns that this power has limitations, as when Auntie Em and Uncle Henry can't prevent Miss Gulch from taking Toto.

What do children do when adults ignore their pleas for help?

How does a child learn what he or she needs to know to get through tough situations?

Can children ever triumph over evil adults?

What about appearances? How do you tell appearance from reality?

What is the nature of power? How do people get power over other people?

The film deals with many of the challenges of becoming an adult: learning what a person needs to

know to be an adult (the challenge of the Scarecrow); acting courageously when you are very scared (the Cowardly Lion); and caring (the Tin Man).

This story also tells children that they can survive all of the challenges of the wide world and still get back home.

These are core developmental issues that children must work out for themselves. They intrigue children and resonate with the child inside us all.

"The Wizard of Oz" also contains some important moral and character development lessons. Dorothy treats everyone with respect and courageously meets whatever challenges come her way. The film teaches that groups of diverse beings can respect one another, work together, and achieve a common goal. It tells us that often evil, in the form of powerful and malevolent beings, has power over us only to the extent that we permit, due to our own weakness, fear, and error. Supposedly powerful people may turn out to be masters of deception who are not formidable when unmasked.

Through this story we also see that if we want to go looking for greater purpose in our lives, we may want to avoid traveling "somewhere over the rainbow," and look instead in our own home community. For some of us "there's no place like home," no matter what wonders and adventures might await us in the big colorful world. "The Wizard of Oz" and [It's a Wonderful Life](#) are the major cinematic proponents of this view. There are many other movies that glorify the effort of young people to break out of the restrictions of their home environments and live in that brightly colored, exciting and somewhat dangerous world beyond their home. These are collected in the [Breaking Out](#) section of the Character Development Index.

Dorothy's story has most of the features of the classic hero's journey of separation, descent and return: Dorothy is carried away to the threshold of adventure (the cyclone); she meets a helpful or protective figure (the good witch Glinda); she is provided with talismans to aid and protect her on her journey (the Ruby slippers, the mark on her forehead from Glinda's kiss); she meets helpers (the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion); she goes through a series of tests; she endures a supreme ordeal and triumphs (the episode with the Wicked Witch of the West); and she gains her reward (the trip back to Kansas). [See [The Hero with a Thousand Faces](#) by Joseph Campbell. This application of Campbell's analysis to "The Wizard of Oz" derived from [The Annotated Wizard of Oz](#), Centennial Edition, page 59.]

There are significant differences between the book and the movie and they should be treated as separate works of art. The book is an excellent fairy tale that was very popular when it was published in 1900 and has been so ever since. The script for the film adds to and actually improves upon the story told in the book.

The film adds a reality in Kansas that is parallel to that of Oz. To construct this reality, the movie introduces new characters such as Miss Almira Gulch, the rich old crone who wants to put Toto to sleep; the three farm hands who parallel Dorothy's friends in Oz; and the fortune teller, Professor Marvel, who is the counterpart for the Wizard of Oz. None of these characters or the incidents in which they meet Dorothy are contained in the book. Nor, in the book, is Dorothy's trip to Oz a dream, as it is in the film. The Dorothy of the book really went to Oz and really came back home

to live in Kansas. There are other differences as well. The whole concept of Dorothy, while she was in Kansas, wanting to go "somewhere over the rainbow" was added by the scriptwriter. In the book Dorothy's shoes are silver rather than ruby (more of this later when discussing the story as an allegory for the Populist movement of the late 1800s.) The way in which the Wizard gives the Scarecrow his brains, the Lion his courage and the Tin Man his heart are different and some of the events have been telescoped in the film.

The state of Kansas is part of the Great Plains, which is a large plateau in the center of North America. The Great Plains extend for over 1500 miles from the Saskatchewan River in Canada, south to the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico. The East-West measure is about 400 miles beginning at the Rocky Mountains and extending east. The natural vegetation is buffalo grass. The climate is hot in summer and cold in winter. The average annual rainfall is only 20 inches. The landscape is famous for its undisturbed monotony.

Tornados are one of the most violent storms in nature. They can occur anywhere in the world but most often strike in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. The speeds of the wind in a tornado range from 200 to 500 miles per hour. Since tornados generally destroy any instruments which record wind velocities, we have no direct data on the speeds of winds inside a tornado. Tornados take the form a funnel made up of water, dust, and debris sucked up into the storm. Where they touch the ground, tornados can be only a few meters wide or they can be up to a kilometer wide. Damage to property results from the wind and from the extremely reduced pressure in the center. Structures explode if the air can't get out of them fast enough. People are instructed to open windows and take cover if a tornado approaches. Dorothy's story has most of the features of the classic hero's journey of separation, descent and return: Dorothy is carried away to the threshold of adventure (the cyclone); she meets a helpful or protective figure (the good witch Glinda); she is provided with talismans to aid and protect her on her journey (the Ruby slippers, the mark on her forehead from Glinda's kiss); she meets helpers (the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion); she goes through a series of tests; she endures a supreme ordeal and triumphs (the episode with the Wicked Witch of the West); and she gains her reward (the trip back to Kansas). [See [The Hero with a Thousand Faces](#) by Joseph Campbell. This application of Campbell's analysis to "The Wizard of Oz" derived from [The Annotated Wizard of Oz](#), Centennial Edition, page 59.]

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Allegory to Populism in U.S. - Late 1800s

Educators can use the The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (the book and not the movie) as an allegory for the history of the Populist movement in U.S. politics in the late 1800s. The validity of the theory is disputed. See the [Links to the Internet](#) for sites reflecting the conflicting interpretations and The Annotated Wizard of Oz, Centennial Edition, Introduction, pages lxxxix and xc. Whether the theory is correct or not, it is an excellent way to teach: (1) the literary device of allegory and (2) the history of Populism in the U.S. during the late 1800s.

A simplified analysis is that the Populists championed a bimetal standard for the U.S. currency, i.e., one based on both gold and silver. With a gold standard, there was too little paper money in circulation. The bankers and industrialists of the day controlled gold and wanted a gold based

currency. This restricted the availability of money and hence, so the theory went, kept inflation and prices low. The Populists believed that if a bimetal standard was adopted there would be more paper money and an increase in commerce, salaries, and prices benefiting farmers and workers.

The Quantity Theory of Money can be expressed as: $MV = PQ$ where:

M = the quantity of money in circulation (M1).

V = the velocity with which money circulates in the economy. (This can be assumed to be a constant. It does go up slowly over time as the technology for clearing transactions through the banking system is improved.)

P = the average price level.

Q = real national output (GNP or GDP).

The Quantity of Money Theory of Price is a corollary to the Quantity Theory of Money and asserts that: $P = MV/Q$. This theory means that when M, the amount of money in circulation, rises the average price level will rise.

The U.S. had been on the gold standard (i.e., all dollars issued had to be backed by gold and could be redeemed for gold) until the Civil War. After the Civil War the issuance of currency was restricted and, in 1879, the Gold standard was resumed. The U.S. economy throughout most of the late 1800s was expanding rapidly and there was a need for more currency. The 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act provided for increased purchase and coinage of silver. There were fears that the U.S. would switch from gold to a silver standard and so people began to hoard gold, depleting the treasury's supply. The Populists believed that more money (M) would result in an increased average price level. This was to be accomplished through "bimetallism," adding silver as a second metal on which the dollar was based.

The Populists never came to power in the U.S. The most influential Populist/bimetallist candidate for president was William Jennings Bryan. Nominated for President by the Democratic party on three occasions, Bryan never achieved the presidency despite the fact that on one occasion he won the popular vote.

An allegory is "the representation of spiritual, moral, or other abstract meanings through the actions of fictional characters that serve as symbols." Random House Webster's College Dictionary, 1999. The analogies on which this allegorical interpretation is based (there are some variations among educators) are as follows:

Dorothy = the American people: plucky, good-natured, naive.

Toto = the Prohibition (Temperance) party. Prohibitionists favored the bimetallic standard but like any fringe group often pulled in the wrong direction. So they got to be a dog. (Toto is a play on "teetotalers.")

Oz = the almighty ounce (oz) of gold.

The yellow brick road = a path paved with gold bricks that leads nowhere.

Dorothy's silver slippers = originally the property of the Wicked Witch of the East, until Dorothy drops the house on the witch. Walking on the yellow brick road with the silver slippers represented the bimetallic standard. (MGM changed the silver slippers to the ruby slippers to exploit the technology of Technicolor.)

The Good Witch of the North = New England, a Populist stronghold.

The Good Witch of the South = the South, another populist stronghold

QUICK DISCUSSION QUESTION FOR CHILDREN AGES 5 - 9: Remember that the Lion needed a medal from the Wizard before he felt that he was courageous. The Tin Man needed a heart from the Wizard before he thought that he could be kind. And the Scarecrow needed a piece of paper saying he was smart before he thought that he was. But wasn't the lion courageous, the Tin Man kind and the Scarecrow smart before when they were walking with Dorothy on the Yellow Brick Road? What does this tell you?

Suggested Response: That you are who you are regardless of whether people recognize that fact. Being acknowledged by people for your courage, compassion or intelligence really doesn't mean that much. In this story, the person that the Lion, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man relied upon to give them their recognition was himself a charlatan, a false wizard, whose power came merely from appearances.

QUICK DISCUSSION QUESTION FOR CHILDREN AGES 9 - 12: Where did the power of the Wizard of Oz come from? Was it real?

Suggested Response: It came from appearances and the willingness of others to obey him. If a child responds that it is not real, remind them that the inhabitants of Oz obeyed the Wizard and that throughout most of the movie Dorothy did as well; talk to them about the power to persuade, e.g., George Washington inspiring men to fight for the revolution; Franklin Roosevelt persuading Americans that we could get through the Great Depression: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."; Martin Luther King inspiring civil rights activists to use nonviolence to gain equal rights. This type of power is not tangible but it is very real.

QUICK DISCUSSION QUESTION FOR CHILDREN AGES 12 and up: Compare the outlines of the plot of "The Wizard of Oz" and the The Odyssey. How are they alike?

Suggested Response: Each story is that of the return home of the hero (used for both genders). The hero did not voluntarily seek the quest. The hero is taken into an imaginary world. He/she has a protector (Athena for Odysseus and Glinda for Dorothy) who doesn't help him/her all the time, but only some of the time, particularly at the end. The hero has helpers in the imaginary world. The hero slays several opponents and undergoes several ordeals. The hero is steadfast in his/her devotion to the desire to return home. There are probably more.