

# The Wizard of Oz: Story and Study Guide

## Background

The Wizard of Oz was a musical stage production loosely based on the book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by Frank Baum, 1900. The stage play opened at the Grand Opera House in Chicago on 16 June 1902, and moved to Broadway early in 1903. The Broadway production included famous songs, the most famous being 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'. The musical toured cities across the nation in full version until 1909 with shorter abridged versions or just music performances by different groups until about 1918. There were a few reprisals in the 1940s plus modern recreations in the 2000s. It was described as one of the most successful American stage extravaganzas of the early 20th century,

## The Story

On the Kansas prairies of the USA, a young girl named Dorothy lives on a farm with her Aunt Em, her Uncle Henry, and her little black dog, Toto. One day, a raging cyclone suddenly rolls through the prairie. Before Dorothy can join her relatives in the storm shelter, the force of the storm knocks her to the floor and picks up the entire farmhouse. Eventually, the house lands surprisingly softly, and Dorothy finds herself in a strange and beautiful country full of trees, rivers, and colourful flowers.

She is met by an older woman: the Good Witch of the North. The Good Witch explains to Dorothy that she is now in the Land of Oz, and thanks her for killing the Wicked Witch of the East. Surprised at this remark, Dorothy notices that the farmhouse has indeed landed on someone wearing silver slippers. This was the Wicked Witch of the East, who is now dead! The Good Witch goes on to explain that the silver slippers belong to Dorothy now, and that the only remaining wicked witch in Oz is the Wicked Witch of the West. Dorothy expresses that she wants to go back home to Kansas right away, but the Good Witch of the North regretfully tells her that a vast, uncrossable desert surrounds Oz on all sides, and so Dorothy has no choice but to stay in Oz forever.

Dorothy is distressed at this news, as she's sure that Aunt Em must be worried about her. Upon reflection, the Good Witch of the North tells Dorothy to travel to the Emerald City and see the great and powerful Wizard of Oz, who can surely send Dorothy back home.

After putting on the silver slippers and preparing for the journey, Dorothy sets off with Toto down the yellow brick road, which leads to the Emerald City. Along the way, she meets three strange new companions: the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion. The Scarecrow has a head full of straw, and he dearly wishes he had a brain. The Tin Woodman is a hollow man made of tin who wants a heart more than anything. The Cowardly Lion is a great beast who nonetheless seems to be afraid of everyone and everything, and he therefore desires courage. All three of them agree to accompany Dorothy on her quest in

the hopes that the Wizard of Oz can grant them what they want as well as sending Dorothy home. The group encounters many perils on their way to the Emerald City, and each of Dorothy's new friends seems to display the quality they believe they lack, without even noticing. The Scarecrow comes up with clever plans, the Tin Woodman shows deep compassion for every innocent creature, and the Cowardly Lion displays a surprising amount of bravery in killing a large spider.

After many trials and tribulations, the four friends and Toto finally arrive at the gates of the Emerald City. The reclusive Wizard of Oz agrees to speak with each of them one at a time, and he assumes a different fearsome form during each meeting. One by one, he agrees to grant each of the travellers' requests, but only if they destroy the Wicked Witch of the West first. Disappointed and frightened by this idea, Dorothy and her friends set out for the west, hoping they can somehow accomplish what the Wizard has tasked them with.

The Wicked Witch sees the travellers arrive in her country from afar. Furious, she sends her army of winged monkeys after Dorothy and her friends. They destroy the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, and capture the Lion and Dorothy, whom the Wicked Witch decides to enslave. The Wicked Witch steals one of Dorothy's silver slippers. Dorothy is furious and throws a bucket of water at the Witch, not realising that water was the thing that would kill the witch. The witch melted into a heap and Dorothy took back her silver slipper.

Some little people called the Winkies, whom the Wicked Witch had enslaved, thank Dorothy for freeing them and agree to reassemble the ruined Scarecrow and Tin Woodman. With the group of friends reunited, they make their way back to the Emerald City to see the wizard.

After much waiting, the Wizard finally agrees to speak with Dorothy and her friends again. They tell him that they've killed the Wicked Witch, but he still orders them to return tomorrow. Just then, Toto accidentally knocks over a screen nearby, revealing the props he used for his so-called 'magic tricks'. The Wizard turned out to be nothing but a small old man who's only been pretending to be a Wizard for years. The man tries to console Dorothy's friends by giving them what they desire, in his own way. He gives the Scarecrow a brain of sorts, made of grain, pins, and needles, representing sharpness and practical thinking. He gives the Tin Man a silk heart, and he offers the Lion a drink that the Wizard insists is courage. The three of them are satisfied, as they now believe they have what they asked for.

As for Dorothy, however, the Wizard has no choice but to fly her back to Kansas in a hot air balloon. The Wizard explains that he once lived in the USA, working as a circus performer, and now longs to return anyway. On the day of the departure, the balloon takes off, but the Wizard accidentally leaves Dorothy behind, as she's busy trying to catch Toto in the watching crowd. The Wizard has no way of bringing the balloon back down, and Dorothy is stranded in Oz once again. As he leaves, the Wizard puts the wise Scarecrow in charge of the Emerald City.

Dorothy's friends are still determined to see her get back home, so they decide to travel south and ask the Good Witch of the South, for help. She tells Dorothy that she can use the silver slippers to get back home. Dorothy activates the magic charm of the slippers and finally returns to Kansas, where Aunt Em and Uncle Henry have built a new house on the prairie. She runs into her aunt's arms, and Aunt Em is relieved to see Dorothy safe and sound. After her long journey, Dorothy is overjoyed to be home.

## **Setting and Characters**

The story is set in Kansas and the magical land of Oz, introducing Dorothy, her family, and her dog Toto. Key characters include Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tinman, and Lion, each representing different desires and traits. The narrative begins with a tornado that transports Dorothy to Oz, setting the stage for her adventure. The Yellow Brick Road serves as a central motif guiding Dorothy to the Emerald City and the Wizard.

## **Plot Summary**

Dorothy's journey begins with her desire to return home after being swept away by a tornado. She learns that the only way back to Kansas is to seek the help of the Wizard of Oz.

Along the way, she meets the Scarecrow, who seeks a brain, the Tinman, who desires a heart, and the Lion, who wants courage.

Each character's journey reflects their personal struggles and desires, culminating in their quest for the Wizard's assistance. The story explores themes of friendship, courage, and the quest for self-discovery.

## **Character Analysis**

### **Dorothy**

Dorothy is a young girl from Kansas who embodies bravery and determination. Her character represents the theme of home and the importance of family. Throughout her journey, she learns valuable lessons about friendship and self-reliance. Dorothy's interactions with other characters highlight her nurturing nature and leadership qualities.

### **Scarecrow**

The Scarecrow symbolizes the quest for intelligence and wisdom. He believes he lacks a brain, yet demonstrates cleverness and resourcefulness throughout the story. His character reflects the idea that knowledge and intelligence come from experience, not just formal education. The Scarecrow's humorous dialogue adds levity to the narrative, making him a beloved character.

## **Tinman**

The Tinman represents the desire for emotional depth and compassion, symbolized by the heart. His backstory reveals a tragic accident that led to his transformation into a tin figure, emphasizing themes of loss and longing. The Tinman's journey illustrates the importance of empathy and connection with others. His song about wanting a heart highlights his vulnerability and desire for love.

## **Lion**

The Lion embodies the struggle with self-doubt and the quest for courage. Despite being a lion, he perceives himself as cowardly, showcasing the theme of inner strength. His character development emphasizes that true bravery often involves facing one's fears. The Lion's backstory of being scared of heights adds depth to his character and relatability.

## **The Good Witch of the North**

Although there is no such thing as a good witch, this character symbolises the good, in the battle of good against evil.

## **The Wicked Witches of the East and West**

These witches symbolise all that is bad.

## **The Wizard**

The Wizard represents someone who strives and pretends to be famous but is actually a fraud. Although dishonest in his attempt to be a figure of importance in the Emerald City, he at least shows some humility when he is found out, and does offer, through his own human capacity, to help Dorothy and her three friends.

## **Key Themes and Motifs**

### **The Quest for Identity**

Each character's journey reflects their search for self-identity and personal growth. For the Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow, the story suggests that the qualities the characters seek are already within them, and only need to be discovered.

Dorothy's return to Kansas symbolizes the realization that home and belonging are the main things that matter to her.

### **Friendship and Teamwork**

The bond formed between Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tinman, and Lion highlights the importance of friendship. Their collective journey showcases how teamwork can help overcome obstacles and fears. Each character supports one another, demonstrating the value of collaboration and mutual support. The narrative reinforces the idea that true friends help each other grow and achieve their goals.

## **Courage and Bravery**

The story explores different forms of courage, from physical bravery to emotional strength. The characters confront their fears, illustrating that bravery is not the absence of fear but the willingness to face it. The Lion's journey is particularly poignant, as he learns that courage comes from within. The narrative encourages the audience to embrace their fears and find strength in vulnerability.

Each of Dorothy's new companions doubt that they have everything it takes to be a complete person. However, it becomes clear throughout their journey that the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion already possess what they think they lack. The Scarecrow wants a brain, but he's constantly devising clever plans and strategies for facing the deadly challenges of the Land of Oz. While the Tin Man claims to be heartless, his behaviour throughout the adventure reveals him to be a kind and compassionate soul from the start. The Lion's cowardice isn't nearly as apparent as his bravery, as he voluntarily puts himself in dangerous and frightening situations to help his friends.

## **Self-confidence and believing in yourself**

The story suggests that the only quality that any of the three friends truly lacked was a willingness to rely on and believe in themselves. By assuming that only an external force like the Wizard of Oz can make them feel whole, they ignore what skills and qualities they already have in spades. Misunderstanding themselves in this way teaches a simple but effective lesson: that self-respect comes from within, not from without. Dorothy's companions didn't believe they were real people because they felt themselves lacking, but by relying on themselves during their adventure, they prove that they're just as real and as valuable as anyone else.

The silver slippers themselves encapsulate this idea: Dorothy has had them on her feet since arriving in Oz but only finds out at the end of the story that they've always been capable of transporting her back home. She simply needed to learn this about herself to accomplish her goal.

## **Home and Belonging**

Almost from the moment that a cyclone sends her to the strange Land of Oz, Dorothy is determined to find a way back home to Kansas and her Aunt Em. This highlights one of the novel's main points: that everyone has somewhere they truly belong. It's notable that Dorothy immediately wants to go home and even sheds tears at the thought of staying in Oz forever. Despite how magical and dazzling Oz seems to be, Dorothy still feels that she belongs back on the flat, grey prairies of Kansas. She expresses this sentiment again in her conversation with the Scarecrow. While he wonders why she'd want to leave a country as splendid as Oz, she explains that people always long for their home, no matter how beautiful

other places might be. Put another way, feeling like she belongs and is at home is more important to Dorothy than marvelling at Oz's many wonders.

### **Good vs Evil**

The goodness or wickedness of the witches is obvious, because their behaviour speaks for itself. The extreme good vs. evil in Oz also heightens the tension and emphasizes Dorothy's childlike innocence by contrast. Dorothy participates in the fight against evil by killing both wicked witches, though it's notable that both killings were accidental.

### **The Ethics of the story for Christians**

Is it right for Christians to read books or watch productions of plays that include witches and wizards?

For young children stories that include witches and wizards, and even fairies for that matter, are confusing. It is difficult for a young child to know the difference between fact and fantasy, and to them, these types of stories may be the equivalent of horror stories, giving them nightmares. The other problem is that exposing young children to these types of fairy stories may set the stage for them thinking in later life that everything to do with witches and wizards is just make-believe.

However, older children and teenagers can easily discern between fact and fantasy. Witches are real, as are ghosts, and as Christians we know these to be evil spirits working through ordinary people who open themselves up to Satan worship. The Bible tells us about a real witch, (also called a medium) in 1 Samuel 28:3-16. Saul consulted a medium to bring up Samuel from the dead, because he was distressed and wanted advice. However, the Samuel that the medium brought up was not the real Samuel – only an imitating spirit – and things did not turn out well for Saul.

Older students can understand when a story illustrates good overcoming evil, using the symbolism of witches as evil. The most famous example of this is the novel by Christian author C.S Lewis, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe". This is in our Year 7 curriculum. If you missed it in Year 7, ask your teacher for a copy.

When choosing to watch movies or read books, remember this:

*Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Avoid filling your mind with horror or stories that glorify evil.

## Your Challenge

Turn the story into a play. This does not necessarily have to be acted out, but using the writing genre of a play is what we are looking for.

### First list the characters:

- Narrator
- Dorothy
- Toto
- Lion
- Tin Man
- Scarecrow
- Good Witch of the North
- Wicked Witch of the West
- Wizard

(Note that the Wicked Witch of the East does not need a part because she gets killed in Scene 1)

### Then list the props

e.g. Yellow brick road

### The Scenes

Then divide the story into scenes and give the actors speaking parts. Note that the Narrator can fill in certain parts of the story that need to be explained without dialogue.

### Example of Scene 1:

#### Scene 1: The Hurricane

*(Strong wind sound)*

**Dorothy:** Help, help! What's happening to me? I'm being blown away!

*(Dorothy lands heavily on the floor. Toto runs up to her.)*

**Dorothy:** Oh Toto, I'm so glad you're here. But where are we? I want to go back home to Kansas!

**Good Witch of the North:** You have been blown here by the hurricane. You have arrived in the land of Oz. Unfortunately, there is no way back. But you have done the land of Oz a big favour. Your house landed on the Wicked Witch of the West, killing her.

**Dorothy:** But I must get home to my family!

**Good Witch:** Well, there is one possibility. There is a Wizard in the Emerald City who might be able to help you. Follow the Yellow Brick Road you see in front of you, to the Emerald City.

(Dorothy and Toto begin walking along the road.)

**Continue writing the play to the end.**