

**fresh film festival**

**study guide**

by Nicole Dunphy

**The  
Wizard  
Of Oz**

**Victor Fleming**

**Wrangler**  
THE AUTHENTIC WESTERN JEANS

# The Wizard Of Oz

**Director** Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited)  
**Producer** Mervyn LeRoy  
**Screenplay** Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf (Based on the novel by L Frank Baum)

## Cast

**Judy Garland** Dorothy  
**Ray Bolger** Hunk / The Scarecrow  
**Bert Lahr** Zeke / The Cowardly Lion  
**Jack Haley** Hickory / The Tin Woodsman  
**Billie Burke** Glinda  
**Margaret Hamilton** Miss Gulch / The Wicked Witch  
**Charley Grapewin** Uncle Henry  
**Clara Blandick** Auntie Em  
**Pat Walsh** Nikko  
**Frank Morgan** Prof. Marvel / The Wizard / Guard / Coachman  
**The Singer Midgets** The Munchkins

## Crew

**Cinematographer** Harold Rosson ASC  
**Editor** Blanche Sewell  
**Music Adaptation** Herbert Stothart  
**Music** Harold Arlen  
**Lyrics** E.Y. Harburg  
**Art Direction** Cedric Gibbons  
**Special Effects** A. Arnold Gillespie  
**Choreographer** Bobby Connolly  
**Costumes** Adrian  
**Character Make-Up** Jack Dawn

# Introduction



One of the classics of American literature, 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' has stirred the imagination of young and old alike for over four generations. Published in 1900, author L. Frank Baum joined archetypal European fairytale characters such as the witch, the wizard and the lost child with new Americanised characters such as the cornfield scarecrow and mechanical woodsman. He created a fable which acts a melting pot for the classic fairytale and modern story to express the universal theme: 'there's no place like home'.

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It was almost four decades before Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer committed 'The Wizard of Oz' to celluloid in 1939. Europe was about to be gripped by war and the simplistic fable of 'The Wizard Of Oz' offered Americans an outlet for an imagination which was being clouded by the events across the Atlantic. The development of the film from book to screen offers us a valuable insight into the workings of a classic Hollywood studio of the period. Four different directors worked on the film at different periods as the shoot went on. The film also utilised the advent of colour in film to great advantage creating masterly fantasy sequences from the three-strip technicolour process. This allowed the film-makers define both the Kansas setting and the scene in Oz in a very deliberate manner.

Whether, 'The Wizard of Oz' is looked at as an allegory for the confusion of the times, a plea for a restoration of the American value system, a simple fable or a just a good musical, it remains as one of the most loved films of children and adults of all time.

## **The Wizard Of Oz**

Dir. Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited), USA/1939/100 mins

# Victor Fleming Biography

A former racing car driver and stills photographer, Fleming accompanied American President Woodrow Wilson to Europe as his chief cameraman during World War I. Fleming established himself with films such as 'Treasure Island' (1934) and 'Captains Courageous' (1937). Hired by MGM to replace Richard Thorpe on 'The Wizard Of Oz', he was moved by producer David O. Selznick to direct 'Gone With The Wind' whilst still in production on '...Oz'. Fleming won an Oscar for 'Gone With The Wind'. He died in 1949

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# Watching The Film

## The story

The film opens with Dorothy Gale, a schoolgirl running along a dusty Kansas road. She is escaping from local neighbour Miss Gulch whose dog has accused Dorothy of allowing her dog, Toto, to go into her garden. Dorothy lives with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry on their small farmholding in Kansas. Farmhands Zeke, Hulk and Hickory give her any advice they can. Miss Gulch arrives at Dorothy's house. She insists that the animal is put down and tells them that she is here to take the dog to the sheriff for that purpose. Dorothy's guardians reluctantly agree to this, to avoid legal proceedings. Toto escapes from Miss Gulch's clutches, however. Realising that Miss Gulch will return with the sheriff, Dorothy runs away from home, taking Toto with her.



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On the road she meets a kindly but crooked fortune-teller, Professor Marvel, who realising she is away from home, tells her that he can see that her Auntie is missing her. Guiltily, Dorothy returns home. But a tornado (twister) blows up and Dorothy is unable to reach the family storm shelter in time. Instead she returns to her house. The twister arrives, Dorothy bangs her head and falls unconscious on her bed. Dorothy dreams that the house, along with her and Toto, are sucked up into the eye of the storm.

The house lands with a jolt. Dorothy and Toto emerge to find themselves in a strange colourful land. Glinda, a good witch, arrives on the scene and tells Dorothy that she has killed the Wicked Witch of the East, as a result of the house

## **The Wizard Of Oz (Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited))**

falling on her. The inhabitants of the land – the Munchkins come out to greet Dorothy and thank her for killing the witch.

In the midst of the celebrations, the dead witches' sister – the Wicked Witch of the West appears and threatens harm on Dorothy. Glinda, however, gives Dorothy the dead witches ruby slippers which she is told will protect her in her time in Oz, the land she has arrived in. But she must be careful, because the Wicked Witch of the West will do everything in her power to get the magical ruby slippers from her. Dorothy tells Glinda that all she wants is to get home to Kansas. Glinda tells her that the only person who can get her home is the great Wizard of Oz who lives in the Emerald City. Dorothy must follow the yellow brick road to get to the City and must never stray from the road or take off the slippers. Dorothy and Toto set off.

On their way, Dorothy meets a scarecrow, who asks her for help. Made of straw, he has no brain and no one takes him seriously, least of all the crows he wishes to scare. Dorothy helps the scarecrow down from his post. Dorothy says that she is going to the Emerald City and that maybe the Wizard can help the Scarecrow too. The scarecrow joins them.

The trio then come upon a tin woodsman who has rusted up in the rain and cannot move. Dorothy and the Scarecrow oil him and get his joints moving. The Tinman tells them the tinsmith forgot to give him a heart. This is all that is preventing him from having feelings like everyone else. Again, Dorothy suggests that he joins them on their trip to the Emerald City to get some help from the famous Wizard.

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The Wicked Witch arrives and attempts to thwart their journey. The Tinman and the Scarecrow say that they will help Dorothy on her journey, no matter that they may not achieve their own goals. Dorothy says that they are the best friends anyone could have.

Now four, as they are walking through the forest an angry lion jumps out at them. The scarecrow and Tinman are terrified. The lion attacks Toto and Dorothy confronts the lion who bursts into tears. It turns out that this king of the jungle is really a coward. Again, Dorothy thinks that he should join her, the scarecrow, the tinman and Toto on their way to the Emerald City. The Lion agrees, hoping that the Wizard can give him the nerve not to be cowardly any more.

The Wicked Witch of the West has been monitoring the groups' progress. She poisons a poppy field that they are walking through and they all begin to feel tired, just as they are in sight of the Emerald City. Glinda intervenes and sends a fall of snow which counteracts the poison. They travel on to the door of the city.

The sentry at the door tells them that no one can see the great Oz. Dorothy shows him the ruby slippers and they gain entry. They tidy up at the Wash and Brush Up Company before they go to see the Wizard. Scared of the great and powerful Oz, they hold hands as they approach the regal chair. The floating head of Oz listens to their requests. But he tells them that they must get the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West before they will have their wishes granted.

They re-enter the forest. The Witch sends an army of flying monkeys who capture Dorothy and Toto, leaving a broken and scared Tinman, Lion and Scarecrow behind. In her castle, the Witch threatens to kill Toto if Dorothy does not give her the slippers. The Witches attempt to get the slippers from Dorothy fails and she realises that she must kill Dorothy to get the slippers.

Toto escapes and brings the Lion, Tinman and Scarecrow back to the witches lair. Disarming the witches guards they get into the castle. Toto leads them to Dorothy, they escape from the castle but the witch traps them. She sets the scarecrow alight and Dorothy, in an attempt to put out the fire, throws water over the Witch who melts. They rush back to the Wizard with the all important broomstick.

The Wizard tells them to come back tomorrow but Toto, pulling back a curtain, reveals that the Wizard is in fact, simply a man operating a machine. They confront him. However, the 'Wizard' proves that the Tinman, Scarecrow and Lion already have the qualities they wish for and offers them a ticking heart, a Diploma in Thinkology and a medal of Courage as verification. However to get Dorothy back to Kansas, the 'Wizard' must bring her in his balloon. But Toto spots a cat and leaps from the basket. Dorothy rushes out of the balloon basket as it takes off. She is stranded and inconsolable.

Glinda arrives, once again, and tells Dorothy to click the ruby slippers together three times and this will return her to Kansas. Dorothy sadly says goodbye to her friends. Clicking her heels, Dorothy repeats the words 'There's no place like home...'

Auntie Em wipes Dorothy's brow as she wakes up, back home once again. Dorothy says she will never leave home again.



# Looking At The Film

## The Power Of The Studios

Hollywood from the 30's to the 50's was dominated by five major studios – MGM, Warner Brothers, RKO, Twentieth Century Fox and Paramount. These studios were more than just the place in which films were made, they controlled the entire industry from production to exhibition. The studios were run by powerful heads who became popularly known as 'movie moguls'. These executives would oversee production from the buying of the rights to a book through to casting, shooting and editing. With such an iron grip on each production, the executives regarded directors as hired hands and would often usurp the limited authority a director had. Well known moguls included Daryl F. Zanuck of 20th Century Fox and Louis B. Meyer of MGM.

Film stars were also strait-jacketed into contracts for a specific studio, with the studio choosing the roles that they felt suited them. The Studio exerted an all-pervasive control over their lives. They were carefully groomed and their private lives were orchestrated by the publicity departments of the studios creating the publicity necessary to maintain their popularity and keep them in the public eye.

Although they were very well paid, stars were tied into very long contracts and were virtually owned by the studios. Perhaps one of the more excessive regulations enforced on the star was that of suspension. This meant that anyone who refused to play a particular role was obliged to wait, unpaid, whilst the film was shot and then half that time again. This penalty was added to the end of an actors contract.

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## Task

- (1) Find out what you can about David O. Selznick who produced 'Gone With The Wind' around the same time as 'The Wizard of Oz'.
- (2) Do film stars still operate in contract to a single studio? What system is in operation in the film industry now?

## Making the Movie

The daughter of vaudevillians, Judy Garland was thirteen when she signed a contract with MGM in 1935. The studio searched for the appropriate film in which to utilise her singing and acting talents and found it in 'xThe Wizard of Oz' in 1939. Loew's Inc. (parent company of MGM) bought the rights of the book from Samuel Goldwyn for \$20,000. Both Shirley Temple and Deanna Durbin were considered for the part but sixteen-year old Garland was chosen. In February 1938, the film industry newspaper, Daily Variety carried an article announcing: "MGM has acquired the screen rights for 'The Wizard of Oz' from Samuel Goldwyn and has assigned Judy Garland to the role of Dorothy."



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With what seems a grim acknowledgement of the times, screenwriters Florence Ryerson and Edgar Allan Woolf, stated an awareness of the onerous task of bringing the much beloved children's novel to life:

"... perhaps the terrific strain under which we are living- with its war alarms, strikes, horrors at home and abroad that are forced upon us hourly by the radio - has drained life of its old joyousness. Whatever the cause, it has resulted in a mental retreat which might almost be called a stampede back to the simple untroubled hours of childhood."

Harold Arlen and Jerome Kern were assigned to write the score for the film which was budgeted at a colossal \$3.7 million. Inspired by a photograph in a

## **The Wizard Of Oz (Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited))**

German magazine, Art Director Cedric Gibbons began work on the set of the Emerald City. The Munchkinland set took one month to build and with 122 structures and one-quarter scale, it was the biggest of the sets. 150 painters worked on 65 sets which if assembled beside one another would have covered 25 acres. The wardrobe department created 4,000 costumes for more than 1,000 members of the cast.

On October 13, Richard Thorpe was appointed director and the studio started shooting with Harold Rosson behind the camera. Trouble started at the outset. The scenes of the first week of shooting were lacking in fantasy and charm. Thorpe had to go and Louis B. Mayer brought in George Cukor. Cukor had been waiting in the wings to direct 'Gone with the Wind' which was being filmed at the same time – he lasted only two days and Victor Fleming was brought in as director. Upon his take-over, Fleming scrapped the existing footage and recast the tinman as the original actor (Buddy Ebsen) had fallen ill.

On February 14, 1939 Fleming was pulled off '...Oz', ironically to replace George Cukor, again this time on 'Gone with the Wind'. At the time '...Oz' was incompleat. A fourth director King Vidor was brought in on 24 hours notice. Important work still remained to be done including the technical tricks of how to make the wicked witch fly on her broom stick and how to show Kansas in the midst of a tornado.

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Victor Fleming returned for the editing of the film. As the project reached an end, a decision was made to cut two musical numbers – 'The Jitterbug' and 'Over the Rainbow' from the film. Arguments ensued and 'Over the Rainbow' was taken out and put back in repeatedly. The preview premiere took place on August 17th, 1939, at Graumans' Chinese Theatre in Hollywood with 'Over the Rainbow' restored.

The next day, the picture opened officially at Loews Capitol in New York. It did seven shows to more than thirty-seven thousand customers. By the end of the week the film had grossed over \$100,000.

The final cost of the production of 'The Wizard of Oz' was \$2,777,000 – an enormous sum in the late 1930s. After the studio added expenses for distribution, advertising, and promotion, the total cost was nearly \$4 million. In its initial release it grossed \$3,017,000. Its first re-release (1948-49) brought an additional \$1,564,000. Even though Oz was one of the year's highest grossing movies, MGM still lost \$750,000 on the film.

# Technicolour

In 1939, when 'The Wizard of Oz' was released, the colour process had gone through ten years of tests. Despite there being almost 365 films released in 1939, only one-eighth of these utilised colour – the rest appearing in black and white. 'The Wizard of Oz' was ground-breaking in that it used colour, specifically for the fantastical sequences in the land of Oz, thereby deliberately adding to the emotive qualities of this wonderful world.



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Technicolour originated from the work of Herbert T. Kalmus and Donald F. Comstock who formed the Technicolour Motion Picture Corporation in 1915. The company lived precariously for a long time – sixteen years without making a profit. It took that long to harness what was considered a novelty to Hollywood's standards of economics. The issue of economies of scale hounded the use of Technicolour. Even after the three strip method had proven viable, the studios did not rush to convert. One principal reason was that Technicolour was hard to adjust to the demands of cost and labour time. In 1936, Technicolour could increase a pictures budget by \$100,000 to \$300,000, an enormous amount of money during the Depression.

A Technicolour film consumed more production time, required more electrical power and could not draw upon the studios library of stock footage. Many producers doubted that Technicolour's novelty could compensate for the expense. As 'American Cinematographer' magazine put it, if the colour was unnatural, the audience noticed it (and that was bad): if the colour was good, the audience forgot about it (thus it was not worth the cost).

## The Wizard Of Oz (Victor Fleming, King Vidor (uncredited))



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After 1935, Technicolour controlled its quality by placing restrictions on production practices. To make a Technicolour film a producer had to rent the cameras, hire a Technicolour cameraman, use Technicolour makeup and have the film processed and printed by Technicolour. The producer would also have to accept a 'colour consultant' who would advise what colour schemes to use on sets costumes and make-up. Every day the camera magazines were inspected in the Technicolour laboratory, checked out by the cinematographer and then returned to the studio. Only trained crews could operate the camera and the production cinematographer had to work closely with the Technicolour cameraman

Hollywood's use of Technicolour was almost entirely motivated by genre. It was to the firm's advantage to stress that colour was simply an increase in realism applicable to any film but the argument did not convince. On the whole, Technicolour was identified with the musical comedy, the historical epic, the adventure story and the fantasy – in short, the genres of stylisation and spectacle. But while Technicolour could play up the spectacular and the artificial, the industry cautioned that colour must not distract from the story.

### Tasks

- (1) Why are the sequences in Kansas shot in black and white and the sequences in Oz shot in colour?
- (2) What does the use of colour in the land of Oz suggest to you.
- (3) Is there a question regarding Dorothy's fervent wish to return to her black and white world of Kansas (home) rather than stay in the multi-coloured world of Oz. Have the film-makers strayed in depicting Oz in such a lavish style? See Over.

# The Contradiction of 'Home'

Dorothy, once she realises that she is in danger of never returning home, speaks of Kansas as if it is as mythical a place as the Emerald City or the Wizard. The film offers us a contradiction between the desires for home and the desire to escape. In the film the contrast between home and away is the contrast between Kansas and Oz, black and white and colour or reality and fantasy.

Writer Salman Rushdie says the song 'Over the Rainbow': "Embodies with the purity of an archetype... the human dream of leaving, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots... In its most potent emotional moment, this is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in the 'place where there isn't any trouble' ...It is a celebration of escape, a grand paen to the Uprooted Self, a hymn – the hymn – to Elsewhere."

As Rushdie points out, given the glorious magic of Oz and the extreme hard bleakness of Kansas, why Dorothy wants to go home is never clear; the dream of leaving seems so strong, especially in Garland's magnificent performance. But while Dorothy dreams an escapist Technicolour dream of a no-place 'over the rainbow', upon her arrival in that place... she begins to yearn for home.

## Task

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- (1) *What do you think causes Dorothy to wish to return to Kansas? Is there a suggestion that Oz is in fact a dangerous place? Can you think of any other fairytale or fable in which the hero or heroine wishes to return home?*
- (2) *If Oz is a dangerous place, what does it represent in the classic fairytale?*
- (3) *If you were Dorothy, would you wish to stay in Oz and be feted as a hero or would you wish to return to your home. Why?*



## **Oz as a metaphor for Europe**

Following the release Disney's animated classic 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves' (1937), the major Hollywood studios were inundated with requests for other such films to be made. Given the context of the times; the Depression and the impending war in Europe, this would seem as an unconscious request from the American population for films with a simplistic structure which would uphold existing moral values such as the love of ones' family, of ones' home and of ones' nation, in a time in which these were under threat.

Taking this point further, we can see in the film various elements that would refer to the outside world as a place of chaos – thus Dorothy's desire to return home. In fact, if Kansas is the seat of American values (the picket fence, the hard-working family toiling to make a living), then Oz can be seen a metaphor for the confusion that was taking place within Europe in 1938. Oz is a world of discordant groups. The Munchkins in fear of the Witch of the East – they declare a Republic when she is killed. The Wicked Witch Of the West intimidates all groups even the great Wizard. The Wizard is in fact a charlatan leader who also rules his subjects by fear (even though we see that he has wisdom). The Witch of the West uses an army dressed like Russian Cossack soldiers.

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These elements serve as a contrast to Dorothy's homeland of Kansas and the film may be requesting that the American nation (Dorothy), whilst solving problems in Oz (Europe) should remain true to it's own value system rather than that of other nations.

### **Task**

*(1) Can you see any other elements or visual images which would refer to America or Europ*



# Adaptation

'The Wizard of Oz' is regarded as an American fairytale. Fairytales, which originated as European folktales in the last millennium, have been seen as a creations in story form which project human needs and desires within a moral order. In 'Little Red Riding Hood' the central character – a teenage girl must go to meet her grandmother and avoid the pitfalls which may befall her in the forest. One of these is the wolf, who symbolically refers to the man who would encourage the girl to stray from the path. In essence, the story acts as a warning to girls to protect their virginity and thus the story, in its original form, attempted to instill core social values that were prevalent to its time.

## Task

- (1) *Dorothy too is on a path – the yellow brick road – what do you think this could symbolically mean?*
- (2) *Do the Scarecrow, Tinman and Lion have symbolic meanings? Remember the traits they wish for. Are there other symbols in the film?*
- (3) *Is the theme of the film: 'There's No Place Like Home' or is there a broader theme evident in the film?*
- (4) *Read Angela Carter's book – 'The Company Of Wolves' for a version of the 'Little Red Riding Hood' story.*
- (5) *Adapt a fairytale e.g. 'Rapunzel', 'Hansel and Gretel' or 'Snow White' and set the story in your school. Remember, you can change any elements of the story you wish, but ensure that the changes you make retain a symbolic value within the story.*

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## More Information

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