

Directions for your Constructive Response to *The Wizard of Oz*

- After you have read each of the constructed response questions below, select one to answer in an intelligent and detailed format.
- Responses are graded on quality not quantity, looking for thinking in your writing, and reflection.
- Use the film *The Wizard of Oz* to explore the characters and storyline in order to provide support for your answers and to properly address the questions.
- You may compose your response in a *Microsoft Word document*.
- Make sure to include your name and hour within your document.
- Turn your work into Turnitin.com, Course ID#6810409, Password: @litto

The Wizard of Oz

Movies are a powerful marriage of image and sound, an exciting yet complex means of affecting how we feel and even how we think. While many of us understand something about the books we read or the music we hear, we don't necessarily understand as much about the movies we see. Think of this constructed response as a way to 'read' movies, to discover how they work and how they communicate through the magic of story-telling on the big screen.



1. What are the Essential Ingredients of a Classic Movie?

Classic movies are movies we want to see again and again. Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* is the 5th of 31 versions. Does it surprise you to discover that there have been so many? Why would so many people, including L. Frank Baum himself, want to make a movie of this story? *The Wizard of Oz* has become part of our culture, of our lives, of our growing up, but why? Why do so many people list it as one of their favorites, when there have been thousands of movies, and 26 more *Wizards of Oz*, made since 1939?

2. What is a Hero?

Why is Dorothy such an attractive and popular hero? Does she represent us -- the child that we were, the child that lives within us still - both frightened of and needing the adult world? How would you describe the pre-tornado Dorothy? Calm, Self-centered, Thoughtful, Caring, Selfish, Brave, or Cowardly? How has she gotten her 'little dog' into trouble? Who does she expect to get Toto out of trouble? How does she feel about rules and the law? How does she feel about adults? What experiences have led her to feel this way? Are these experiences typical for a teenager? Why?

Dorothy saves people through the power of her indignation, her common sense, and her concern for others. What is there about these character traits that we find attractive? Is this what we find heroic about her?

3. The Archetypal Story Pattern

The Wizard of Oz follows an archetypal (pronounced ark-uh-tie-pull) story pattern, or a pattern that repeats itself through many ages and cultures. In most archetypal hero stories, the hero starts a journey after being an outcast at home. The journey often begins with a crisis or a dream which leads the hero into a passage, often termed a 'night-sea journey' because it is dark and dangerous. Early in the journey, the hero often finds or receives a 'talisman,' which is a magical object that gives the hero special powers. During the journey, the hero meets people who challenge the hero, then help him or her become more heroic. Often, the hero is accompanied on the journey by a 'familiar,' an animal who uses its animal sensitivity to warn or guide the hero. There is also a guide, or mentor, who offers useful advice at important moments. Toward the end of the journey, the hero meets someone powerful who demands a test of the hero's worthiness. After passing the test, which often involves defeating or tricking a powerful villain, the hero gets the approval and help of the powerful figure. Most often, the hero returns home with new-found wisdom and is greeted with celebration.

This story pattern is such a good match to *The Wizard of Oz* that it reads as though someone wrote it for the movie. As you think about the archetypal story pattern, you can find one or more close or exact matches to the movie's story. However, if you think about other stories, specifically *The Odyssey*, *Clash of the Titans*, *Star Wars*, *Hercules*, *Wild America* and *Huckleberry Finn*, you will find equally good matches. This is because all these stories are examples of archetypal hero journeys.

There is a major difference, however, in *The Wizard of Oz*. It is the only one of the stories mentioned where the hero is a female. How does Dorothy's being female make *The Wizard of Oz* a different story? Are there any parts of the story that seem implausible? Does Dorothy ever do anything that is uncharacteristic of our expectations of a stereotypical woman? She kills both witch sisters, one with a house and the other with a bucket of water, but these are accidents. Would you have been surprised if she had killed a witch intentionally? Would Dorothy hit a lion? Why? How do you think this story would have changed if the main character was a Kansas boy? Could the story have happened this way at all? Is *The Wizard of Oz* a Feminist or Chauvinist story? Does this question even apply to the story? Why?

4. Possible Meanings of *The Wizard of Oz*

What is the meaning of the story? While L. Frank Baum's original purpose may have been to write a simple children's story (see his introduction to the original book), a great many people believe he did more than that.

Some people see Dorothy's ongoing battle with the Wicked Witch of the West as a symbolic struggle between good and evil. This version of the movie was released in 1939, the same year the Second World War began. Might audiences of the time have interpreted Dorothy's struggle as symbolizing the conflict between fascism and democracy in Europe? Explain.

Dorothy wants to travel 'over the rainbow,' but when she gets to Oz she only wants to return home. What is it about Oz that made her realize home was a better place? Do some viewers take a lesson from 'The Wizard of Oz' and appreciate their lives 'at home' more after watching it? Is that the way you felt after watching the movie? Explain.

If we were to imagine *The Wizard of Oz* as an allegory for today's current events, who might be Dorothy? ...the Wizard? ...the Witch?

Source: Neil Andersen. Neil Andersen is an award-winning Curriculum Consultant with the Toronto District School Board. He is also a speaker and consultant in media and communications technology. His most recent work includes the *Between the Lines* CDs, the teachers' study guide for the award-winning *Scanning Television*, and study guides for *Space*, *Bravo!* And *Much Music's Cable* in the Classroom broadcasts of original media literacy programming.