

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Study Guide

NOTE:

Items in **RED** are particularly appropriate for use with younger students, and many other activities can be adapted as such.

DEAR TEACHER,

We have created the following study guide to help make your students' theatre experience with *The Yellow Brick Road* as meaningful as possible. For many, it will be their first time viewing a live theatrical production. We've learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production the experience is more significant and long lasting. Our study guide provides pre- and post-production discussion topics, as well as individual and class activities. These are just suggestions; feel free to create your own activities and areas of discussion. We hope that you and your class enjoy the show!

THE STORY

Yes! *The Yellow Brick Road* does have something to do with *The Wizard of Oz*! In fact, its basic structure parallels that of L. Frank Baum's famous children's book and the beloved film version about a young girl's journey with three new friends in a strange land, searching for what each most desires. Our Dora's story brings us to a major American city: Chicago; the time is "now." Dora's mother treasures her latino heritage; its culture, language, and traditions. Dora wants to completely assimilate into American life; in fact, she calls herself "Dee." Her mother is excited to celebrate Dora's upcoming "quinceañera" – her "sweet fifteen party" – with her uncles and friends; Dora would rather have an iPhone.

Their conflict triggers a tornado, sudden displacement to the Emerald City ("la Ciudad Esmeralda"), encounters with the Scarecrow, the Iron Chef, and the Mountain Lion (who are searching for, respectively, a Brain, a Heart, and Courage: hmmm!). Oh, and did we mention Dora's little Chihuahua dog, Gypsy? Together, Dora and her pack face many adventures and near disasters – a wicked "Bruja," a nasty Monkey, and a fake Wizard - as they continue to sing and dance down "the yellow brick road" in order to find –what? – themselves!

This tale could be told using just about any two groups with different cultural views who share the same country. But more universally, many of us also share the longing to find out who we are – and what we can become – what we really need in life, and what we mean by "home." As L. Frank Baum's Dorothy says, "there's no place like home;" some us have more than one "home," a situation which can be both a challenge and an advantage.

The Yellow Brick Road is a funny, moving, and modern musical with serious and timely underpinnings that will be sure to evoke lively and thoughtful discussions among your students as they - like Dora - learn to respect and balance differing influences and to resolve conflicts of generations, cultures, and identities in their own lives.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

Dora Inez Garza	La Bruja del Oeste
Gypsy (Dora's dog)	Scarecrow
Mother	Iron Chef
Uncle Chelo	Mountain Lion
Uncle Chapparo	Crows: Bob and Frank
Tino (friend – wannabe chef)	Monkey
La Curandera (a "healer")	Bouncer
Chico, Pico, and Rico (in Oz)	Announcer
Carnival Gloria	Wizard

A VARIETY OF SUGGESTIONS FOLLOWS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION, DEPENDING ON THE GRADE LEVEL OF YOUR STUDENTS.

BEFORE SEEING THE MUSICAL

Learning about Language

We always include a vocabulary section in our Study Guides, but in the case of *The Yellow Brick Road*, we are expanding this aspect. The show's story itself revolves to a great extent around words – words, in this instance, from two different languages, two different cultures. Dora doesn't speak Spanish; her mother doesn't want her to forget her roots. Finding understanding between parent and child is one of the most important problems facing our heroine, who struggles to live in “two worlds.”

We anticipate that *The Yellow Brick Road* will be seen by students from diverse classrooms: some with many Spanish-speaking students; others, few or none. (You, the teacher, may enjoy teaming with a colleague). Native speakers of English or Spanish will take pride in helping their classmates (they may even be helpful to you!). These vocabulary words – all of which occur in *The Yellow Brick Road* – range from basic to challenging, depending on the grade that you teach. In short, this vocabulary section is designed to enhance the students' enjoyment of the show, to enrich their vocabulary base, and to foster co-operative learning in your classroom.

A Crash Course in Spanish

Well, not really! The Spanish language has some interesting pronunciation, punctuation, and accent marks; point out these items to your students who do not know Spanish.

1. The letter “j” is pronounced like “h”; a written “h” is silent; the wiggly “tilde” sign above an “n” (“ñ”) tells us to say the letter like the “ni” in “onion” or the “ny” in “canyon”; two Ls together are pronounced as “Y” as in “yes”
2. Exclamation marks and question marks are doubled in Spanish: one – written upside down – appears before the word or phrase; the other appears at the end, facing up, as in English.
3. Accent marks: a short diagonal slash above a syllable tells us to stress that syllable.

SHARED WORDS:

Chihuahua
Fiesta
Idea
No
Piñata
Puma
Tango
Tiara
Tornado
Valor

SPANISH FOOD WORDS:

Burrito
Cilantro
Enchilada
Frijoles
Guacamole
Maíz
Paella
Pastel
Salsa
Taco

SIMILAR WORDS:

Celebrar (to celebrate)
Ciudad (city)
Destino (destiny or destination)
Esmeralda (Emerald)
Fantastico/Fantastica (fantastic)
Frustrado/Frustrada (frustrated)
Habilidad (ability)
Importante (important)
Increíble (incredible)
Infancia (childhood/infancy)
Lenguaje (language)
Maravilloso/Maravillosa (marvelous)
Mucho (much)
Necesitar (to need)
Ocasión (occasion)
Precioso/Preciosa (precious)
Problema (problem)
Promesa (promise)
Reflejo (reflection)
Silencio (silence)

OTHER SPANISH WORDS FROM THE SHOW:

(This vocabulary study also can be a chance to teach or review parts of speech.)

ADJECTIVES:

Bonito/Bonita (pretty)
Bueno (well)
Caliente (hot)
Feliz (happy)
Hermoso/Hermosa (beautiful)
Mal (bad)
Muerto/Muerta (dead)
Triste (sad)

ADVERBS:

Demasiado (too)
Muy (very)
No (no)
Sí (yes)
También (also)

INTERJECTIONS:

¡Adios! (goodbye!)
¡Basta! (enough!)
¡Hola! (hello!)
¡Mira! (look!)
¡Oye! (hey!)

NOUNS:

La Bienvenida (the welcome)
La Bruja (the witch)
La Cabeza (the head)
El Cerebro (the brain)
La Chica (the girl)
El Chico (the boy)
Las Castañuelas
(the castanets)
La Comida (the food)

El Corazón (the heart)
La Curandera (the healer)
El Espejo (the mirror)
El Fuego (the fire)
Las Gracias (the thanks)
El Lodo (the mud)
El Mundo (the world)
De Nada (it's nothing/
you're welcome)

La Nada (the nothing)
La Palabra (the word)
La Pregunta (the question)
La Quinceañera (the 15th
birthday party)
El Sabor (the taste)
El Señor (the man)
La Señorita (the woman)
Las Zapatillas (the slipper)

NOTE: Because of their highly changeable nature, we have not included VERBS in the above list of "Other Spanish Words," although they appear below.

SOME KEY LINES & PHRASES FROM THE SHOW

¡Vamos a bailar y cantar!Let's dance and sing!
Sigue el camino amarillo ... Follow the yellow road
Mi casa es su casa My house is your house
el viento de la vida the wind of life
¿Que te pasa? What's the matter with you?
¿Quién es usted?Who are you?
¡No tengas temor! Don't be afraid!
No te arrepentiras You won't be sorry
¡Buenas días! Good morning!
¿ Como estás? How are you?
Bien, gracias Fine, thank you
No me siento bien I don't feel well
todos los días every day
¿Come se dice? How do you say?
¡Por favor! Please!
Gracias por salvarme. Thanks for saving me.

Entiendo I understand
en mi cabeza in my head
¿Donde está ? Where is?
todo el mundo all the world
Yo quiero I want
Tengo hambre. I'm hungry [I have hunger]
¡Déjala! Leave it be!
No puedo I can't
Venir con nosotros. Come with us
Es muy hermoso. It's very beautiful
Yo soy I am
¿Que vamos a hacer? What are we going to do?
¡Tengo un idea! I have an idea!
en dos lenguajes in two languages
¡Estoy feliz! I'm happy!

Si es importante para ti, es importante para mi If it's important for you, it's important for me
Tenemos un problema similar We have a similar problem
Yo voy a pensar en ti también I'm going to think of you too

BONUS: WORDS IN FRENCH:

Au Revoir (Goodbye)

Boutique (shop)

Mystique (mystical)

ENGLISH WORDS:

You may also wish to review these words, which may be unfamiliar to your students.

VERBS:

Comprehend
Destroy
Enchant
Extract
Hesitate
Meditate
Pursue
Reject
Retreat
Vanish

ADJECTIVES:

Bittersweet
Daring
Elegant
Embarrassed
Magnificent
Puny
Sinister
Stealthy
Unsurpassed
Vicious

NOUNS:

Allergy
Asthma
Barbarian
Borders
Buffet
Carnival
Celebrity
Chamber
Chef
Concern
Debt
Disgrace (also verb)
Diva
Family Tree
Kettle
Marquee
Mercy
Migraine
Munchkin
Potential
Precision
Pride (re: lions)
Rhythm
Runt
Ruse
Skyline
Superstar
Supervision
Tradition
Vegetarian

LEARNING ABOUT THEATRE

Discuss with your students -

1. Some important terms to know about a play or a musical:

- **Setting** (where and when does the story take place?)
- **Characters** (who are the people?)
- **Plot** (what happens?)
- **Theme** (what is the Big Idea?)
- **Structure**: Acts and Scenes (how is the play “built”?)
- **Style** (how again: - realistic? fantastical? futuristic? – etc.)

2. Some important people who make a play or a musical happen:

- Good **playwright**
- Creative **director**
- Believable **actors**
- Imaginative **designers**
 - **set**
 - **costumes**
 - **lighting**
 - **sound**
 - **props**

A musical also needs special creators:

- a “**book**” **writer** (the spoken words)
- a **composer** (the music)
- a **lyricist** (the words that are sung)
- and a **choreographer** (the dances)

3. Great audiences can make good shows even better. Here’s how:

- Listen, really listen!
- Laugh if it’s funny; cry if it’s sad – but please don’t talk (actors hear you)!
- Exercise your memory (Hey! That’s the tiger they talked about in Act One!)
- Turn off cell phones and pagers! No photos!
- Eat your candy bar before or after. Scientific studies prove that *it is impossible to unwrap it quietly!!*

LEARNING ABOUT LIFE *(Issues to think about and discuss in small groups or as a class)*

Much of this musical's plot is about the transition from one stage of life to another: most importantly, from a child's world to that of an adult. What does that feel like? Are there pro's and con's? If there are older siblings, what differences are there in privileges and responsibility? What do younger children look forward to? What concerns them?

Explore, write about, and perhaps share personal experiences:

- What are the various cultural backgrounds in your class? What is something that you especially like about your own roots?
- Which children's book has meant the most to you – and why? What did you learn from it?
- How are adult family members similar to or different from you in their relationships to cultural holidays and traditions? What are your favorite ways to spend time with family members or friends of the family? What do you learn from them?

AFTER SEEING THE MUSICAL

1. *Being Drama Critics*

While it's still fresh in your minds, discuss:

- It's possible that your class is familiar with the film version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Perhaps you've had class discussions about the film and its themes. Discuss ways in which the musical further develops these concepts or introduces new concepts. Was anything unclear? If so, help out each other.
- Discuss the main characters — and the actors who portrayed them. What specific lines or actions did actors use to help you understand these characters as individuals? To what extent did they resemble people – or types of people – whom you know? What is the effect of having actors play multiple roles? (For example, Dora's cook friend Tino is also the Iron Chef.) If you were directing the musical, would you add or change anything about the characters?
- How did the musical numbers change or add to your understanding of the characters or the Big Ideas? Which songs and dances did you particularly enjoy -and why?
- Discuss the designs. For example, how did the *set* help you to imagine the world of Chicago? Of Oz? Describe some of the *costumes*. How did the costumes say something about the characters – AND the Big Ideas? Even *props* play important roles in this show: what are some examples of props that also work as "symbols"?

2. *Being You*

A play is like a mirror. What do you see of yourself (or someone you know) when you look into the "mirror" of *The Yellow Brick Road*? How does seeing yourself through this musical make you feel connected to other people? Write a paragraph about your thoughts and share the paragraph in a small group.

3. *Being Balanced*

By the end of *The Yellow Brick Road*, one of the ideas we're left with is the sense that we can learn to "separate" ourselves as individuals while still able to "celebrate" our heritage. We also sense that both Dora and her mother have learned to better understand each other and are now not only loving but also mutually respectful. Discuss in small groups or with the class other ways to become more balanced in your own lives, especially among your family members.

Friction between people of different backgrounds can also occur in schools. Discuss ways in which you and your classmates can actively create a climate in your school that will help reduce alienation or cultural conflict among students. Look closely and honestly at your school in terms of student interaction: what are the strengths that can be reinforced? What could be improved? Most important: how can you help in the way that you deal with other students?

4. For Younger Students

Discussion (and perhaps writing) might center around the following ideas:

- Who is your favorite character from the show and why?
- Which character is most like you and why?
- Dora and her friends are smart, caring and courageous. What are your best qualities?
- What strengths or abilities would you put on a “Wish List” and why?
- Who are important adults in your life, and how do they help ?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

(Items noted in **RED** may be especially suitable for younger students. Also, many of the proposed activities are quite flexible and can be tailored for particular ages in both directions, younger and older.)

1. Creative Dramatics

Improvisation. Many of your students are probably familiar with the art of improvisation: actors create mini-scenes “on the spot” – usually being told by the audience only the basic situation and identities. Even very young students can have fun doing “improv.” For example, ask for two or three volunteers. The situation might be that Dora and her friends “Brain” and Heart” are lost . Ask an audience member to give the place, e.g., the zoo; ask another to give the problem: find your way out. Give the actors a short time to confer. Limit the improvisation to about 2-3 minutes. The actors’ goal is to stay in character and to resolve the issue.

Original Scene. Ask your students to collaborate on a short dialogue between Dora and one or two other characters; rehearse and perform. Consider the following possibilities:

- “A time to say ‘thank you.’”
- “I’m afraid.” *
- “I think I can . . . “ *

2. Creative Writing

Ask your students to think about (perhaps discuss) and write –

- A description of a trip – it could be to another city or state, to the beach, an office, a store, another school, etc. What did you learn from this trip?
- A campaign speech that shows how well you know yourself, especially your strengths – deliver it!
- A poem about a character or about yourself – recite it to the class.

Assign a more formal essay –

- “Brain, Heart, Courage: What do these words really mean?”
- “What I know about myself – so far”
- “When I need advice I . . .”
- “Living in two worlds”
- “A time when I had to be brave”

3. Artistic Expression

- Design, make, and celebrate a class piñata.
- Create a chart of “symbols” that represent important things in your world.
- For a class performance, create a song, a dance, or both, inspired by the show.
- Design and make your own hand puppets and let them act out a scene from the show.
- Individually or as a group, create “Enchanted Mirrors”: draw, paint, construct or sculpt them; decorate them. They might reflect something negative or positive; funny or serious about your world.
- Create a decorative family tree (you’ll probably need help from home on this).
- Create your own interpretation of a traditional culture object; e.g., a statue, mask, doll, bowl, jewelry. Share it with the class (perhaps you can create a class art exhibit that other students can see).

4. *Speaking*

Ask your students to design a series of short speeches, or even a panel presentation on the following issues (or similar ones):

- **Your own family traditions (Show and Tell is great!).**
- “Things” are important in the show (Dora’s clothes, the ruby slippers, the magic castanets, the mirrors). What “things” in your life really matter? What could we do without? What things do harm to us?
- **Tell about an adult in your life who has influenced you.**

5. *Discussion*

Ask your students to reflect on (at home) and to come to class prepared to discuss:

- Why is the show set in Chicago? In what other places in America or elsewhere in the world would this story be meaningful?
- **“Two worlds”: What do these words mean to you?**
- **Extended families in our lives**
- “Enchanted Mirrors and False Wizards” – who are our role models?
- Life journeys: what path are you on now? What will be next?
- Selected scenes from *The Wizard of Oz* film: compare and contrast.

6. *Research Projects*

Students can learn more about the concepts presented in the show by doing some research, exploring the library or the Internet for information, interviewing people. Students can work individually or in groups to create presentations displaying their finds. Here are some subjects to consider:

- **Traditional food / music / dance / games / clothing in your culture.**
- Traditions of transition; e.g., quinceañera, bar and bat mitzvah, confirmation.
- **Survey: ask a few adults about people in their lives who were strong influences.**

WHAT ROAD DO YOU HOPE TO TRAVEL?