



# WICKED & VCE

**WICKED has been included on the 2008 Theatre Studies Unit 4 Prescribed Playlist. The following notes should be of interest to all VCE students, but are specifically designed to be relevant to Unit 4, Theatre Studies.**

## GENERAL OUTLINE

WICKED is not merely an entertainment. Its historical relevance to theatre is extensive. Its genesis harks back to an original 1898 book *The Emerald City*, which was followed by a series of stories, written by Lyman Frank Baum, one of the great American writers of children's stories in the 20th century. Its evolutionary journey follows through live stage adaptations of Baum's original works, a legendary film adaptation, numerous Broadway musical adaptations, a best-selling prequel novel written by Gregory Maguire and ultimately, a musical adaptation of Maguire's novel by Stephen Schwartz, of *Godspell* and *Pippin* fame. The performance is steeped in theatrical history. It explores a number of serious issues of prime concern to today's young people.

WICKED is an example of the contemporary Broadway musical. The book, as written by Winnie Holzman, is as complex and as detailed as the Gregory Maguire novel. It attempts to create a complete universe. Where the original *The Wizard of Oz* offers mainly ciphers, stereotypical characterisations reminiscent of types rather than actual people, WICKED attempts to complete this human landscape in all its complexity. This modern incarnation of Oz is rich, detailed, complex and as complete as the form will allow.

WICKED was developed during the period when Bill Clinton was under siege in the White House, George Bush was assuming power, the Twin Towers in New York were felled, there was a declaration of "war on terror", anyone who was not "with us" was deemed to be "against us", people different to ourselves were being widely regarded as the enemy, there was an identified and perceived "axis of evil" and there was unprecedented control and manipulation of the media. This global situation is echoed throughout WICKED, and in this very important way, WICKED will be seen by future generations as a product of the times in which we are living.

"The characters in WICKED grapple with moral dilemmas and ethics in a way that is unique among Broadway shows. At the heart of the show are important and relevant questions about tolerance: Does "tolerance" mean that we should respect and treat kindly those who are different from us, or has it been redefined to mean that we should not "tolerate" anyone with whom we disagree? In the same way, WICKED probes the question of good and evil. Can we ever judge anyone as evil? Is there any objective source that defines good and evil or are they strictly matters of one's personal feelings and opinion? Do we need a Wizard or a god-like being to assist us to make these decisions? Can we say it is wrong to scapegoat girls born green, or talking animals, for one's own political gain?



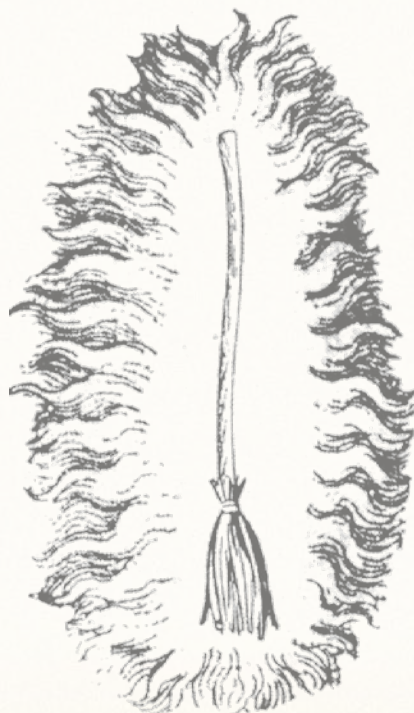


This musical also raises the issue of propaganda and the manipulation of the citizens of Oz. Students now live in a world where the media is pervasive and drives our popular culture. WICKED raises questions that will inspire students to assess their own sources of information and how they respond to the barrage of media influences that permeate their lives, becoming an instructive tool for developing critical thinking skills.

What happens when good is called “evil” and evil, “good”? Is everything good and evil, with us and against us, black and white, or, as WICKED seems to suggest, are there shades of green? For today’s young people growing up in a world searching for its moral compass, WICKED is a provocative theatrical work that explores these critical issues in an entertaining way.”  
Marc Platt, Producer of the original Broadway WICKED.

Beyond the current world situation, there are historical echoes that permeate the script, especially in relation to Doctor Dillamond, the “token goat”. Some reviewers have compared Gregory Maguire’s conception of the Emerald City as a centre of intellectual and social life to Vienna at the turn of the 20th Century. Vienna drew political and social activists from all parts of Europe, becoming a sophisticated multi-cultural city. This gave rise to extreme political and social tension; virulent anti-Semitism took hold.

WICKED uses the situation of sentient talking animals as an allegory for the oppression of minorities (who literally lose their voices). The parallel can be seen very clearly with the plight of the Jews in the 1920s and 1930s who became political scapegoats throughout Europe. In WICKED, Doctor Dillamond is a literal “scapegoat”. Anti-Semitic propaganda painted Jews as being animalistic; a feature common to racial oppression throughout history.





## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Unit 4, Outcome 3 – Students should be able to analyse and evaluate acting in a selected production. School-assessed coursework tasks for this outcome as follows.

1. *Analysis of character/s in the production, including status, motivation and characteristics.*

There are a number of major characters, including Elphaba, Galinda/Glinda, Madame Morrible, The Wizard, Doctor Dillamond, Fiyero, Nessarosa, Boq and Chistery.

### **ELPHABA (later to become the Wicked Witch of the West):**

**Status:** Hers is a study in status – from the lowest to the highest.

**Motivation:** Although all others see her as evil, she is driven by good.

**Characteristics:** A complex character rather than merely a study of evil or good.

### **GALINDA (later, Glinda the Good):**

**Status:** Her status mirrors the reverse of Elphaba's, from relative high to low, in our perceptions.

**Motivation:** Although she is driven by doing good, compromise and lack of single-mindedness reduce her ability to achieve her aims.

**Characteristics:** The classic well-meaning do-gooder, first encountered in Jane Austen's *Emma* and later in Alicia Silverstone's Cher Horowitz in the Paramount film, *Clueless*.

### **THE WIZARD:**

**Status:** From beginning to end, he remains low in our expectations and perceptions, but all-powerful to those around him.

**Motivation:** He is driven by power, control and manipulation, although he would see this as doing the best he can for his subjects and his empire. In this way, he is little different to any other dictator who has absolute control of his subjects.

**Characteristics:** Devious and manipulative, from the first meeting until the last.

### **DOCTOR DILLAMOND:**

**Status:** From respected teacher at Shiz University to mute beast.

**Motivation:** Doctor Dillamond is our "scapegoat", the classic victim.

**Characteristics:** He begins as almost entirely human, a sentient being, and gradually takes on the characteristics of a goat.





2. Analysis and evaluation of interpretation of character/s by actor/s in a performance of a playscript including use of expressive skills, focus, acting space and non-verbal language to convey the intended meaning/s of the playscript.

**ELPHABA (later to become the Wicked Witch of the West):**

**Expressive skills:** Singing, dancing and acting. A role requiring a performer to play “real” whilst dressed as a classic witch and made up in green make-up.

**Focus:** A role requiring extraordinary levels of presence and focus.

**Acting Space:** A role requiring the performer to dominate the space in all of its three dimensions, including “Defying Gravity” where she ascends to the roof of the stage.

**Non-verbal language:** Although playing low status, suggestions related to her later ascendancy are ever-present in her manner and attitudes.

**GALINDA (later, Glinda the Good):**

**Expressive skills:** Singing, dancing and acting. She must play superficiality, but with levels of complexity and depth. She is outwardly superficial, but inwardly vexed.

**Focus:** Outwardly a character lacking direction and focus; later to be revealed as a driven, albeit troubled, young woman.

**Acting Space:** From the moment she appears in her “bubble”, Galinda (Glinda) dominates the acting space around her with her presence. She cannot be ignored, nor silenced.

**Non-verbal language:** Her physical appearance and “bubbly” personality give her power and influence beyond that which her intellect would indicate.

**THE WIZARD:**

**Expressive skills:** Expressing the ability to play as if all-powerful, whilst maintaining the vulnerable veneer which we know him to possess.

**Focus:** The Wizard must be focused enough to dominate Emerald City and all of its inhabitants – except Elphaba.

**Acting Space:** As himself, he may appear ineffectual and cunning. Dominating the stage behind the enormous mask he has contrived for himself, he takes on messianic proportions.

**Non-verbal language:** Whether utilising his green elixir for persuasion or his giant mask to elicit fear, it is never so much what The Wizard has to say as how he goes about saying it.

**DOCTOR DILLAMOND:**

**Expressive skills:** A dramatic role demanding considerable variation and skill.

**Focus:** Playing a range of characteristics; both human and animal.

**Acting Space:** At first dominating the space and later being dominated by all around him.

**Non-verbal language:** Commencing as a fully rounded human being and completing his dramatic journey as an animal, caged and unable to verbalise in any human manner.





3. *Analysis and evaluation of the establishment and maintenance of actor-audience relationship/s and ways theatrical style/s are utilised in the production.*

**ELPHABA (later to become the Wicked Witch of the West):**

**Actor-audience relationship and style:** The protagonist. Retains a high level of empathy with the audience throughout.

**GALINDA (later, Glinda the Good):**

**Actor-audience relationship and style:** Complex empathetic relationship with the audience. At first she seems merely shallow. Later, her relationship with Elphaba becomes the central, driving theme of the story.

**THE WIZARD:**

**Actor-audience relationship and style:** The Wizard is the primary antagonist.

**DOCTOR DILLAMOND:**

**Actor-audience relationship and style:** Doctor Dillamond elicits significant empathy from the audience. He is an animal, at first with human characteristics but increasingly taking on the characteristics of the goat that he is to become.





## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following are a series of questions designed to stimulate students to consider the specific requirements of the outcomes of the school-assessed coursework for Unit 4, Outcome 3. In terms of how to approach these questions, it might work best if a class of students were each allocated a group of specific questions to consider for pre, during and post-show. Answers could then be collated from the entire class.

1. *Analysis of characters in the production, including status, motivation and characteristics.*

### **Status:**

#### **Questions to consider before the show:**

- From your knowledge (if any) of the original story or film of *The Wizard of Oz*, who of the characters would you expect to hold the higher/lower and highest/lowest status?
- From your reading of the script of WICKED, who of the characters would you expect to hold the higher/lower and highest/lowest status?
- Were there any obvious changes of status from the original story?

#### **Questions to consider during the show:**

- Can you identify who holds the highest and lowest status on stage at all times?
- Can you identify who holds the highest/lowest status on stage in the first part of the story and when does this start to change, if ever?
- Can you identify some of the ways that characters achieve higher or lower status on stage – including examples of the use of costume and make-up, height and levels, blocking, lighting & FX, gesture and stance, dialogue, singing and/or dancing?

#### **Questions to consider after the show:**

- Can you graph the relative status of each of the major characters for the duration of the show?
- The two main characters are Glinda and Elphaba. Can you chart how these two characters compared in terms of status throughout the performance?
- Can you identify how Glinda and Elphaba influenced each other's relative status and how other characters, such as Nessarose, Boq, Fiyero, Madame Morrible and particularly The Wizard, influenced their relative status?







## Characteristics:

### Questions to consider before the show:

- From your exposure to *The Wizard of Oz* and your reading of the script or synopsis of WICKED, how do you expect each of the major characters to appear to you?
- What particular differences, similarities and contrasts do you expect to see between the costumes, appearance, make-up, gesture and acting styles of the major characters?
- With which two major characters do you expect to see the greatest contrast of characteristics?

### Questions to consider during the show:

- Identify clearly how each of the major characters appears, walks, talks, gestures, sings, dances, acts and responds to others.
- Which characters offer the greatest differences and similarities in their characteristics?
- Which characters, if any, change their characteristics during the performance?

### Questions to consider after the show:

- Can you make a list of the characteristics of the major characters from the performance?
- Are there any characteristics of the major characters, which are inherent or obvious in the written script, but have been changed, omitted, downplayed, exaggerated or overshadowed in the actual performance?
- Can you list some performance techniques or directorial decisions that were used to enhance or illuminate particular characteristics of the major characters?

2. *Analysis and evaluation of interpretation of character/s by actor/s in the performance of a playscript including use of expressive skills, focus, acting space and non-verbal language to convey the intended meaning/s of the playscript.*

## Expressive skills:

### Questions to consider:

- **Analysis:** How did the major characters make use of expressive skills such as singing and acting to convey the intended meaning of the script?
- **Analysis:** Why were some scenes almost entirely sung and others acted?
- **Evaluation:** Which characters used their expressive skills most successfully?
- **Evaluation:** Which expressive skills worked best to convey intended meaning – singing or acting?





## Focus:

### Questions to consider:

- **Analysis:** How did performers draw focus to themselves?
- **Analysis:** Which actors made use of such devices as levels, blocking, stance, FX, costume and make-up to draw maximum focus?
- **Analysis:** Why did some actors need to work particularly hard to draw maximum focus?
- **Analysis:** Can you chart or describe the graph of who held the strongest focus on stage for each of the scenes?
- **Analysis:** Can you identify a scene where the focus of the audience changed primarily from one of the major characters to another? Can you describe how this was achieved?
- **Evaluation:** How well did the major performers draw focus to themselves?

## Acting Space:

### Questions to consider:

- **Analysis:** How do the major characters make use of the acting space?
- **Analysis:** Why are levels so important to convey the meaning of this story?
- **Evaluation:** Which of the major characters used the acting space best to tell his/her side of the story?
- **Evaluation:** How well did the director block the major characters to achieve intended meaning?
- **Evaluation:** Can you identify some specific successful and unsuccessful attempts to use the acting space to convey intended meaning?

## Non-verbal language:

### Questions to consider:

- **Analysis:** How do the major characters make use of gesture and dance to convey meaning?
- **Analysis:** Why is dance the most appropriate medium to convey particular meaning?
- **Evaluation:** Is Chistery, the flying monkey, more successful as a character primarily using mime or would he be better as a character making more use of dialogue?
- **Evaluation:** Which character makes use of gesture, stance and non-verbal communication in the clearest and most appropriate manner?





3. *Analysis and evaluation of the establishment and maintenance of actor-audience relationships and ways theatrical style/s are utilised in the production.*

### **Actor-Audience relationships:**

#### **Questions to consider before the show:**

- **Analysis:** From your knowledge of the story and script, how would you go about staging the show to maintain a close and intimate relationship with the audience?
- **Evaluation:** Considering the intentions of the script, do you believe that the show would work best as an intimate experience or as a major spectacle?

#### **Questions to consider during the show:**

- **Analysis:** The show occurs mainly behind a proscenium, in a traditional fashion. Can you identify all the times, if any, where there is a direct address to the audience, an actor breaks the fourth wall or the setting breaks the barrier of the proscenium?
- **Evaluation:** How engaged are you in the performance?
- **Evaluation:** Do you feel personally touched by any particular part of the show?
- **Evaluation:** Do you feel particular empathy with any character who you feel is addressing you directly or personally?
- **Analysis:** Can you identify different ways that particular actors relate to the audience?

#### **Questions to consider after the show:**

- **Analysis:** In how many different ways did the major characters relate to the audience?
- **Analysis:** Sitting in the theatre and watching the show, how did it feel to be part of the audience?
- **Evaluation:** Was any major character more effective than another in relating to the audience?
- **Evaluation:** Did the setting primarily assist or hinder the actor-audience relationship?
- **Evaluation:** How effective were the costumes and the make-up in contributing to the actor-audience relationship?





## Theatrical style/s:

### Questions to consider before the show:

- **Analysis:** From your knowledge of *The Wizard of Oz*, musicals as an art form and the nature of the storyline, what conventions do you expect to be utilised most prevalently in the performance?
- **Evaluation:** Although a commercial and popular musical is expected to be highly entertaining, there are some serious issues which will be dealt with in the script. How well do you expect the production to approach these issues within its chosen style?

### Questions to consider during the show:

- **Evaluation:** How well is the story being told and issues/themes being considered through such conventions as song, dance and acting?
- **Analysis:** Is the story primarily unfolded through song, dance or acting?
- **Analysis:** Is there any kind of division between moments of entertainment and times where more serious issues or themes are being covered?

### Questions to consider after the show:

- **Analysis:** WICKED is a musical, but prides itself on being described as a musical with a difference. Can you identify where WICKED might have moved away from the style of the conventional musical?
- **Evaluation:** The original *The Wizard of Oz* was a book which became a film which became the basis for a novel by Gregory Maguire. The first choice of Universal was to create a film of the book, which later became a musical rather than a film. How appropriate and successful was the choice of style to tell the story and to illuminate the issues?
- **Evaluation:** Could the story have been just as successfully told on film as through live performance?
- **Evaluation:** Could the issues and themes have been better-considered in a straight play rather than a musical?
- **Evaluation:** Were any issues or themes that seemed clear in the written text lost or overshadowed in the live performance?
- **Evaluation:** Which issues or themes were particularly enhanced by the use of musical as a style?

