

THE  
**WIZ**

**STUDY  
GUIDE**



THE  
**NATIONAL THEATRE**  
FOUNDATION

The Wiz  
The National Theatre  
October 24–29, 2023

Book by William F. Brown  
Music and Lyrics by Charlie Smalls  
Additional material written by Amber Ruffin  
Directed by Schele Williams  
Choreography by Jaquel Knight  
Music Supervision, Orchestrations, & Music Arrangements by Joseph Joubert  
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Leayne C. Dempsey

Everybody Rejoice! The Tony Award-winning musical THE WIZ is coming to D.C.!

Producers Kristin Caskey, Mike Isaacson, Brian Anthony Moreland, and Ambassador Theatre Group present an all-new production of the groundbreaking, Tony Award-winning musical *The Wiz*, adapted from *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. The highly anticipated Broadway revival of *The Wiz* returns “home” to stages across America in an all-new Pre-Broadway tour, the first one in 40 years.

This groundbreaking twist on *The Wizard of Oz* changed the face of Broadway—from its iconic score packed with soul, gospel, rock, and finger-snapping 70s funk to its stirring tale of Dorothy’s journey to find her place in a contemporary world. Audiences get to enjoy the epic grooves of such beloved, timeless hits as “Ease on Down the Road,” which became the show’s break-out single, and the bona fide classic “Home” in this spectacular revival.

Featuring a book by William F. Brown and a Tony Award-winning score by Charlie Smalls (and others), director Schele Williams (*The Notebook*, revival of *Disney’s Aida*), choreographer JaQuel Knight (Beyonce’s “Single Ladies”), Amber Ruffin (additional material), and Joseph Joubert (music supervision, orchestrations, & music arrangements) conjure up an Oz unlike anything ever seen before.

A dynamite infusion of ballet, jazz, and modern pop brings a whole new groove to easing on down the road. So everybody rejoice! An all-new 21st-Century WIZ is sliding into an Emerald city near you.



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—“America’s Main Street”—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

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Written and Curated by Leayne C. Dempsey, Dramaturg  
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20004  
[www.nationaltheatre.org](http://www.nationaltheatre.org)

# DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY

**“The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” was written solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out.”** —L. Frank Baum

Oh, what would life be like if the heartaches and nightmares were no more?

The words above are some of the first you read when you open author L. Frank Baum’s book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In his introduction, he makes it clear that his whimsical story is all about bringing cheer and wonder to the reader. There is no doubt that this revival of *The Wiz* does the same to its audience, and especially to the younger generation who is seeing *The Wiz* for the first time.

This revival of *The Wiz* tells the story of Dorothy, who, after crash-landing into the strange land of Oz, finds her way back home with the help of her three good friends: Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion. When we first meet Dorothy, she doesn’t have many friends, and although she lives with her dear Aunt Em, their differing perspectives on life leave the two at odds. Yet, like a modern member of Generation-Z, Dorothy maintains a faint hope that things may get better.

One of the wonderful parts about this revival is that it puts forward a very clear and poignant message to Gen-Zers: “I see you”. From the cultural references, to the fashion, to the way characters relate to another, Gen-Z should see itself represented in this show.

Generation Z, born in the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, has always known what it’s like to live in a world of nightmares and heartaches. They grew up in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Great Recession, and came of age during the COVID-19 pandemic. This generation is highly proficient with technology and often referred to as “digital natives.” They have the ability to connect with people from all over the world with just their voice, and according to many surveys, Gen-Z defines itself as the most open-minded and accepting group of people.

Like Dorothy, this generation will get to take its own journey through Oz, experiencing the joys and wonderment available to those brave enough to dream. Although the evil Evilene still lurks around the corner of each scene, *The Wiz* gives Generation-Z a moment to forget about the stressors of their day.

And in true Dorothy fashion, despite all of the storms this group encounters through their childhood to adolescence, they always seem to make it through with the help of their friends, a few trusted adults, and a little magic, too.

Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg

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