

# WICKED IDEAS FOR ENGLISH

## Language (suitable for students in year 5 to year 10)

Teachers can teach this as a stand-alone activity over 1 or 2 English lessons OR as part of a broader topic on debating.

In WICKED, those opposed to the *status quo* (represented by the Wizard), such as Elphaba and Doctor Dillamond, have little opportunity to present their point of view in a debate. Students can act out a hypothetical debate, taking the roles of the characters on different sides (the Wizard, Doctor Dillamond, Madame Morrible, Elphaba). If they wish, students can frame their arguments “in character”: that is, as if the debate is occurring within the WICKED “universe”.

Debate topics could include:

- Animals should be caged
- Animals should be seen and not heard
- Animals should be granted the same rights as regular people

Assistance with conducting class debates is provided by the ACT Debating Union at [http://www.actdu.org.au/archives/actein\\_site/basicskills.html](http://www.actdu.org.au/archives/actein_site/basicskills.html)

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY

*Try having a pre-show and post-show debate on the topic  
“Are people born WICKED”? Did your views on this change after having seen the show?*

## Writing (suitable for students in Years 8 -11)

Teachers can teach this as a stand-alone activity over 1 or 2 English lessons OR as part of a broader topic on using different registers and forms of writing to convey a message.

1. **Script Writing** – Using the conventions of traditional script writing, write a short script about an argument between ‘popular students’ on the school oval and those considered ‘less popular’. Use informal/colloquial language and register to capture the authentic sound and emotion of the altercation.
2. **Speech Writing** – Write a short formal speech that the principal of the school would give at assembly that week in which he/she affirms student diversity and condemns the use of aggression on the school grounds.
3. **Audience** – Imagine that the mother of one of the students calls the school to arrange an interview with the principal. Write the text of the conversation she has with the principal’s secretary. Would it be best written/spoken using informal or formal language? Ask students to discuss their decision.

# WICKED IDEAS FOR ENGLISH

## Literacy – Creating Texts (suitable for students in year 7 and above)

Pre-teaching activity: teachers explain the following definitions to the class  
(taken from [www.tolerance.org/hidden\\_bias/tutorials/index.html](http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/tutorials/index.html))

A **stereotype** is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group — a generalisation that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation.

A **prejudice** is an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. Prejudice is often aimed at “out-groups”. Social scientists believe children begin to acquire prejudices and stereotypes as toddlers.

**Discrimination** is behaviour that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behaviour, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

**This activity can be undertaken in English classes as a project over the course of a term, and would work best in conjunction with other texts dealing with the themes in the above box – for example “To Kill a Mockingbird”.**

Students are to prepare a campaign using media such as: radio and TV advertisements, posters and pamphlets, and social media.  
**Their brief:** *Doctor Dillamond and the other Animals have approached you to help campaign for their right to speech.*

Students should consider the following when preparing their campaign:

- In WICKED, Doctor Dillamond is a literal “scapegoat”. Compare this to the anti-Semitic propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s that painted Jews as being “animalistic”: a common stereotype used by many dominant groups throughout history. The Animal story in the show has strong elements of the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany or minority races in the United States.
- Stephen Schwartz has said: “Oz in the book is essentially a totalitarian state, and The Wizard rules by fear, aided by his secret police force. In the show, The Wizard is more manipulative ...”
- The Wizard says, “When I first got here, there was discord and discontent. And where I come from, everyone knows: **the best way to bring folks together is to give them a really good enemy**”.

# WICKED IDEAS FOR ENGLISH

## Literature – Exploring Literature (suitable for students in years 9 to 12 )

**Teachers can use this activity over one or two lessons in English or as part of a wider unit.**

Teachers can explore the literary technique of **imagery** by using images from WICKED and related texts. Along with the image of the witch herself, students can investigate the significance of the broom, the pointed hat, Glinda's bubbles, the Grimmerie (i.e. a magic book of spells), and the symbolism of the crucible in the Arthur Miller play of the same name.

### RESEARCH

Students independently research the history of the symbolism of these and other items in the show, with consideration given to the following examples:

- The WICKED Witch of the West is widely known as one of the most infamous icons of evil, yet WICKED reveals that she was simply misunderstood. In WICKED, Glinda symbolises the classic 'good' witch: Dressed in white, wielding a wand and performing good deeds. Elphaba is the classic 'WICKED' witch, with her green skin, pointed hat, broomstick and propensity for evil deeds. In WICKED the truth is shown to be far more complex, as it is in the real world.
- Witches have been symbols of good or evil in Western folklore and literary heritage since the beginnings of history. The ancient practice of magic existed before the Greek and Roman empires and predates Christianity. Women were accused of being witches throughout history. The inclusion of witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was a deliberate one, as contemporary audiences believed in the actual existence of witches and their presence on stage would have been sure to make an impact.
- The Salem witch-hunts are amongst the best-documented witch hunts in history and are the basis for Arthur Miller's famous play, *The Crucible*. Wikipedia defines the idea of the crucible as follows: "a metal container in which metals or other substances are subjected to high temperatures". Each character is metaphorically a metal subjected to the heat of the surrounding situation. The characters whose moral standards prevail in the face of death ... symbolically refuse to melt. "Crucible" could also refer to the literary technique in which characters are placed in an inescapable situation and forced through conflict.

### STUDENT WRITING

**This activity can follow on from the research above in English classes over a few lessons or it could work in conjunction with other texts focusing on symbolism and imagery**

Write a short story or out-scene from WICKED. An 'out scene' is an additional scene, which we do not see on the stage. Use one of the symbols that you have researched such as the pointed hat, green skin or the crucible etc. to highlight a key idea. For example,

- The hat - *in illustrations of children's fairy tales, the tall, black, conical hat and the ugly crone became readily identifiable symbols of WICKEDness, to be feared by children.* So, in a story or out-scene, the hat could be put on or thrown on the floor as a symbol that 'WICKEDness' has either begun or ended.
- The crucible – this could be a symbol to 'cook up' a spell or recipe for success in a story or out-scene.
- The green face – this could be equated to beauty (or lack of beauty). So in the story or out-scene, one of the characters could go to a cosmetic surgeon and have surgery which goes right or wrong. Is the green skin beauty or ugliness? In many societies, things we consider beautiful are thought hideous. In some African and Asian cultures neck rings are worn to create the appearance that the neck has been stretched. The ancient custom of foot binding is another practice that we find unattractive and disturbing yet those who practiced it thought it beautiful.