

## Wicked: A Tale of Shame

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April 12, 2015



This morning, Kristen Smith will be doing an interpretive dance based on the novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*.

The novel is a political, social, and ethical commentary on the nature of good and evil, which takes place in The Mythical Land of Oz, in the years leading to Dorothy's arrival. The story centers around **Elphaba**, the misunderstood, green-skinned girl who is fiercely independent, yet lonely, and powerfully passionate about the rights of animals. Elphaba eventually grows up to become the notorious Wicked Witch of the West that we have all heard about.

Since Kristen is dancing specific scenes from the book, I will share the story behind each scene so you can better understand the symbolism.

**Scene 1. In the Woods.** This dance represents Elphaba's childhood. She is born in the far-off land of Oz, the child of a Munchkin female named **Melena** and the unnamed stranger, the Wizard, who seduced her. As a result of a green potion given to her mother by the Wizard, Elphaba has green skin and sharp teeth. She bites anyone who comes near her and is terrified of water because touching it causes her great pain.

Elphaba lives with her family in the woods, and as you might imagine, her childhood is difficult. Her family is alternately repulsed by her and scared of her. Her mother's husband, an itinerant preacher, actually believes Elphaba is some kind of punishment from God. As a result, Elphaba spends much of her childhood alone, unloved, and ashamed of her appearance.

**Scene 2. University Life.** Fast forward to Elphaba's college years where she works for a Professor at the University who is a talking Goat. That's right—in the Land of Oz, intelligent, self-aware talking animals exist – they are called Animals, with a capital A. Unfortunately, the Wizard of Oz is a cruel dictator who works day and night to take away the rights of all Animals. As a student, Elphaba spends much of her time cloaked, hiding her green face from other students, and staying hidden as she begins to get involved in the Animal-rights movement.

**Scene 3. Love at Last.** While attending University, Elphaba meets **Fiero**, a Prince from a nearby kingdom. She falls in love with him and he with her. He is quite curious about her and sees the lovely person she is beneath her green skin. Elphaba blossoms, beginning to believe she is indeed a beautiful and worthy person.

**Scene 4. Working for the Underground.** Elphaba continues to work with the Professor and the Animal-rights underground. Because she is so passionate about the rights of Animals, Elphaba decides she must kill the evil Headmistress of the University, **Madam Morrible**, because she works for the cruel Wizard and supports his hateful, anti-Animal legislation. Elphaba does not tell Fiero of her plans, but Fiero is concerned she might do something dangerous – so he decides to follow her. Unfortunately, Fiero ends up in the wrong place at the wrong time and is murdered by the Wizard's anti-Animal supporters.

**Scene 5. Death at Last.** Elphaba is devastated by Fiero's death and runs away to his homeland where he once ruled as Prince. His family takes her in and she lives with him. The Wizard continues his cruel dictatorship, never giving up on finding Elphaba and destroying her because of her involvement with the Animal-rights underground.

Eventually, the **Dorothy** we all know and love arrives in Oz and finally meets the Wizard. By that time, he has figured out where Elphaba is and tries to convince Dorothy to kill her. Of course, Dorothy is too good a person to do that. However, a strange quirk of fate brings Dorothy and Elphaba together – and after a tense confrontation, Dorothy accidentally kills Elphaba by tossing water on her when her skirt catches fire. Elphaba dies and is remembered across Oz as the cruel Wicked Witch of the West.