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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2016 Volume III: "Over the Rainbow": Fantasy Lands, Dream Worlds, and Magic Kingdoms

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## **Seeking a Home: The Wiz and the Black Arts Movement**

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by Jennifer Giarrusso

High school students are often asked to discuss race, but these conversations only superficially deal with the way that the American black artistic community has used art, literature and music not only to explore and create a cultural identity, but also find a cultural home in one that is majority white. The Black Arts Movement, an artistic parallel to the political Black Power Movement, is well-suited to allowing students to think critically about black identity, black pride and how a cultural minority navigates its situation in a white, mainstream culture.

The centerpiece of this unit is the 1978 film *The Wiz*. Students will question what influence, if any, the Black Arts Movement had on the creation and interpretation of the film. Alongside Black Arts Movement poetry, nonfiction essays by black writers from the late 20th century and a Radiolab podcast called "Debatable," students will examine the ways that Black Arts Movement writers used their politics and art to search for a home and the influence of that movement on later black work. This unit is intended for English Language Arts, grades 9-12.

(Developed for English I CAS and English I PSP, grade 9; recommended for English, grades 9-12)

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