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## "The Bad Ones" Lesson Plan Guide

by Melissa Albert

### Unit Overview

**Duration:** 3-4 weeks

**Grade Level:** Grades 9-12 (Florida Teens Read)

**Subject Integration:** ELA, Psychology, Folklore Studies, Critical Thinking

**Essential Question:** How do we navigate the tension between loyalty to past relationships and self-preservation, and what are the dangers of seeking knowledge we might not be prepared to handle?

**Content Advisory:** This novel contains mystery/thriller elements including disappearances, potential occult themes, and psychological tension. Teachers should preview and consider students' readiness for darker, suspenseful content.

### Learning Objectives

**Students will be able to:**

- Analyze complex relationship dynamics and their evolution over time
- Examine mystery structure and suspense-building techniques
- Explore themes of dangerous knowledge, community secrets, and games as metaphor
- Understand atmospheric writing and gothic elements in contemporary fiction
- Evaluate character choices and their consequences in dangerous situations
- Make connections between folkloric elements and contemporary anxieties
- Express understanding through analytical and creative projects

### WEEK 1: Disappearances, Clues, and Complicated Histories

#### Day 1: Introduction to Mystery and Gothic Elements

**Objective:** Establish genre expectations and thematic framework

**Materials:** Mystery genre overview, gothic literature examples, discussion materials

#### Opening (10 minutes)

- Quick-write: "What makes a mystery compelling? What makes it scary?"
- Discuss expectations for mystery/thriller with darker elements

#### Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Genre Exploration** (15 minutes)
  - Examine conventions of mystery and gothic fiction
  - Discuss small-town secrets as literary trope
  - Introduce concept of atmospheric suspense



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**2. Book Introduction (15 minutes)**

- Preview disappearances and investigation structure
- Discuss significance of ex-friend dynamic
- Establish reading schedule and discussion norms

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Exit ticket: "What intrigues you most about this premise?"
- Assign reading: Opening chapters through the disappearances

**Assessment:** Genre understanding, engaged anticipation

**Day 2: The Four Disappearances**

**Objective:** Analyze the inciting incident and Nora's initial response

**Materials:** Timeline worksheet, character relationship chart

**Opening (10 minutes)**

- Think-pair-share: "Why does Nora believe this isn't coincidence?"

**Main Activity (30 minutes)**

**1. Incident Analysis (20 minutes)**

- Map the four disappearances: timing, connections, circumstances
- Analyze police dismissal as coincidence
- Explore Nora's emotional response to Becca's disappearance

**2. Relationship Complexity Discussion (10 minutes)**

- Examine the "ex-best friend" dynamic
- Discuss complicated emotions: obligation, guilt, anger, lingering care
- Analyze significance of Becca's final text

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Quick-poll: "Would you investigate if an ex-friend disappeared?"

**Homework:** Read chapters covering Nora's decision to investigate

**Assessment:** Analytical observation, relationship complexity understanding

**Day 3: Following Clues and Retracing Steps**

**Objective:** Analyze investigation structure and clue revelation

**Materials:** Evidence tracking chart, investigation analysis worksheet

**Opening (5 minutes)**

- Review clues discovered so far

**Main Activity (35 minutes)**

**1. Investigation Structure (25 minutes)**

- Track physical and emotional journey as Nora retraces Becca's steps
- Analyze what clues reveal about Becca's state of mind



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- Discuss investigation methods and their dangers
- 2. **Clue Analysis** (10 minutes)
  - Examine what makes an effective literary clue
  - Discuss red herrings and misdirection
  - Predict where clues might lead

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Exit ticket: "What clue seems most significant so far?"

**Assessment:** Evidence tracking accuracy, analytical prediction

**Days 4-5: The Goddess Game Emerges**

**Objective:** Analyze the central mysterious element and its implications

**Materials:** Game analysis worksheet, folklore research materials

**Structure for Each Day:**

- **Opening** (10 min): Discussion of new revelations about the Goddess Game
- **Main Activity** (25 min): Literature circles focusing on game mechanics, history, and danger
- **Closing** (10 min): Theory development about the game's role

**Reading Assignments:** Continue through sections revealing game details **Assessment:** Game mechanics understanding, thematic connections

**WEEK 2: Dark History and Escalating Danger**

**Day 6: Small-Town Secrets and Dark History**

**Objective:** Analyze how setting and history create atmosphere and conflict

**Materials:** Setting analysis chart, community dynamics worksheet

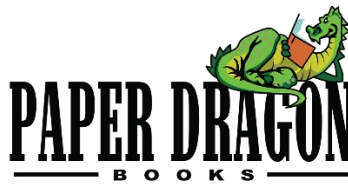
**Opening (10 minutes)**

- Small group discussion: "What dark history is Nora uncovering?"

**Main Activity (30 minutes)**

1. **Historical Pattern Analysis** (20 minutes)
  - Track revelations about the town's past
  - Examine how history repeats or influences present
  - Discuss community complicity in hiding truth
2. **Gothic Elements Discussion** (10 minutes)
  - Identify gothic literary elements in the story
  - Analyze how Albert creates atmosphere and dread
  - Discuss role of setting in amplifying suspense

**Closing (5 minutes)**



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- Quick-write: "How does knowing the town's history change the mystery?"

**Assessment:** Historical pattern recognition, gothic element identification

### **Day 7: Games, Ritual, and Power**

**Objective:** Explore themes of play, belief, and dangerous power

**Materials:** Game theory resources, ritual analysis materials

#### **Opening (5 minutes)**

- Poll: "Why do people play games that might be dangerous?"

#### **Main Activity (35 minutes)**

1. **Game Analysis** (25 minutes)
  - Examine the Goddess Game: rules, appeal, danger
  - Discuss how children's games can have dark dimensions
  - Explore belief and power—does the game work because people believe it does?
2. **Real-World Connections** (10 minutes)
  - Research actual children's games with dark origins
  - Discuss urban legends and dangerous challenges (Charlie Charlie, etc.)
  - Connect to contemporary anxieties about games and reality

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

- Exit ticket: "What makes the Goddess Game dangerous?"

**Assessment:** Thematic understanding, real-world connections

### **Day 8: Nora in Increasing Danger**

**Objective:** Analyze escalating tension and character vulnerability

**Materials:** Tension tracking chart, danger analysis worksheet

#### **Opening (10 minutes)**

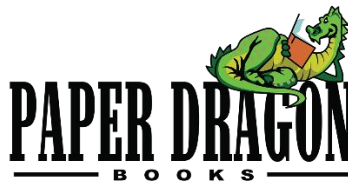
- Partner discussion: "When does Nora realize she's in over her head?"

#### **Main Activity (30 minutes)**

1. **Danger Escalation** (20 minutes)
  - Track how investigation puts Nora at increasing risk
  - Analyze decisions that deepen her involvement
  - Discuss: At what point should she have stopped?
2. **Suspense Technique Analysis** (10 minutes)
  - Examine how Albert builds tension through pacing and revelation
  - Identify moments of maximum suspense
  - Discuss reader manipulation and emotional engagement

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

- Quick-write: "What would you tell Nora to do at this point?"



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**Assessment:** Tension analysis, narrative technique understanding

**Days 9-10: Friendship, Betrayal, and Complicated Loyalty**

**Objective:** Deeply analyze the Nora-Becca relationship

**Follow similar structure with focus on:**

- What caused their friendship to end
- How investigating forces Nora to confront their shared past
- Whether Becca's involvement was voluntary or involuntary
- What Nora learns about Becca through the clues

**WEEK 3: Resolution, Themes, and Analysis**

**Day 11: The Climax and Resolution**

**Objective:** Analyze story's resolution and character outcomes

**Materials:** Climax analysis worksheet, resolution evaluation chart

**Opening (10 minutes)**

- Complete reading of climax chapters
- Initial reactions and questions

**Main Activity (30 minutes)**

1. **Climax Analysis** (20 minutes)
  - Examine the confrontation or revelation
  - Analyze whether Nora saves Becca (and how)
  - Discuss: What does "saving" mean in this context?
2. **Resolution Discussion** (10 minutes)
  - Evaluate whether the ending is satisfying
  - Discuss what happens to the Goddess Game
  - Explore lasting consequences for Nora and community

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Poll: "Are you satisfied with how the mystery resolved?"

**Assessment:** Climax understanding, resolution analysis quality

**Day 12: Themes of Knowledge and Danger**

**Objective:** Synthesize major themes throughout the novel

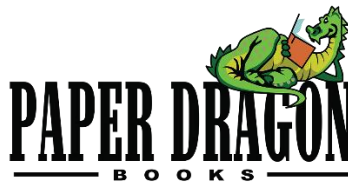
**Materials:** Theme analysis worksheet, textual evidence collection

**Opening (10 minutes)**

- Think-pair-share: "What are the main messages of this story?"

**Main Activity (30 minutes)**

1. **Theme Synthesis** (25 minutes)



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- Identify and analyze major themes with evidence
- Focus on: dangerous knowledge, complicated loyalty, community secrets, games and power
- Discuss: What is Albert saying about each theme?

**2. Title Discussion (5 minutes)**

- Explore multiple meanings of "The Bad Ones"
- Identify who might be "bad" and in what ways
- Connect title to themes and character judgments

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Exit ticket: "What's the most important lesson from this story?"

**Assessment:** Theme identification with evidence, title analysis depth

**Day 13: Folklore, Games, and Contemporary Anxieties**

**Objective:** Connect folkloric elements to modern concerns

**Materials:** Folklore research resources, contemporary comparison materials

**Opening (5 minutes)**

- Review folkloric elements in the story

**Main Activity (35 minutes)**

**1. Folklore Analysis (20 minutes)**

- Research real folklore about games, rituals, and small-town legends
- Analyze how Albert adapts folkloric elements for contemporary setting
- Discuss why these elements remain powerful

**2. Modern Application (15 minutes)**

- Connect the Goddess Game to contemporary "games" (social media challenges, viral trends)
- Discuss how technology changes but underlying dynamics remain
- Explore what the novel says about herd mentality and dangerous participation

**Closing (5 minutes)**

- Share one connection between folklore and modern life

**Assessment:** Folkloric understanding, contemporary application quality

**Day 14: Character Analysis and Moral Complexity**

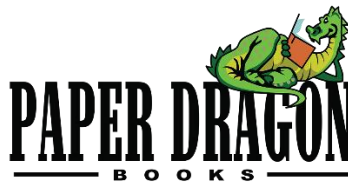
**Objective:** Deeply analyze character motivations and choices

**Materials:** Character psychology worksheet, moral analysis chart

**Opening (10 minutes)**

- Small group discussion: "Was Becca a victim or a willing participant?"

**Main Activity (30 minutes)**



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1. **Character Complexity** (20 minutes)
  - Analyze Nora's mixed motivations for investigating
  - Examine Becca's choices leading to disappearance
  - Discuss other characters' roles in enabling or preventing events
2. **Moral Ambiguity Discussion** (10 minutes)
  - Explore whether characters can be simply "good" or "bad"
  - Discuss complicity and degrees of responsibility
  - Connect to title: Who are "the bad ones"?

#### **Closing (5 minutes)**

- Quick-write: "Who bears the most responsibility for what happened?"

**Assessment:** Character analysis depth, moral reasoning quality

#### **Day 15: Analytical Project Introduction**

**Objective:** Apply understanding to analytical or creative projects

**Materials:** Project guidelines, research resources

#### **Project Options:**

1. **Mystery Analysis Essay:** Examine how Albert structures mystery and builds suspense
2. **Folklore Research Paper:** Investigate real games/folklore and connection to novel
3. **Character Study:** Psychological analysis of Nora or Becca
4. **Thematic Essay:** Analyze one major theme throughout novel
5. **Creative Extension:** Write sequel, prequel, or alternative perspective

#### **Structure:**

- **Opening** (10 min): Project explanation and selection
- **Work Time** (30 min): Planning and research
- **Closing** (5 min): Project proposal sharing

**Assessment:** Project proposal quality, thematic grounding

### **WEEK 4: Projects, Presentations, and Synthesis**

#### **Days 16-17: Project Development**

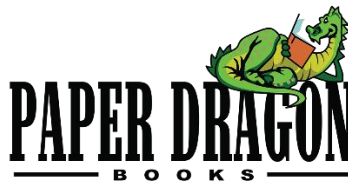
**Objective:** Develop analytical or creative projects

**Materials:** Various research and creative resources

#### **Structure for Each Day:**

- **Opening** (5 min): Progress review and goal-setting
- **Main Activity** (35 min): Independent work with teacher conferences
- **Closing** (5 min): Progress sharing and problem-solving

**Assessment:** Project development, analytical/creative depth



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### **Day 18: Presentations Part 1**

**Objective:** Share analytical and creative work

**Materials:** Presentation equipment, evaluation materials

**Opening** (5 minutes)\*\*

- Presentation expectations and audience guidelines

**Main Activity** (35 minutes)\*\*

- Student presentations (6-7 minutes each)
- Audience provides questions and thoughtful feedback

**Closing** (5 minutes)\*\*

- Reflection on presentations and insights gained

**Assessment:** Presentation quality, analytical sophistication

### **Day 19: Presentations Part 2 and Discussion**

**Objective:** Complete presentations and synthesize learning

**Materials:** Synthesis materials, discussion prompts

**Structure:**

- **Opening** (5 min): Final presentation setup
- **Main Activity** (30 min): Remaining presentations and cross-project discussion
- **Closing** (10 min): Thematic synthesis across all projects

**Assessment:** Presentation completion, synthesis participation

### **Day 20: Unit Reflection and Contemporary Relevance**

**Objective:** Connect novel to broader contexts and personal meaning

**Materials:** Reflection prompts, contemporary connection resources

**Opening** (10 minutes)\*\*

- Think-pair-share: "What will stay with you from this novel?"

**Main Activity** (30 minutes)\*\*

#### **1. Contemporary Relevance** (15 minutes)

- Discuss how novel's themes apply to current issues
- Explore what story teaches about critical thinking and risk assessment
- Connect to real discussions about dangerous trends and viral challenges

#### **2. Personal Reflection** (15 minutes)

- Students write about personal takeaways
- Consider: How might this change their approach to friendship, risk, or community?
- Share insights voluntarily

**Closing** (5 minutes)\*\*





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- Unit celebration and acknowledgment of thoughtful engagement
- Preview next unit or independent reading suggestions

**Assessment:** Reflection depth, contemporary application quality

### **Assessment Rubric**

#### **Reading Comprehension (25%)**

- **Exceeds:** Sophisticated understanding of complex plot, atmosphere, and thematic development
- **Meets:** Solid comprehension with adequate textual support
- **Approaching:** Basic understanding with guidance needed
- **Below:** Limited comprehension

#### **Theme and Literary Analysis (25%)**

- **Exceeds:** Nuanced analysis of themes with sophisticated textual interpretation
- **Meets:** Clear theme recognition with appropriate analysis
- **Approaching:** Basic theme identification
- **Below:** Minimal thematic understanding

#### **Mystery Structure Understanding (25%)**

- **Exceeds:** Sophisticated analysis of suspense techniques and mystery construction
- **Meets:** Clear understanding of mystery elements and their effects
- **Approaching:** Basic mystery structure recognition
- **Below:** Limited analysis of genre elements

#### **Critical Thinking and Application (25%)**

- **Exceeds:** Exceptional connections between text and real-world issues with sophisticated reasoning
- **Meets:** Good analytical thinking with reasonable connections
- **Approaching:** Basic critical thinking with support
- **Below:** Limited critical engagement

### **Differentiation Strategies**

#### **For Advanced Readers:**

- Independent research on folklore and urban legends
- Comparative analysis with other mystery/gothic literature
- Leadership in complex theme discussions
- Extended creative writing projects

#### **For Students Needing Support:**



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- Graphic organizers for tracking plot and clues
- Audio support for challenging sections
- Simplified analytical frameworks
- Collaborative project options

**For English Language Learners:**

- Visual supports for complex plot elements
- Key vocabulary pre-teaching
- Collaborative discussion opportunities
- Flexible demonstration of understanding

**For Students Sensitive to Dark Content:**

- Content previews before difficult sections
- Alternative project options if needed
- Permission to process reactions
- Connection to support resources

**Materials List**

- Class set of "The Bad Ones"
- Evidence tracking and mystery analysis materials
- Folklore and urban legend resources
- Chart paper and markers
- Research materials for projects
- Presentation equipment

**Extension Activities**

**Home Connections:**

- Family discussions about friendship evolution
- Sharing family folklore or local legends
- Discussing critical thinking about viral trends
- Reading other mystery/thriller titles together

**Community Connections:**

- Research local folklore and urban legends
- Guest speakers on community history or psychology
- Exploration of local "dark history" (appropriately)
- Discussion of how communities handle secrets

**Cross-Curricular Connections**



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**Psychology:**

- Group dynamics and herd mentality
- Decision-making under pressure
- Friendship formation and dissolution
- Risk assessment and vulnerability

**Folklore Studies:**

- Origins and evolution of children's games
- How legends spread and transform
- Function of folklore in communities
- Contemporary urban legends

**Sociology:**

- Small-town dynamics and social structures
- Community secrets and collective memory
- Power structures and information control
- How communities handle uncomfortable truths

**Real-World Applications**

**Critical Thinking:**

- Evaluating information and assessing danger
- Recognizing manipulation and peer pressure
- Understanding when to seek help
- Analyzing risk vs. benefit in choices

**Media Literacy:**

- Recognizing dangerous viral challenges
- Understanding how games/activities spread online
- Critical evaluation of trends and their risks
- Distinguishing fiction from real dangers

**Social-Emotional Skills:**

- Navigating complicated friendships
- Setting boundaries with former friends
- Recognizing when loyalty becomes dangerous
- Trusting instincts about unsafe situations