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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

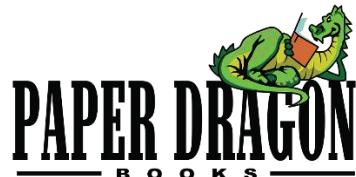
Materials: Mystery genre overview, gothic literature examples, discussion materials

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

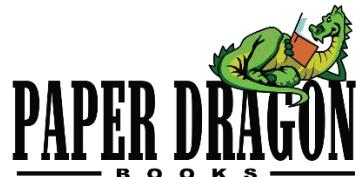
Opening (5 minutes)

- 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

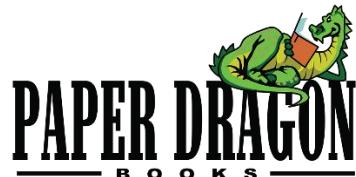
Opening (10 minutes)

- 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)

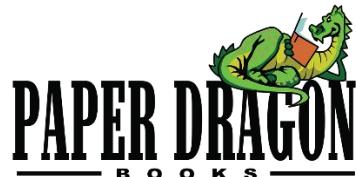
- Track how investigation puts Nora at increasing risk
- Analyze decisions that deepen her involvement
- Discuss: At what point should she have stopped?

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

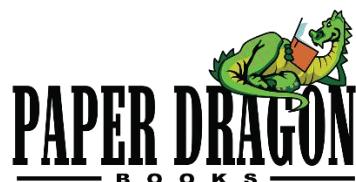
Materials: Theme analysis worksheet, textual evidence collection

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

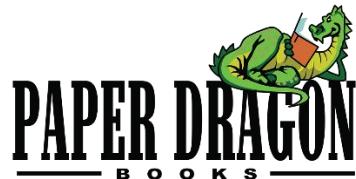
Objective: Deeply analyze character motivations and choices

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)
 - o Analyze Nora's mixed motivations for investigating
 - o Examine Becca's choices leading to disappearance
 - o Discuss other characters' roles in enabling or preventing events
2. **Moral Ambiguity Discussion** (10 minutes)
 - o Explore whether characters can be simply "good" or "bad"
 - o Discuss complicity and degrees of responsibility
 - o 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

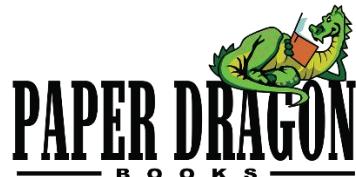
Objective: Develop analytical or creative projects

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

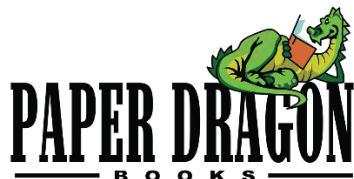
Opening (10 minutes)**

- 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%)

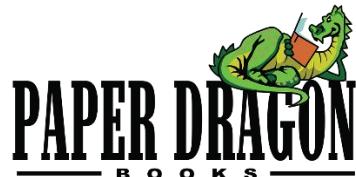
- **Exceeds:** Exceptional connections between text and real-world issues with sophisticated reasoning
- **Meets:** Good analytical thinking with reasonable connections
- **Approaching:** Basic critical thinking with support
- **Below:** Limited critical engagement

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

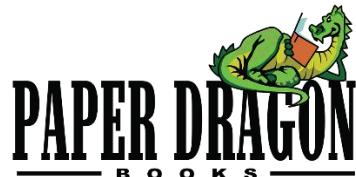
Home Connections:

- 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