

There are two sides to every story....

Meet twenty-six of history's most notorious women, each with a rotten reputation. But are these women harlots or heroes? Liars or ladies?

Jane Yolen and Heidi E. Y. Stemple appear as themselves in a series of accompanying comic panels as they debate each girl's badness with wit and sass. Heidi argues as the prosecution and Jane argues for context.

Readers can weigh in on the discussion and tip the scales of justice—are these girls bad, not so bad, or something in between?

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Discussion Guide

Developed by Charlesbridge

- 🌸 After reading *Bad Girls*, ask students if they think any of the women were misunderstood or misused. Who and why?
- 🌸 Ask students which Bad Girl they would like to be friends with and why.
- 🌸 Ask students if they have heard the story of Delilah before. What do they know about her?
- 🌸 After reading Jane Yolen's and Heidi E. Y. Stemple's arguments for and against Delilah, do students think Delilah was good or bad?
- 🌸 Should Jezebel have adopted the beliefs and lifestyle of her husband, King Ahab's, people?
- 🌸 Cleopatra had a vision for Egypt. Ask students if they think her actions were justified or if she had alternatives.
- 🌸 Ask students if they think Salome understood the consequences of her actions. Did she have a choice?

-  Did Anne Boleyn deserve to be executed? Given what they have learned about life in the court of King Henry VIII, do students think Anne could have been spared?
-  Do students think that if Queen Mary—Bloody Mary—had been a man, would she have received the same treatment that she did? Would she have made a good king?
-  Elisabeth Báthory believed in witchcraft and that the blood of young girls could maintain her beauty. Ask students if they think looking beautiful is important to them.
-  Ask if any students feel sorry for Elisabeth Báthory—a bored and lonely teenager when she began her gruesome acts.
-  After reading about Moll Cutpurse, ask students if they like Moll or not. Knowing that she ran away from indentured servitude, would they have chosen the same path for themselves?
-  Did Tituba manipulate and corrupt the children in her charge?
-  Should Tituba have been forgiven for telling stories of black magic and teaching the children in her care about witchcraft? As a slave, was she just doing as she was told?
-  Ask students if they would like to be pirates like Anne Bonney and Mary Read. Do they think you can be an outlaw and still be a good person?
-  Ask students if they think Peggy Shippen Arnold was a traitor. Why or why not?
-  Did Peggy Shippen Arnold manipulate Benedict Arnold, who had been praised as a hero of the American Revolution?
-  Read about Catherine the Great. Was she a good leader? Was she right to overthrow the Tsar?
-  Jane Yolen and Heidi E. Y. Stemple write that Catherine the Great could have been called Catherine the Ruthless. Under her rule Russia became a great nation, however. Ask students if they think the ends justify the means.
-  Ask students why they think Rose O’Neal Greenhow is included in *Bad Girls*. Do they think she was bad?
-  Read Jane Yolen’s argument in defense of Belle Starr. Ask students if they agree that Belle was a product of her environment. Why or why not? What about her life after the Civil War?
-  Ask students if they think Calamity Jane was a hero or a trouble maker. Were there men living similar lives and were they considered bad?
-  Ask for a raise of hands: what girls identify with Calamity Jane?
-  Ask students if they have heard the story of Lizzie Borden before? What do they know about her?
-  Recite the rhyme about Lizzie Borden. Knowing that there were not forty whacks, could the whole story about Lizzie Borden be incorrect?

-  Ask students if they think Lizzie Borden is guilty or innocent? Review the evidence, does anyone change their minds?
-  Madame Alexe Popova was executed for killing over 300 men. Do your students think she was a cold-blooded murderer or was she defending helpless wives?
-  After reading about Pearl Hart, ask students if they would steal to get money to help a loved one? Is breaking the law ever justifiable?
-  Pearl left her children with her mother to go out west and pursue her dreams. What do students think about her decision?
-  Ask students if they'd ever heard of Typhoid Mary before. After reading her story do students sympathize with Mary or do they think she was complicit in spreading disease and causing deaths?
-  Mata Hari was accused of being a double agent during World War I. Given what they have learned about her, do students think Mata Hari did what she had to do?
-  Do students think Mata Hari was a bad woman or a victim of circumstances?
-  A few of the women in *Bad Girls* were spies. Do your students think spying is bad? Do they think it is important? By raise of hands, ask if anyone would want to become a spy.
-  After reading about Ma Barker, ask students if they think she knew about her sons' activities. Ask students if they think Ma Barker was a good mother or a bad one. Why or why not?
-  Ask students if any of them have seen the musical "Chicago." Do they think it is a fun story? Did they realize it is based on true events?
-  Read about Beulah Annan. Ask students if they think Beulah being acquitted was fair or not. Do they think she was guilty?
-  Read about Belva Gaertner. Ask students if they think she killed Walter Law or do they think he committed suicide, as Belva's lawyer claimed. Do students think she was guilty?
-  Ask students if they had heard about Bonnie and Clyde before reading *Bad Girls*. Ask if they liked Bonnie after reading about her. Why or why not?
-  Ask students why they think Bonnie Parker entered a life of crime. Do they think she had other choices given the times she was living in?
-  Gangster Bugsy Siegel was killed in Virginia Hill's home when she was away. Do students think she had something to do with his death?
-  Read the conclusion of *Bad Girls* out loud and discuss what students think of women's roles and how we have judged them throughout history and today.