

CHARACTERS BEHAVING BADLY

A VIGNETTE PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Characters Behaving Badly is a vignette that examines what it means to be “good” and “bad.” Who is in control of the definition of “good” and “bad”?

Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price is the Vice President of Theatrefolk Inc. and the co-creator of the Drama Teacher Academy. She has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

Characters Behaving Badly is a vignette play made up of short scenes on a theme. Each scene explores different scenarios that ask the audience what it means to be “good” and “bad.” Who defines what “good” and “bad” are? What’s the worst thing a person can do? Sometimes we let people decide if we are good or bad. If we are defined by others, does that identity remain? Can we change if we are seen as “good” or “bad”? How do our actions represent who we are? What does it mean to have a reputation? Scenes include two characters deciding whether to take a wallet full of money they find on the ground, a teen who lies to get the better of someone and it all blows up in their face, a superhero who is trying to recover from past mistakes, and a friend who makes a bad decision because they think they are doing the right thing.

Characters

As this is a vignette play, actors play multiple roles in a variety of scenes. Most of the characters are teenagers. Generally, each scene contains a set of characters that only appear in that one scene. The play is designed so that the majority of characters can be played by any gender. There is one trans character.

Themes

Right vs. wrong, appearance vs. reality, morality, ethics, identity, consequences, gender

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does being good mean to you? What does being bad mean to you?
- ★ What's the worst thing a person can do?
- ★ What is a good deed?
- ★ Have you ever done something that you define as "bad"? How did you feel?
- ★ How would you define your moral compass?
- ★ Who defines good and bad?
- ★ What makes up a person's identity?
- ★ Do you believe a good reputation means someone is a good person?
- ★ Do you think people should be defined by their reputation?
- ★ Can you change your reputation?

Pre-Read Activities

Compliments

- ★ As a class, discuss what empathy and understanding mean. What are their definitions?
 - » Empathy can be defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
- ★ Discuss what it feels like when someone is mean to you.
 - » How do you feel when someone says something mean?

- » How do you respond when someone is mean to you?
- ★ After the group discussion, pair students up and have them compliment one another. Have students do this for about two to three minutes. Then pair them up with another student. Do this as many times as you like or have time for.
- ★ Another way to do this is to give each student three Post-it Notes on which they will write compliments for three different students. Designate a space for students to post their compliments. You may want to assign who students compliment so that no one is left out. After the compliments are posted, everyone will read not only what others say about them, but all the compliments.
- ★ After wrapping up the activity, have a discussion.
 - » What did it feel like to be complimented? What did it feel like to give compliments?
 - » What did you learn about empathy and understanding through this activity?
 - » How can you be empathetic and kind to people in your daily life?

Good vs. Bad Scene

- ★ Put students in pairs and tell them one person is going to be a good character and one is going to be a bad character. What does that mean to them?
- ★ Have students write a one-to-two-minute scene where each character is trying to get what they want. They have to do that from the perspective of good and bad. The scene has to come to a resolution by the end, whether that means one character wins or they work together.
- ★ After they have written their scenes, have students perform them.
- ★ Once all the performances are done, have a discussion as a class.
 - » How did you decide how your scene was going to end?
 - » When deciding who was good and who was bad, how did that inform how you created your characters?
 - » What shocked you about the scenes you saw?

Identity Control/Change Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau that focuses on the subject of trying to control or change one's identity.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The first picture will feature a group of students visualizing their current identity. The second picture will show students trying to change or control an aspect of their identity. The third picture will show the aftermath of that decision.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: Do you feel you are in control of your identity? Is there something you would change about your identity if you could? Why or why not?

Good & Bad Tableaux

- ★ Divide students into groups and tell them they are going to create a tableau that focuses on doing something "good" and a tableau of them doing something "bad." Have each group present their two tableaux.
- ★ After each group presents, discuss as a class.
 - » What differences did you notice between the "good" and "bad" tableaux?
 - » Which tableau was easier to create? Why?
 - » Were you surprised by any of the tableaux? How so?
 - » Which tableau stood out to you the most? Why?

Reputation Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Groups will create a one-minute scene on the theme of good/bad reputation. They can show characters reacting to someone with what they consider a "bad"

reputation, someone trying to change their reputation, or the qualities of a good reputation.

- ★ Discuss afterward: Are you in control of your reputation? Why or why not? How important is it to students to have a “good” reputation? What does reputation represent?

Hero & Villain Scenes

- ★ Oftentimes villains are seen as bad and heroes are seen as good, but what if they wanted to change? Is change possible?
- ★ Put students in pairs and tell them one will be a villain and one will be a hero.
- ★ The plot twist is that the hero wants to do something bad and the villain wants to do something good. What conflicts arise? How does this affect their subtext? Does this make either character good or bad?
- ★ Have students write a one-to-two-minute scene exploring this and then have them perform.
- ★ After everyone performs, discuss as a class.
 - » Was either character good or bad?
 - » What did you first think when you were going to be a villain or a hero?
 - » How did that change based on the hero/villain trying to get what they wanted?
 - » Can people change? Why or why not?

Our Actions

- ★ Ask students to create a list of “good” and “bad” things they have done within the last two weeks.
- ★ After students create the list, have them say one or two of the actions they listed.

- ★ You may want to do this anonymously. Have students write on slips of paper their good and bad things and hand them in to you. Shuffle the pages and read a selection of good and bad actions randomly. This way, students may feel more comfortable sharing and it will eliminate the judgment of connecting specific students to specific bad things. As much as we like to say we don't judge people, we all do.
- ★ When everyone has gone, have a discussion as a class.
 - » How did you define if an action was "good" or "bad"?
 - » Did someone decide that for you?
 - » Do you think you are a "good" or "bad" person because of your actions? Why?
 - » How do our actions affect our reputation?

Describe Yourself

- ★ Have students write a description of their outsides and insides. How do they present themselves in public? How do they see themselves in private? Do they believe they are the same inside and out?
- ★ Alternatively, have students describe themselves (outside and inside) using the five senses. What is their look, their sound, their texture, their smell? Have them identify a specific food for taste.

I Am... (Good/Bad) Monologue

- ★ Have students free write for five minutes about what it means to be "good" and what it means to be "bad."
- ★ After the time is up tell students to write a monologue based on their freewrite. For example, they can write a monologue as a character doing something bad or about a good action they did.
- ★ When students finish writing their monologues, have them perform.

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Characters Behaving Badly*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. How many categories of bad are there?
2. What do Lan and Palla have in common in Scene One?
3. Why is Vac nervous in Scene Two?
4. How does Koi feel in Scene Two?
5. What object is causing the conflict between Sid and Klo in Scene Three?
6. What happens to the object at the end of Scene Three?
7. Why is Com going to get in trouble with their mom in Monologue One?
8. Why is Com grounded in Monologue One?
9. What did Feejee do to get in trouble in Scene Four?
10. What does Nar say they have to give to Palla in Scene Five?

11. What does Nar want in exchange in Scene Five?
12. Why is Lan volunteering at the children's cancer charity event in Scene Six?
13. How does Vac feel about volunteering in Scene Six?
14. What is Koi's current job in Monologue Two? What job did Koi have before?
15. Describe the relationship between Klo and Sid in Scene Seven. Using context clues from the text, what do you think their relationship is?
16. What did Vac do for Palla in Scene Nine? What does Palla do when she finds out?
17. Who is Com trying to see in Scene Ten?
18. How did the playwright choose to end the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. How does the playwright use juxtaposition throughout the play?
2. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose to share the subject matter episodically through scenes, rather than following one story from beginning to end?
3. In Scene Two Vac talks about Michelle, who is a character we do not see. Based on what is said about them, how do you picture Michelle? Is Michelle good or bad?
4. Do you think Gaz is being empathetic in Scene Four? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel about Feejee and their decisions in Scene Four? Why do you think they want Gaz to call the cops so badly?
6. How does the playwright make you empathize with the characters? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
7. How would you costume Koi in Monologue Two?

8. How do you think the playwright came up with the names for the characters? Do you think they stand for anything?
9. How does the playwright use music to transition from scene to scene? How does this add to the tone of the play? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
10. What is Scene Eight trying to say about labels?
11. In your opinion, is there a common conflict throughout the scenes? If so, what is it?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. How does the playwright want you to respond to the play?
2. In your opinion, why is the play named *Characters Behaving Badly*? Would you name it something else instead? Why?
3. Pick a character from the play. In your opinion, what happens next to them? Explain why you picked the character you did.
4. What is the playwright trying to say about identity? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. What is the playwright trying to say about reputation? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. If you were John, how would you feel about Lan and Vac's thoughts and actions in Scene Six? Why?
7. If you had to decide, which character do you think acted the worst? Who is "bad" in your opinion? Why? Cite the text to support your answer.

Post-Read Questions

- ★ After reading the play, have your ideas about what is good and bad changed? How?
- ★ Is there a character you resonated the most with? Why?
- ★ Do you identify as good or bad? Do you identify with neither or both?
- ★ What questions do you still have after reading the play?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you present yourself?
- ★ Do you think any of the characters thought they were doing something “bad” or did they think it was the right thing to do? Why or why not?

Post-Read Activities

What Would You Do?

- ★ Choose a scene in which a character makes a decision between good and bad. I suggest Scene Three.
- ★ As a group, read the scene together and discuss what was good and what was bad in regards to the character’s actions.
- ★ Now ask students to put themselves in the character’s shoes. What would they do?
- ★ Put students in pairs and ask them to rewrite the scene to illustrate what they would do instead of what the character did. The scenes should be one to two minutes.
- ★ After students are done writing the scene, have pairs perform.
- ★ Once performances are finished, debrief with students.
 - » What did it feel like to put yourself in someone else’s shoes?
 - » What did you enjoy about this activity? What was the hardest part?

- » Was it hard to do the right thing? Why or why not?
- » What surprised you about the other scenes you saw?

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize the play in a single image that would attract an audience? Would you use a box? What box would it be? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Set Design

- ★ Throughout the play, the playwright never gives specific settings for each scene, just general ones, such as a store and the street.
- ★ Put students in groups of three to four and assign them a scene to create a set design for.
 - » Note: The play calls for a simple unit set, but this is an opportunity for students to use their imaginations and get creative and specific with the details for their set.
- ★ Students can either present their set as a drawing or a 3D model. After each group presents, ask them questions about their set.
 - » What inspired the set?
 - » How did the students decide where the scene took place?
 - » How would they use the set to inform their staging of the scene?

Alternate Endings

- ★ Put students in groups of three to four and assign each group a scene.
- ★ Tell students that they should read through the scene and decide what they want to change to create an alternate ending. For example, what would have happened in Scene Four if Gaz had actually called the police?

- ★ Have students write a part of the scene (about two to three minutes of it) with this change and alternate ending in mind.
- ★ After students are done writing, have them perform the scenes.
- ★ Once performances are finished, discuss as a class.
 - » What shocked you about how the scenes changed?
 - » Did the characters in the scene change to become good or bad?
 - » How did you make the decision on what to change? How did this affect your ending?

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Is There a Right Decision?

- ★ Present students with two different ways to approach a scenario. For example, your friend tells you they stole something from a store. Do you tell the manager or do you keep it to yourself to avoid betraying your friend's trust?
- ★ Have a discussion on the outcome of both scenarios and discuss whether there is a right one. Why is it right or wrong?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing Characters Behaving Badly. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for writing this play?

I'm always interested in human behaviour, especially the type of behaviour that people feel they need to slap a label on. There are many reasons why people do things and that is always going to make for an interesting topic for a play!

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Figuring out the order in a vignette play is always tricky. You want to have a variety of tone, variety of style, and variety of character. Also, when you're dealing with a topic where characters do bad things, you have to decide HOW bad. The scenes all can't have characters telling little white lies and they can't all be acting like the worst human beings on earth. It's all about balance, and again, variety. And finally, you have to think about the ending of each scene. People who do bad things, whatever that means, don't often think about the consequences. And further, they don't change in a moment. You can't have every character say, "Wow, I never realized and I'm going to change my ways!" Having said that, some of the characters have to at least think about changing, otherwise all the scenes will end the same way. All of these things are awesome challenges!

What was it like to see the play performed?

I love having a moment of "Yep, that works" when I see a play. It doesn't always happen! But it's very rewarding when it does and you can close the book on a script.

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play and why?

I am very fond of all these characters. I love writing characters who are flawed, even if they think they're doing the right thing. My favourite moment though is the character who is singing about eating on the couch because they were grounded for getting an A minus. They are acting "bad" even though in the moment they don't really want to.

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

I adore first drafts. The act of getting everything on the page without judgement is freeing and fun. I fully embrace messy first drafts with lots of plot holes and things that need to be solved. And then you actually have to solve those problems in the rewrites, which is always more a challenge for me.

What's your writing process like?

I love to write initial ideas down in notebooks. I always start with pen and paper. I keep writing notes and ideas and characters until I feel that pen and paper is actually getting in the way of my progress. That's when I know I'm ready to move to the computer and start compiling a first draft. I often start my writing process thinking about the play and letting it roam in my head for a while. So after thinking and taking notes I'm ready to dive into something more tangible.

What engages you about playwriting?

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than be distant from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!