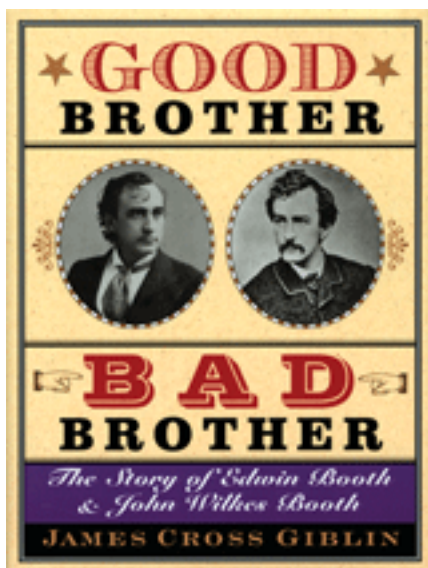


## A Teacher's Guide



# Good Brother, Bad Brother

by James Cross Giblin

## Lesson Four: Bad Brother

- [Synopsis](#)
- [National Curriculum Standards](#)
- [Time Required](#)
- [Materials Needed](#)
- [The Lesson](#)
- [Worksheets](#)

## Synopsis

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In this lesson, students will deal with the historian's dilemma of how to write about people in the past who committed wicked deeds. Giblin acknowledges that "John wasn't just any villain. He was the first in a long line of men and women who, for various reasons, killed or tried to kill a president of the United States. And his target was Abraham Lincoln, who would become arguably America's most beloved president. No wonder John Wilkes Booth is still talked about, and still detested, today." In this lesson, students will analyze a well-known cartoon, "Satan Tempting Booth to the Murder of the President," on p. 115 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother*. Then they will read *Good Brother, Bad Brother* to try to determine when and how John Wilkes Booth, a man "who seemed so loveable and in whom all his family found a source of joy in his boyish and confiding nature," turned into "a villain" (Edwin Booth, quoted on p. 5). This lesson is most appropriate for middle school students, grades 6–8, but may be suitable for high school students, grades 9–12.

## National Curriculum Standards

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Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning has created standards and benchmarks for language arts, math, science, geography, economics, and history. This lesson meets standards and benchmarks for:

**United States History Standard (4th Ed.)** for Era 5 — Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877) including benchmark 14, Understand the course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people:

Level III (Grades 7–8)

2. Understands how different groups of people shaped the Civil War (e.g., the motives and experiences of Confederate and white and African American Union soldiers, different perspectives on conscription, the effects of divided loyalties)

Level IV (Grades 9–12)

4. Understands how the Civil War influenced Northern and Southern society on the home front (e.g., the New York City draft riots of July 1863, the Union's reasons for curbing civil liberties in wartime, Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during the war)

**Historical Understanding (4th Ed.)** Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective including benchmark:

Level III (Grades 7–8)

1. Understands that specific individuals and the values those individuals held had an impact on history

Level IV (Grades 9–12)

8. Understands how past events are affected by the irrational (e.g., the assassination of John F. Kennedy or Archduke Ferdinand) and the accidental (e.g., the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus)

11. Knows how to perceive past events with historical empathy

12. Knows how to evaluate the credibility and authenticity of historical sources

13. Evaluates the validity and credibility of different historical interpretations

14. Uses historical maps to understand the relationship between historical events and geography

**Theatre Standard (4th Ed.)**, Standard 6: Understands the context in which theatre, film, television and electronic media are performed today as well as in the past

Level III (Grades 7–8)

4. Knows ways in which theatre reflects a culture

Level IV (Grades 9–12)

3. Understands similarities and differences among the lives, works, and influences of representative theatre artists in various cultures and historical periods

## Time Required

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This lesson will probably take a half to a full class period, more if reading and writing assignments are not completed outside of class.

## Materials Needed

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- *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth*
- Copy of cartoon, found on p. 115 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother*, in this guide, or online at the Library of Congress, "Satan Tempting Booth to the Murder of the President," lithograph by John L. Magee, Philadelphia, 1865. Item # LC-USZ62-8933 [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?pp/PPALL:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(cph+3a53167\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?pp/PPALL:@field(NUMBER+@band(cph+3a53167)))
- Cartoon Analysis Worksheet
- Reader's Guide to *Good Brother, Bad Brother*

# The Lesson

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## Lesson-Starter

1. Ask students to look at the cartoon of John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre for two minutes. They may wish to use the first minute or so to focus on one quarter of the image at a time, covering the rest from their view with their hands or paper; the remainder of the time they may want to look at the caption and take in the entirety of the image. When the time is up, ask students to put away or turn over the cartoon and then jot down their first impressions of the image in Step 1, Visuals on the Cartoon Analysis Worksheet. Ask students to share their findings of people, objects, and actions. Students may ask what Satan is holding. It is a peacock feather, a symbol of excessive pride, associated with sorcery but also immortality.
2. Next, allow students to complete the remainder of the worksheet with the cartoon in front of them. Discuss their answers and any questions they may have about the cartoon.

## Procedures

1. On p. 221 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother*, Giblin writes, "Real life is more complicated than fiction, however . . . Nor did John as a young actor and bon vivant deserve the label bad brother. Reckless and rambunctious, yes, but not necessarily evil. All that was forgotten, though, in light of John's final murderous act — the act that ensured he would be remembered only as the killer of Lincoln." Or, in the words uttered by John Wilkes Booth in the role of Marc Anthony, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." (*Julius Caesar*, III.ii.75–76.)
2. Direct students to read *Good Brother, Bad Brother* and take notes on the Reader's Guide worksheet (following Evaluation).
3. As a culminating activity, assign students to conduct additional research and compose one of the following written assignments:
  - Write an essay explaining whether knowing that the most notorious assassin in U.S. history was at times a good son, brother, and uncle makes him more or less frightening, approachable, interesting, or understandable — and explain why

- Compose a biopoem (a pattern poem) in the following style:  
 Style Two — Seventeen Lines; Title is the person's name  
 I am (two adjectives or descriptive characteristics)  
 I wonder (a matter this person is curious about)  
 I hear (something real or imaginary)  
 I see (something real or imaginary)  
 I want  
 I am (repeat first line)  
 I pretend  
 I feel (something real or imaginary)  
 I touch (something real or imaginary)  
 I worry  
 I am (repeat first line)  
 I understand  
 I say  
 I dream (some real or imaginary goal)  
 I try  
 I hope  
 I am (repeat first line)

- Invent and "document" the dialogue between Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth if they had met backstage after Booth's November 9, 1863, performance of *The Marble Heart*.

- Prepare a letter written by John Wilkes Booth to his older brother, Edwin, to be opened in the event of his death, as if he'd actually written it.

- "Transcribe" an "interview" you've conducted with Edwin Booth focusing on his personal character and whether he was a "good brother"; use with some questions patterned after those developed by Bernard Pivot and used by James Lipton of *Inside the Actors Studio* (see Lesson 3 for questions).

## Assessment

The student's written assignment may be graded on a twenty-five point scale (which may be multiplied by four to convert to one hundred-point scale or for conversion to letter grades) using the following rubric:

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Unacceptable</b>
<b>Historical Issues (15 points)</b>	<p><b>(15–14 points)</b></p> <p>Included ten or more guidelines</p> <p>Addressed both accuracy and fairness thoroughly</p> <p>Showed great insight into the process of writing history</p>	<p><b>(13–12 points)</b></p> <p>Included ten guidelines</p> <p>Addressed both accuracy and fairness in a balanced manner</p> <p>Showed insight into the process of writing history</p>	<p><b>(11–6 points)</b></p> <p>Included ten guidelines but some are the same only reworded, or unclear</p> <p>Addressed both accuracy and fairness but unevenly, concentrating on one</p> <p>Showed some insight into the process of writing history</p>	<p><b>(5–1 points)</b></p> <p>Included less than ten guidelines</p> <p>Addressed only fairness or only accuracy OR prepared guidelines with some merit but without a clear relationship to the issues of fairness or accuracy</p> <p>Understood problems in writing history to a very limited degree</p>	<p><b>(0)</b></p> <p>Did not prepare a list of guidelines</p>
<b>Written Components (10 points)</b>	<p><b>(10–9 points)</b></p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed all spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions; error-free</p>	<p><b>(8 points)</b></p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed all spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions; one or two errors</p>	<p><b>(7–6 points)</b></p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed most spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions; several errors</p>	<p><b>(5–1 points)</b></p> <p>Generally wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Had numerous problems with spelling, punctuation, and/or grammar conventions</p>	<p><b>(0)</b></p> <p>Did not prepare the assignment</p>

## Internet Resources

Smithsonian Associates, CivilWarStudies.org, John Wilkes Booth Escape Route  
<http://civilwarstudies.org/OnlinePrograms/Thumbnails/Boothtour/start.htm>

District of Columbia Cultural Tourism, Civil War to Civil Rights Trail with map  
[http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/information2546/information\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=71433](http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/information2546/information_show.htm?doc_id=71433)

## Interdisciplinary Activities

### Geography

1. Explain that Wilkes-Barré, Pennsylvania is named, in part, for John Wilkes, an English member of Parliament who was considered to be a powerful voice for democracy in government (along with Major Isaac Barré, an English hero of the French and Indian War and later a member of Parliament). Ask students to locate the town on a map. In 1838, English actor Junius Brutus Booth, Sr., named his son, John Wilkes Booth, after John Wilkes, who died in 1797 and was a distant relative. Ask students how significant Wilkes must have been if children and towns were named for him.
2. Students can sharpen geography skills by assuming the role of investigators trying to capture John Wilkes Booth and his co-conspirators. Using information in the book and from additional research, students should pinpoint locations and trace the path of John Wilkes Booth and the co-conspirators in Washington, D.C., using separate colors for Booth, Davey Herold, George Atzerodt, and Lewis Powell. They should continue to follow Booth and Herold's flight to Garrett's barn on regional maps, marking times and dates. A world map will be necessary to track John Surratt.

### Drama

1. Examine the comments on p. 73 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother* and decide if the Booth brothers' acting styles were predetermined by their differing personalities. Was one a better actor than the other, or just different? What style of acting appeals to you most as a viewer? What style of acting do you think would be your style if you were an actor? Aside from Brad Pitt, what other modern actor do you think matches the style of John Wilkes Booth most closely, based on the descriptions of his acting. Why?
2. In *Good Brother, Bad Brother*, a number of critical reviews of John Wilkes Booth's acting are included, for example on p. 70. It was noted that he "ignored the fundamental principal of all vocal study and exercise: that the chest, and not the throat or the mouth, should supply the sound necessary for singing or speaking." The outcome of this abuse is recounted in Chapter 10. What conditions, in travel and in theater, created this problem? Is it still a problem for modern actors?
3. Despite the increasingly bitter political differences between John and his brothers Edwin and Junius, Jr., he embraced the idea of a benefit performance to erect a statue of William Shakespeare in Central Park. Read about this joint effort on pp. 97-101. Consider other causes that have brought artists of differing political persuasion together, such as the concerts for 9-11, Hurricane Katrina families, and encouraging young voters to exercise their right to vote.

4. Examples in the book show how John Wilkes Booth handled flubbing his lines (p. 51), wardrobe failure (p. 70), fame, and breathless women at the stage door. Do these details make him more accessible as a human being? Kate Reynolds blamed his lack of discipline on being the spoiled child of the family and "gaining position by flashes of genius, but the necessity of ordinary study had not been borne in on him." How do you think others in the theater profession felt about the kind of person to whom all things came with little work, even if he was gifted?

## Worksheets

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["Satan Tempting Booth to the Murder of the President" cartoon](#)

[Cartoon Analysis Worksheet](#)

[Reader's Guide for \*Good Brother, Bad Brother\*](#)



The Library of Congress

## Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

	<b>Visuals</b>	<b>Words (not all cartoons include words)</b>
Step One	1. List the objects or people you see in the cartoon.	1. Identify the cartoon caption and/or title.  2. Locate three words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon.  3. Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.
Step Two	2. Which of the objects on your list are symbols?  3. What do you think each symbol means?	4. Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant? Why do you think so?  5. List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed in the cartoon.
Step Three	A. Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.  B. Explain how the words in the cartoon clarify the symbols.  C. Explain the message of the cartoon.  D. What special interest groups would agree/disagree with the cartoon's message? Why?	

Developed by the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., 20408

## Reader's Guide for *Good Brother, Bad Brother*

1. Write examples, including page numbers, of when John Wilkes Booth was a "good brother" to his brothers, sisters, or sister-in-law, Mary Devlin Booth.
2. Write examples, including page numbers, of when John Wilkes Booth was a "bad brother" either to his brothers, sisters, or brother-in-law, John Clarke.
3. Write examples, including page numbers, of when John Wilkes Booth was a "good son" to his mother, Mary Ann Booth.
4. Write examples, including page numbers, of when John Wilkes Booth was a "bad son" to his mother, Mary Ann Booth.
5. How do you explain John Wilkes Booth's behavior in helping to get a statue of William Shakespeare erected in New York City (in the North, which he hated, pp. 97–99) and assisting with the rescue of Adam Badeau (Edwin's wounded Union Army friend) during the Draft Riots (p. 84)?
6. Focusing in particular on pp. 53–58, 60–63, 82–86, 96–97, 101–9, 110–124, and 136–149, what did John Wilkes Booth believe about:
  - John Brown and abolitionists?
  - the North's superior numbers and use of immigrant Irishmen in the Union Army?
  - not fighting for the South?
  - treason laws in the North?
  - acting as a spy and blockade runner?
  - Lincoln and his legitimacy as president?
  - the North's superior numbers and collapse of prisoner-of-war exchanges?
  - African-American slavery?
  - extending citizenship and the vote to African Americans?
  - the ethics of kidnapping Lincoln?
  - the ethics of killing top officials of the United States government, including Lincoln?
  - the press not viewing him as a Southern patriot following the assassination?
7. Do you think there was a particular point in his life when John Wilkes Booth's assassination of Lincoln was inevitable, or was it a random, irrational act that could have been prevented by any number of things? Explain.
8. Do you think, as Edwin Booth did, that on the matter of patriotism to the South, John Wilkes Booth was "insane on that one point"? Or were his actions sane, if wicked? Explain.
9. Do humanizing details about John Wilkes Booth make him more likable or more troubling to you? Explain.
10. "For every person who knows that there was once a great actor named Edwin Booth, there are thousands who know that his brother, John Wilkes Booth, assassinated Abraham Lincoln" (p. 221). Explain whether you believe any book, play, or film can change that reality. Does *Good Brother, Bad Brother* succeed in transforming John Wilkes Booth from the one-dimensional, demonically possessed man of Magee's cartoon into a more complete person? Is it better for history and students of history that we have a well-rounded study of even those who perpetrate great evil? Explain.