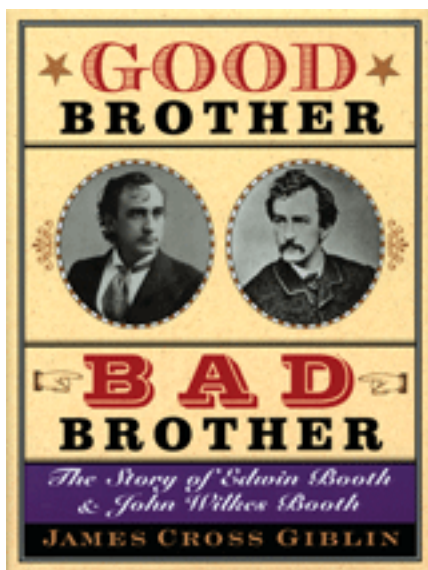


A Teacher's Guide



Good Brother, Bad Brother

by James Cross Giblin

Lesson One: The Historian's Craft

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Synopsis

In this introductory lesson to *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth*, students will examine the challenges facing historians and biographers. Students will look at a fairy tale villain (such as the wolf from the *Three Little Pigs* or the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*). Next, they will complete a worksheet considering the challenges presented by historical resources, both primary and secondary. The class will discuss why it is important to write about history's villains while avoiding the traps of over-demonizing or over-glorifying them. Finally, pupils will draft a list of guidelines for researching and writing about historical persons. The 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

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:

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

5. Understands that historical accounts are subject to change based on newly uncovered records and interpretations

6. Knows different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests, and biases expressed within them (e.g., eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos; magazine articles, newspaper accounts, hearsay)

Level IV (Grades 9–12)

1. Analyzes the values held by specific people who influenced history and the role their values played in influencing history

Time Required

This lesson will probably take a half to a full class period, depending on whether the worksheet and written activity is completed outside of class.

Materials Needed

- *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth* (p. 221)
- Historical Sources Worksheet

The Lesson

Lesson-Starter

1. Read the passage written by Giblin, on p. 221 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth*. "But 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. This is yet another example of the long-held truism that villains in fiction and in life are more interesting and colorful than heroes."

2. Share with your students a fairy tale such as Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* by A. Wolf. Or you may choose a song from the soundtrack of a Broadway show about the Wicked Witch of the West, such as "Nobody Mourns the Wicked" from *Wicked* or "No One is Alone" from *Into the Woods*, sung by Rapunzel's Witch.

3. Briefly discuss whether hearing both sides of a story makes it any easier to write about history or people from the past.

Procedures

1. Provide students with the Historical Sources Worksheet (included at the end of this lesson) and ask them to complete it. Discuss the worksheet with the students. (Further information about Asia Booth Clarke's *John Wilkes Booth: A Sister's Memoir* may be found on pp. 211 and 225 of *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth*.)

2. Establish the historical context of the documents and materials quoted in secondary sources. Point out that historical documents are not made with modern readers' sensibilities in mind and may contain words that are considered racially offensive or profane. Ask students about how such documents should be handled.

3. Both Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth played the role of Shakespeare's Hamlet (see the Library of Congress photo of Edwin Booth as Hamlet on p. 170). Hamlet is also mirrored by Simba in the popular children's film *The Lion King*. At the end of the final act of the play, Hamlet's friend Horatio wants to commit suicide and die along with Hamlet, but Hamlet prevents him from doing so. Hamlet realizes that if Horatio dies, all remaining witnesses will think "mad Hamlet" has gone on a murder spree. He wants Horatio to live and bear witness to the truth, commanding him, "Absent thee from felicity a while and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story" (*Hamlet*, V.ii. 347-348).

Ask students how *Hamlet* would have been different if Claudius told the story as opposed to Horatio, or how *The Lion King* would have been different if Scar were writing the tale. (Playwright Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* examines Hamlet from the point of view of a pair of minor characters in the Shakespeare play; available on VHS (1990) and DVD.) Ask students to brainstorm a list of problems historians and biographers face as they try to write accounts of the past, especially when dealing with conflicting points of view or complex individuals capable of both good and wickedness.

4. Inform students that they will be writing a list of guidelines for writers of history, so that readers will get an accurate and fair presentation about past people and events. This may be done in pairs or individually. Lists should be written in complete sentences with standard spelling, punctuation, and grammar and

- Include at least ten guidelines
- Clearly address the problems of accuracy
- Clearly address the problems of fairness

Assessment

The students' guidelines 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:

| | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor | Unacceptable |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| Historical Issues(15 points) | <p>(15–14 points)</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>(13–12 points)</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>(11–6 points)</p> <p>Included ten guidelines, but some were the same but reworded, or unclear</p> <p>Addressed both accuracy and fairness but unevenly, concentrated on one</p> <p>Showed some insight into the process of writing history</p> | <p>(5–1 points)</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>(0)</p> <p>Did not prepare a list of guidelines</p> |
| Written Components (10 points) | <p>(10–9 points)</p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed all spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions; error-free</p> | <p>(8 points)</p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed all spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions; one or two errors</p> | <p>(7–6 points)</p> <p>Wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Followed most spelling, punctuation, and grammar conventions, several errors</p> | <p>(5–1 points)</p> <p>Generally wrote in complete sentences</p> <p>Numerous problems with spelling, punctuation, and/or grammar conventions</p> | <p>(0)</p> <p>Did not prepare the assignment</p> |

Internet Resources

Image of the 1850 Census of the 5th Ward of Baltimore listing the household headed by Junius Brutus Booth, whose occupation is "Tragedian." Edwin is enumerated on line 17; John on line 20. http://www.rootdig.com/1850census/1850_john_wilkes_booth.html

The Library of Congress American Treasures Imagination Web site includes an 1873 chromolithograph poster of Edwin Booth playing the role of Hamlet at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/at0166A.2s.jpg>.

Interdisciplinary Activities

Dramatic Arts

A twenty-one-year-old clerk named Charles Clarke provided a 60,000 word description of Edwin Booth's portrayal of Hamlet. This original obsessive fan took detailed notes, for example these observations from the first act, as reported by John A. Mills (*Hamlet on Stage: The Great Tradition*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985):

Booth entered with a slow, unvaried "monotread," which seemed to say that his presence was "in sullen obedience to the courtesy of the occasion." The little bow he gave the King after the first solemnly scornful aside had something of the same quality . . . In his reply to Gertrude (I.ii.76–86) he employed a number of illustrative gestures which were typical of his general manner; he raised the hem of his cloak on "suits of solemn black" and again on "trappings," struck his breast "gravely" on "that within" and pointed to his eye when he mentioned that organ's "fruitful river". . . the many gestures "were delivered with so much ease and in so natural a manner that one would scarcely notice them especially. There was no vivacity in them; they were full of languor, but so conversant with Hamlet's meditative, mournful demeanor that they appeared highly natural."

PBS broadcast a program available in VHS and DVD, *Discovering Hamlet* (1999), showing how Sir Derek Jacobi instructed Kenneth Branagh when he played Hamlet. Ask students to watch the first act of Hamlet from at least two different productions (either live or recorded) and take note of the gestures and movements used to convey Hamlet's character. After reviewing their notes, ask them what kind of Hamlet the actor was trying to portray and to judge how successful the actor was. Versions of *Hamlet* available on VHS or DVD include:

Adrian Lester, 2005 (*Hamlet* by Brook)
Kevin Kline, 2002
Campbell Scott, 2000
Kenneth Branagh, 1996
Mel Gibson, 1991
Ethan Hawke, 1990
Derek Jacobi, 1980 (Part of the BBC Shakespeare Tragedies set)

Nicol Williamson, 1969
Richard Burton, 1964
Innokentij Smoktunovskij, 1964
Laurence Olivier, 1948
A&E Biography, *Hamlet* (February 1995) features some archival footage of Sir John Gielgud as Hamlet.

Historical Sources Worksheet

1. List three things you would like to know about the people who lived in the United States during the Civil War.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Where might you look to find information about the three topics you selected above?

Topic

Source

a. _____ a. _____

b. _____ b. _____

c. _____ c. _____

3. Historians classify sources of information as primary or secondary. Primary sources are those created by people who actually saw or participated in an event and recorded that event or their reactions to it. Secondary sources are those created by someone who was not present when that event occurred. Classify the sources of information you listed above as primary or secondary.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4. Some sources of historical information are viewed as more reliable than others, although all of them may be useful. Factors such as bias, self-interest, and faulty memory affect the reliability of a source. Below are five sources of information about John Wilkes Booth. Rate the reliability of each source on a numerical scale where 1 is very reliable and 5 is very unreliable. Be prepared to explain your ratings.

a. your textbook account of Lincoln's assassination 1 2 3 4 5

b. an encyclopedia entry on John Wilkes Booth 1 2 3 4 5

c. John Wilkes Booth's diary 1 2 3 4 5

d. 1850 census of Baltimore's 5th ward with the Booth family 1 2 3 4 5

e. The memoir of John Wilkes Booth by his sister Asia,
mainly written in 1874, revised until her death in 1888
and published by the daughter of an English friend in 1938 1 2 3 4 5

5. Reconsider what sources you would use to find information about the Civil War and add three more.

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

Adapted from a worksheet developed by the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408