

# Teachers Guide

September 2007



## A Resource for using Bad Girls Club in the classroom

### ABOUT THE BOOK:

In this sad and compelling novel, sixteen-year-old Destiny is left to care for her mentally ill mother and her abused sister, while her father lives in denial and refuses to believe that anything is wrong. Destiny has a great longing to save her mother and to save her little sister from her mother's abuse, but she sacrifices her social life, her friends, and her own wellness and becomes totally obsessed with holding her family together. It isn't until her grandmother arrives that she begins to understand the cost of her decisions and how it's ruining her life. She is able finally to save herself and her sister while her mother spirals deeper into madness.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Judy Gregerson grew up in Long Island and has always had an interest in reaching abused teenagers. Her first book, *SAVE ME! A Young Woman's Journey Through Schizophrenia* was used as a supplemental college text and *BAD GIRLS CLUB* has been well received by school counselors, school psychologists, teachers and librarians. Judy lives in the Seattle area with her husband and has two college-aged daughters.

### PRE-READING IDEAS:

Have a school counselor or school psychologist speak to the class about mental illness and its effects on teenagers. Invite an abuse specialist to visit the class and answer questions about the cost of abuse in teenage lives. If possible, bring in an intervention specialist from a women's shelter and discuss the effects of abuse on families and children, how it colors their lives, changes their futures, and robs them of security.

## Juvenile Fiction

Contemporary, abuse and dysfunctional relationships, abandonment, self-esteem, social issues, families, sisters.

| Young Adult |

| Trade Hardcover |

| Blooming Tree Press |

| Fall 2007 |

| \$16.95 |

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## THEMES:

### Abandonment:

Destiny learns during the trip to Crater Lake that her mother has emotionally abandoned

her. She tries to step in to help her mother and her sister. Discuss how this affects her relationship with her mother, her sister,

her father, and her friends. Why doesn't she listen to her friends? Why does she feel that she's the only one who can help her family?

## THEMES cont:

**Abuse:** There are many forms of abuse: emotional, physical, and mental. Discuss the types of abuse in Bad Girls Club, who suffers it, and from whose hand. Why is one daughter physically abused and the other not? Which form of abuse is worse? Which leaves the worst scars? Or are they all the same? Discuss the results of abuse and the effects on

society.

### **Self Esteem:**

Children build their framework of “self” upon the messages given to them by their family and society. What are the messages to these children in the story? Why do they believe them? How do they act out those beliefs?

**Obsession:** Destiny is totally blind to her obsession with saving her mother. Why does she abandon the rest of her life to live out this obsession? What is the cost of obsession? Discuss other obsessions. Is obsession a form of mental illness, a coping mechanism, or just a random behavior? How do you overcome obsession?

## Classroom Connections:

**Role Playing:** Assign each student a character. Have them write three or four questions for another character and put them in groups of five to ask each other those questions.

**Writing:** Have students write one page about how they would have made other/better choices and who they would have asked for help and how they would have found it.

Have them write letters to

their Congressman asking for more resources for abused children and families that are at risk. Have them write a letter to Destiny, telling her what they would have done differently.

## Internet Resources

When your parent has a mental illness

<http://www.couns.uiuc.edu/brochures/parents.htm>

When the child becomes the parent

<http://www.focusonyourchild.com/relation/art1/A0001349.html>

Facts about abuse and neglect

<http://www.focusonyourchild.com/relation/art1/A0001349.html>

One teen beats the odds:

<http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070731/NEWS01/707310426/1008>

A Hero Saves an Abused Child:

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/lake/orl-missinggir-11707jun17.0.7747344.story?coll=orl-news-headlines-lake>

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Destiny says she'd like to fly away with her sister. But she never leaves. Why do you think she stays? What would happen if she left? If she took her little sister? Discuss loyalty and how it can be both a positive and negative thing.
2. Mom has labeled both her daughters as "bad girls". It's normal for a mother to tell a child that something they did is bad, but why did she work so hard to make them feel that they were bad and what did she gain by their thinking that? How did she use it against them to get what she wanted?
3. Destiny has a tremendous amount of shame because of what her mother did and how she reacted to her at Crater Lake. Her life changed when she told her mother that she'd help her. Discuss how that shaped her relationship with everyone in her life.
4. Who does the crow represent to Destiny? Why does she hate him at first and then look for him as the story goes on? Why does he show up at the end of the story and why is he so close to her?
5. Dad pays Destiny to help him with her mother. How do you think it makes Destiny feel to receive money for being her mother's caretaker? How do you think it affected her self-esteem?
6. Why does Destiny believe that evil is a real being that has overtaken her house?
7. Cassidy never talks much and then she stops talking at all. Compare how she handles family problems with how Destiny handles them.
8. Some say that the weak bring down the strong. Discuss how weakness is often strength and how it can be used to manipulate people.
9. Compare Mom's love of fire with Destiny's hatred of darkness. What does the fire represent to Mom and what does the darkness represent to Destiny? How are they alike and different?
10. Discuss why Chloe stands by Destiny when she deserts her. Why doesn't she tell someone what is going on so they can intervene? Was this good or bad?
11. Destiny is afraid to get too close to her boyfriend, Joshua. What is she afraid of exposing about herself and what does she think will happen if she does?
12. What process does Destiny go through before she realizes that she cannot save her mother? What does she think will happen if she lets go and what consequences will that have on her life?
13. At the end of the story, Destiny chooses to take care of herself. She also faces and understands the games her mother played to control her. Why didn't she see this earlier in the story and what would have been different if she had?
14. How would Destiny and Cassidy's relationship been different if their mother wasn't mentally ill?

**Read the excerpt below and ask your students to discuss what each image means to this excerpt and to the whole story:**

1. Light
2. Flames
3. Hole in the head
4. Phantom
5. Island
6. Sand
7. Up to my knees
8. Quicksand
9. Traps
10. Broken vase

A woman who used to be my mother has taken up residence in the living room. She watches TV during the day and burns presto logs at night as if their light can make her well. I watch the light of the flames flicker across her body. My Mom has slipped away through a hole in her head and can't find her way back. I miss her so much, but I can't think about that. I hardly remember who she was.

Sometimes I feel like I will die if things don't get better.

As I watch the flame shadows dance on my mother's face, I wonder where she's gone. Should I ask this woman who used to be my mother how she expects us to live without her? No. You don't ask those questions of a phantom. You don't quiz the universe about puzzles that have no end. There's a reason that I've been put on this road, and it's my job to find my way through.

My life, this island on which I stand, is built with sand, and with each step I take, my feet sink to my ankles. Some days I sink all the way up to my knees. Today I will pull my little sister behind me, sometimes carrying her on my back because she is too small to pull herself out of the quicksand that often traps us. And on our way across this island, I will tell her jokes, and I will hold her hand, and I will shield her from the woman who used to be my mother.

I will manage to hold the pieces of our lives together as if our family is a broken vase that can be glued together again and again.