

**Teacher's Rationale**

School: Arrowhead Union High School

**Teacher(s):** Budzien / Vacek / Johansen / Freeburg

**Title:** *Bad Monkeys* by Matt Ruff

**Grade or Course:** Modern Literature X

**Approximate date(s) a book will be used:**

Semester 1

Semester 2

**This book will be (check one or more):**

studied by the whole class. (But students have option to choose different text).

studied by small groups.

placed on a reading list.

placed in a classroom library.

recommended to individual students.

part of a larger study of (explain):

other (explain):

**Ways in which the book is especially appropriate for student in this class:**

This book is a cross between Sci Fi (which has not been represented in the Modern Literature curriculum since *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) and a scary thriller that is clever, fast-paced, funny and unpredictable. With surreal scenes reminiscent of *The Matrix* movies, the narrator is a strong and witty young woman who is supposedly a member of a secret organization devoted to fighting evil by liquidating "bad monkeys," namely sociopaths who are beyond redemption. The themes of good vs. evil, reality vs. unreality, ego vs. alter-ego and the individual vs. society are addressed through a tough streetwise, unreliable female narrator, and should generate plenty of stimulating classroom discussion. Students will care about the protagonist's fate as she struggles, much like themselves, to decipher right from wrong and truth from falsehood while discovering their own true selves.

**Ways in which the book is especially pertinent to the objectives of this course or unit:**

*Bad Monkeys* gives students a strong, intelligent female figure with a sense of humor and a slightly skewed moral compass. Girls should be able to relate to her vibe, guys to her jive. Guys, who stereotypically relate to action-thriller fantasies, will relate to Jane Charlotte's plight and talkativeness, and girls, who traditionally relate to relationships and personal dialogue, will relate to the action. It's a Win-Win and a Grow-Grow situation for readers of both genders.

**Special problems that might arise in relation to the book and some planned activities that handle this problem:**

Jane Charlotte is a tough kid, coming of age, and therefore uses tough street language that occasionally degenerates into a rare “F-bomb” (used as an adjective rather than as a verb). Jane has also dabbled in drugs and has been sexually active, even promiscuous, in her past, but this is mostly alluded to obliquely and does not contain detailed descriptions of either activity that would pander to prurient interests. Science Fiction violence (brain aneurisms and heart attacks induced by special ray-guns) are prevalent. Some “standard” violence also occurs (someone murdered with a knife to the throat), but it is neither too graphic nor very common in the text. Also present is an occasional, subtle, and guarded allusion to sexual predatory behavior (stalking, kidnapping, abuse, murder), but that in no way is the thrust of the book’s content, and “bad monkeys” who engage in that behavior justifiably end badly.

**Some other appropriate books an individual student might read in place of this book:**

*A Good and Happy Child* is a scary and disturbing mystery of a boy who is possibly being tormented by a demon as he struggles with the aftermath of his father’s death. Again, discussion on the nature of good vs. evil, the natural vs. the supernatural, and truth vs. falsehood as one comes of age would make this an acceptable alternate title.

**Summary of the book:**

Jane Charlotte has been arrested for murder but claims she is a member of a secret, all-seeing government organization devoted to fighting evil. She says she works for the Department for the Final Disposition of Irredeemable Persons—aka “Bad Monkeys.” Her confession lands her in the jail’s psychiatric wing and earns her countless hours of poking, probing, and questioning by a professional. The question is, is Jane crazy, lying, or telling the unbelievable truth? It is impossible to catalogue the many feints, surprises, false starts, false leads, murders, meltdowns, and double and triple crosses, but as the *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review* says, it is “A highly satisfying speculative thriller, intricate, unpredictable, and frequently laugh-out-loud funny.” It is highly entertaining and surprising, culminating in a bizarre and surreal confrontation with Jane’s own evil twin and alter ego.

**Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:**

Matt Ruff has received broad critical recognition for many of his books including:

1. *New York Times* Notable Book
2. James Triptree, Jr. Award
3. Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award
4. Washington State Book Award
5. Nomination for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award
6. Received a Literature Fellowship in Prose from the National Endowment for the Arts