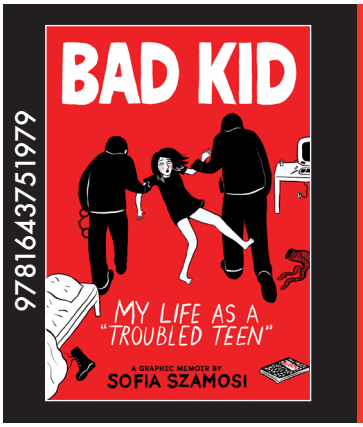


BAD KID

MY LIFE AS A "TROUBLED TEEN"



A GRAPHIC MEMOIR BY SOFIA SZAMOSI

TEACHING TIPS

Through her memoir, Sofia Szamosi offers readers a firsthand perspective on the labels given to young people, the systems that claim to help them, and the power of telling your own story. The questions and activities below offer opportunities to explore these themes through discussion, research, reflection, and creative response.

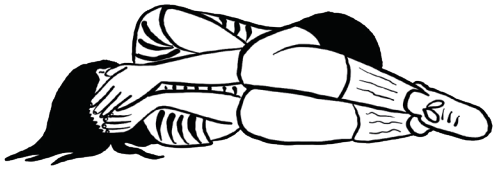
DISCUSSION NOTE

Bad Kid addresses difficult experiences involving the teenage years, family relationships and conflict, behavioral correction programs, authority, and loss of control. Establish respectful discussion norms before beginning the book. Keep discussion centered on the memoir and its evidence rather than asking students to disclose personal experiences. Students should always have alternatives to sharing personal or difficult experiences during classroom activities.

LABELS AND IDENTITY: WHO GETS TO BE A "BAD KID"?

What does it mean to be a "bad kid"? What happens when a young person is given a label and that label begins to shape how other people see them? In *Bad Kid*, Sofia Szamosi looks back on her adolescence and her experiences as a young person labeled "troubled" and "bad kid." Invite students to consider the difference between describing a behavior and defining a person.

- What does the title *Bad Kid* mean? What do the words "bad kid" mean to you?
- How do we decide what is "good" and what is "bad"? Who gets to make those decisions?
- What is the difference between a person's behavior and a person's identity?
- If someone makes a good choice, does that make them a "good" person? If someone makes a bad choice, does that make them a "bad" person?
- How can labels influence the way people see themselves?
- Who gets to decide which labels we use for ourselves and for other people?



POWER AND AGENCY: WHO DECIDES WHAT "HELP" LOOKS LIKE?

Bad Kid offers a firsthand perspective on the troubled teen industry and on programs intended to address the behavior of young people considered "troubled." Sofia's experience raises important questions about systems designed to help young people, the adults who make decisions for them, and what happens when a place intended to provide help and healing instead leaves a young person feeling trapped and without control over their own life.

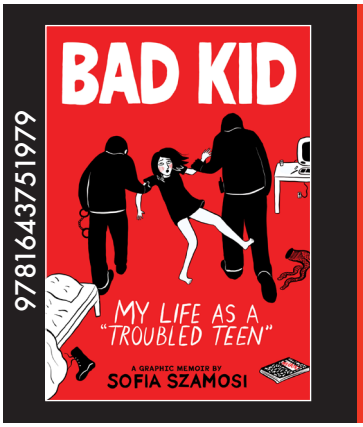
Activity: Investigating the Troubled Teen Industry

Ask students to investigate the history of programs designed for "troubled teens" and the language used to describe the young people who entered them.

- What did these programs promise families?
- Were these programs regulated?
- How were teens described?
- Did teens have contact with the outside world? With their families?
- What does it mean to have agency over your own life?
- What responsibilities do adults have when making decisions for young people?
- What does healing look like when young people have little control over the decisions being made for them?
- What questions does Sofia's experience raise that require further research?

As students explore additional sources, encourage them to consider who created each source, who its intended audience was, and the perspective it represents.





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Activity: Reconsidering the Label
Have students choose a label that is used to describe young people (such as "troubled," "rebellious," "difficult," or "good"). Ask them to consider what the label suggests about the person who receives it and what it leaves out.

- Who is applying the label?
- What does the label assume?
- What might the person being labeled say about themselves?
- What changes when the label is removed?

STORYTELLING AND MEMOIR: WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY?

Bad Kid is a memoir told through the visual language of comics. Szamosi uses images as well as words to revisit experiences from her adolescence, giving readers a visual way to understand memory, emotion, and identity.

Activity: Visual Storytelling
Choose a page or sequence from *Bad Kid* and look closely at how the artwork contributes to the story.

- What does the artwork communicate that the words do not?
- How do panel size, repetition, perspective, color, or visual detail affect the way a moment feels?
- What might an artist be able to express through a drawing that would be difficult to explain directly?
- Whose perspectives are represented, and whose are missing?
- How does it matter that Sofia is the person telling and drawing her own story?



CREATIVE RESPONSE: WHO GETS TO TELL YOUR STORY?

Activity: One-Page Visual Narrative
Ask students to create a one-page visual narrative about a moment when someone else's perception of them differed from how they understood themselves.

The moment can be completely ordinary. Students should choose what they are comfortable sharing; they do not need to disclose a difficult or private experience.

Students can use comic panels, drawings, photographs, handwritten words, symbols, color, or other visual elements to tell the story.
Before beginning, consider:

- What did someone else see?
- What did they miss?
- What do you want the reader to understand?

After completing their pages, invite students to reflect on how their artistic choices shaped the story they wanted to tell and changed the way they understood it. Can making something change the way we understand an experience?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Students' questions, paired with accessible resources, can support deeper inquiry and interdisciplinary connections. Partner with your school librarian, media specialist, or local public librarian to compile a list of websites, books, school library databases, organizations, and community experts that can help students explore different perspectives, evaluate sources and authority, identify bias, and distinguish between primary and secondary sources.