

**A Discussion Guide
based on**

MEAN
girls

facing your beauty turned beast

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Introduction

Let's face it. It's tough to be a girl. Sugar and spice and all that's nice? Not quite. The truth is that Mean Girls are everywhere—even in your own youth group. Take a closer look. It's very likely that the girls in your group have either been victims of a Mean Girl or are Mean Girls themselves. The victims may be those who feel unpopular or unliked, while the Mean Girls are those who love to spread rumors, fight over the smallest things, tease, and torment. Wish you could help? Now you can.

This *Mean Girls* discussion guide is packed with activities and discussion questions that give you everything you need to help your students engage in their relationships with other girls and participate in open, honest discussion of the book *Mean Girls: Facing Your Beauty Turned Beast*. Together you will discover why Mean Girls act the way they do, what God thinks about Mean Girls, and how to find and build new, more healthy relationships.

In the coming pages you will find four complete sessions (with an optional fifth session included) each coordinating with specific sections of the book. You'll also find activities, questions, and helpful sidebars that will help you make this guide work for you and your group. Each session begins with an opening activity that helps your students start thinking about Mean Girl concepts. After each opening activity you'll find numerous questions you can use to kick start a discussion. Please note that these questions are just guidelines. You may find that your students come with enough questions of their own to fuel an hour's worth of conversation. Or you may need to rely on these questions provided here to keep the discussion rolling. How you want to use these questions is up to you. Just remember: the goal is to generate a healthy discussion—not to simply “get through” the list of questions provided.

It's almost time to get started. But first, here are some helpful hints about using this guide in a group setting.

Before You Start

Before you begin this study, you may want to take a quick appraisal of the girls who will be involved. Could there be any Mean Girl problems within your own group? If so, it's important to be sensitive to the problem while you go through this book discussion together. Some girls may have difficulty opening up about their struggles

if their Mean Girl is right in your group. Or perhaps some of the girls will become defensive if they feel like they're being accused in front of the group.

If you think there might be some Mean Girl issues within your own group, here are a few suggestions for how to handle the situation:

- » Ask all of the girls to leave out the name (or make up a name) when they share personal stories about Mean Girls in their lives. Tell them that this group is not the place to accuse others of Mean Girl behavior.
- » Be honest about the issue from the start. Tell the girls you know there may be Mean Girl issues within your own group. Tell them that you're available to offer support and advice if anyone feels like they don't know how to handle the problem during this study time.
- » In an extreme situation, you may want to divide your study group into two or more small groups for discussion times. That way, you can split up the Mean Girl and the girl she's been picking on, thus avoiding any potential blow-ups between the two.
- » Recognize the special opportunity this book discussion offers. This may be the perfect time to confront some girls in your group who've been stuck in the Mean Cycle and encourage them toward reconciliation. Just remember that any sort of confrontation or discussion of this sort should happen on an individual basis, and not during group time.

Follow-Up

If your group has a positive experience with this Mean Girls event, offer your students the opportunity to do a more in-depth Bible study of these concepts with my follow-up book: *Mean Girls Gone: A Spiritual Guide to Getting Rid of Mean*. The book is available wherever Christian books are sold. (Note: many retailers offer discounts for multiple copy purchases). This and other youth resources are also available from Revell at www.revellbooks.com. And don't forget to check out my websites: www.hungryplanet.net and www.meangirls.net.

Group Rules

Remind your girls that this study group is a place where people are to be valued and respected. We suggest that you share these simple group rules with everyone before you start:

- » **Practice confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
- » **Respect other people's views**, even when they are different than your own.

- » **Listen.** Listen. Listen. Don't be the one who does all the talking. Let others have a chance to share their views as well.
- » **Don't interrupt.** Wait your turn to talk.

Tips for Leading a Discussion

Here are a few ideas to help you keep your discussions rolling in a meaningful way:

- » **Prepare.** Make sure you've read through the book chapters for each session. As you prepare for the sessions, consider one or two personal anecdotes you may be able to share during the group's discussion.
- » **Be yourself.** Thank students for sharing their thoughts and opinions, but don't feel that you need to agree with every one. Be honest with your students about the lessons you've learned in your own experiences—even if they may not be what your students want to hear!
- » **Encourage students to go deeper.** When someone gives a simple response, ask them follow-up questions such as "Why do you feel that way?" "What do you mean by that?" "Tell us more."
- » **Allow for silence.** Remember your students haven't read the questions ahead of time and they may need some time to process a response. Allow for about seven to ten seconds of silence before saying anything further, even when it makes you feel uncomfortable. If necessary, you can reword the question or move on to another topic.
- » **Include everyone in the discussion.** If it seems like the same two or three students are responding to all of your questions, look for ways to bring others into the conversation. Some students may need a little encouragement to share their thoughts and opinions. Invite them to talk by saying something like "Lisa, I'm curious what you think about this too," or "Sara, I'd love to hear what you have to say about that." Be sensitive to their feelings, though. If the student has nothing to say or looks extremely uncomfortable, give them an out by moving on to someone else.
- » **Be a good listener.** The goal is to have a true discussion, not just a "talk" by the group leader. Avoid putting words in the students' mouths or overreacting to comments that you may not agree with. Try asking "mirror" questions that challenge students to clarify or affirm what you've heard. For example, say "What I hear you saying is this. Is that what you mean?" or "So what you seem to be saying is this. Would you agree?"
- » **Bring God into it.** Pray for the students before and after each session. Ask God to direct your discussion and be open to the Spirit's leading. It may be that he takes you in an unexpected direction, so don't get too hung up on "the plan." If students are genuinely interested and engaged in a healthy side topic, let the conversation go, saying a silent prayer for God to be working on their hearts as you go.

Session One

Opening Activity: Mean Girl Stories

Supplies Needed: pens, paper

Before the session, cut out small slips of paper so there is one for each girl in your group. (Don't forget to count yourself and any other adult leaders who will be there.) Write "True" on half of the slips, and "False" on the other half. Fold the papers and place them in a basket or hat.

To start the activity, pass out a pen and sheet of paper to each girl in the group. Tell them that they need to write about a Mean Girl experience—in which they were either the Mean Girl or the Mean Girl's victim. Before they begin, ask each girl to pull a slip of paper from the basket. Those who grab "True" slips need to write about a real-life experience that actually happened to them. Those who grab "False" slips need to make up a Mean Girl experience that sounds believable, but never actually happened to them.

Give everyone about two to three minutes to think about their story. Then take turns having the girls share their stories. For each story, ask the rest of the girls to vote on whether they think the story is true or false before the storyteller reveals which one it was.

Follow-Up Questions:

- » What stories do you think were worse—the real ones or the made up ones?
- » For those who wrote true stories, did you find it easy or difficult to come up with a Mean Girl memory? Why?
- » In general, do you think it's easier to remember incidents where you were the Mean Girl or where you were the Mean Girl's victim? Why?

Student Feedback

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had as they read pages 7–15.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you identify with anything in Hayley's story on p. 7–11?
 - » Have you ever had a Mean Girl plague you? If so, how did she affect your everyday life?
 - » How do you think Mean Girls affect their victim's view of herself?
2. On page 8, Hayley asks, "Why is it that girls think that boys are more important than their friends?" How do you think our interest in guys ends up playing into the Mean Girl problem?
 - » Discuss this quote: "Let's face it, we need each other. Guys are great, sure, but they are different, and you can't really connect with a guy the same way you can connect with a girl." (p. 9)
 - » How much do you think guys notice the Mean Girl cycle going on among girls? How do you think it impacts their views of women?
 - » How could fighting the Mean Girl problem help girls in general?
3. Describe some Mean Girls from your school. Share some stories if you want. (But remember, don't use real names!)
 - » Why do you think these Mean Girls ended up being so mean? What made them that way?
4. Do you think there are ever Mean Girl issues in our own youth group?
 - » Do the girls in our group generally spend more time building each other up or teasing and tearing each other down?
 - » Are there any areas where we could make improvements as a group?
5. After taking the quiz on pages 14 and 15, where did you find yourself? Are you plagued by Mean Girls? Are you a Mean Girl yourself? Or are you the one trying to bring peace between other girls who have a problem with mean?
 - » Do you think it's possible to be a Mean Girl victim while also being a Mean Girl yourself?
 - » Agree or Disagree: every girl is mean at some point in her life.
6. Discuss this quote: "Warning: You might find some tips and tricks in here that make perfect sense, and you might try them and find that life gets a little bit better—but without faith in a God who can change lives and change hearts, any change will only be temporary." (p. 13)
 - » Why would it be impossible to solve Mean Girl problems without God in the picture?
 - » On a scale of 1–10, how connected do you feel to God right now? What made you choose the number you did?

- » What is one way this week that you could try to strengthen your faith in God?

Closing Prayer:

Praying for someone is a wonderful way to prevent and/or break the Mean Girl cycles that so often destroy girls' relationships with each other. So start a tradition of praying for each other at the end of each Mean Girls study session.

If the girls aren't yet comfortable sharing prayer requests out loud, invite them to write down their requests anonymously. Then shuffle the papers and hand one to each girl, asking her to say a silent prayer for the girl who wrote those requests.

End tonight's prayer time by saying a prayer of thanks for the girls in your group. Mention each one by name and pray for God to be at work in their hearts during the weeks to come.

Session Two—The Mean Girl

Opening Activity: Overcoming the Slam

Supplies Needed: copies of the “Overcoming the Slam” handout

Have the girls divide into small groups of three to four girls for this activity. Pass out copies of the “Overcoming the Slam” handout (available at the back of this guide) and tell the groups to follow the instructions on their sheet. When the groups are finished, gather back together for the follow-up questions.



Handout

Follow-Up Questions:

- » What’s a more difficult situation to be in: the victim, the friend of the victim, or the friend of the Mean Girl?
- » In general, do you tend to stand up for others when you see them getting slammed? Why or why not?
- » What were some of the practical ways you came up with for taking the power out of the Mean Girl’s slam?

Student Feedback

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had as they read pages 16–77.

Discussion Questions for “The Mean Girl”:

1. “Really mean girls define themselves based on who they can hurt. It’s a power trip. Their goal in life.” (p. 18) If a girl is mean because she wants to be on a power trip, what would be some good ways for her victim to take that power away?

2. Why is it so easy for girls to gossip? What makes it feel so good?
 - » Do you think there's such a thing as harmless gossip? Why or why not?
 - » How can you encourage your girlfriends not to gossip without coming across as "holier-than-thou"?
3. Do you find it easy or difficult to ignore girls who are being mean to you? Why?
 - » Can you think of any techniques that would help you stay calm and keep your anger or sadness hidden until you get home?
 - » How could you help your friends get through a Mean Girl situation?
4. Hayley says ". . . you know that revenge doesn't end well; it always keeps the anger flowing between you and the enemy. In fact, it gets between you and God as well." (p. 20) How does revenge get between you and God?
 - » When someone is mean to you, are they sinning against you or God?
 - » How does a desire for revenge show a lack of trust in God?
 - » In what ways could dealing with Mean Girl experiences help you grow closer to God and more confident in yourself?
 - » Consider this quote: "Remember, no matter what people call you, they can't change who you are. Only you and Christ can do that." (p. 26) If someone really believed this, how would that change their view of the Mean Girl problems in their life?
5. Why do you think girls tend to respond to compliments by saying something negative about themselves? Is this a healthy thing?
 - » If you had to create some "Compliment Dos and Don'ts," what guidelines would you list?

Closing Prayer:

Introduce this week's prayer time with this question: "What is one way that you can do a better job of dealing with the Mean Girls in your life?"

Here are some examples to get you rolling:

- Have a better sense of humor about yourself
 - Learn to trust God to take revenge
 - Pray for your Mean Girl
 - ?
 - ?

Encourage the girls to be a little more vulnerable and share one response about that question with the group. Then end the night by giving them time to pray silently for each other and conclude with a spoken prayer by yourself or another leader.

Session Three—You and Your Mean Girl

Opening Activity: With Compliments

Supplies Needed: pens, paper

Remind your girls about your discussion of compliments last week and tell them you're going to begin this session by practicing your complimenting skills.

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to break into smaller groups of about five to six girls for this activity.

Hand each girl a pen and a slip of paper. Tell them to write down the names of each girl in their group. Now they should write down one or two compliments they would like to offer to each of those girls. Encourage them to phrase their compliments in a healthy way and to be sincere about the things they admire in each other.

For the rest of the activity time, the girls should take turns sharing their compliments with each other. As girls receive compliments, challenge them to say a simple "thank you" or to offer another compliment in return. They should resist the urge to put themselves down in response. Throughout the activity, all the girls should be "compliment police." If they hear anyone putting themselves or someone else down, they should point it out immediately and force her to adjust her compliment or response!

Follow-Up Questions:

- » Was it easy or difficult to accept compliments? Why?
- » If girls really gave and received compliments like this all the time, how do you think it would change the way we feel about ourselves? How would it change the way we feel about others?

Student Feedback

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had as they read pages 78–131.

Discussion Questions for “You and Your Mean Girl”:

1. Check out Hayley’s description of the Mean Cycle on p. 86–87. Have you ever been pulled into a Mean Cycle or know someone who has?
 - » Why does it feel so good to get even? Are these feelings godly or sinful?
 - » Is it ever possible to get even with someone without being mean? Why or why not?
 - » How is getting even with someone like playing God?
 - » Discuss this quote: “. . . I’ve learned that the best thing to do is to deny the good feeling of being mean and instead to soak up the awful feeling of being broken. Brokenness is that feeling you get when you tell your pride to shut up and trust God.” (p. 91) How could it be better to embrace brokenness instead of trying to make yourself feel better by getting even?
 - » If getting even is no longer an option, what should your attitude be toward a Mean Girl in your life?
 - » How does “getting even” keep you from growing stronger as a person?
2. How important is reputation to a girl? Why does it hurt so much when someone says something mean or untrue about us?
 - » What does it mean to trust God with your reputation?
 - » How does the way you handle Mean Girls affect God’s reputation?
3. Check out this quote: “Changing her isn’t your job, but loving your enemies and forgiving people is.” (p. 93) Why is it important to keep your focus on loving the Mean Girl instead of trying to change her?
 - » God is ultimately the only one who can change a Mean Girl. But how might he be able to use you to do that?
4. How does dealing with Mean Girls affect your relationship with God?
 - » How might a Mean Girl situation cause someone to grow away from God?
 - » How might a Mean Girl situation be used to grow closer to God?
5. Read through the colored lines about “dying to self” on p. 101. Does “dying to self” make a girl a stronger or weaker person? Why?
 - » Will “dying to self” make a girl appear stronger or weaker to other people? Why or why not?

- » What are some practical ways you could practice “dying to yourself” in everyday life?
 - » How does “dying to self” affect the Mean Cycle?
6. What does the way you handle a Mean Girl say about your character and faith?

Closing Prayer:

For this session’s closing prayer, ask each of the girls to take a turn sharing a personal prayer request. Then enter into a time of “popcorn” prayer, inviting girls to jump in with prayers spontaneously. Ask someone to close the prayer for your group after several minutes of the popcorn prayer.

Session Four— Choosing Beauty over the Beast

Opening Activity: Interior Decorators

Supplies Needed: several magazines and catalogs, poster board, markers, scissors, glue

Before this session, gather together about ten to fifteen magazines and catalogs. (You may need more if your group is quite large). Include some old, out-of-date catalogs/magazines if you can find them.

When the girls arrive, divide them into two teams. Give each team a piece of poster board, as well as some scissors, markers, and glue. Tell them that they are interior decorators tonight and they must use their supplies to create a presentation of the items they would use to decorate a house. Suggest that they create a poster for each of the following categories:

- » Kitchen
- » Bedroom
- » Living Room
- » Bathroom

Before the teams get to work, tell them there's one last detail they need to think about: their client. Team A is working for a young, successful and upbeat single girl: They should look for the cutest, trendiest items they can find for her house. Team B, on the other hand, is working for Oscar the Grouch: they should decorate his house with the ugliest, trashiest items they can find. Tell them to be creative and do the best job they can at meeting their client's expectations.

Give the teams about ten to twenty minutes to create their presentations and then have them take turns presenting their decorating plans to each other.

NOTE: if your group is quite large, you may want to use four teams instead of two. Give two of the teams the young woman assignment and two of the teams the Oscar the Grouch assignment.

Follow-Up Questions:

- » How would you feel if you got to live in the young woman’s cute, trendy house? How about if you had to live in Oscar the Grouch’s house?
- » If a girl always focuses on ugly, negative things in life, how would that affect her character and her actions? What kind of impact will she make on her friends and her school?
- » What about a girl who focuses more on the positive, good things? What kind of actions and impact will she make?

Student Feedback

Before moving into further discussion, ask students to share any questions or comments they had as they read pages 133–185.

Discussion Questions for “Choosing Beauty over the Beast”:

1. How would you describe the Girl Grown Up?
 - » Look through the list of GGU traits on p. 135 & 136: which of these traits do you think is the toughest to live up to? Why?
 - » What could you and your girlfriends do to help each other live up to the GGU standards?
2. On p. 147, the book quotes James Allen who says “Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results; bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results.” Do you think this is true in every situation?
 - » Do you think most girls tend to think positive thoughts or negative thoughts? Why do you think this is?
 - » How can friends help each other focus on positive thoughts?
3. What sort of advice would you give to a girl who realizes that some of her friends are Mean Girls?
 - » Is it ever ok to continue hanging out with someone, even though they may be a Mean Girl?
 - » How do you know when it’s time to call it quits with a friendship? How should you handle this kind of situation?
4. Do you think it’s easier to be friends with guys or with girls? Why?
 - » Why is it important to have girlfriends in your life?
 - » How can you build strong girl relationships?

5. On p. 174, Hayley says, “You aren’t fighting the [mean] girl; you are fighting the enemy.” How does this perspective change the way you think about Mean Girls at your school?

» What are some concrete ways you can stop the enemy’s Mean Girl Strategy at your school?

Closing Prayer:

Before this session’s prayer, explain that each girl is going to be praying for the person to her right. Then give all of the girls an opportunity to share prayer requests.

Listen Up! Encourage your girls to pay close attention to the requests of the person on their right.

If you have a group that is still shy about public prayer, remind them that simple, short prayers are fine, as long as they are heartfelt.

Session Five (Optional)— Ammo for the Battle

Opening Activity: The Mean Girl Prayer Walk

End your Mean Girl study with a session that includes food, fun, and prayer. It doesn't matter where you go or what you eat. Whether fast food or take-out, enjoy the meal together. While you eat, ask the girls to take turns sharing one Mean Girl lesson they learned through your study.

After you're done eating and sharing, lead the girls in the "Mean Girl" prayer walk.

NOTE: that this special session will require a longer time period than your other study sessions. If you want to include time for dinner and the prayer walk, we suggest allowing at least 30 minutes for dinner, and an hour or more for the prayer walk.

Prayer Walk Introduction

Introduce your prayer walk by reading or telling the story of the Israelites marching around Jericho from Joshua 6:1–20. Draw a parallel between the walls of Jericho and the walls that get put up between girls because of the Mean Girl cycle. Tell them that tonight you will take a march of your own—with the goal of asking God to tear down those Mean Girl walls in their schools and their personal lives.

School Prayers (30–45 minutes)

Make a list of each school represented by your group of girls. If the driving distances are reasonable, drive to each school for a prayer walk.

At each school, give the girls who attend a moment to share about the Mean Girl atmosphere there. Ask one of the girls from your group to say a prayer for that school (or offer the prayer yourself). Then ask the girls to quietly walk around the school, saying silent prayers as they go.

If some of the schools are too distant, you can simply pray for them while you are at one of the other schools. Do a second walk around the building, encouraging the girls to be thinking of the distant school this time around. If you have a very large

group representing several schools, you may also consider dividing the group into smaller crews that go to one or two schools each.

Prayers for Each Other (15–30 minutes)

Meet back at your church or youth center and end the night by praying for each other. Set up two rows of chairs—one on each end of the room (Side A and Side B). Set up enough chairs so there is one for every girl in the group and space the chairs about eight to ten feet apart.

Start the prayer time by having the girls on Side A walk over to the person sitting across from them on Side B. They should kneel down in front of that girl and ask if she has any special prayer requests. Once the requests have been shared, the kneeling girl will say a prayer for the girl in the chair, and then walk quietly back to the other end of the room. Each girl should sit down in a different chair than the one she originally came from.

Once all of the girls are seated again, have the Side B girls repeat the same procedure, praying for someone on Side A and then returning to a different seat on their own side.

Repeat this process as time allows. Since the girls will be returning to different seats each time, they should end up with opportunities to pray for (and be prayed for by) several different girls.

Wrap-up Prayer

End the night by saying one final, brief prayer for your girls. Encourage them to keep praying for their schools and for each other.

Handout

Overcoming the Slam

It happens to all of us: Some girl slams you with an insult or rude behavior. Or maybe you're just the witness and you're standing by when another girl gets slammed by a Mean Girl. So what can you do to take away the power of her slam? Throughout the book, Hayley offers lots of ideas for dealing with the Mean Girl in your life. Here are a few examples:

- » "It's an ancient truth: Ignore it and you help it go away." (p. 22)
- » "Don't let the label you get ruin who you are. If it's true, live it up. Change it into something positive. And if it's not true, start the anti-label campaign. Prove them wrong by being who you really are, not who they are trying to make you." (p. 26)
- » "Remember, if you make fun of yourself, you take away the power of the slam from the other person." (p. 34)
- » "If you fight back or act snotty in return, you lose. . . . She gets a point by making you mad." (p. 40)

Here's a chance for you to practice overcoming the slam. Read through each situation, and then brainstorm ways that you could overcome the slam as the victim, the victim's friend, or the friend of the Mean Girl.

Situation #1:

Mean Girl Monica relishes picking on Julie. Every chance she gets, she makes snide comments to Julie. Today, she created a "Top Ten Things I Hate about Julie" list that she circulated among most of the girls in their class. She invited the others to add their own ideas to the list and after gathering the insults and signatures of about a dozen girls, she posted the list on Julie's locker.

What can Julie do?

What can Julie's friend do?

What can Monica's friend do?

Situation #2:

Jessica's boyfriend, Ben, recently dumped her and started dating Claire a few weeks later. Now Jessica is trashing Claire every chance she gets. She's been telling people that Claire stole her boyfriend, even though Claire never made a move on Ben until after he'd broken up with Jessica. At the last football game, Jessica sat down behind Claire and her friends. She "accidentally" bumped into Claire's arm, making Claire's pop spill all over her lap. Jessica quickly quipped, "Oh I'm sorry, Claire. I guess you'll need to get another pop. But maybe you can just steal one, since you seem to be good at stealing things that belong to other people."

What can Claire do?

What can Claire's friend do?

What can Jessica's friend do?



About Hayley

Hayley DiMarco writes cutting-edge and best-selling books for teens including *Mean Girls*, *Mean Girls Gone*, *Sexy Girls*, *Technical Virgin*, *Dateable*, *The Dateable Rules*, *The Dirt on Dating* and *The Dirt on Breaking Up*. Hayley also writes books for former teens including *Marriable* and *Mean Girls All Grown Up*. Her goal is to give practical answers for life's problems and encourage readers to form stronger spiritual lives. Hayley is Chief Creative Officer and founder of Hungry Planet, an independent publishing imprint and communications company that feeds the world's appetite for truth. Hungry Planet helps organizations understand and reach the multi-tasking mindset, while Hungry Planet books tackle life's everyday issues with a distinctly modern spiritual voice. For more information on Hungry Planet including leader resources and online communities that revolve around the books, visit www.hungryplanet.net.