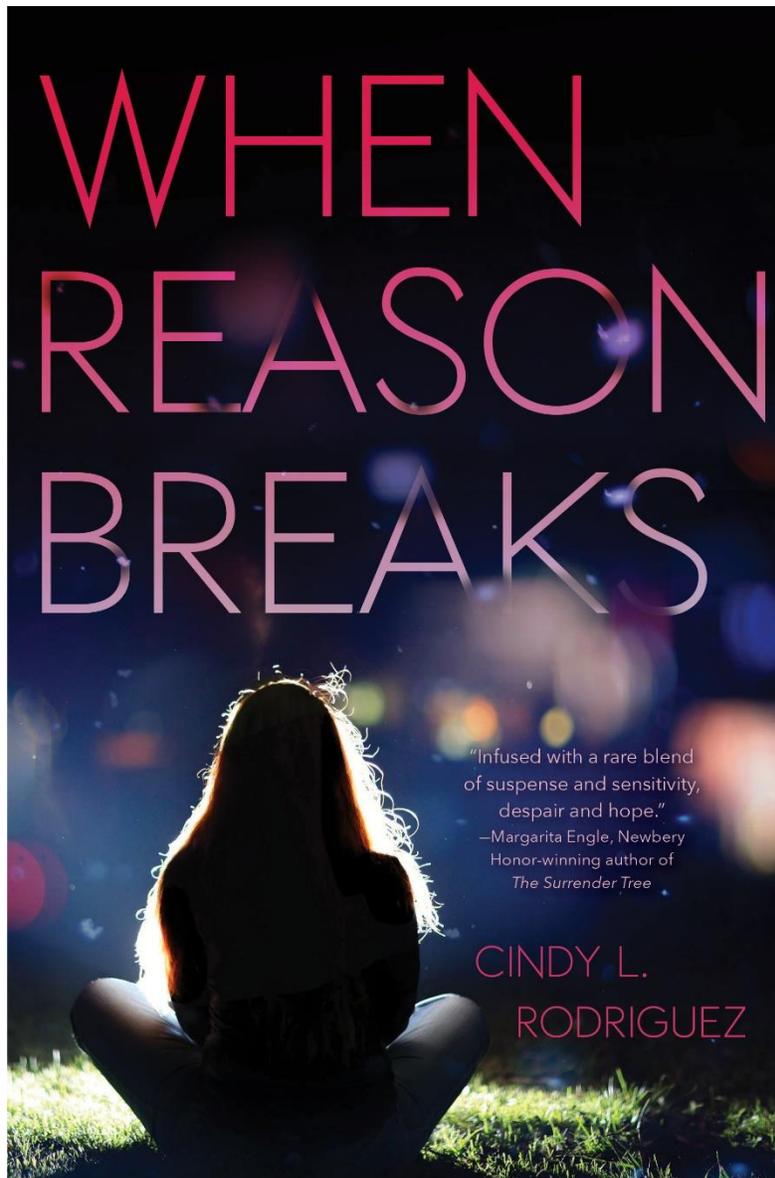
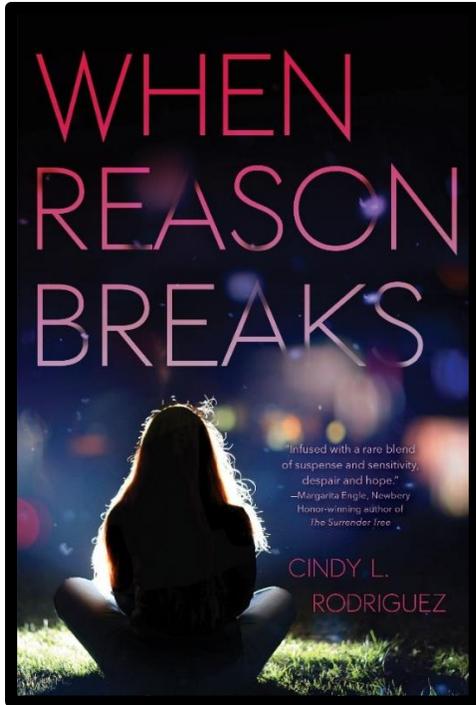


A Reader and Educator Guide for:



Discussion questions and activity ideas that align with Common Core State Standards and fit into curriculum goals for grades 7-12.

Created by Cindy L. Rodriguez
author | certified ELA 4-8 | certified remedial ELA/reading 1-12



ABOUT THE BOOK:

A Goth girl with an attitude problem, Elizabeth Davis must learn to control her anger before it destroys her. Emily Delgado appears to be a smart, sweet girl, with a normal life, but as depression clutches at her, she struggles to feel normal. Both girls are in Ms. Diaz's English class, where they connect to the words of Emily Dickinson. Both are hovering on the edge of an emotional precipice. One of them will attempt suicide. And with Dickinson's poetry as their guide, both girls must conquer personal demons to ever be happy.

"*When Reason Breaks* is infused with a rare blend of suspense and sensitivity, despair and hope. The poetic spirit of Emily Dickinson shines through the gloom of daily struggles faced by modern teens, as they discover the possibilities where they dwell."

Margarita Engle
Newbery Honor-winning author
of *The Surrender Tree*

"The portrayal of the different ways people experience depression is spot-on...A sharply drawn, emotionally resonant tale of two girls—one gripped by uncontrollable rage, the other by unrelenting numbness—that will speak to many teens."

Kirkus Reviews



Cindy L. Rodriguez is a former newspaper reporter turned public school teacher. She is now a middle school reading specialist but previously worked for the Hartford Courant and the Boston Globe. She lives in Connecticut with her daughter and rescue mutt. *When Reason Breaks* is her debut novel.

Bloomsbury Children's Books

ISBN-13: 978-1619634121

ISBN-10: 1619634120

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An excerpt from WHEN REASON BREAKS:

Emily and Elizabeth are not friends, but they share a mutual friend. They are at a Halloween party but are talking alone in a room in the house. Here is a part of their conversation:

With wide eyes, Emily asked, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Elizabeth smiled and sucked hard on her straw.

“You’re lying,” she said with a grin.

“Maybe, but this isn’t about me. It’s about you. Tell them. Get it over with, Delgado.”

Emily shook her head and hugged the book to her chest. “Tell them what?”

Elizabeth stared at Emily. They were quiet, listening to voices in the hallway and the music pounding below them, so loud the floorboards vibrated.

Elizabeth sprang forward from her sitting position and crawled the few feet that separated her from Emily. She kneeled and sat back on her heels.

“Look at me,” she whispered. Emily pushed her back into the wall and locked gazes with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth scanned Emily’s face and then framed the girl’s eyes with her fingers.

“Ah, there it is,” said Elizabeth.

“What?”

“Hold still. Elizabeth pressed down her index finger, closed her eyes, and said, “Click.”

“What are you doing?” asked Emily.

“I’m taking a mental picture of you.” Elizabeth leaned in closer. Emily inhaled sharply.

“I see you, Emily Delgado,” she whispered. “Your problem isn’t really about your friends or Kevin or your dad. You try to hide it, but I know.” Elizabeth patted Emily’s leg. “Trust me, I know.”

If you’re a librarian, bookseller, or teacher and would like to request bookmarks for your patrons or class, email cindyrodriguez71@gmail.com, with the quantity and whether you’d like them to be signed.

For publicity, contact Courtney Griffin at Courtney.Griffin@Bloomsbury.com or (212) 419-5340.

For the book trailer, scan your QR reader here:



Discussion Questions:

Before reading, you may want to explore information on Emily Dickinson, depression, and suicide.

A great resource for Dickinson is the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts.
<http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>

Great places for information about depression and suicide include:

- The Center for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/>
- The National Alliance on Mental Health: <https://www.nami.org/>
- Mental Health America: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>
- National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

Also, the American Psychiatric Association has a helpful page about mental health in the Hispanic/Latino communities, including a video and a downloadable fact sheet.

<http://www.psychiatry.org/mental-health/people/hispanics-latinos>

1. In Chapter 1, an unnamed girl is attempting suicide. What can you tell about her and her home life based on details in the chapter?
2. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce Elizabeth Davis. Could she be the girl in Chapter 1? What are the similarities between Elizabeth and the unnamed girl in the opening scene?
3. Describe Elizabeth's relationships with her mom, her sister Lily, and Tommy Bowles. As you continue to read, note how and why these relationships change.
4. Chapters 4 and 5 introduce Emily Delgado. Could she be the girl in Chapter 1? What are the similarities between Emily and the unnamed girl in the opening scene?
5. Describe Emily's relationships with her parents, her brother, and her friends, Abby and Sarah. As you continue to read, note how and why these relationships change.
6. In Chapters 4 and 5, Emily thinks, "Would they know? Even with the evidence gone? Would they still be able to tell? Why didn't she tell them?" Emily doesn't directly state what she is hiding from her friends. What do you think it is?
7. Chapter 6 is the first of several letters and journal entries written by the same unnamed girl in Chapter 1. As you read, think about what these chapters reveal, how they influence the narrative, and whether they are likely written by Emily or Elizabeth or if they could be written by either girl.

8. Chapter 8 and 10 introduce Ms. Diaz. Chapter 8, titled “We introduce ourselves,” is about first impressions. What is your first impression of Ms. Diaz? Based on what the students say and do, what do you think Ms. Diaz’s first impressions are of them, Emily and Elizabeth in particular? As you continue to read, note whether your thoughts about Ms. Diaz change and how and why Ms. Diaz’s initial thoughts about her students change.
9. In Chapter 16, Emily and Elizabeth find themselves separated from the party. Pay close attention to their conversation. What are they explicitly saying? What is implied? For example, what is Elizabeth revealing about herself when she talks about lying and its consequences? What does she really mean when she says, “I see you, Emily Delgado. Your problem isn’t really about your friends or Kevin or your dad. You try to hide it, but I know...Trust me, I know”?
10. Why is the novel called *When Reason Breaks*? How is this phrase significant? (Chapter 18)
11. In Chapter 19, Emily and Elizabeth analyze Dickinson poem #486, which begins “I was the slightest in the House —” Pay close attention to how they interact in the classroom and then in the hallway. What is explicitly stated? What else is implied based on dialogue, thoughts, and actions? How are each of the girls similar to or different than the narrator in the poem?
12. Compare the different characters in the novel, including Emily and Elizabeth, Kevin and Tommy, Abby and Sarah. How are they similar and how are they different?
13. The novel presents different family structures. Tommy’s parents are happily married, while Emily’s parents are married but not happy. Elizabeth’s parents are divorced, and Kevin has two dads. Ms. Diaz is unmarried and does not have children. As you read, determine the importance and/or influence of the adults on the teen characters and the plot. Do the adults’ personal relationships have an effect on the teen characters? If so, what is the effect and is it positive or negative?
14. How do Emily and Elizabeth develop and change during the novel? Pay close attention to how they interact with each other and other characters, and how their actions advance the plot or develop themes. How do the secondary characters change because of what happened?
15. At the end of the novel, consider these questions: were you correct about which character attempted suicide? Did you change your mind while reading? Did the structure of the novel create mystery and tension? What are some of the novel’s major themes?

Activity suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards:

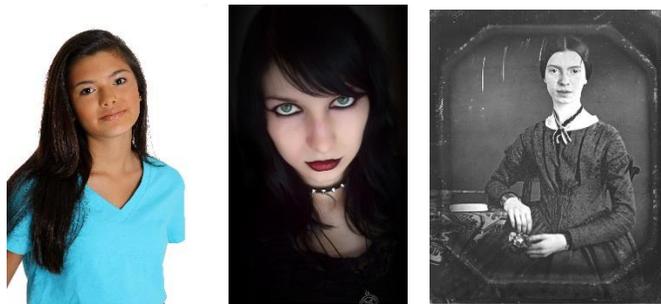
Text structure: How does the novel's structure create mystery and tension?

When Reason Breaks begins with an attempted suicide scene, but the reader doesn't know if it's Emily or Elizabeth. The novel then flashes back eight months prior and alternates points of view so that the reader learns about each girl and why she may have decided to attempt suicide. Also, a series of letters are delivered to Ms. Diaz and excerpts from a journal are included to help the reader with the mystery.

Students can analyze how the novel's structure and third person point of view create mystery and tension or not. Students can stop periodically and analyze the letters and journal entries, in particular, and determine whether those were likely written by Emily or Elizabeth, or if they could have been written by either girl, using specific examples from the narrative to support their theories.

Some readers prefer linear, chronological texts with a first person narration. Students could read *When Reason Breaks*, along with other novels with varied text structures to analyze author's craft and how decisions about structure affect storytelling and the reader's experience.

Fiction and reality: Analyze how the novel represents aspects of Emily Dickinson's life through fictional characters.



The author's note explains that almost all of the characters represent someone who actually existed and influenced Emily Dickinson's life. The two girls and the teacher represent Dickinson herself, while others represent her family members and influential friends. For example, like Emily Dickinson, Emily Delgado's father is a lawyer and politician and her mother is detached and ailing. Elizabeth represents Dickinson's darker, bolder poems, and like Dickinson, she is a poet and visual artist.

Students can read the author's note and, combined with pre-reading or after-reading research on Emily Dickinson, compare the characters with the real people. Students can also analyze how these connections create another layer for readers. The story can be read for its social issues wrapped in a mystery, but can also be read as a modernized version of Emily Dickinson's life or as a way to connect the poet's personal struggles with modern teens. How, then, was Emily Dickinson like modern teens? Is she and her work still relevant today?

Use of source material: How does the author use and transform Emily Dickinson's poetry throughout the novel?

Almost every chapter title is a first line from one of Dickinson's poems and selected poems are used to advance the plot and draw connections between the poet and the protagonists. Students can analyze how the poetry is used throughout the novel. Also, students can read any of the poems that had first lines used as chapter titles. The first lines fit the chapters, but the poems, when read completely, are about other things entirely. Students can analyze how authors use selected pieces of source material, such as a line from a poem or a quote from Shakespeare, for their own purposes and whether this adds, detracts from, or does nothing to impact the original text.

See Appendix A for the list of chapter titles and selected poems used in the novel.

Themes: Determine a theme or central idea in the novel and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text.

When Reason Breaks addresses these topics, any one of which can be the focus of a thematic unit or the basis of analysis as called for in the standards on theme/central idea:

- depression
- family dynamics
- friendships
- pressure to succeed
- perseverance
- hope
- healing through the arts

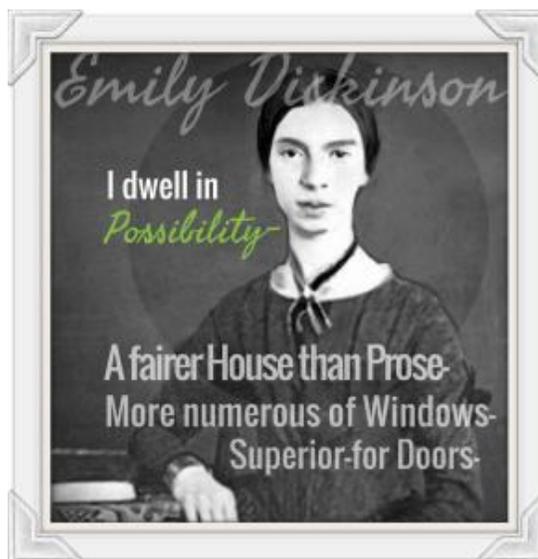


For activities, final projects, or as part of a cross-curricular plan with the art department, students could explore the healing through the arts theme using one of the modes used by characters in the novel: poetry, letter writing, journal writing, photography, or drawing. Creating a thematic statement or analysis using words and images would complement a part of the novel since Emily and Elizabeth are matched for a poetry project that requires both a written and visual response. Chapters 19, 21, and 24 address this assignment.

Word work: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings.

Emily Dickinson’s poems are great for close multiple readings to analyze word choice and figurative and connotative meanings. In fact, a Dickinson poem is listed as a text exemplar in the CCSS for every grade level. Her work, however, is often difficult to understand, so *When Reason Breaks* could be an excellent supplement when teaching poetry and Dickinson in particular. In fact, in the novel, there are certain scenes when the characters themselves are engaged in close reading of her work, which mirrors what happens in real ELA classrooms.

In Chapter 10, Ms. Diaz leads the class as they read and analyze poem #466, which begins: “I dwell in Possibility –”



In Chapter 19, Emily and Elizabeth read and analyze poem #486, which begins: “I was the slightest in the House –” Further discussion of this poem occurs in Chapter 21.

Students could participate in similar activities before reading these chapters. During or after reading the chapters, students could compare the characters’ interpretations to their own, noting how a poem as a whole and even single words within a poem can convey different meanings to different readers.

Common Core State Standards addressed in this guide:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5

Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6

Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9

Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the

text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain

APPENDIX A: Chapter Titles & Full Poems Used

Chapter 1:	"When One has given up One's life"
Chapter 2:	"Adrift! A little boat adrift!"
Chapter 3:	"Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –"
Chapter 4:	"The ones that disappeared are back"
Chapter 5:	"I haven't told my garden yet –"
Chapter 6:	My Letter to the World
Chapter 7:	"Denial – is the only fact"
Chapter 8:	"We introduce ourselves"
Chapter 9:	"Forbidden Fruit a flavor has"
Chapter 10:	"I dwell in Possibility –"
Chapter 11:	"Afraid! Of whom am I afraid?"
Chapter 12:	"A Secret told –"
Chapter 13:	Letter #1
Chapter 14:	"When we have ceased to care"
Chapter 15:	"Pain has but once Acquaintance"
Chapter 16:	"I can't tell you – but you feel it –"
Chapter 17:	"Death is the supple Suitor"
Chapter 18:	My Letter to the World
Chapter 19:	"I was the slightest in the House –"
Chapter 20:	"That Distance was between Us"
Chapter 21:	Letter #2
Chapter 22:	"We talked as Girls do –"
Chapter 23:	My Letter to the World
Chapter 24:	"'Tis so appalling – it exhilarates"
Chapter 25:	Letter #3
Chapter 26:	"To try to speak, and miss the way"
Chapter 27:	"I hide myself within my flower"
Chapter 28:	"The Soul has Bandaged moments –"
Chapter 29:	"A poor – torn heart – a tattered heart –"
Chapter 30:	"Alone and in a Circumstance"
Chapter 31:	"I'm Nobody! Who are you?"
Chapter 32:	"I am ashamed – I hide –"
Chapter 33:	My Letter to the World
Chapter 34:	"This World is not Conclusion"
Chapter 35:	"Back from the cordial Grave I drag thee"
Chapter 36:	"How well I knew Her not"
Chapter 37:	"Is it too late to touch you, Dear?"
Chapter 38:	"Such are the inlets of the mind –"
Chapter 39:	"Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature –"
Chapter 40:	"I found the words to every thought"
Chapter 41:	"'Hope' is the thing with feathers –"

Poems used in full:

Chapter 10: poem #466

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –

Chapter 19: Poem #486

I was the slightest in the House –
I took the smallest Room –
At night, my little Lamp, and Book –
And one Geranium –

So stationed I could catch the Mint
That never ceased to fall –And just my Basket –
Let me think – I'm sure
That this was all –

I never spoke – unless addressed –
And then 'twas brief and low –
I could not bear to live – aloud –
The Racket shamed me so –

And if it had not been so far –
And any one I knew
Were going – I had often thought
How noteless – I could die –

Chapter 39: Poem # 749

All but Death, can be Adjusted –
Dynasties repaired –
Systems – settled in their Sockets –
Citadels – dissolved –

Wastes of Lives – resown with Colors
By Succeeding Springs –
Death – unto itself – Exception –
Is exempt from Change –