

A study guide prepared by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

**Breaking Point**

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As you read this book, Breaking Point, please make a list of all words that are used in the book that you do not know the meaning of. Bring your list to class each week, along with your copy of the book, and this study guide, and we will resolve vocabulary words that you find.

**CHAPTER 1**

1. Classes had just ended for the day at Bluford High School, when best friends Vicky Fallon and Teresa Ortiz met in the hallway. Vicky wants Teresa to join her in a hearing after school for Vicky's friend, Martin Luna. Vicky also has to rush home right after school to help the family move in her grandfather, who was coming to live with them. Teresa's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday was a month away, and she had something else on her mind. (p.3) What was on Teresa's mind instead?
2. Why would Teresa's family make such elaborate and expensive plans for her upcoming Quinceanera, when they could not afford it, and would have to borrow money to pay for it all?
3. (p.5) What is Teresa's opinion of Vicky's friend, Martin Luna?
4. (p.5-6) As they leave, Teresa reminds Vicky that she owes \$95 for her dress. What does Vicky think about this? Have you ever been forced to do something because of plans made by someone else?
5. Vicky meets up with English teacher, Mr. Mitchell, just outside of the auditorium. Vicky and several other students were present to speak on behalf of Martin Luna as a character witness. What kind of hearing was this?
6. Vicky recalls the time when Martin told Vicky about Martin's younger brother, Huero, who had been shot and killed. (p.9-10) "It should have been me, Martin had confessed, leaning into her. In that moment she felt the weight of his body, the rhythmic thump of his heart. All his anger and swagger were gone. Instead Martin cried and she held him, touched his face, felt the pain gush from him in waves. She had never been so close to a boy". "It was as if they were the only two people in the world. As if she had reached in and touched his soul somehow". Have you ever had someone touch your soul like this, or perhaps you reached in and touched someone else's soul?
7. (p.12-13) Martin spoke for himself at his suspension hearing, and ultimately it was decided that his expulsion was not necessary. What did Martin say that convinced the school superintendent?

**CHAPTER 2**

1. (p.15-16, 18) Due to the after school hearing for Martin Luna, Vicky was late getting home from school. Why was her mother so angry with Vicky for being late coming home?

2. (p.17) Where was Vicky's grandfather going to sleep, now that he had moved into Vicky's house?
3. (p.17, 22-23) What is the relationship like between Vicky's mom and dad?
4. (p.29-30) At 3:27am Vicky is awakened. Why? What brought this about?

### CHAPTER 3

1. This chapter takes place entirely in Mr. Mitchell's English class. Vicky was tired from sleeping on the couch, and hearing her parents fighting late into the night. Mr. Mitchell asks about a character from Hamlet, and a class discussion breaks out as to whether or not friends should give advice to friends, if it is something they won't want to hear. What is the relationship like between Vicky and Teresa during this classroom discussion?
2. One of the comments being made in class was by Steve Morris, the star running back. Vicky and Steve went back many years. (p37) What was Steve like in 5<sup>th</sup> grade?
3. (p.38-39) "Yet sometimes Vicky still saw flashes of the sad boy in Steve's eyes, the person he was before his father broke his heart and filled him with anger, before girls started treating him as if he could do no wrong, before colleges began scouting him and telling him he was special. That is why she agreed to go with him to the Spring Formal last year". What happened at the Spring Formal that changed Vicky's opinion of Steve?
4. (p.39) Steve's words made her wince. It was as if **something inside him was broken**. As if what happened in middle school had forever changed him. It turned everything into a competition. **It made him a great athlete, but it also made him mean**. And whenever Vicky watched him, no matter how beautiful his body, she saw something else when he acted this way. **Ugliness**." Do you know anyone like this, someone who has something inside him that is broken?
5. (p.44-45) When the class period ended Vicky and Martin go out into the hallway and find Teresa is waiting. Teresa informs Vicky that Vicky can bring Martin to Teresa's upcoming quinceanera. Teresa then gives Vicky a bill for the cost of Vicky's dress. What happened then? Have you ever had a stormy breakup, or ended a friendship with someone under circumstances like this?

### CHAPTER 4

1. Vicky got called out of class, and directed to report to the school office. (p.48) Why?
2. Vicky's plans to go out for pizza with Martin after school were now just not possible. (p.49-50) With strong feelings of disappointment Vicky goes out to her locker after the final bell. There she is confronted by whom?
3. (p50) Vicky's old boyfriend Steve Morris told her that Teresa had told him that Vicky and Teresa are fighting. This brings on additional feelings of disappointment. Martin sees that Vicky is talking with Steve Morris, and Martin gets very angry with Vicky, bringing on even more disappointment and stress.

- Steve and Martin exchange words and each one eggs on the other. (p.54) Who is it that finally puts an end to this argument?
4. Martin questions Vicky about her past relationship with Steve Morris. (p.58) “Why did you ever go out with someone like that?” Martin asked. (p.59) Vicky responds “You don’t hear me asking you about every girl you went out with”. (p.59) Vicky felt as if she was being pulled in opposite directions, as if she was about to rip in half somehow”. Have you ever had times when you felt your life was pulling you in opposite directions? Have you ever experienced jealousy like this, or found that someone you were dating was experiencing jealousy like this?
  5. At this same point Vicky is experiencing lots of disappointment and pressure. What was she experiencing in her relationships with:
    - Her mother telling her that she had to come home from school and take care of grandpa?
    - The constant fighting between her mother and father?
    - The fact that she had been kicked out of her own bedroom, so that her grandpa would have a room to stay in?
    - Her failed relationship with Teresa?
    - Her failed relationship with her former boyfriend, Steve Morris?
    - The friction between Steve Morris and Martin Luna?
    - Martin’s anger and unreasonable questioning of Vicky?When was a time in your life when you felt great disappointment and pressure?

## CHAPTER 5

1. This chapter begins with both Vicky and her brother Danny arriving at home right after school because both had been contacted at school by their mother. Why did their mother want them home early?
2. (p.61) As Danny gets off his bus, Vicky overhears other students on the bus ridiculing and making fun of Danny. What are they saying about Danny?
3. As Vicky and Danny open the door to their home they call out for their grandpa, with no response. (p.64) Where is grandpa?
4. (p.65-66) What was grandpa doing in the bedroom?
5. Some of the photographs grandpa was looking at included Vicky and her family at the beach. (p.69) “Was it the last time she had heard her parents laugh together?” “What happened?” she thought to herself, studying the photo. It was as if she was staring at something that was gone forever, something she could never reclaim, no matter how much she wanted it back. An ocean of sadness stirred inside her, its invisible waves breaking as she glanced at the photo.” Seeing this old photo brought up more sadness for Vicky. “She wanted to be alone, to go somewhere and forget about the photo, her grandfather’s sadness, the fight with Teresa, her worries about her parents, the problems with Martin and Steve. But there was nowhere to escape. She didn’t even have a bedroom.” Have you sometimes felt that you had no escape from your problems?
6. (p.70-71) The telephone rang, but no one answered the phone, leaving it for the answering machine. Who was on the phone?

7. (p.72) Vicky “escaped to the living room, flopped on the couch, and turned on the TV”. Then what did she discover?

## CHAPTER 6

1. On Saturday morning Vicky is awakened by the sound of her father talking to someone on the phone. “Don’t do this, Please”. “I just need more time.” (p.76) “Give me more time. This is our home you’re talking about”. “C’mon, work with me here. Please!” What is going on? What is their conversation about?
2. Grandpa then gets up and goes into the kitchen to make breakfast, with Vicky helping. Doing something helped grandpa to feel useful. Are there some things that you have done around your home that made you feel useful?
3. Danny notices that Dad did not join the family for breakfast. Mom said that he was out on an early morning job interview. (p.80) “Vicky knew something wasn’t right about Mom’s answer. Her father didn’t seem as though he was talking about a job interview when she’d heard him in the kitchen. And why was he loading the car if he was going to an interview? It didn’t make sense.” “Instinctively she reached for her cross. It was gone”. What do you think happened to her cross? Go back to page 76 and reread the first two paragraphs. Does that give you a different perspective, now that we know her cross is missing?
4. Vicky finally asks her mom about all of the calls from bill collectors. (p.82) “Mom, when’s this gonna stop? It’s getting worse, not better”. (p.85) “Where’s my Game Box”? Danny yelled from the living room”. Danny suggests that someone stole it. Vicky suggests (p.86) “Maybe Dad took it”. “I heard him this morning when he left. He took a bunch of stuff to the car”. “You mean Dad stole my Game Box”? Danny exclaimed, his voice a mix of hurt and outrage”. Mom said “He didn’t steal it. If he took it, there was a good reason”. “Yeah, right! My games are gone too, Danny blurted, rushing into his room and slamming the door behind him”. At this point in the story, is there any hope for a solution to the many problems facing Vicky and her family?

## CHAPTER 7

1. “You’re worried about him, aren’t you” grandpa asks Vicky. “You’re carrying too much on your shoulders right now”. Grandpa informs Vicky that “I’m here to help you two and your mother. That’s going to be my job from now on”. At grandpa’s suggestion, Vicky goes over to Mario’s house, a friend of Danny. While walking through the park, what did Vicky see as new graffiti spray painted on a brick wall?
2. Vicky is told by Felix, Mario’s older brother, that Danny was not there, and that Mario was still in bed. Since the apartment complex where Mario lived was the same one where Martin Luna lived, Vicky decided to stop for a visit with Martin. (p.95-96) When Vicky knocks on the door, Mrs. Luna answers and tells Vicky that Martin is not home. Where is Martin?

3. Vicky wakes up at home, after a very bad and frightening dream. (p.100) Vicky confronts her brother about the graffiti. "I can't believe you been taggin' our park". What does Danny think about his sister's concerns?
4. (p.101-102) Dad comes home in an obvious bad mood. The telephone rings, and is answered by grandpa. What did Dad do with the phone?
5. (p.103) Dad becomes physically violent. "Her father had never screamed at them in blind rage. Most of all no matter how angry he had been her father had never made her as scared as she was right now. A line had been crossed" What is it that had Dad so angry and upset? "I-I'm so sorry." He stretched his arms open as though asking for a hug. "It's just...these bills, this house...I lost it all.." Vicky saw tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry".

## CHAPTER 8

1. This chapter begins with Vicky in school on Monday morning where Mr. Mitchell is giving a pop quiz on Hamlet. Vicky did not know the answers to any of the questions. Vicky was the best student in Mr. Mitchell's class, and everyone -- Mr. Mitchell, Martin, Steve, Teresa, and all other class members, were surprised that she was so ill prepared for the quiz. (p.110) When the time for the quiz was over, whom was the first student that Mr. Mitchell calls upon for the first answer?
2. (p.113) "For the first time ever, school seemed completely pointless". Has there ever been a time in your life when school seemed completely pointless – when you could see no relevance of school for your life in the future?
3. (p.114) Even though Mr. Mitchell had asked Vicky to stay after class for a few minutes, who else stayed after class to speak with Vicky?
4. (p.116) Mr. Mitchell expressed his worry and concern for Vicky. What were his initial concerns?

## CHAPTER 9

1. By gym class Vicky was exhausted and asked to go see the school nurse. The nurse correctly determined that Vicky is under a lot of stress and worries, yet Vicky does not give the nurse full and honest answers to her questions. (p.123) "Well, sounds to me like you have too much on your plate, Vicky. And sometimes it can do serious damage too, she added". Have you had times when you had too much on your plate, resulting in feelings of helplessness?
2. While at her locker Vicky is met by Teresa. Teresa initially suspects that Vicky is pregnant. (p.124) "Vicky looked up at her old friend. The anger and judgment that had been in her eyes lately was gone, replaced by a look of concern. It was as if the bitter words between them had never happened, that Teresa knew something was seriously wrong". (p.125) Vicky finally breaks down and tells Teresa "It's my family..." she choked, struggling to say the words aloud. "They're broke. All they do is fight anymore. The other night, my Dad almost...hurt my brother. Dad left home two days ago. He's never done that before. It feels like everything's coming apart, you know? As she spoke, a dam of emotion broke inside her, and tears ran down her face". Have you had times in your life when

- you have had something bottled up inside of you, and then felt great relief when you were finally able to let it all go?
3. When Vicky finally gets home she sees a dented cardboard box on the stoop of their house. Inside the box was a letter from her father. What did her father say in his letter?

## **CHAPTER 10**

1. The entire family is shocked by the news in the letter left by Dad. Early the next morning Vicky is awakened by her Mom, and asked to stay home from school to watch grandpa, while she goes to the bank in an attempt to see what can be done about the mortgage payments that had not been paid. Just after lunch there is a knock on the door. Who is there – and why?
2. Vicky's family is being evicted from their home, with movers coming in and taking everything out of the home, and placing it on the front lawn. Vicky's brother Danny is extremely upset that his family and all of his belongings have been thrown out on the front lawn. Who does everyone blame this situation on?
3. (p.145) When trying to think of what to do, Vicky suggest apartments at Hillside Manor. "We don't have enough money for a deposit" Mom replied. "Yes we do", grandpa said. Where did grandpa come up with a box of cash?
4. Vicky's mom applied for housing at the same complex as Danny's best friend, Mario, and Vicky's friend Martin. How do they get all of their property moved off the lawn of their old home, and moved into their new apartment?

What did you think of this book?

### **ALTERNATIVE ENDING**

Now that you have finished this book, I would like for you to write an alternative ending for this story – anything that is different from how these authors ended the story. Please remember that there is no right or wrong ending, you can write whatever you wish. Be creative. Have fun. When you are finished, I will show you an alternative ending that I wrote.

## **ALTERNATIVE ENDING**

Written by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

*“Something new was happening, something she had never imagined. Though it was laced with sadness and pain, there was something else there too.*

*Friends. Family. A future.*

*Vicky took a deep breath, turned away from the empty house, and joined everyone.*

*They had work to do”*

As soon as they arrived at their new apartment Vicky and her family immediately began the back breaking process of unloading the truck and hauling everything into the somewhat confined apartment. After two or three minutes a car pulled up to the curb and Martin got out with four buddies. “We are here to help”. Martin pulled Vicky aside and softly spoke to her in hushed tones “Vicky I am so sorry for the way I treated you. I had no idea what you and your family were going through. I wish that we had known each other better, so that you would know that you could have trusted me with all that was going on. Please know that I will always be here for you.

Everyone pitched in, and with so many people helping, it was no time at all before all of the boxes, all of the furniture, all of the possessions, had been taken off the street, and moved into the new apartment. Vicky’s mom said aloud “Now all we have to do is figure out where to put everything”. Despite her organizational skills, this was going to take some time, making the adjustment to a new apartment. Just a few moments later there was a knock on the door. Martin Luna’s mother stood there when the door was opened, and introduced herself to Vicky’s mom. “I want to welcome you to the neighborhood” Mrs. Luna said, with a warm smile on her face, and reaching out to shake hands in a soft embrace. “Martin and I would be honored to have you and your family join us at our house for dinner tonight. I can give you all the ‘low down’ on the neighborhood – the good, the bad, and the ugly! I can’t tell you how blessed I felt when your daughter Vicky reached out to my Martin in his time of need. She truly demonstrated to him that she cared”. Vicky’s mom hardly knew what to say, but reluctantly agreed, figuring that the task of putting things away could wait until after dinner. Danny spoke up and said “Mom, I really would like to spend time with Mario, if that is possible”. Mrs. Luna immediately jumped in and said “What’s one more? He is welcome to join your family, that is, if it is ok with his family.”

That evening Vicky’s entire extended family sat down to an extremely comfortable and delicious dinner. Most importantly, it was the first time in many months that they were free of stress. Everyone could just relax!

The next morning everyone awoke knowing that the day would be filled with more hard work. At 7:30 there was a knock on the door. Mario stood there with his mother. “Mario took the liberty to tell me about the many terrible things that have happened to your family recently. We are part of a very close church group, and I hope that you don’t mind that I reached out to them last night, and they are here with some things to help you make the adjustment to your new home”. As the door

opened wider Vicky's mom could see that at the bottom of the stairs stood close to ten men and women, all carrying packages and bags. With tears in her eyes Vicky and Danny held the door for their mom, and let these strangers into their new home. Groceries, toiletries, cleaning supplies, even new clothes; everything that they could possibly need was there. Danny let out a gasp when he saw Mario's dad come through the door, with a new Game Box and games in his arms. "You have always been the best friend my son could ever hope for". "Welcome to our neighborhood. We look forward to Mario having many more opportunities to spend quality time with a nice young man like you", said Mario's dad. Danny felt guilty. He knew that his days as a tagger were over.

Mario's dad then turned to Danny's mom and quietly asked "May I have a word with you in private?" They stepped around the corner and Mario's dad said that "The men's group at our church are a very tight group of men who look out for each other's needs. I told them about your situation, and no one can accept the actions of your husband, in taking a bad situation and making it worse. But Darrell Johnson has been looking for a hard working man to fill a spot at the body shop that he owns. I know that your husband worked in car sales, but does your husband have any experience doing repairs? If so, Mr. Johnson would be willing to take him on, but only if he is willing to join our church, and get some counseling on gambling addiction. We all are broken men, but we all can make a new start in life!"

With a smile on her face, Vicky's mom said that she would attempt to pass this job offer on to her husband as soon as she could. All Mrs. Fallon could think is "Yesterday there was no hope, and today endless possibilities". Vicky could see that her mom was now relaxed, with a constant smile on her face, almost as if she had a secret that she had not shared with anyone. Vicky quietly walked over to the cardboard box that her father had left on the door step recently. Vicky reached in to retrieve her grandmother's cross necklace that grandpa had given her, which her father had stolen, but did not have the courage to sell. After putting it back on her neck Vicky walked confidently toward her grandpa, and said, "It looks like grandma is still watching over us, grandpa". Grandpa had a grin flash across his face as he responded "That's what I am here for. She won't let me get any rest until she knows that I am watching over you and your family every day". Vicky said a silent prayer to herself, giving thanks that she was finally feeling better, without the stress, and pains in her stomach and temples. "It is a beautiful day grandpa. How about if we get started on the rest of our lives".