Broken

By Daniel Clay
ISBN: 9780061561047

Introduction

Until that fateful afternoon, Skunk Cunningham had been a normal little girl, playing on the curb in front of her house. Rick Buckley had been a normal geeky teenager, hosing off his brand-new car. Bob Oswald had been a normal sociopathic, single father of five slutty daughters, charging furiously down the sidewalk. And then Bob was beating Rick to a bloody pulp, right there in the Buckley's drive, and life on Drummond Square began to disintegrate.

Narrated by eleven-year-old Skunk, Daniel Clay's *Broken* is a brilliantly observant, darkly funny debut novel about a British suburb upended by petty lies, malignant indifference, and one family's unyielding penchant for violence. Told in a voice that is at once charmingly innocent, cynical, and wise, and inspired by Harper Lee's classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Clay renders a twisted but surprisingly uplifting story of this all-too-modern community.

Questions for Discussion

1. The catalysts for many of the major events in the novel come from Susan Oswald's lies. Do you think Susan is a character to be pitied or hated? Why?

2. The younger characters' understanding of the world around them and how it works often seems limited to soulless facts and unquestionable rules. For example, Skunk knows stealing is bad because several people have told her so, but no one seems to have explained why it's bad. How do you think this helps and/or hinders these younger characters?

3. What sort of character do you think Rick Buckley was before Susan Oswald's lies had such a catastrophic affect on his life? Do you think he would have encountered similar problems even if the Oswalds had never entered his life?

4. The Oswald and Cunningham families are both motherless by the time the novel starts. What do you think of Bob and Archie's attitudes to parenting? Considering the children, how different might things have turned out had the families been headed by single mothers instead of single fathers? What do you think of Mrs Buckley as a parent? How does she compare to Archie and Bob?

5. If you could have stepped into the novel at any one stage and given a single character a single piece of advice, what would it have been and whom would you have given it to?

6. What did you think of Cerys's relationship with Skunk? Was Cerys a positive or negative role-model?

7. Considering Dillon's willingness to risk his friendship with Skunk in order to appease the in-crowd and whom he thinks about at the end of the novel, how do you think Dillon really felt about Skunk?

8. Towards the end of the novel (page 294), Skunk reflects that love is a bad thing, nasty, and destructive. Do you think she still holds this view at the end of the novel?

9. The novel starts after the major action in the novel has taken place, with Skunk reflecting in the first person and a third person narrative filling in the gaps. Did this technique enhance or detract from your reading of the novel?

10. The author has mentioned he was heavily influenced by Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; the first spark for *Broken* came from wondering how the three main families in Harper Lee's novel would interact with each other if they lived in the street he lived in at the time. Were you aware of this influence as you read? If so, had the author not mirrored so many of the character names in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—Skunk for Scout, Jed for Jem, Dillon for Dill, Archie for Atticus, Broken Buckley for Boo Radley, etc.—would you still have spotted the influence? How closely, if at all, do you think the writing styles and plot-lines are between Broken and *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

About the Author

Daniel Clay lives in Hedge End, England, with his wife, Alison. His short stories have been published in *Writers' Forum*, *The Ashes*, and *World Wide Writers* in the UK. *Broken* is his first novel.