BREAKING POINT

Brief Summary
Vicky Fallon, a Bluford High School sophomore, is nearing her breaking point. Her father has lost his job, her parents are arguing over money problems, and her elderly grandfather is moving in with her family, forcing Vicky to give up her bedroom. To make matters worse, Vicky’s little brother, Danny, is becoming increasingly troubled, and Vicky’s best friend, Teresa Ortiz, resents Vicky’s new relationship with Martin Luna. Vicky’s situation becomes even more stressful with the discovery that Dad has been gambling and selling family possessions to pay off debts. After keeping her troubles to herself, Vicky finally confides in Teresa who, in turn, alerts Martin. As the book ends, the Fallons are evicted from their home due to unpaid bills resulting from Dad’s gambling debts, but Martin and others join in to help them move to their new apartment.

Full Summary
Vicky Fallon, a Bluford High School sophomore, is under a lot of stress. Her best friend, Teresa Ortiz, has been pressuring her to attend her upcoming quinceañera. She doesn’t realize that Vicky can’t afford to because money is tight now that Dad lost his job. In addition, Teresa resents Vicky’s growing involvement with Martin Luna, who faces expulsion from Bluford. At home, Vicky must give up her bedroom to her elderly grandfather (Abuelo), who is moving in with the family, as well as endure her parents’ bickering over money problems.

Although Vicky is relieved when Martin is not expelled, tensions come to a head between Vicky and Teresa, and Vicky refuses to attend the quinceañera. Later on, when Vicky’s former boyfriend Steve Morris and Martin nearly get into a fight, Vicky realizes that the hostility between them is largely due to Steve’s continuing interest in her.

Early Saturday morning, Vicky awakens to the sound of Dad on the phone pleading with a bill collector. Soon afterward, he storms out of the house carrying some bags and boxes. At breakfast Vicky notices that her necklace is gone, and her younger brother Danny notices that his Game Box is missing. Putting two and two together, Vicky concludes that Dad took the items to pay the bills. Upset that his father would steal his possessions, Danny hurries off to his friend Mario’s at Hillside Manor. Going to check on him, Vicky is disturbed to see that Danny has “tagged” a wall in the park with his bomb design. Later that day, when Abuelo makes the mistake of answering a call from a bill collector, Mr. Fallon reacts violently, throwing the phone against the wall and nearly striking Danny. Although he recovers his temper and apologizes, it is clear that he has crossed the line, and he leaves the house.

Back at school, Vicky can’t concentrate in class. Feeling weak and light-headed from not eating, she visits the school nurse, who advises her to talk to someone as a way of relieving stress. A short while later, Vicky tearfully confides her problems to Teresa. When tensions again flare between Steve Morris and Martin Luna at Vicky’s locker, Teresa takes charge, telling both to back off and leave Vicky alone.

Returning home, Vicky finds a note from Dad explaining that he lost thousands of dollars betting on sports and that their house is going into foreclosure. Furious at this news, Danny defaces a wall of his bedroom by spray-painting a time bomb on it. The next afternoon, Vicky watches helplessly as workmen pile the family’s belongings into the front yard. But her spirits lift when Martin, who has learned of the Fallons’ problems from Teresa, arrives to lend his moral support. With Abuelo paying for the security deposit, Mrs. Fallon arranges for her family to move into an apartment at Hillside Manor—where Martin lives. Although Vicky is sad that Dad has left the family in such desperate circumstances, the book ends on a hopeful note as friends and family join in to help her family move to their new home.
List of Characters

**Vicky Fallon**: The main character, a sophomore. She is smart, pretty, and respected by her classmates.

**Teresa Ortiz**: Vicky’s friend since kindergarten. Lately, Teresa has become resentful of Vicky’s relationship with Martin Luna.

**Martin Luna**: A 16-year-old high school sophomore. He transferred from Zamora High to Bluford High this year. His old friends were mostly gang members.

**Eric “Huero” Luna**: Martin’s 8-year-old brother, who was killed a few months ago in a drive-by shooting.

**Mr. Mitchell**: A popular English teacher at Bluford.

**Eric Acosta**: The freshman Martin defended in his last fight at Bluford.

**Roylin Bailey**: A junior who failed English and is now in Vicky’s class.

**Steve Morris**: A cocky football star who used to date Vicky. He is jealous of her new interest in Martin Luna.

**Mr. Gates**: The school superintendent.

**Ms. Spencer**: Principal at Bluford High School.

**Danny Fallon**: Vicky’s younger brother and a seventh grader at Irving Middle School.

**Mom (Yolanda Fallon)**: The mother of Vicky and Danny.

**Dad (Michael Fallon)**: The father of Vicky and Danny. He lost his job at a car dealership months ago.

**Abuelo (Diego)**: Vicky and Danny’s grandfather. He recently broke his hip and needs help getting around.

**Ms. Ford**: Geometry teacher at Bluford.

**Shanetta Greene and Roslyn Webb**: Classmates of Vicky.

**Ms. Bader**: Ms. Spencer’s secretary.

**Clarence**: A boy who tags along with Steve.

**Mario and Javon**: Danny’s friends.

**Felix**: Mario’s older brother.

**Mrs. Luna**: Martin’s mother.

**Ms. Kinney**: Vicky’s gym teacher.

**Nurse Wilkins**: The nurse at Bluford High.

**Lionel and Brisana**: Students at Bluford.

**A police officer and two workmen**
UNIT ONE
Chapters 1, 2, and 3

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS

A. Vocabulary in Context

1. In the following excerpt, what does the word *jostled* mean?
   A group of boys jostled by, bumping her. Theresa shot them a mean look.
   a. pushed  c. skipped
   b. walked carefully d. danced

2. In the following excerpt, what does the word *frail* mean?
   Vicky peered into her room and nearly gasped at the frail man sitting on the edge of her bed. He looked as if he had aged years since Grandma’s funeral last September.
   a. powerful  c. confident
   b. weak d. handsome

B. Supporting Details

3. The following words were said by
   “You know those fights weren’t his fault! He never started anything. You know how Steve and Clarence are—”

4. The following words were said by
   “Girl, you’re crazy. When I saw you ready to stand up for me like that . . . I still can’t believe it. Like I said, thank you. You’re the closest . . . friend I got.”

5. The following words were said by
   “He can be a *chamberlan* if he comes with you. But he can’t bring any of his friends. My mom don’t want no *cholos* there.”

C. Main Idea

6. The main idea of the excerpt below is that
   a. Huero died in Martin’s arms.
   b. Martin showed Vicky pictures of Huero.
   c. Vicky saw how deeply Huero’s death had affected Martin.

   Just a few days ago [Vicky] had stood with Martin, alone in the small apartment he shared with his mother. That was when he told her how Huero, his eight-year-old brother, had been killed in a drive-by shooting last July. Martin’s eyes glistened with tears as he showed her pictures of him. She could still hear how Martin’s voice shook as he described how Huero died in his arms, the blood dripping through his fingers.
7. The main idea of the following passage is that
   a. black stubble covers the lower half of Vicky’s father’s face, and saggy creases stretch from the corners of his mouth.
   b. being unemployed has taken a toll on Dad’s appearance and attitude.
   c. Vicky’s father used to dress nicely.

   Vicky couldn’t help but notice that her father looked drained. Black stubble covered the lower half of his face. Saggy creases, the beginnings of wrinkles, stretched from the corners of his mouth. Even his shirt and tie looked limp. Before the dealership closed, Dad always looked good—neatly pressed shirts, a hint of cologne, always a wide smile and a joke. He had worked long hours, but he had always been happy and full of life. Now he seemed defeated.

8. The main idea of the following is that
   a. Vicky is turned off by Steve’s ugly behavior.
   b. Steve thinks of everything as a competition.
   c. Steve is a great athlete with a beautiful body.

   Vicky knew [Steve] was being honest, but his 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. Teresa couldn’t understand.

D. Conclusions

9. You can conclude from the following excerpt that
   a. the janitors are lazy.
   b. people are impressed by what Martin says.
   c. Martin will begin giving speeches on a regular basis.

   “Maybe if I never came to this school, I’d have thrown my life away. But being here gave me a chance to think and see another way,” [Martin] said glancing at the crowd. “And more than anything, I have to live a better life for my little brother. I gotta live the future he’ll never have,” he confessed, his voice heavy with emotion. “That’s what I hope to do right here at Bluford.”

   A hush gripped the auditorium. Even the janitors had stopped working to listen. It was as if everyone was stunned by what they heard.

10. You can infer from the following passage that
   a. Vicky usually participates in class.
   b. Vicky almost never participates in class.
   c. Martin is seriously concerned about Vicky.


   “Nah, you were just giving someone else a chance to answer the questions for a change,” [Martin] replied. “You can’t always be the one with all the answers.”
SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. As the book begins, what activity does Teresa accuse Vicky of forgetting? What is on Vicky’s mind instead?
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2. What does Martin say that convinces Superintendent Gates not to expel him from Bluford?
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3. What does Mr. Fallon spend most of his time doing when he’s at home? Why does his wife criticize him for this?
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4. What happened to Steve Morris when he was in the fifth grade? How did it affect his behavior?
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5. How does Vicky respond when Teresa accuses her of being jealous of her upcoming quinceañera?
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Teresa is very excited about her quinceañera party, but Vicky thinks of it as a waste of time and money. With whom do you agree? Why?

2. Vicky has to give up her bedroom when her grandfather moves in with her family. Why is this a particularly difficult time for her to do so?

3. Besides disagreeing about Martin and the quinceañera, Vicky and Teresa also have different opinions about Steve Morris. What does Teresa think about him? What does Vicky think? With whom do you agree? Explain.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. As a chubby fifth grader whose dad has left the family, Steve Morris is bullied by other students. But when he gets older, he becomes something of a bully himself. Have you ever come in contact with a bully, or even bullied someone yourself? Write a paper in which you describe the situation in detail. You might also discuss why it is that certain people become bullies.

2. Vicky and Teresa have been close friends since kindergarten. But even close friends can disagree. Write about a time when you had a serious disagreement with a friend. Who was the friend? What was the disagreement about? Did you later settle the disagreement and stay friends? Or did your friendship end as a result of the disagreement?

3. In Mr. Mitchell’s class, Vicky and her classmates are studying Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Ophelia is a character whose family and boyfriend problems Vicky can relate to. Now think of a book or story you have read that features a character with whom you can relate. Write a paper about how and why you identify with this character. Explain just what it is about this character that strikes a chord with you.
UNIT TWO
Chapters 4, 5, and 6

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS

A. Vocabulary in Context

1. In the following excerpt, what does the word *garbled* mean?
   Without a word, she escaped to the living room, flopped on the couch, and turned on the TV. The screen filled with a garbled image. The TV hissed with static, as if it was cursing at her.
   a. jumbled  c. colorful
   b. clear     d. tiny

2. In the following excerpt, what does the word *vulnerable* mean?
   “What’s gonna happen?” Danny asked then. He seemed younger and more vulnerable somehow. “We hear the messages. I see the mail. Now the TV’s not working. It’s like each day, things get worse, and the way you and Dad are acting lately . . .” his voice trailed off.
   a. silly      c. peaceful
   b. friendly   d. defenseless

B. Supporting Details

3. The following words were said by
   b. Teresa.  d. Clarence
   “Yeah, you should probably go, Sanchez. I know you can’t afford to get in trouble again, not after your hearing and all.”

4. The following words were said by
   “Nah, it’s all good, Vic. I gotta see my counselor tonight anyway, remember? Gonna work on them anger management issues.”

5. The following words were said by
   “I don’t need help. I’m fine! . . . I’m a man, not a baby!”

C. Main Idea

6. The main idea of the following passage is that
   a. Abuelo had recently slipped and cracked his hip.
   b. Vicky is worried about Abuelo falling and hurting himself again.
   c. Abuelo is shaky on his feet.
   Vicky shrugged. *What if [Abuelo] fell again?* she wondered. Last time he slipped, he cracked his hip and lay on the floor for hours, unable to get up. Since then, he had never been the same. Most days, he was sore and stiff and shaky on his feet. Mom said he was too stubborn to admit he needed help. That was why she insisted that he move in with them. Vicky imagined he was on the other side of the door, stretched out on the floor, hurt but unwilling to tell anyone.
7. The main idea of the following excerpt is that Abuelo
   a. was married fifty-six years ago.
   b. showed his wedding picture to his grandchildren.
   c. doesn’t know what to do with himself now that his wife is dead.
     “Is that who I think it is?” Danny asked.
     Abuelo nodded somberly. “That’s our wedding picture. Fifty-six years ago, God bless her,” he said, pausing for several seconds. In the silence, Vicky could almost see the thoughts racing through his mind.
     “I was supposed to go first, not her,” he added, his eyes glistening, his hands trembling.
     “Abuelo—”
     “What do I do now?” he asked, looking to each of them and then back at the picture, as if he was talking to it, waiting for an answer that would never come. “What do I do?”

8. The main idea of the following passage is that Vicky
   a. hates that her family is being hassled for money.
   b. wonders about the person on the other end of the phone.
   c. hears the sound of others being called in the background.
     “Michael Fall-on?” the caller said, mispronouncing her last name.
     Vicky could hear other voices in the background. Laughter. Countless other calls being made. Other people being hassled for money. She wondered about the person on the other end of the phone. Did he know what it was like to be harassed at all hours of the day? Did he even care that her father was out of work, her grandfather was ill, and her mother was struggling? It was as if money was the most important thing in the world. Vicky hated it.

D. Conclusions

9. You can conclude from the following excerpt that
   a. Vicky is often in trouble at school.
   b. Vicky has a reputation for being a good student.
   c. Vicky’s classmates dislike her.
     “The office, Ms. Fallon. The secretary wants you there right now.”
     “Why? What’d I do?” Vicky said as she got up from her desk. The day was almost over, just one more class to go.
     “Oooh, girl, you got busted,” joked Shanetta Greene from two rows back.
     “Yeah, right. Like she’d do anything wrong,” teased Roslyn Webb.

10. The following passage suggests that Steve
    a. doesn’t really care that Vicky has broken up with him.
    b. secretly enjoys fighting with Vicky.
    c. is hurt that Vicky has broken up with him but doesn’t want her to know it.
    “I knew this was comin’,” [Steve] said, kicking a can across the street. “You the only one who makes me think about how things were back in the day. And you know what? I’m tired of thinkin’, and I’m tired of fighting with you all the time. Do what you gotta do. I ain’t stoppin’ you,” he mumbled, keeping his eyes hidden from hers. His voice sounded heavy and hoarse. “I don’t need you anyway. I don’t need no one.”
SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Why is Vicky called to the office at Bluford? How does she react to what she is told there?
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2. Why did Vicky break up with Steve Morris? How did Steve react to the breakup?
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3. Why is Danny angry as he gets off his school bus? How does he express his anger?
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4. After Abuelo shows Vicky and Danny his wedding picture, they notice some more old photos. What are these photographs of? How do they make Vicky feel? Why?
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5. What alarming conclusion does Vicky draw about Dad on Saturday morning? How does she arrive at this conclusion?
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, how responsible is Vicky for the bad feelings between Steve Morris and Martin Luna? Is she fully responsible, partly responsible, or not responsible at all? Explain.

2. When Vicky sees other students making fun of Danny, she says nothing because she believes that if she does, Danny will get angry and tell her to stay out of it. Do you agree with Vicky that this is probably how Danny would react? If so, why?

3. With Dad unemployed, the Fallons are going through tough times financially. Although Mom tries to be reassuring, what she says only makes Vicky more worried. In your opinion, should parents let their children know if they are having serious financial problems, or should they try their best to keep it from their children? Explain.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Although Vicky and Teresa have been friends since kindergarten, lately their relationship has cooled. Write about a relationship you had that changed over time. It could be a romantic relationship or a close friendship. What caused it to change? Was it a specific incident or just something that seemed to happen slowly over time?

2. Things have gotten pretty complicated and confusing in Vicky’s life. Pretending you are Vicky, write an entry in your diary. Discuss the various things going on in your life and express how you feel about them. Be especially sure to address what is happening with your family members, with Martin, and with Teresa.

3. Abuelo starts feeling better (and looking younger) when he realizes that his purpose in life now is to help Vicky, Danny, and their mother. Write a paper in which you describe an important goal you have in life. It could be something like finishing school, finding a good job, raising a family, or even achieving some sort of creative goal. In writing your paper, be sure to list the steps you will take toward reaching this goal.
UNIT THREE
Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS

A. Vocabulary in Context

1. In the following excerpt, what does the word *resignation* mean?
   But as Mom got out of the car slowly, Vicky could see the resignation in her eyes. She looked as if she was watching her whole life burn down and was powerless to stop it.
   a. challenge  
b. questioning  
c. pleasure  
d. acceptance of defeat

2. In the following excerpt, what does the word *shambles* mean?
   As the car pulled away, Vicky sat next to her grandfather and looked at the shambles of her life. A stack of her clothing lay in a heap on the ground. In another little pile were some of the boxes she and Danny had unpacked just days ago.
   a. organization  
b. mess  
c. colors  
d. beauty

B. Supporting Details

3. The following words were said by
   a. Danny.  
b. Felix.  
c. Martin.  
d. Teresa.
   “I knew you wouldn’t get it. That’s the only place, you know, where I feel like I’m doin’ something real. School, this house, this place—it ain’t real, and you know it.”

4. The following words were said by
   a. Abuelo.  
b. Martin.  
c. Mom.  
d. Dad.
   “Oh Princess, don’t look at me that way. . . . No matter what happens, remember I love you. I’m so sorry.”

5. The following words were said by
   a. Martin.  
b. Teresa.  
c. Steve.  
d. Vicky.
   “If you were her friends, you’d listen to her and leave her alone. Right now, you’re only making her problems worse. Go home, girl. . . . I got this.”

C. Main Idea

6. The main idea of the following passage is that
   a. Vicky dresses nicely in case she sees Martin.
   b. listening to her parents fight is causing Vicky to feel bad and lose weight.
   c. Vicky’s jeans seem a bit loose.
   Vicky showered and put on her favorite jeans and a snug ribbed tank top just in case she would see Martin. Her jeans, which once hugged her hips perfectly, seemed a bit loose. Had she lost weight? Mom’s scale said Vicky was six pounds lighter than she had been a few weeks ago. She knew she had been eating less. Most days, especially when her parents were fighting, she didn’t have any appetite. Often her stomach didn’t feel right, and she had headaches.
7. The main idea of the passage below is that Nurse Wilkins
   a. feels Vicky’s forehead and helps her off the cot.
   b. wants Vicky to eat.
   c. advises Vicky to talk to someone as a way of relieving stress.
   
   Nurse Wilkins felt [Vicky’s] forehead again and helped her off the cot. “Well, sounds to me like you have too much on your plate, Vicky. And sometimes that can make your stomach hurt. Sometimes it can do serious damage, too,” she added. “Now I want you to make sure you get some food in your system so you don’t get weak. And if you ask me, I think you might be stressed about something. Talk to someone. Your parents. Some close friends. Someone you can trust. Better to get that stuff out so it doesn’t eat you up inside, you hear?”

D. Conclusions

8. The following passage suggests that
   a. Danny’s behavior shows how upset he is with Dad.
   b. Dad taught Danny how to use spray paint.
   c. Danny is angry at Abuelo.
   
   The windows were open, but the room stank of paint. On the floor were torn photos of Dad, including the one Abuelo had just given him, when he and Dad were at the beach together. On the wall above Danny’s bed was a freshly painted image of a time bomb. Its fuse was lit. Drops of extra paint spilled like tears down the wall. Vicky’s jaw dropped.
   “Danny!” Mom gasped.
   Danny slumped on his bed.
   “Why did he leave us, Mom?” he said as tears rolled down his cheeks. “Why did he go?”

9. The following passage suggests that Vicky’s mom
   a. wishes she had never met her husband.
   b. knows the bank’s president.
   c. now wishes she had paid more attention to the family’s bills.
   
   “What’s going to happen, Mom?” Vicky asked. “Are we gonna lose our house?” Vicky couldn’t hold back the questions that had been haunting her since she read Dad’s letter.
   “I don’t know,” she said, rubbing her temples. “Your father always took care of this. I never paid any attention to it,” she admitted. A spark of anger flashed on her face. “But I have a friend at the bank. Maybe she can help us. That’s why I have to go.”

10. You can conclude from the following excerpt that
    a. Vicky will probably get back with Steve.
    b. Martin now considers Steve a friend.
    c. Martin’s feelings for Vicky are deep.
    
    “Listen,” [Martin] insisted. “You stood with me when I needed you most. No one’s ever done that for me. I’ll stand with you, too. You hear me?” he said, touching her face. “Even if you wanted to get back with Steve, you’re still going to have me as a friend. You understand?”
SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Abuelo tells Vicky and Danny that he has a new purpose in life. What is it?

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2. What does Vicky see on a wall at the park? Why does what she sees disturb her?

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3. How does Mr. Fallon “cross the line”? How does Vicky react to his behavior?

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5. How do the Fallons find a place to live after they are evicted from their house? Who helps them with the move?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Vicky has a dream that clearly reflects what’s on her mind. How would you interpret Vicky’s dream? In general, what is your opinion of the value of dreams?

2. How does Mr. Fallon’s secretive behavior hurt his family? How could he have better handled the situation?

3. When Vicky asks Danny why he tagged the wall, he says that doing so makes him feel real, that school and family life aren’t “real.” What does he mean? Why do you think he feels this way? Do you agree with him? Explain.

4. Although being evicted is a nightmare for Vicky and her family, the book ends on a note of optimism. What contributes to this hopeful tone?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Sometimes when people are feeling angry or hurt, they find it useful to write a letter to the person who has disappointed them. In that letter, they can pour out all their feelings and ask the questions they wish could be answered. Afterwards, they tear up or burn the letter; just writing about their feelings has made them feel better. Pretend you are either Vicky or Danny. Write a letter to Mr. Fallon, saying everything you think each character might have felt in her or his heart.

2. In order to help Vicky, Teresa tells Martin about the Fallons’ money problems. As a result, Martin is able to lend Vicky emotional support when her family is evicted. Write about a time when a friend has gotten actively involved and helped you with a specific situation. Be sure to describe what your problem was, how your friends’ actions created a change, and how you responded to the assistance your friend provided. Alternatively, you may write about a time when you actively did something to change a friend’s situation.

3. When Danny is feeling especially angry and frustrated, he paints a time bomb that expresses his explosive feelings. Write about something that you do that helps you cope with stressful or upsetting situations. Be sure to provide an example of a time when you used your strategy to deal with a specific situation. How did you feel at first? How did you feel afterwards?
FINAL ACTIVITIES

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS

A. Central Ideas

1. A central idea in Breaking Point is that
   a. school is a waste of time when your family is having money problems.
   b. parents should keep their children from learning about their money problems.
   c. it is better to share your problems with someone close to you than to keep them bottled up inside.
   d. today’s teenagers are more interested in throwing expensive parties than in helping out their friends.

2. One of the lessons we can learn from Michael Fallon’s behavior is that
   a. betting on sports is not a good way to earn money.
   b. lack of communication between husband and wife can have disastrous consequences.
   c. personal frustration can lead some people to lash out at their loved ones.
   d. all of the above.

B. Supporting Details

3. When Teresa accuses Vicky of being jealous of her quinceañera, Vicky responds by
   a. calmly explaining to Teresa that Dad is out of work and she can’t afford to buy an expensive dress for the party.
   b. saying she wouldn’t attend the quinceañera if Teresa paid her to and throwing a bill at her feet.
   c. telling Teresa that spending a lot of money on one party is a total waste.
   d. admitting her jealousy.

4. Vicky breaks up with Steve Morris after
   a. she sees him make fun of a smaller kid and realizes that Steve would probably make fun of her own younger brother.
   b. she sees him flirting with Teresa Ortiz and several other girls.
   c. Steve makes fun of her younger brother Danny’s acne.
   d. Steve gets into a fist fight with Martin Luna.

5. Mr. Fallon is obsessed with watching sports on TV because
   a. he used to play football for Penn State.
   b. it’s his way of getting his mind off his problems.
   c. he is betting on sporting events in hopes of paying off debts.
   d. he is thinking of becoming a professional sports photographer.

6. Danny’s graffiti “tag” is a picture of a
   a. hammer.
   b. blowtorch.
   c. time bomb.
   d. smiley face.

7. Toward the end of the story, Teresa helps Vicky by
   a. lending her the money for a new dress.
   b. telling Martin about Vicky’s family problems.
   c. finding an apartment for the Fallons.
   d. telling Mr. Mitchell why Vicky hasn’t been paying attention in class.
C. Conclusions

8. When Vicky sees Danny in the pickup truck with Mario and Felix, we can conclude that she believes
   a. having friends like Mario and Felix will help Danny deal with the pain of being evicted.
   b. Felix will soon teach Danny how to drive the truck.
   c. Felix and Mario will make fun of Danny for being evicted.
   d. Mario and Felix will steal some of Danny’s belongings.

9. By the end of the story, we can conclude that
   a. Teresa and Martin will continue to dislike each other.
   b. Vicky will buy an expensive dress and attend Teresa’s quinceañera.
   c. Mom will demand that Vicky stop seeing Martin.
   d. Teresa and Martin may start to get along better.

10. By the end of the story, we can conclude that
    a. Dad will soon return to his family.
    b. Mom will manage to move her family back into their old house.
    c. Danny will forgive Dad for leaving the family.
    d. Vicky will start to pay better attention in class.
GUIDED PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENT

Write a paragraph in which you provide supporting evidence to back up the following point:

**Point:** In *Breaking Point*, Vicky fails to tell others what’s on her mind on at least three different occasions.

**How to Proceed:**

Here are steps to take in writing your paper.

1. Select three occasions on which Vicky fails to share what’s really bothering her. Write what these occasions are here:

   ____________________________ _________________________ _________________________

2. Freewrite for five minutes or so about each occasion when Vicky fails to let others know what’s troubling her—that is, just write down whatever comes into your head. Who was involved? Why did Vicky keep her feelings to herself? What might have happened if she had told someone else about her problems? Don’t worry at all about spelling, punctuation, or grammar at this early stage.

3. Next, look over your freewriting and go through the book to get more information about how Vicky failed to let others know what was bothering her. Add more details.

4. Now write a rough draft of your paragraph. The box below shows you how you can organize your paragraph.

   **Vicky’s Silence**

   In *Breaking Point*, Vicky fails to let others know what’s bothering her on three different occasions. The first time she fails to let someone else know what’s bothering her is _____________________________. *(Add supporting details.)*

   A second instance of Vicky’s failure to communicate her problems is _________________________. *(Add supporting details.)*

   A final instance in which Vicky fails to talk about her struggles is _________________________. *(Add supporting details.)*

   **Hint:** Be sure to use **transitions** to help organize your paragraph. Transitions include such words as *first, second, and final*, as shown above. Transitions are word signals that make clear to the reader each new part of your paragraph.

5. Set the paragraph aside for a while so you can take a fresh look at it later. See if you have provided enough supporting details to back up your point that Vicky misses three opportunities to share the burden of her problems with others. See if you can add more details, or even better details. Rewrite the paper, trying to make your support as convincing as possible.

6. Now it’s very important to **read your paper aloud**. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all of your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.
GUIDED ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Given below are the introductory and concluding paragraphs for an essay, along with the topic sentence for the three supporting paragraphs. The final sentence of the introductory paragraph (underlined below) is the thesis, or central point, of the essay.

**Introductory Paragraph**

Thinking about a book’s title can be part of understanding the story. The meaning of a title can change during the story, initially describing one incident but later developing into a central theme. For example, in *Breaking Point*, Vicky describes ocean waves reaching their breaking point during a family trip to the beach. But by the end of the story, it is clear that the term “breaking point” can be used to describe what is happening to some key characters. In this book, three characters who reach their “breaking point” are Michael Fallon, Danny Fallon, and Vicky Fallon.

**Supporting Paragraph 1**

**Topic Sentence**: Vicky’s father, Michael Fallon, is one character who reaches his “breaking point.” *(Add supporting details.)*

**Supporting Paragraph 2**

**Topic Sentence**: Like his father, Danny Fallon also reaches his “breaking point.” *(Add supporting details.)*

**Supporting Paragraph 3**

**Topic Sentence**: Finally, the character of Vicky Fallon reaches her “breaking point,” like her father and her brother. *(Add supporting details.)*

**Concluding Paragraph**

It is clear that the term “breaking point” applies to Michael, Danny, and Vicky Fallon. Throughout the story, the stresses they face put more and more pressure on them. Each of the characters reacts to this stress in different ways, and each comes to the limits of what he or she can endure. Through these three characters, the authors develop additional levels of meaning for the title *Breaking Point*.

**Assignment**: Write the three supporting paragraphs needed to complete the essay.

**How to Proceed:**

1. Ask yourself questions about Michael Fallon and write down detailed answers. What pressures does he face? How does he respond to these pressures? How does his behavior change as he reaches his “breaking point?” Write down examples of the pressures he faces and how he reacts to these pressures—examples you could use if you were explaining his story to a person who had not read the book.

   Then ask yourself similar questions about Danny and Vicky Fallon and write out detailed answers.

2. Now write a rough draft of each paragraph. Start each paragraph with one of the topic sentences given above. Remember, you want to have clear examples from the story of how each of the three characters approaches his or her breaking point.

3. Set the paragraphs aside for a while so you can take a fresh look at them later. See if you can add more details, or even better details, to back up your point that each of the three characters approaches his or her breaking point. Now write the entire essay, making sure your support is as convincing as possible.

4. Finally, it’s very important to *read your paper aloud*. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.
A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING

Remember that the two basic goals in writing are to make a point and to support that point. Here are steps to follow while working on your paper:

Step 1: Think about your topic by writing about it in one of three ways.
- Freewrite for ten minutes. Write whatever comes into your head about your subject. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar. Just get down on paper all the information that occurs to you.
- Make up a list of ideas and details that could go into your paper. Pile these items up, one after another, like a shopping list, without worrying about putting them in any special order.
- Write down a series of questions and answers about your topic. Your questions can start with words like what, why, how, when, and where.

Step 2: Plan your paper with an informal outline.
- First of all, decide on and write out the point of your paper.
- Then list the supporting reasons, examples, or other details that will back up your point. Try to have two or three items of support.

Step 3: Use transitions.
Use your outline as a guide while writing the early drafts of your paper. Use transitions to introduce each of the separate supporting items (reasons, examples, or other details) you present to back up the point of your paper. Transitions include such words as First of all, Secondly, Another reason or Another example, and Finally.

Step 4: Always read your paper aloud.
Chances are you’ll find grammar or punctuation mistakes at those places where the paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed.

ADDITIONAL PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paragraph that supports the following point:
   Point: I identify with the Breaking Point character of [insert name] __________ for three reasons.
   Be sure to support your point effectively by describing each reason in detail. Use transitions to introduce each reason you give. For example, you might write: “The first reason I identify with __________ is . . . . The second reason I identify with __________ is . . . . The final reason I identify with __________ is . . . .”

2. Nurse Wilkins gives Vicky good advice when she tells her to talk to someone about her problems. Think of a time when someone gave you advice. Be sure to address the following questions: What was the advice you received? What were your resulting actions? Why did you act as you did, and what was the outcome? Looking back, do you think you made the right choice in following or not following the advice? You might begin with a topic sentence such as: “I followed/ignored the advice of others when I __________ .” Alternatively, write a paper about a time when you gave someone advice. Did he or she follow your advice? Looking back on the situation, do you think your advice was good?

3. Although Vicky Fallon goes out with Steve Morris for a while, Vicky later realizes that he can be mean to others. Write a paragraph about someone you liked at first but developed a poor opinion of later on. Provide details that show exactly why your opinion of this person changed. Begin your paragraph this way:
   Point: Someone I liked at first but, for several reasons, later came to dislike is __________.
   Alternatively, write a paragraph about a person you did not like when you first met him or her but later learned to like.
ADDITIONAL ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

1. Vicky and her family love Abuelo and value his role in the family. Still, having him live with them is sometimes difficult. Write an essay in which you identify three possible effects of having an elderly grandparent live with the family. Those effects could be all positive, all negative, or some of each. Your thesis sentence might, for example, look like the following:

   **Thesis:** Having an elderly grandparent move in could have a variety of [choose one: positive / negative / positive and negative] effects. These effects include __________, __________, and __________.

   Each of your three supporting paragraphs should discuss, in detail, a positive or negative effect suggested by your thesis. (Note: If you deal with positive and negative effects, be sure to include a strong transition when moving from one to the other.) Your concluding paragraph should sum up the three effects you’ve discussed in your essay. It should also provide a concluding thought about the advantages and/or disadvantages of having a grandparent live with the family.

2. In *Breaking Point*, Vicky faces pressure due to her family’s money problems, pressure from her best friend Teresa, and pressure from Martin and Steve. Write an essay in which you identify three kinds of pressure on young people today. Your thesis statement might look like this:

   **Thesis:** Teenagers today often come under pressure from __________, __________, and __________.

   Each of your three supporting paragraphs should discuss, in detail, each of the types of pressure you presented in your thesis. Your concluding paragraph should sum up the three pressures you’ve discussed in your essay and should also provide a concluding thought about the effects of these pressures on teens.
CREATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Scripted conversation.** Like Vicky and Teresa, sometimes even the best of friends can have a hard time revealing what is really bothering them, especially if the problem is serious. Write the script for a conversation between two friends in which one of the friends finally admits what’s been on his or her mind. The following is the format for writing a script:

   Jason: Kevin, I want to talk to you about something.
   Kevin: Okay. What’s up?

Try to make the conversation as realistic as possible. What kinds of things would they say to each other? How would they go about dealing with the problem? Try to express, through the characters’ words, the kinds of emotions they are feeling.

Begin your script with a narrator who explains who the characters are, what they are doing, and where they are when the conversation takes place.

Your script might then be performed in class, with one student as the narrator, another as one young person, and another as the other young person.

2. **Scene illustration.** Think of your favorite scene from the book. Write a paragraph explaining why this was your favorite scene. In addition, draw a picture of how you imagine that scene would look. Try to include as much detail as possible about all the characters involved and the surrounding scenery.

3. **Postcard Activity.** Pretending you are a character in *Breaking Point*, write a postcard to another character from the book. In the postcard, you should ask that character a question about his or her actions or behavior. Then pass your postcard to another student in class, who will write a reply to your postcard in the voice of that other character.

4. **Character diagram.** On a separate sheet of paper, draw five boxes. Label each box with the name of one of the main characters in the book: Vicky, Teresa, Martin, and two other characters of your choice. In each box, do the following:

   a. Write two facts that you’ve learned about that person. Example: He is tall. She is fifteen.
   b. Write two descriptive words that seem right for that person. Example: Generous and comical.
   c. Identify one or two key quotes from the story that help illustrate each person’s personality.

   If you’d like, you may also draw a picture of each of the characters.

5. **Epilog.** An epilog is a short final chapter of a story that discusses what happens after the main action of the story is finished. Write an epilog for *Breaking Point* discussing what you would like to see happen to the main characters after the story ends.

   For instance, you might consider one or more of the following questions: Does Vicky continue to feel overly stressed? Does Danny become more or less angry? Will Dad ever return to his family? Does Teresa change her opinion of Martin? Does Vicky attend Teresa’s quinceañera?
BREAKING POINT

UNIT ONE

Comprehension Skill Questions

1. a  6. c  
2. b  7. b  
3. b  8. a  
4. d  9. b  
5. c  10. a  

Short Answer Questions

1. Teresa accuses Vicky of forgetting that today is the fitting for her quinceañera. Rather than thinking about the fitting, Vicky is thinking about two things she must do: attend Martin’s hearing and rush home to help her grandfather move in with her family.

2. Superintendent Gates doesn’t expel Martin because Martin makes a moving speech in which he announces his intention to live the future his younger brother Huero will never have.

3. Mr. Fallon spends most of his time at home watching sports on TV. Mrs. Fallon criticizes him for this because she thinks he should be making more of an effort to find a job.

4. Steve Morris’s parents divorced when Steve was in the fifth grade. As a result, Steve’s dad stopped coming to Steve’s football games, and other students teased Steve because of this. Steve reacted by lashing out at his tormentors. Ultimately, he was expelled from private school. When he got older, he became a bully himself.

5. Vicky responds by announcing that she wouldn’t go to the quinceañera if Teresa paid her to go and throwing the bill for her dress at Teresa’s feet.

Discussion Questions

1. Answers will vary. Some students will agree with Teresa that the quinceañera is an important tradition; others, like Vicky, may question the expense involved.

2. It’s a particularly difficult time for Vicky to give up her bedroom for several reasons. One is because she is a teenage girl who is experiencing many things for the first time, including a budding romance with Martin. As a result, she might naturally be expected to want more privacy. Secondly, her parents are fighting, and now she has no place at home to get away from their arguments. Finally, her father has become obsessed by watching sports on TV and even watches it while Vicky is sleeping on the living room couch—a frustrating situation.

3. Teresa thinks Steve Morris is quite a catch because he’s a star athlete with a great body. She tells Vicky that she is crazy for no longer wanting to be with him. Vicky, on the other hand, is turned off by Steve’s meanness—in particular his bullying of those who are smaller and weaker than he. Answers will vary as to the second part of the question.
BREAKING POINT

UNIT TWO

Comprehension Skill Questions

1. a 6. b
2. d 7. c
3. c 8. a
4. d 9. b
5. a 10. c

Short Answer Questions

1. Vicky is called to the office because her mother wants her to come straight home to stay with her grandfather before she gets home from work. Vicky is disappointed and angry because she had planned to go out with Martin after school.

2. Vicky broke up with Steve because she saw him bullying kids who were smaller and weaker than he and suspected he would do the same to her younger brother Danny. Steve reacted to the breakup by saying, “I don’t need you anyway. I don’t need no one.”

3. Danny is angry because some of the boys on the bus are teasing him about his acne. He expresses his anger by shouting at them to shut up.

4. The other photos are of a pleasant day that the Fallons spent at the beach. Vicky feels sad when she looks at these photos because her parents no longer smile as they had in the photos.

5. Vicky concludes that Dad has taken some family belongings to sell to pay off debts. She arrives at this conclusion after she hears him pleading with a bill collector on the phone, sees him taking packages out of the house, and later realizes that her necklace and Danny’s Game Box are missing.

Discussion Questions

1. Answers will vary.

2. Answers will vary. Most students will probably feel that Danny would indeed get angry with Vicky if she got involved in his problems. They may suggest that Danny doesn’t want Vicky to stick up for him because he is at the age where he wants to become more independent and not feel like a child. But some students might argue that Vicky should talk to her brother nonetheless as part of her older-sister responsibility.

3. Answers will vary.
BREAKING POINT

UNIT THREE

Comprehension Skill Questions

1. d 6. b
2. b 7. c
3. a 8. a
4. d 9. c
5. b 10. c

Answers to Short Answer Questions

1. Abuelo tells Vicky that his purpose is to help Vicky, Danny, and their mother—that that’s going to be his job from now on.

2. Vicky sees a time bomb that she realizes Danny has spray painted on the wall. She is disturbed by this because defacing public property with graffiti is against the law.

3. Mr. Fallon “crosses the line” by yanking the phone from Abuelo’s hand, thereby knocking him off balance and to the floor. Then he shoulders Danny aside, sending him slamming against the wall, tears out the phone’s base, and seems about to hit Danny with it. When Vicky comes between the two, Mr. Fallon throws the phone against the wall. Although Mr. Fallon quickly apologizes, Vicky is horrified by his violent behavior.

4. Nurse Wilkins advises Vicky to talk to someone about the stress she is under. “Better to get that stuff out so it doesn’t eat you up inside, you hear?” she says. A short while later, Vicky confides in Teresa.

5. Vicky remembers that there is an opening at Hillside Manor, Abuelo offers to pay for the security deposit with his savings, and Mrs. Fallon goes to arrange matters, using Mrs. Luna as a reference. Martin, as well as Danny’s friends Mario and Felix, help the family move their belongings to the new place.

Discussion Questions

1. Students should interpret Vicky’s dream as a reflection of what’s happening with her family. In the dream, Vicky’s dad and brother Danny are washed out to sea. In reality, Mr. Fallon is being overwhelmed by debt while Danny is being overcome by anger, symbolized by the time bomb he paints on the park wall and his bedroom wall. Answers will vary as to the second part of the question.

2. Answers will vary; however, students may suggest that Mr. Fallon’s secretive behavior causes his family to lose trust in him. He could have handled the situation better by owning up to his gambling losses much earlier and warning the family ahead of time about the foreclosure, thus giving them time to prepare for it.

3. Answers will vary. Certainly Danny’s artwork gives him (temporarily at least) a feeling of power that he doesn’t have at home (where money problems are overwhelming the family) or at school (where he is being bullied).

4. Answers will vary. Students should infer that Vicky is relieved that her family has found a place to live and that she feels optimistic about the growing closeness between herself and Martin and about Danny’s supportive friends. In addition, they may conclude that Vicky is probably relieved that Martin and her best friend Teresa seem to have overcome the barrier between them, as revealed by Martin’s appreciative comment that Teresa really has Vicky’s back.
BREAKING POINT

FINAL ACTIVITIES

Comprehension Skill Questions

1. c 6. c
2. d 7. b
3. b 8. a
4. a 9. d
5. c 10. d