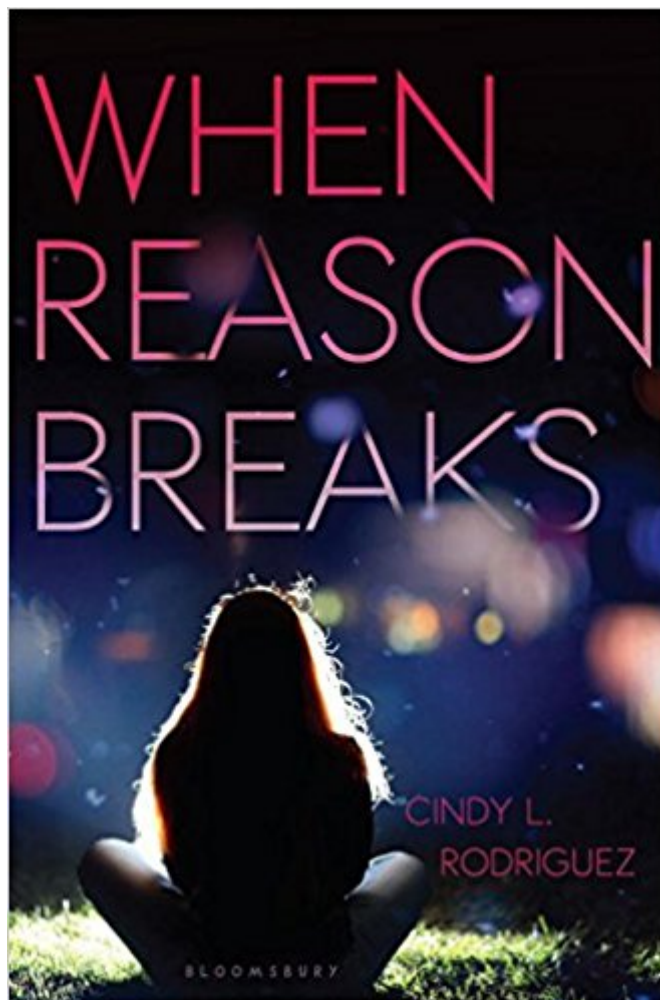


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# When Reason Breaks



## Synopsis

*13 Reasons Why* meets the poetry of Emily Dickinson in this gripping debut novel perfect for fans of Sara Zarr or Jennifer Brown. 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 their personal demons to ever be happy. In an emotionally taut novel with a richly diverse cast of characters, readers will relish in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and be completely swept up in the turmoil of two girls grappling with demons beyond their control.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up — This realistic novel invites readers into the lives of two high schoolers, Elizabeth Davis and Emily Delgado, as they struggle with unrelated painful events, reacting in ways as different as their personalities. Artistic Elizabeth changes her appearance to look goth, skips class, fights with her mother, and sometimes experiences uncontrollable rage. Emily tends toward a preppy, academic style, but bouts of anxiety impact her studies and relationships. The two young women are brought together in their English class, where teacher Mrs. Davis engages students with authentic care and a curricular focus on Emily Dickinson. Deep analysis of the poet's life and writings results in personal insights for the protagonists. The use of foreshadowing at the beginning

of the book alerts to future trauma without spoiling the plot, and a reference to the board game Clue provides a subtle tool for making meaning of the quick shifts in narrative perspective and form. Latino culture, and bicultural and gay family relationships are woven easily into the story; popular culture references and some romance will also resonate with adolescents. Overall, this text provides important insights into the various stressors that can lead to depression and suicide, as well as the type of support required to move toward potential healing. —Ruth Quiroa, National Louis University, IL

"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* "A sharply drawn, emotionally resonant tale." —Kirkus Reviews "Rodriguez cleverly represents Emily Dickinson's dark side and her reclusive tendencies through the two distinct personalities of her teenage heroines . . . gripping." —Publishers Weekly "Dickinson fans will love the focus on her life and poetry." —Booklist

In *When Reason Breaks*, we meet Emily Delgado and Elizabeth Davis: two teenaged Latinas dealing with depression in different ways. While Emily withdraws from her friends and activities, Elizabeth wears her anger on her sleeve and is a well-known troubled kid around school after her dad left last year. They enter Ms. Diaz's English class, where they read the poetry of Emily Dickinson and grapple with boyfriends, non-boyfriends, and alleged-best-friends. As the year progresses, both girls struggle in different ways, and ultimately, one of them attempts suicide. But which one? You'll have to read to find out. I originally picked up this book for the diverse cast and the depression rep, and I wasn't disappointed. I was so happy to see two Latina girls dealing with depression; we see so many white kids with mental health problems, but the reality is that things like depression are often more devastating in communities of color, in part because it's not talked about. The nuanced portrayal of depression was exactly what I'd been looking for. I think too often we think of depression as being obvious like Elizabeth's, and it was nice to have her contrasted with Emily, who's clearly very withdrawn, very isolated, despite seemingly having everything together. So often when it comes to teenage depression, it manifests in these ways: Elizabeth's rage at the world as well as Emily's quiet withdrawal

from life. But it's the withdrawal that's less noticeable. There's also somewhat of a mystery element, in that we don't know which girl attempts suicide. The English teacher, Ms. Diaz, is a fantastic character as well. She reminds me of some of my favorite high school English teachers, in that she really wants to engage with the kids and she cares about them just as much as she cares about literature. She tries so hard to do the right thing for these girls, particularly Elizabeth, but, like most people, she's imperfect. I think it's important to show positive adult role models who make themselves available to talk to their students, as well as showing the ways that sometimes it's not enough. I also really enjoyed the discussion of Emily Dickinson more than I thought I would; I think this would be really accessible to kids who maybe aren't into classic literature (yet!) in that Ms. Diaz does a great job explaining poetry to her kids. Honestly, I'm just a sucker for YA that also shows a window into everyday life of teenagers because life is never just drama and parties, am I right? I don't want to spoil the story for anyone, but the way the book ends is exactly what I wanted. So often in books about teens with mental illness, the story follows the recovery arc and then magically the character is "cured" in some way. As I've said many times before, this is so often not the case in real life, and it's harmful to portray depression in particular as something that just goes away. In *When Reason Breaks*, the book ends with both girls attempting to move forward with life, while recognizing that it's not always going to be easy. They both make some necessary changes toward becoming better, whether it's getting professional help and taking medication or reaching out to close friends and family. The great thing about this book is that, while there are some really dark moments, it ultimately ends on, if not a positive note, than a hopeful one but without being unrealistic. Will Elizabeth lash out again at someone in the future? Probably. Will Emily struggle with keeping secrets from her father? Absolutely. But they'll work through it. And that's well, that's life. My only complaint with this book is that I had a little bit of trouble connecting to the voice. Because it's written in third person, the reader is distanced from what's going on. While this can be useful in highly emotional material that might otherwise be overwhelming, I felt in this case it was a little underwhelming. Despite that drawback, it was still an enjoyable read and even more important one that I think could really do some good.

Young Adult novel Appropriate for all teens, parents, teachers, and caregivers. This book should be on classroom shelves in high schools. A well-written and well-researched novel, *When Reason Breaks* tells the tale of two teens dealing with common teen problems, but also the true pains of depression. Depression can spiral downward quickly and lead to thoughts of suicide. Rodriguez leaves it up to the reader to decide exactly what type of depression the girls are battling. It could be hereditary or it could be situation induced. She does not give a diagnosis. Instead, this story, told in the third person, shows us the signs. You will recognize yourself in moments. You will recognize friends. You will also see friends reaching out to one another, trying to help. As an adult reading this novel it was a reminder to pay attention to one another. We should never suffer in silence. Teen readers will get the same message. They will see how many branches of help there are in the support system of friends, family, and school. Most importantly, they will see survival. As a reader, what was most powerful to me was that the book did not end with 'an event.' Rodriguez takes all the way through the stories to the aftermath and recovery, and this included friends close to the girls. Yes, depression is real - don't let anyone tell you otherwise - but there is also hope - which perches in the soul (E.D.) Highly recommend. (Read it in a day because I couldn't put it down!)

This was a fantastic novel. The connections to Emily Dickinson's life made this novel even more compelling and unique. I would truly recommend reading this moving book by Rodriguez.

It took this beautiful book for me to finally gain an appreciation of Emily Dickinson. There are so many layers to the story. The teens, Emily and Elizabeth, are well-developed and their struggles are real. The genius of the story is in how Rodriguez threads the poetry and biography of Emily Dickinson throughout, bringing life to her work and her own struggles. Well-crafted and deeply moving, this one has stayed with me.

Wonderful!

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