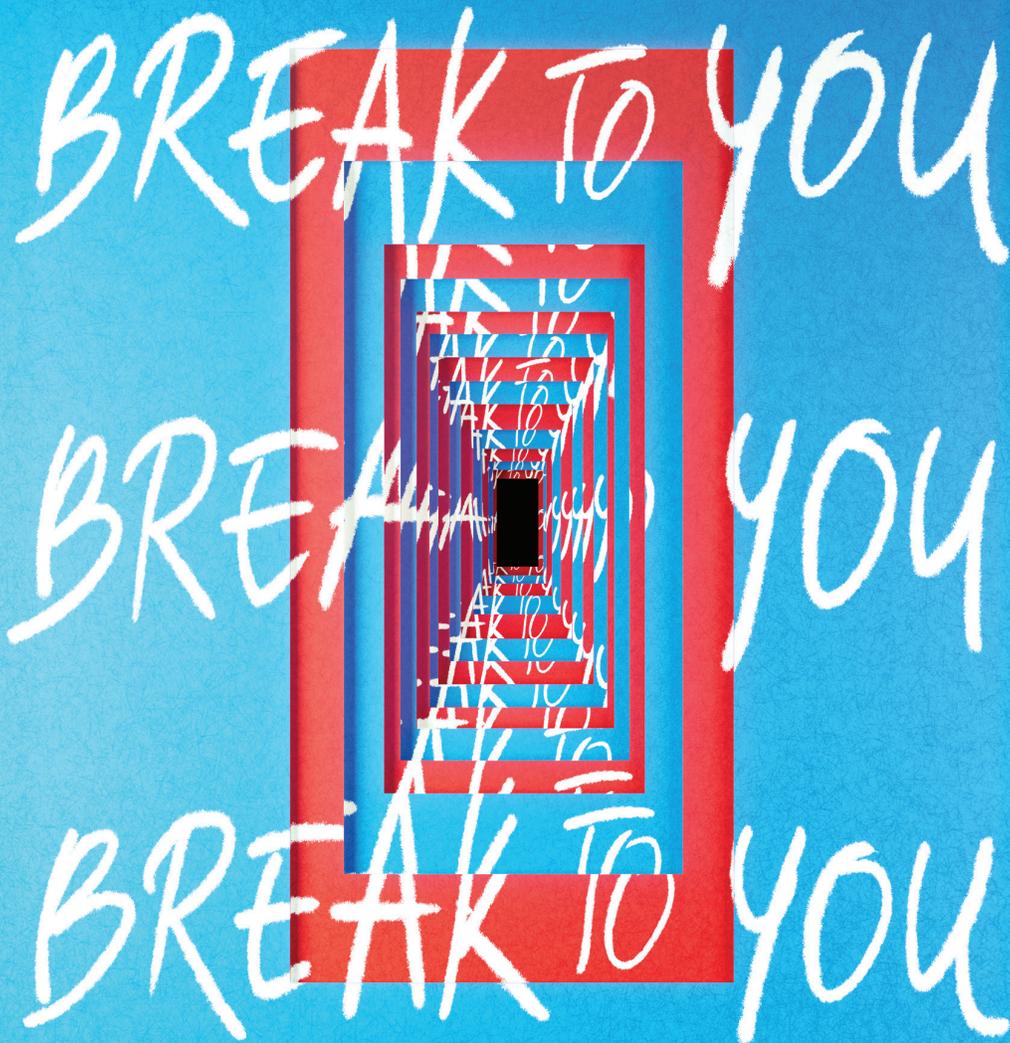


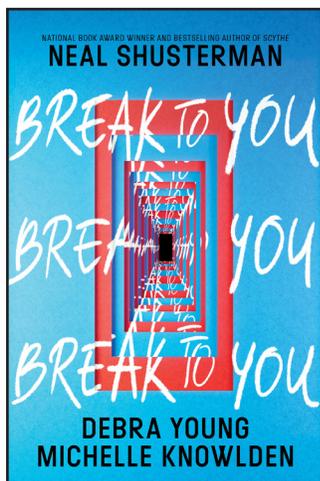
Educator's Guide

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF SCYTHE

NEAL SHUSTERMAN



DEBRA YOUNG
MICHELLE KNOWLDEN



ABOUT THE BOOK

From bestselling author Neal Shusterman and coauthors Debra Young and Michelle Knowlden comes a story of how love can bloom in the most unlikely circumstances and against all odds. Sentenced to seven months at Compass juvenile detention center, Adriana knows she can't get through her sentence without her beloved journal, the leather-bound book into which she pours her innermost thoughts and feelings. Terrified after she leaves the journal in the Compass library, she soon discovers it has been shelved in the stacks, and that Jon, a male inmate from the other side of the gender-separated facility, has written to her in it. At first Adriana is enraged at Jon, and then the two begin to correspond, and over time they fall in love. They decide to risk everything to meet, enlisting other detainees to help them execute their plan. But to meet in person is the ultimate risk—one that just may cost each of them their freedom, and maybe even their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Neal Shusterman is the *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author of more than fifty books, including *Challenger Deep*, which won the National Book Award; *Scythe*, a Michael L. Printz Honor Book; *Dry*, which he cowrote with his son Jarrod Shusterman; *Unwind*, which won more than thirty domestic and international awards; *Bruiser*, which was on a dozen state lists; *The Schwa Was Here*, winner of the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award; and *Game Changer*, which debuted as an indie top-five best seller. He is the winner of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for the body of his work. You can visit him online at storyman.com.

Debra Young wrote fantasy, science fiction, and horror. She published stories in *The Horror Zine*, *Dark Fire Fiction*, *Swords and Sorcery* magazine, and *Black Fox Literary Magazine* and was the author of *Grave Shadows*, a story anthology. Sadly, she passed away due to complications from lupus in 2024.

Once a space shuttle engineer and extreme hiker, Michelle Knowlden now writes full-time. The Shamus Award nominee's stories have appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Amazing Stories*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and Neal Shusterman's *UnBound* and *Gleanings* anthologies. Her books include the Abishag Mysteries quartet, the Deluded Detective series, the Faith Interrupted Cozy Mysteries, *Her Last Mission*, and the 1930s novella *The Admiral of Signal Hill*. Under the name Michelle Dutton, she wrote the fantasy series Ravenscar Shifters and the historical romance *Lillian in the Doorway*. She splits her time between riverboats and the Arizona highlands with family, friends, and an Icelandic sponge named Marino.

Guide created by Colleen Carroll, literacy educator, content creator, and author of the How Artists See series (Abbeville Kids).
Learn more about Colleen at www.colleencarroll.us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Compass from Adriana's point-of-view. Adriana feels violated that the intake clerk is touching her belongings, especially her journal. Adriana thinks: "Pretend it doesn't matter. They can't hurt you if they think you don't care" (p. 2). How is this thought a defense mechanism? Do you agree with her? Adriana is skilled at building walls around herself to protect her from dealing with painful emotions. On page 178, she tells her family, "I'm fine . . . Don't feel like you're obligated to visit all the time." Discuss other situations in the story where Adriana's defensiveness plays out. How and when do these defenses begin to crumble after she begins her correspondence with Jon? Why are defense mechanisms a matter of life and death to some of the inmates at Compass?
2. Young people of different races reside at Compass. At Adriana's first meal with fellow inmates, she notices some of the other girls at her cafeteria table: "Then the Prom Princess approaches with a few members of her court, and they join Pip, Jolene, and Adriana at their table. The girl gives Adriana a warm smile. She's Latina, but there's a hint of something else there too. Indian? Filipina? Adriana wonders why she's programmed to care." (p. 20). What does Adriana mean by "programmed?" On page 28, you learn that "The faces around her range from vampiric pale to pure cacao, with every shade in between. More brown faces than white— clearly this place isn't a cross section of America, but more a cross section of who America kicks to the curb." Discuss the preponderance of Black and Brown people in youth detention facilities. How is Adriana's racial "ambiguity" a "double-edged sword" (p. 28)?
3. Discuss how Adriana and Jon's relationship develops as they correspond through Adriana's journal. Through their writings, Adriana and Jon get to know each other without physically meeting. On page 153, Jon realizes there are "things he knows about her without actually knowing her too. Like the ambivalence she feels about her family. Like the way she secretly dissects the relationships of the people around her. Like the way she manages to trust him in spite of all the times she's been burned by trust." What are some things that Adriana knows about Jon? Discuss the importance of trust in their relationship.
4. Inmates at Compass learn about character-building in group therapy sessions and practice character-building with chores, such as the Teleportation Team job. What is character? How does a person build character? Many of the inmates have poor self-images. How are self-image and character related? After Bianca asks Adriana, "Who are you away from this place," Adriana wonders, "Who am I? Or who was I? Because Compass really does feel like a bookmark between before and after" (p. 73). How does her sense of feeling "not enough" change over the course of the story, and why?
5. On page 51, Alvarado lectures Adriana about choices: "Whether you know it or not, you have a million to choose from, so why do you gravitate toward the ones that don't serve you?" Choices are a recurring subject in *Break to You*. In Jon's first journal entry, he writes, "It's like Jung says: We are what we choose to become" (p. 59). Do you agree with the philosopher Carl Jung, that you choose what you want to be? What outside forces or circumstances affected the choices that Adriana and Jon made that got them arrested and sent to Compass? On page 125 Jon and his podmates are discussing fate, to which Jon replies: "No such thing. We all got to answer to the laws of thermodynamics. It's all cause and effect. Maybe you don't make

the cause, but sometimes you're stuck smack in the middle of the effect." Discuss what Jon means by these statements. How can being "stuck smack in the middle of the effect" influence the choices you can make?

6. Both Adriana and Jon, as well as many of the other detainees at Compass, have experienced a traumatic loss in their lives. Reread chapter 21, "A Brief History of Jon." How was the trauma of losing his mother, and the resulting grief, a key factor in how he ended up being convicted of second-degree murder? When Jon learns that Silas (Meerkat) lost his mother, he thinks of his own mom: "who sometimes feels so far away in his memory, and other times it's like she's right in the next room, so close he can smell her cooking." Why does learning about Silas's loss spark empathy in Jon?
7. What is betrayal? On page 209, Jon refuses to use his journal entries to prove that he wasn't involved with the attack on Silas, yet he agrees to betray his own sense of right and wrong to frame Knox. Discuss both of these decisions. How are they alike? How are they different? As Jon is recovering in the hospital, he remembers how Raz betrayed him, and the memory "makes everything inside him hurt anew" (p. 384). Why is this betrayal so emotionally painful for Jon? Imagine such a betrayal by a close friend. How do you think you would feel?
8. Throughout the story, the words justice, revenge, and retribution appear more than once. Describe how Jon reveals his inner sense of justice. In chapter 35, "Kant's Justice," Alvarado reveals to Jon his plan to frame him and keep him incarcerated indefinitely. John realizes, "Despite his job at Compass, here is a man who ascribes to Kant's point of view, not Jung's. Rehabilitation and restoration are meaningless. The only accepted response to a crime is retribution. Punishment in equal measure to the offense." How is Alvarado's act a betrayal of his oath as a therapist and to the overall concept of justice? Discuss/debate both sides of the argument about rehabilitation vs. retribution.
9. By writing in the journal, Adriana and Jon are able to reveal truths to each other that might be difficult or impossible to say face-to-face. After Jon shares the truth of why he is in Compass, he regrets it, fearing that it will drive her away: "Yeah, she asked for the truth, but she didn't ask to be beaten over the head with it. Hitting someone like that, truth or not, is just as wrong. Wrong as hitting them for real" (p. 243). Do you agree with Jon? Later on this same page, you read that "But once he started, it all flowed out of him. There was no way to stop that river of pain." How is telling the truth cleansing? How does Adriana's understanding and loving response to Jon's confession strengthen their relationship?
10. Despite a physical barrier between them, Adriana and Jon fall in love. Describe the evolution of their relationship. How does their correspondence satisfy their deep need for love and connection? Reread page 289. Being physically separated prevents Adriana and Jon from physical contact or even knowing what the other looks like. Discuss what Jon means by, "Sure, it might be looks that grab your attention, but it's what's inside that holds you. Looks are kind of like a book cover." And: "Perhaps that's why his feelings for Adriana are so strong—because it's all about the pages in between, and not the cover. Who she IS—not what she looks like or sounds like. Not the way she walks or the way she smiles, but the essence of her very being. That kind of love is beyond powerful" (p. 288). How do you think Jon would describe the essence of Adriana's being? And how would Adriana describe Jon's?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

On Poetry.

When Adriana first discovers that someone has written in her journal, she realizes that the writer has read and commented on her poetry. Review and study each of the poems written by Adriana and Jon. Analyze the poems, discussing use of language, themes, tone, mood, and voice. The following website offers a series of questions on how to analyze poetry:

- <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/american-poets-of-the-20th-century/how-to-analyze-poetry>.

Juvs in America.

Research aspects of the criminal justice system that feature in *Break to You*: juvenile detention, the foster-care system, and mental health. After students gather information about a specific aspect or issue of the youth justice system, allow time to have presentations, followed by a question and answer period. The following websites contain information to help students begin their research:

- <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice>
- <https://jlc.org/youth-justice-system-overview>
- <https://www.lawinfo.com/resources/criminal-defense/juvenile-law/issues-and-problems-within-the-juvenile-justice-system.html>

Power of the Pen.

The Compass librarian, Ms. Detrick, offers *Adriana Anne Frank: the Diary of a Young Girl*. Ms. Detrick says, “Anne was in a dire situation, yet she never lost her spirit and she never lost hope” (p. 65). Teach students the history of Anne Frank. Discuss how she used writing to cope with her “dire situation.” Compare Anne’s journal/diary writing to Adriana’s journal entries. Challenge students to journal for 14 consecutive days. After the 14-day period, gather students together to discuss the experience. For information on Anne Frank and her diary, visit:

- <https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/diary/>

Through a Pinhole, Brightly.

On page 249, Adriana compares their journal to a pinhole camera: “a tiny window into each other’s souls that somehow allows them to see everything.” Experiment with pinhole photography by making a camera and using the homemade device to create self-portraiture. The following website offers instructions on how to make a pinhole camera, and examples from a contemporary photographer who uses this simple camera to create self-portraits.

- How to make a pinhole camera: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Pinhole-Camera>
- Examples of pinhole portraiture: <https://casualphotophile.com/2021/02/10/nicole-small-interview/>