

Breaking Faith –
Inquiry-Based Study Guide
by E. Graziani



About the Author

E. Graziani is a teacher/librarian, author, and speaker. She is the author of *War in My Town* (Second Story Press), which was selected by Canadian Children's Book Centre as one of their Best Books for Kids & Teens and a finalist in the Hamilton Arts Council Literature Awards for Best Non-Fiction. Graziani has written the Alice young adult novel series, *Alice of the Rocks*, and *Alice-Angel of Time* and *Jess Under Pressure*, a women's fiction novella (Morning Rain Publishing). *Breaking Faith*, a contemporary fiction novel was published in 2017 by Second Story Press. E. Graziani regularly speaks to young people about her books and the publishing process. She resides in Ontario, Canada with her husband and four daughters.

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Novel Outline

Faith Emily Hansen is a mere toddler when she witnesses a bloody shoot-out between police and a neighborhood gangster. Because Faith's single mother and her bitter grandmother provide a very loose and dysfunctional family structure, Faith never receives guidance or counseling to deal with the trauma. Over time, the anxiety and depression which result from this ordeal take a toll on Faith. With her two half sisters, Constance and Destiny, she grows up in a poor, run-down area where drug use is rampant and where their widowed mother succumbs to addiction, leaving them very much alone. The one person whom Faith can trust and talk with is her older sister, Constance, the daughter of the only man their mother ever married, but she eventually leaves the family to live with her father's affluent family. Told in Faith's tortured voice, this novel traces the path of despair as she loses everything that a growing young woman needs to survive and thrive. She eventually becomes consumed by the need to "chase the dragon" – the heroin addiction that seems to keep the Darkness at bay, but leads her to live on the street. The determination to find love and comfort that lures Faith to drugs is ultimately the same stubborn force that can drive her to recover.

This book was written to shed light on why some kids act the way they do, so that they can be understood by all, meaning other kids and adults. There is a backstory to everyone.

Setting

Breaking Faith is set in the present day. It takes place in Greenleigh, Ontario, Canada – a fictitious city. The second half of the novel takes place in Toronto, the capital city of Ontario, Canada, and the largest city in Canada.

Genre

Contemporary/Realistic – Realistic fiction creates imaginary characters and situations that depict our world and society. It focuses on themes of growing up and confronting personal and social problems. This genre portrays characters coming to understand themselves and others.

Themes

Character Education	Strong Female Characters	Drug Abuse & Addiction
Bullying	Broken Families	Mental Health & Illness

Concepts & Attitudes

Difficulty of Communication – There is an inherent lack of communication in Faith’s family, which carries through to her own experiences. Her discussions with teen runaways, counsellors, and experiences in group therapy at the rehab clinic help Faith overcome the difficulty of communication, and galvanizes her dreams of helping other kids who may be struggling in the same way. Only after she learns to share her pain and let others help her to carry her ‘load,’ does she begin to heal.

Issues of Adolescent Identity – Faith observes the social stratification at school (divisions between jocks, populars, posers, geeks/nerds/losers and others) and feels that she does not belong in any group. She is lonely no matter where she is.

Health & Phys Ed – The novel can be part of the healthy living component as it addresses drug abuse, mental wellness, and hygiene.

Preparing to Read *Breaking Faith*

The primary aim is to make reading enjoyable and to motivate students to enjoy what they are reading while they learn about some deeper topics as mentioned in the Concepts & Attitudes portion. It is not the aim of this study guide to give a step-by-step instruction in the teaching of the novel, as it is widely accepted that student driven inquiry, guided by the teacher, is the most effective way to deliver curriculum expectations and to help a child become a life-long learner. Instead, it offers guidelines and suggestions to help shape student learning.

The teacher may want to introduce the novel with a group discussion about the themes which will be addressed in *Breaking Faith*. There are countless reliable websites that are appropriate to students which discuss difficult issues such as those mentioned under the Themes portion of the guide. A talk by a guidance counsellor or school social worker would be beneficial to introduce this novel study, so that students can ask questions about child neglect, PTSD, anxiety, depression, drug abuse and addiction, and any other issues about which they will read in the novel. These discussions may help provide a brief introduction to give students a platform upon which to build the context of the events in the book.

It may be a good idea to have social workers come into the class periodically during the study, to discuss the importance of seeking help, talking to a professional, a trusted adult or friend when confronted with difficult issues.

To accommodate the differing needs of students in the class, the activities suggested in this guide can easily be adapted through quantity, length and amount of work required. Synopsis of Chapters are also included in this guide, which may be copied and given to students as a reference for study purposes.

Suggested Topics for Pre-Study Discussion

1. **Discuss family dynamics** and how students think they effect children i.e., bonding between parent and child; attachment; dependability of the adults in a child's life; family dynamics; nurturance; protection; guidance; encouragement, etc.
2. **What is Mental Health?**
A state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life.
3. **What is Mental Illness?**
Any of various disorders characterized by impairment of an individual's thoughts, emotions, or social functioning, including schizophrenia and mood disorders such as bipolar disorder.
4. **What is PTSD or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?**
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness. It often involves exposure to trauma from single events that involve death or the threat of death or serious injury. PTSD may also be linked to ongoing emotional trauma, such as abuse in a relationship.
5. **What is anxiety?**
Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Anniversary dates of traumatic events can reactivate thoughts and feelings from the actual event, and survivors may experience peaks of anxiety and depression.
6. **What is depression?**
An illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts and that affects the way a person eats, sleeps, feels about himself or herself, and thinks about things.
7. **What do you know about Drug Abuse & Addiction?**
8. **Define bullying** – Have you ever encountered bullying? did you ever stand up for someone when they were bullied? How did it feel?
9. **Discuss homelessness** – When you see homeless people or youth, do you ever wonder why they choose to live on the street?
10. **Discuss the Bob Marley quote: “You never know how strong you are, until being strong is your only choice.”** What does it mean to you?

Breaking faith – Chapter Summaries

Prologue – pg. 1

Faith Emily Hansen introduces herself to the reader. Our first experience with Faith is of her recounting the event that would forever shape her life – the killings which she witnessed in her neighbourhood, a very rough part of Greenleigh notorious for its drug dealers and gangs. A shoot out takes place between a drug dealer and the police, which sends stray bullets through Faith's bedroom window. Lacey, Faith's mom, throws herself over her child saving her from harm. Faith is never treated for this mental trauma, which will prove to affect her adversely in the future. The narrative is told in the first person. She also gives a brief background about her family and introduces her sisters, Destiny 'the younger' and Constance, 'the older', as well as her grandmother Dorothy, and mother Lacey. Faith does indicate to the reader that she is 'struggling' with the demons of anxiety, drugs and being on 'the bad side of mental health' – she also tells the reader that she hopes to reach other kids who are struggling by telling her story.

Chapter 1 – pg. 9

A short chapter, outlining one of the first times Faith becomes aware that her mother has mental health issues. She and her sisters become aware that she cries a lot, but hides it from them and tries to be strong. We also are made aware that the Darkness, or anxiety, is still plaguing Faith.

Chapter 2 – pg. 13

Faith describes her childhood, growing up in an unstable family. She describes her cold grandmother and her mother's constant arguing, and the fact that Lacey is now often in Toronto, though it is never really discussed between the family why she goes there. After the girls beg their mother to give them a timeline of when they can move there with her, she promises that next spring, when the crocus buds from the ground, she will take them with her. Gran Dot (Dorothy) makes no secret of the fact that she is skeptical that will ever happen.

Chapter 3 – pg. 19

This chapter gives some background on Lacey's life. She met Simon Tingley, Constance's father, at a high school dance. She became pregnant and they married against the wishes of Simon's wealthy family. Simon was killed in a car crash, which started the cycle of depression and mental illness for Lacey. Eventually, she moved back with Gran Dot, became pregnant with Faith and then Destiny. None of the other fathers really have contact with the other girls. We also find out that Constance (Connie) has decided to move to kindly Grandma Josephine's house in Irony Heights, a well-to-do part of Greenleigh. She promises to bring the girls over for visits and sleepovers which makes things a bit easier on Faith, as she idolizes her older sister, Connie.

Chapter 4 – pg. 26

Faith's childhood marches on, with visits to Josephine and Connie's on the weekend and her mother increasingly absent. Faith's anxiety is still strong. She calls it the Darkness because of the memories of the Blood Porch incident, which still plague her. Faith is becoming more and more withdrawn, relying on protecting Destiny and visiting Connie for comfort. Kids in school are becoming cruel, taunting her because of her family life and social awkwardness. She is also rebelling against an often uncaring Gran Dot. The years roll by and so do the crocus buds, without Lacey coming to get her daughters. After a long stretch without contact from her, Gran agrees to try to track her down.

Chapter 5 – pg. 31

It is the last spring in middle school. Faith wants desperately for Gran to find mom so she and her sisters can move to Toronto. Faith wants to go to another school where the kids don't know her or her family dynamic, as she is embarrassed. This culminates on a bus ride home when the kids are particularly cruel. Faith explodes and hits a girl who says that her mom is in Toronto doing bad things with men and taking drugs. That same day, Gran Dot tells Faith and Destiny that they are going to stay with Josephine and Connie for a while as she found out that Lacey is in hospital. The chapter ends as the girls' worst nightmare is realized – Gran Dot tells them that Lacey has been placed in rehab for drug addiction.

Chapter 6 – pg. 42

Faith returns to school after a week with Gran Josephine. She thinks she must face the music concerning what happened the previous week on the bus, but instead the vice principal tells her that she will be visiting with a counsellor, Miss Shelley, with Gran Dot's permission. Faith likes Shelley right away and finds comfort in her visits as they talk about what is troubling her. We also find out later in the chapter that Lacey is coming home, but Gran Dot is nervous about it. Faith misinterprets Gran's nervousness about a possible relapse as her not being happy to see her daughter, which adds to Faith's confusion. The end of the chapter sees a grand reunion between Lacey, Faith, and Destiny as they get off the school bus and fall into their mother's arms.

Chapter 7 – pg. 51

Josephine and Connie come over that night for dinner, but the tension is palpable in the small kitchen. Connie challenges her mother to tell the truth about what she was doing in Toronto, which makes Faith angry as she wants everything to be stress free for Lacey (Momma). Connie decides that she wants to stay with Gran Josephine until the weekend instead of moving back home as Lacey wishes.

Chapter 8 – pg. 55

Lacey has made it through three weeks of outpatient rehab, when Connie decides that she is staying with Gran Josephine indefinitely. This infuriates Faith, as she feels that Momma needs to have her children around her in order to heal. It also brings back her feelings of anxiety. Constant arguing with Gran Dot and situations she cannot deal with due to her precarious state slowly send Lacey back to her habits, as she visits Wheelchair Louie, a drug dealer in the complex. One evening after school, Faith and Destiny come home to a crying Connie, Gran Dot, and Josephine. Their Momma has left them to go back to Toronto. Faith blames Connie and her Gran Dot for this, never placing blame for it on her mother.

Chapter 9 – pg. 64

Faith continues to talk to Shelley but middle school is just around the corner. Shelley tells her that she will be assigned another counsellor, which troubles Faith. The fights continue as Faith grows more and more detached from the rest of the children at school, displaying anger and sadness in violent ways as they taunt her mercilessly. She meets the new social worker but does not feel a connection as she felt with Shelley.

Chapter 10 – pg. 69

Puberty is upon Faith as she enters middle school which she calls ‘an incubus hatched from hell.’ She doesn’t fit into any group and continues to spiral into her world of truculent behaviour, not showering and being plagued by anxiety, or the Darkness, at every turn. The more the kids make fun of her the more she engages in anti-social behaviour. She is alone for much of her first year there and endures bullying from her classmates on a daily basis. She does make friends with two other misfits in grade seven, when they come to her rescue during a particularly cruel bullying session in one of her classes: Norma, a ‘cutter’ and Ishaan, a boy struggling with his sexuality. They become her friends and coax her into taking a shower and washing her clothes. Faith feels better about herself than she has in years.

Chapter 11 – pg. 80

Faith comes to school the next day with clean clothes, clean hair and somewhat more confidence, knowing she has two new friends. With this in her back pocket, she finds strength to stand up to the bully in her English class. Faith and her friends agree to meet later to smoke a joint and a new experience unfolds for Faith as this is her first time smoking weed. They continue to hang out in grade seven, becoming even faster friends.

Chapter 12 – pg. 87

In this chapter, we find out that Faith's mother, Lacey, dies of septicemia brought on by IV drug use. Faith is bitter, not only at her mother but at Connie and the world who don't seem to care much that her mother is gone. Fast forward to November of grade eight, Faith, Ishaan and Norma decide to take their drug use to another level. Bored with weed, they decide to try a mix of Ambien and alcohol to get a better high. They are caught as things go awry and get into a heap of trouble. They are forbidden to hang out with each other. Upon receiving much admonishment from Connie, and to set a better example for Destiny, Faith promises to try to do better.

Chapter 13 – pg. 101

Now in grade nine, the ban from hanging out together has been lifted. Happy to be going into high school, and properly hating their respective families, Faith and her friends continue to test their boundaries. With an upcoming snow tubing trip to Blue Mountain on the horizon, Connie asks Faith to refrain from smoking and just enjoy nature on their trip. Faith promises she will and keeps her promise. She tells Connie that she was right and feels very good about herself for making her older sister proud.

Chapter 14 – pg. 111

This chapter begins with Faith beginning to feel like she is outgrowing the need to get high on weed and her two best friends, Ishaan and Norma, but soon there is a crisis on the horizon. Norma cuts a little too deep and her family fears she tried to commit suicide. Ishaan blames Faith because she tried to get Norma to stop abusing drugs and alcohol as self medication for her mental illness. Faith is firm in the fact that she can always rely on her two sisters for support no matter what.

Chapter 15 – pg. 118

At the very beginning of the chapter, Faith tells us that only five months into grade ten, she ran away. It is January and she chronicles how Connie invites her to her nineteenth birthday party, with all her upscale friends. However, she doesn't realize that it was due to pressure from Gran Josie that she did so. Faith fashions a homemade bracelet for Connie, one of a set for all three sisters. We see how important it is for Faith to have family around her, supporting her. Connie brings Faith upstairs to visit with her grandmother for a while, as she heads back down to the party. Faith has a good conversation with Gran Josie, where she feels nurtured.

Chapter 16 – pg. 129

Faith feels very good about her relationship with Connie at this point. She relates to Josie that she is studying, paying attention in school and living clean. Faith heads back downstairs to find

her sister, but Connie's friends are less than welcoming. She asks where Connie is and she is directed to the sunroom. What happens next is a major turning point in the novel.

Chapter 17 – pg. 134

When she approaches the sunroom, she overhears a caustic conversation between Connie and her friends about how much she is ashamed to be Faith's sister, a bombshell she is not prepared to deal with in her fragile state of attempting to live a good life. She is hurt to the core by Connie's indifference and accordance with her 'Barbie doll' friends about her sister's looks and style of dress. Reeling from the knowledge that her idol and older sister is ashamed of her, she leaves the party, but not before drinking multiple shots and stealing a coat. She gets on a bus and heads to the highway where she hitches a ride to Toronto. Faith gets a ride from born-again Christian, Reggie, who also offers her advice on how to survive on the street. He drops her off in front of the University of Toronto library where she spends her first night in a top floor bathroom, crying.

Chapter 18 – pg. 143

Faith tries to get herself settled in Toronto – she plans on staying there, getting a job and making it on her own, showing everyone in the DC and in Greenleigh that she isn't a loser. She gets to the Triple S shelter and befriends a girl – Emma, who confides that if she needs a place to stay in an emergency, to look up her friend Brian. She writes his address on a paper for her. That day, Faith looks for a job, but no one will give her work so she returns to the shelter. The next day, she discovers that her roommate has stolen her money and her coat. Now she's broke, and facing a long winter.

Chapter 19 – pg. 152

Faith coasts through the winter, learning how to survive on the street, befriendng other runaways and panhandling to survive. The warmer weather arrives and she makes friends with two other girls, Taylor and Shaylee, living in the Eaton Centre – their stories of why they ran away are hair-raising to say the least. As the months roll by, they meet up with some boys who invite them to a party, complete with weed and alcohol. The three girls are to meet the boys at the park before the party, but when they show up there are many more boys tagging along. Faith gets a bad feeling and tries to discourage her friends from going but they don't listen. Afraid to be a 'pussy' Faith agrees to go with her friends. The boys take them to an abandoned factory down by the overpasses, which is a haven for drug users, sleeping off their highs. Not long into the party, the boys start assaulting Taylor and Shaylee – Faith manages to get away and runs to a pay phone to call 911. Sleeping in a doorway, she hopes that the police got to her friends in time. The next morning, she awakens and discovers Brian's address and phone number in her backpack.

Chapter 20 – pg. 164

Faith takes the streetcar to Brian's address figuring she's got nothing to lose, but when she finds him, he is less than helpful. He sends her away. Just as she is walking out of the walk up, a kindly old woman opens her door and begins a conversation. Mrs. Lieberman takes her in, feeds her and lets her shower, giving her clean clothes to change into. Faith also finds out through a news report that her friends survived the savage attack by the group of boys. Faith spends the night, knowing that she must leave the next morning, but is thankful for the kindness Mrs. Lieberman has shown her.

Chapter 21 – pg. 176

Mrs. Lieberman asks Faith to stay with her, to do her groceries and her laundry. She teaches Faith how to make Jewish food and Faith is comfortable and happy in her new situation. Mrs. Lieberman tries to get Faith to open up about her family, but she refuses. Finally, she tells her about her broken family, her sisters, her mother's drug use and death, her troubles at school and how she was bullied because she was different. Mrs. Lieberman, in turn tells her about her horrific experience in Poland during the Nazi occupation, which according to Faith makes her troubles feel less insurmountable.

Chapter 22 – pg. 185

In this chapter, after having a normal, nurtured couple of weeks with Mrs. Lieberman, Faith finds her dead in her bed. After calling 911 and leaving a message for her son that she had passed, Faith once again takes to the streets, more broken and crushed than ever.

Chapter 23 – pg. 188

Not knowing where else to go, Faith returns to Brian's. He offers her a place to stay for the day and when he comes home from work, he convinces her to call home. Destiny begs her to come home, but Faith has a brutal yelling match with her grandmother. She hangs up, not telling them where she is. Brian offers her some weed, but defiant and angered by Gran Dot's accusations, she asks for something stronger.

Chapter 24 – pg. 195

Brian brings heroin to her, which she smokes from aluminum foil and a metal tube. It makes her troubles seem far away.

Chapter 25 – pg. 197

Not knowing how long she has been smoking, but knowing she needs to smoke again soon, Faith asks for more. Brian tells her to get out as his brother, a drug dealer, is on his way because he

suspects Brian is giving Faith free heroin. She leaves the apartment, with a few dollars and a couple more hits, but Faith realizes she is on her own and a heroin addict. It is late December, she is cold and must now fend for herself.

Chapter 26 – pg. 202

Now March in Toronto, Faith is struggling to live on the streets. By her words, we can assume that she has stolen and panhandled to feed her drug habit, which is now consuming her. During a particularly cold stretch, she is living in an alley behind Yonge Street, and has decided that tonight is the night to let herself fall asleep after a last high and let the cold take her. As she ponders these thoughts as she is on the nod, she hears a familiar voice – Connie's! Through a shouting match in which Connie tries to get Faith to come home with her, we find out that they have been looking for her since she disappeared. All the while, Connie is in contact with Des (Destiny) through her cell phone, who is overjoyed that she has found Faith. Connie is now going to university in Toronto. After a lengthy talk and Connie's patient persistence, Faith agrees to go home with her, if Connie buys her sister her next hit.

Chapter 27 – pg. 219

Connie patiently takes Faith to get her drugs. Faith opens up to Connie about her life on the street, and she finally agrees to seek help. The family meets at the hospital where Faith will be detoxing for a brief reunion before she is whisked away on the verge of withdrawal. Faith describes the beginning of her detox, and the pain and lack of dignity associated with it.

Chapter 28 – pg. 224

Faith is now in rehab, looking at a four week stay, which is paid for by Gran Josephine. Faith is finding it hard not to think about the high and is often plagued by the Darkness again, which only magnifies her need for a hit. She meets Dr. October Common, her psychologist, whom she likes right away, and talks about her family history. She attends focus groups, learns how to eat healthy and strategies to control her behaviour. A session in counselling makes her rethink why she ended up on the street in the first place. During another session with Dr. October, Faith confesses that she has had to deal with what she calls the 'Darkness' all her life, that she feels she won't be able to be successful when she leaves the clinic. She talks about the Blood Porch and about how the Dark eats her up inside. Dr. October offers Faith some advice. She feels that by following a suggestion from Dr. October, that she has some hope.

Chapter 29 – pg. 235

Faith chronicles the next fourteen days in rehab in which she undergoes intensive therapy, by talking about the underlying causes of her addiction. She and the doctor talk about the Darkness and the Blood Porch 'endlessly' among other things to try to address her anger and resentment. One day, she is allowed to have some time with her family on the outside. They go to Connie's

condo to eat and practice being with family, but it is strained and awkward as Faith cannot let go of the hurt. An argument breaks out between Gran Dot, Connie, Destiny, and Faith, where deep secrets and feelings and many years of anger are revealed. After this, Faith begins to believe that the healing process can start.

Chapter 30 – pg. 249

In a meeting with Dr. October, Gran Dot, and Faith, it is revealed that Faith has been suffering from PTSD or post traumatic stress disorder all these years as a result of the incident she calls the Blood Porch. This caused her anxiety, which in turn, fueled her lack of self esteem and life as a social outcast. It is also revealed that because her mother risked her life to save her, she felt that she could not give up her loyalty. Gran Dot agrees to help after these revelations and Faith agrees to continue her counselling and psychotherapy.

Chapter 31 – pg. 254

Faith now realizes that by talking about her pain, that the load is easier to bear. She is happy for the first time in a long time, will be going back to school and is assisting in her own recovery. The quote by Bob Marley, often quoted by her in the book now takes on a new meaning. “You never know how strong you are, until being strong is your only choice.” When we meet tragedy in life we can react in two ways – either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits or by using the challenge to find our inner strength. Faith did a little of both, but triumphed in the end. At the end of this chapter, Faith tells us that she plans on helping others who may have the same troubles as her. The last paragraph has Connie, Destiny and Faith walking out onto the beach hand in hand – as Faith says, they’re all going to be fine.

Comprehension & Discussion Suggestions

Sharing and Responding to *Breaking Faith*

As students read through *Breaking Faith*, teachers should stop at key points or natural breaks. Depending on the students' level of understanding, educators may wish to stop and ask the students to summarize what has happened so far, and predict any outcomes or what might happen next. A discussion of the key concepts is suggested after each chapter, requiring more frequent stops if they are lengthier.

- Try to have the students identify the themes in each chapter and give evidence to their rich responses.
- Try to have the students identify the key concepts and attitudes introduced in the pre-reading activities in each chapter and have them give evidence to their rich responses.
- To emphasize a particularly striking/important passage or to bring alive a spirited dialogue, teachers and students may engage in a read aloud and discuss the passage in terms of significance.
- Character Study - Group Work - have the students work in groups to log/profile Faith's growth (emotionally, mentally and in terms of character) as a person. Provide chart paper to each group - at the very beginning and then at key points throughout the novel to the end. Have them add to the paper at each key point, then share with the rest of the class.
- Reading responses to rich questions at each chapter - have the students formulate the questions for each chapter - teachers may add to these at their discretion. An overwhelming abundance of questions are not necessary, instead they should reflect the student's insight and understanding of the larger issues as it relates to them and the world around them.
- The teacher may wish to have the students work in groups and generate questions for other groups to answer, or have each group come up with three questions for each chapter and then the teacher will choose one from each group to have the entire class work on for that particular chapter. These questions may be literal (what is happening in the novel), inferential (related to significance of events and possible outcomes), or analytical (comparing and classifying).
- Once the questions have been taken up and discussed, the teacher may choose several of these questions for an end of the unit test.

- This novel may also be studied in a literature circle format. There are many masters available online which can be used as resources for such a study.
- A culminating essay based on a thesis of student's choice relating to the book may also be assigned if desired.
- Educators may want to combine the culminating activity with a media theme. Have groups of students create book trailers or even a movie trailer. Or act out a particularly important scene in the book, record it and present it as a teaser for a movie.

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