

**Break Point**

Kate Jaimet

Reading level: 3.9

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**Book Summary**

It's the summer of Connor Trent's sixteenth birthday, and the stakes for him have never been so high. Connor's summer job at the Bytowne Tennis Club allows him to train at a historic facility. It also throws him into confrontation with his rich-kid rival, Rex Hunter, whom he will battle for a berth in the National Junior Tournament. After a series of fundraisers is sabotaged, Connor suspects that someone wants to bankrupt the club and take over its valuable riverfront property. A fabled trophy, rumored to contain hidden cash, might solve all of Connor's problems—if he can win it.

**Prereading Ideas**

- How does tough competition help you grow?
- Have you ever made sacrifices for a cause you believed in?
- Why is it so difficult to stand up to people who are rich and powerful?

## Connecting to the Text

### *Plot*

- Talk about the purpose served by an epilogue. Have students write a different epilogue for *Break Point* that sets Connor—and maybe Maddy too—on a slightly different path. Does Connor win the championship? Does he get a shot at competing internationally? Does he realize he really just wants to run the tennis club?
- Discuss with students the idea of a book's *premise*. The premise is a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the story. It's a statement of what happens to the characters as a result of the actions in the story. It's a bit different than plot, which is a listing of the events in the story. It takes a bit of practice to figure out the premise of a story. You might want to start by discussing the premise of some familiar stories, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Toy Story* or *Cinderella*. Divide students into pairs and see whether they can develop a clear statement of the premise of *Break Point*.
- Chapter endings are essential to maintaining the reader's interest. Have students revisit the ending of chapter 1. What makes it such a strong ending? What questions does it raise in the reader's mind? Have them look for other examples of exciting, cliffhanger endings from *Break Point*. Look through other books in the classroom to find weak endings; challenge students to rewrite them to make them stronger.
- The plot is how the story develops over time and as events unfold. A timeline is one way to lay out how the story evolves. Have students create a timeline for *Break Point*. If you like, spice things up a bit with this web interactive: [www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/timeline-30007.html](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/timeline-30007.html). Invite students to share their timelines with the class.

### *Character*

- *Break Point* is told from Connor's point of view. Have students write a scene from another character's perspective. For example, try writing from Maddy's point of view during her final game against Connor; from Mrs. Sharma's perspective after the first incident of vandalism; or from Connor's mom's perspective when he brings home the trophy.
- Have students draw a character map of Connor that details his personality characteristics, his values, his weaknesses, his strengths and his physical traits. Add to the map as students read the story. Remind them they can learn more about Connor not just from what Connor tells us, but also by the way other characters interact with and react to him. Use this as a springboard to teach students how to write a full character analysis (see web link in Resources, below).

**Theme**

The theme is the “big idea” or message in a book. Often books can have more than one theme. Several themes run through *Break Point*. One of them is that it's worth fighting for something you care about. Have students work with a partner to figure out some of the other themes in the book.

**Setting**

Have students draw the setting of the Bytowne Tennis Club, including the courts, the grounds, the river and the clubhouse.

**Literary Devices**

- A *simile* is a comparison using the word “like” or “as.” Here's an example from chapter 8, where Connor describes the Ontario Racquet Club: *The club had about the same level of elegance as your average Walmart store.* Pair students up and task them to find five more similes from *Break Point*. Have them replace three of these similes with three of their own (they have to make sense!).
- Akin to a simile, a *metaphor* describes something in terms other than what we usually would use. Here's an example of Connor describing a particularly intense tennis match in chapter 8: *It was hand-to-hand combat, down in the trenches, fighting for every inch of ground.* Invite students to write metaphors to describe things that are commonplace in their world: completing their homework, washing the dishes, arguing with a sibling, scrounging for something to eat in an empty kitchen.

**Vocabulary**

- Have students choose five of the following terms from the book. Using two different print or online resources, have students define their chosen terms, then use each term in a sentence.

appraisal	concede	intercept
bankruptcy	consecutive	nirvana
benefactor	crusade	onslaught
bequeath	executor	retaliation
braggart	gauntlet	salvo
carom	gist	vintage

- In chapter 7, Mr. Hunter tells Connor he watched his semifinal match against Rex. “What a drubbing!” he says. Have students use events in the story and context clues to write a definition for this word.

**Connecting to the Curriculum****English**

- Read aloud to students the following passage from the end of chapter 2:

*My fingers itched for my tennis racket. I wanted the satisfaction of pummeling a serve past a stunned opponent, of whipping a backhand straight down the line. I wanted to get up and fight back, not just sit around watching things fall apart.*

Have students jot down the verbs they hear as you read the passage. When you finish, have students share their verbs. What do they notice about them? (Many of them are strong verbs.) Discuss how strong verbs make a passage so much clearer and livelier. Have students go back through *Break Point* and find other passages where the verbs are similarly strong. Challenge them to incorporate strong verbs into their own writing, or to create a Mad Lib-style story where the verbs have been blanked out (to be filled in by a friend).

- Talk to students about the first lines of books. How is the first line important to a story? Discuss. Tie this discussion in with an acknowledgement of the importance of first impressions. What do they think of the first line of *Break Point*? Have each student gather two or three books from around the classroom and record the first line of each. As a class, compare the first lines. Discuss which ones make them want to read further. Rewrite “weak” lines to make them stronger or more engaging.
- Author Kate Jaimet is skilled at “showing” instead of “telling.” What do students know about this writing technique? Have them find places in the book where the “showing” language helps to create a detailed picture in the reader’s mind. Here’s an example from chapter 1: *I was heading for the phone when the sound of a car on the street below made me freeze.* Another example from chapter 8: *Mike had a fighting look in his eye and a cocky sneer on his lips when I met him in the locker room the next morning before our match.* As an added challenge, have students select a pre-existing piece of their writing from their portfolio and go through it, looking for places to use “showing” to sharpen the images created by their words.
- In the third-to-last paragraph in chapter 8, the author writes a tennis game in a very detailed, blow-by-blow way. Have one student read this aloud to the class. Talk about the technique of slowing a scene down like this—almost like a camera is filming it. Have students choose an activity in their own lives and write about it in a similar way.

### *Art*

In chapter 3, Connor says playing tennis with Maddy is a good way to spend time with her—and it’s better than going “out on a limb” and asking her for a date. This is an example of a figure of speech. Another from chapter 8: *When we came up for air, we were tied 6-6 in the first set.* Have students look through *Break Point* and find other figures of speech. What would it look like to “go out on a limb” or “come up for air”? Have fun illustrating these figures of speech.

***Health/Personal Planning***

- Connor reflects that unless he gets a scholarship to a US school, he'll end up studying to be a plumber at a small-time college in Canada. What he doesn't know is that skilled trades (e.g. plumbers, electricians, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, people who maintain wind turbines, etc.) often out-earn their "professional" counterparts (e.g. college instructors, veterinarians). Have students look up employment earnings by trade, and then research the vocational and trades schools in your province or state. Invite a skilled tradesperson in to your classroom to talk about the job options open to them.
- In *Break Point*, Quinte is bullied. So are the leaders of the Bytowne Tennis Club. Different victims, different perpetrators: same effect. What makes a bully? Why do some people need to bully? What makes it stop?

***Social Studies***

- Connor is upset that the racket used by Bjorn Borg in the 1970s is smashed during the first act of vandalism at the club. Connor reflects that Borg was a significant player, having won five Wimbledon trophies. What do students know about Wimbledon? Have them research the history-rich suburb of London after which the international tournament is named, beginning with Google Maps.
- The Bytowne Tennis Club is an older club. Connor sees old photos of the club from when it was built in the 1920s—when his hometown of Ottawa was just a small town. Have students choose a significant feature in their community and research its history. Possibilities include universities, historic buildings, clubs or even parks and cemeteries. Put students in touch with your local archives to ferret out maps and documents that represent the history of this feature.
- Connor knows all about debt since his father left, forcing his mother to buy a fixer-upper that just eats up the cash. It's hard for them to manage their debt. Currently, the average debt load being carried by Canadians and Americans is at an all-time high. Have students learn more about this, using the websites in the Resources section below as a jumping-off point. How much of this debt is personal debt? How much is mortgage-related? What are experts saying is the reason for our debt and overspending? How do we begin to get a handle on it? If students wish, they can take their debt research farther, to examine recent events on a national scale in the US, Cyprus, Greece and Spain. What is the lesson to be learned from these nations being so deeply mired in debt?
- The Archibald Cross Memorial Cup is reputed to have secret money stashed inside. Connor has even heard it might house a nickel—the first one Mr. Cross ever earned as a shoe shine boy in the Dirty Thirties. What do your students know about the Great Depression? Talk about the stock market crash and the compounding problem of poor weather across the prairies. Discuss the Great Depression in the

context of our current international fiscal dilemma. Use the web resources below for a starting point.

- Connor's mother is distraught that developers are planning to cut down an old tree on their street. She goes out of her way to research the problem and argue against the tree's removal, including going so far as to camp out in the tree to make her point. This is an example of civil protest. It's a right and a privilege of people who live in democratic societies. Have students research and discuss examples of real-world civil protest in their country of origin. What about in other countries and under other forms of government? Talk about logging; talk about the Keystone Pipeline; talk about the Arab Spring. What would happen if we didn't have the right to protest, peacefully or otherwise?

### ***Physical Education***

When Connor goes head to head with his opponents, he already knows their weaknesses. Bruno Chan, for example, is fast on the court, but doesn't have an accurate hit. What's the payoff in studying your opponent's strategies and weaknesses?

### **Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Connor heads for the tennis court whenever he's stressed or angry. What do you do? How does this activity help you decompress and get life back into perspective?
2. Connor says his mom is a "crunchy-granola type of person" (ch. 2). Describe this stereotype. What stereotype do you fit into, if at all? Are stereotypes useful? Explain.
3. At the beginning of chapter 3, Connor reflects that "good times can disappear in a heartbeat." While he's referring to his parents' breakup, how do his words have a broader applicability to life? Make a text-to-text, a text-to-self and a text-to-world connection based on this statement.
4. When Connor plays against Maddy, he drops his usual rule of trying to destroy people with his serve. He reasons that she wouldn't want to keep playing if he made it too difficult for her. Is this an example of good sportsmanship? Explain. In what ways have you made similar accommodations for a friend or loved one?
5. Connor wants to win the cup so badly he can almost taste it. Now that he's old enough to imagine a variety of uses for the money, Connor decides "a stack of dough would solve a whole lot of problems" (ch. 3). Do you agree? Explain.
6. Partway through a game against an opponent, Connor realizes he has to stop trying to score by hitting balls into hard-to-reach areas and instead focus on what he's good at: killer serves. Why—and when—is it important to stick to what you're good at instead of trying to improve your performance in other areas?
7. Connor's dedication to tennis shows in his willingness to go to bed early and get up early, and in his willingness to train hard. Do you share this kind of commitment to a hobby or sport? What activity *would* make you this passionate?
8. Quinte is a target for jerks like Mike Baron. In chapter 7, Connor reflects that Quinte

would do anything to please his so-called friends. Make a text-to-text, a text-to-self and a text-to-world connection about this human tendency.

9. In the final round against Mike in chapter 8, Connor knows he's going to have to "dig deep." When have you needed to dig deep?
10. In chapter 9, Maddy claps for Rex, but only because her mom is watching...and because Rex and his dad are valuable members of the club. Write about how we so often end up doing things to keep other people happy. What's your position on this tendency?
11. Connor isn't sure how he's supposed to scrape together \$2000 to go to the national championships, as he won't have earned enough from his summer job. How do you get your money?
12. Connor wants to go to the police with his suspicions about Mr. Hunter's involvement in the vandalism. But if he does, he might lose his job...and his membership in the club...and the possibility of ever dating Maddy. So he doesn't go to the cops. As you see it, how do our relationships with other people sometimes restrict our ability to do the right thing?
13. In order to have a chance at winning the Archibald Cross Memorial Cup, Connor knows he has to pound Maddy. Write about a time when you had no choice other than to take away the top spot from a friend or loved one.
14. Write about or discuss how Connor must feel about his mother giving her time and energy to saving a tree rather than watching her child compete in a high-level tennis tournament.
15. Connor's mother feels passionately about the tree. In chapter 15, she tells him if something is important to him, he has to always fight for it. Make a text-to-self, a text-to-text and a text-to-world connection with this comment.

### Author's note

Dear Reader,

A few years ago, while sitting on the verandah of the Ottawa Tennis and Lawn Bowling Club, it struck me that this place—with its grand 1920s-era clubhouse and idyllic location on the Rideau River—would be an interesting setting for a novel. Thus, *Break Point* was born.

The Club was founded in 1881. Since that time, Ottawa has grown from a small town of about 25,000 people, to a city of nearly one million. In the central core of old Ottawa, real-estate companies jump at any chance to build expensive condos on rare tracts of undeveloped land. If there was criminal activity surrounding the tennis club, (and I needed some for my mystery plot!), I figured it would have to involve unscrupulous developers trying to get their hands on the property.

In the novel, the financial problems of the fictional tennis club parallel the financial problems of Connor's mother, who has to sell her house when she can't pay the mortgage.

Similarly, hundreds of thousands of American families have lost their homes since 2007, trapped by mortgages they couldn't afford on houses that turned out to be worth far less than the price they had paid for them. Money worries—and the way that some people benefit from others' financial despair—is a theme that runs through the novel.

Finally, I'd like to say a word about Quinte. His character is based on a real-life, mentally challenged teenager who was put on trial some years ago for allegedly burning down an Ottawa-area shopping mall. When I covered the case for the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, it became clear to me that the teenager was the scapegoat for a whole gang of teens, who were all involved in the arson, but who pointed the finger at him during police interrogation. Based on a garbled quasi-confession, the mentally challenged boy was charged, while the others walked away. Although he was eventually acquitted by the jury, it struck me as unfair that the only one who stood trial was the one least able to defend himself.

In life, unfortunately, it's often the "big guys" who get away with impunity, while the "little guys" take the fall. In fiction, it's satisfying to make the "big guys" pay for their unscrupulous actions, while the "little guys" come out on top.

Kate Jaimet

## Resources

### *Character analysis*

[www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Character-Analysis](http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Character-Analysis)

### *Debt*

Debt levels among Canadian households

[www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/canadian-household-debt-levels-reach-a-new-high/article6323546/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/canadian-household-debt-levels-reach-a-new-high/article6323546/)

[www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2012/10/15/household-debt.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2012/10/15/household-debt.html)

Debt levels among U.S. households

[www.nerdwallet.com/blog/credit-card-data/average-credit-card-debt-household](http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/credit-card-data/average-credit-card-debt-household)

[www.money-zine.com/Financial-Planning/Debt-Consolidation/Consumer-Debt-Statistics](http://www.money-zine.com/Financial-Planning/Debt-Consolidation/Consumer-Debt-Statistics)

### *The Great Depression*

Visions in the Dust: A Child's Perspective of the Dust Bowl

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/dust/intro.html>

Brother Can You Spare a Dime?

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/dime/intro.html>

Photographs of the Great Depression

<http://history1900s.about.com/library/photos/blyindexdepression.htm>

Great Depression of Canada

[www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/projects/canadianhistory/depression/depression.html](http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/projects/canadianhistory/depression/depression.html)

Dust Bowl Days

[http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=300](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=300)



**Tennis**

[www.tenniscanada.com](http://www.tenniscanada.com)  
[www.tennisonone.com](http://www.tennisonone.com)

**Divorce**

[www.changeville.ca](http://www.changeville.ca)  
[www.familieschange.ca](http://www.familieschange.ca)  
[www.kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/Parents/divorce.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/Parents/divorce.html)  
[www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/divorce/index.html](http://www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/divorce/index.html)

**Books**

*Fiction*

Blume, Judy. *It's Not the End of the World*  
Clippinger, Carol. *Open Court*  
Corbet, Robert. *Fifteen Love*  
Padian, Maria. *Jersey Tomatoes are the Best*  
Peterson, Lois. *Silver Rain*  
Powell, Randy. *The Whistling Toilets*  
Shull, Megan. *Amazing Grace*  
Wells, Rosemary. *When No One was Looking*

*Nonfiction*

MacGregor, Cynthia. *The Divorce Helpbook for Teens*  
Parsons, John; Henry Wancke and Tim Henman. *The Tennis Book: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Tennis*  
Roza, Greg. *Venus and Serena Williams: The Sisters of Tennis*  
Strain-Trueit, Trudi. *Surviving Divorce: Teens Talk About What Hurts and What Helps*  
White, Steven. *Bring Your Racquet: Tennis Basics for Kids*  
Whitfield, Simon and Clive Deenshaw. *Simon Says Gold: Simon Whitfield's Pursuit of Athletic Excellence*

**Author Biography**

**Kate Jaimet** is an author and journalist who recently began a freelance career after many years as a daily newspaper reporter for the *Ottawa Citizen*. Her first book in the Orca Sports series, *Slam Dunk*, was selected by the Junior Library Guild and the Canadian Children's Book Centre as a Best Book for Kids & Teens.

**Author Website**

[www.katejaimet.com](http://www.katejaimet.com)