

# BOOK CLUB in a bag

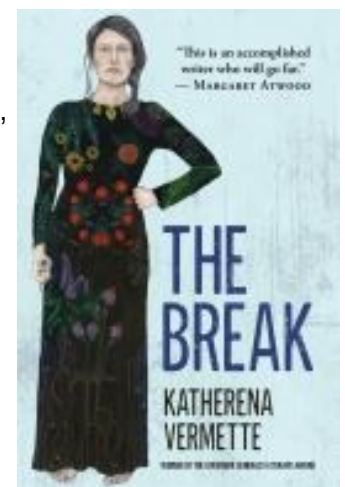


## The Break

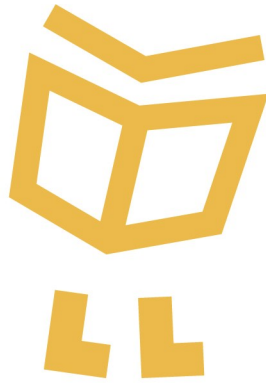
Katherena Vermette

### Discussion Questions

1. The book begins with a shocking act of violence and its investigation by the police. In what way does *The Break* follow the pattern of a more conventional crime or mystery novel, and in what ways does it depart from the forms of these genres?
2. The book is organized into four parts, and at the start of each is a short reflection by an unnamed character. How does this point of view provide insight into the events unfolding in the novel?
3. At the book's opening Stella is isolated in her home alone with her young children and partly estranged from her family. Why is she distant from her relatives? How do the events of the novel force her to reconsider this distance?
4. When we are introduced to Cheryl, she is trying to revive a series of paintings in which she represents her family members as wolf women (47) and at the end of the novel, Cheryl imagines herself and her sisters together, "just wolves with shed skin" (344). What is the intent of these paintings and what does this image reflect for Cheryl? Why does she initially have trouble finding the spark of inspiration for these works?
5. The image of the Manitoba Hydro towers recurs throughout the novel. When snow falls on the lines, they buzz constantly, "like a whisper you know is a voice but you can't hear the words" (5). What disparate places do these towers connect? What might they symbolize?
6. The book's epigraph comes from Alice Walker: "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." How would you relate this quote to the relative social power — or powerlessness — of the characters in *The Break*? Do they think that they have power? Why or why not?
7. Phoenix wilfully ignores the idea that her unborn child will have to go into care. Instead, she dreams about pushing a stroller down the sidewalk, the way she did with her baby sister Sparrow. What does this mental image of Phoenix's reveal about her sense of herself, her history, and her state of mind at the end of the novel?



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## About the Author

Katharena Vermette is a Métis writer from Treaty One territory, the heart of the Métis nation, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Her first book, *North End Love Songs* (The Muses Company) won the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. Her National Film Board short documentary, *this river*, won the Coup de Coeur at the Montreal First Peoples Festival and a Canadian Screen Award. Her first novel, *The Break* (House of Anansi) was a national bestseller and won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award, the Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction, and the Carol Shields Winnipeg Book Award. *The Break* was shortlisted for a Governor General's Literary Award, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and was a 2017 Canada Reads finalist.

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