

Broken Places Discussion Questions

by Tracy Clark

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & author website)

Tracy Clark is a native Chicagoan who writes mysteries set in her hometown while working as an editor in the newspaper industry.



In addition to her Cass Raines novels, Tracy's short story "For Services Rendered," appears in the anthology "Shades of Black: Crime and Mystery Stories by African-American Authors." She is currently writing her next Cass Raines mystery and binge-watching "Game of Thrones".

Characters:

- **Cass Raines** – (34) – Black female former police detective. Shot (and was shot by) Jimmy Pick during his arrest. Left the force and became a private detective. Mother died of cancer, father disappeared when Cass was 12. Raised by grandparents. No living family. Owes grandparents old home and rents out the first 2 floors.
- **Father Ray Heaton** – "Pop" – (69) – Priest at St. Brendan's church. Helped Cass's grandparent raise her. Plays chess with Cass once a week. Always looking out for the downtrodden. Believes someone is following him and performing small acts of vandalism.
- **Deanna "Dee Dee" Baxter** – Very protective step-father. Homeschooled. Dee Dee is pregnant.
- **Anton Bolek** – St. Brendan's school janitor. Had an argument with Father Heaton.
- **Sister Barbara Covey** – Cass's childhood friend. Nun. Teaching in Africa. Comes from a large hell-raising family.
- **George Cummings** – New parishioner from N. Carolina. Has a wife, Janice, and step-daughter, Deanna (Skeeter). Owns a contracting company. Doesn't like the homeless he sees in the parish.
- **Detective Farraday** – Police detective. Has an influential family. Bit of a cowboy detective. Not well thought of in the department. Hates Cass.
- **Kallishes** – Stuart, Marie, and 4-year-old son, Nate. Doctoral students. Rent Cass's 2nd floor apartment.
- **Cesar Luna** – (18) – Boy killed in the church with Father Heaton. Belongs to a gang - the Scorpions. Beaten a couple of hours before he was killed. Wanted out of the gang.
- **Charles "Whip" Mayo Jr** – (35) – Cass's childhood friend. Ex-con. Currently working as a cook. Wants to help Cass find Father Heaton's murderer.
- **Detective Ben Mickerson** – Cass's police partner. (40s) Has an ex-wife.
- **Father Pasco** – New priest at St. Brendan's. Grumpy.
- **Hector Perez** – Friend of Luna's. Part of the Scorpions. Ex- con. Was with Luna a few hours before his death.
- **Jimmy Pick** – (19) – Shot and killed a rival gang member. Killed by Raines, Mickerson, and Farraday during his arrest. He shot Cass Raines during the incident.

- **Pouch** – Ex-con friend of Whip’s. Pickpocket. Was in jail for murder.
- **Theodore Raines** – Cass’s father. Abandoned her when she was 12 after her mother died. Insurance adjustor. Remarried with a son, Whitford (17).
- **Maise Ross** – Store sells drug paraphernalia and alcohol (to minors). Father Heaton got her store closed down. She stole his bible. Son, Renauld, is in jail.
- **Old Sarge** – Homeless man known at St. Brendan’s. Has “magic” boots and Army jacket. Might know something about Father Heaton’s murder.
- **Thea** – Church cook and housekeeper. Ex-addict.
- **Mrs. Vincent** – Renter of the Cass’s downstairs (1st floor) apartment.
- **Detective Eli Weber** – (mid 40’s) – Police detective. Black. Farraday’s new partner. Unknown

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. **Broken Places** was Tracy Clark’s debut book. Could you tell? What was done well? What, if any, aspect of the book needed polishing?
3. What do you think the title “**Broken Places**” means?
4. This book is written from a first-person perspective. Do you like it or would you have preferred another perspective? Why or why not?
5. Did the characters in the story seem real and believable? Why or why not?
6. Who was your favorite character? Who was your least favorite character?
7. The last book we read, **Down the River Unto the Sea**, featured a private detective who was once a police officer – so does **Broken Places**. How were the two books similar? How were they different? Did you like one more than the other? Why?
8. Why do you think Cass left police work after the incident with Pick and turned to private investigating? What hole did private investigating fill? Why did police work no longer suffice?
9. Do you think the killer intended for there to be a message or symbolism when Luna was shot in front of the altar and Father Heaton in the confessional? Or do you think it was just circumstance? Why?
10. One of the reasons it was so hard to find Father Heaton’s killer is that the priest was a bit of a firebrand and got involved in many social issues – homelessness, discrimination problems, abuse cases, etc. Is that common for the priests/ministers you know?
11. There was a great deal of time spent on homelessness in the book with an underlying look at the connection between mental illness and homelessness. Why do you think there is such a large link between the two?
12. How did the way Cass grew up (deceased mother, absent father, raised by grandparents, etc.) inform her adult decision making? What effect did it have?

13. There is an underlying theme of parenting in this book. Cass's father left and Father Heaton became a type of replacement for him. And, then, you have Dee Dee Baxter's overbearing step-father... What do you think the author is trying to say about parenting?
14. Many of Cass's friends are cons or ex-cons. Is that a product of where she lives? How she was raised? Her job? Temperament? Why do you think Cass is so comfortable with (former?) rule breakers?
15. Why do you think Theodore Raines (Cass's father) chooses now to come back into Cass's life? Is her reaction understandable? Why or why not?
16. Did you know who the killer was before it was revealed? Why or why not? Did the author give you enough clues for you to figure it out?
17. Were you satisfied with the ending of the story? If you could change it, what would you do to make it better?
18. Tracy Clark has three books in this series. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction -- <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/c/tracy-clark-2/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/36679614-broken-places>
- Tracy Clark's Website – <https://tracyclarkbooks.com/>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=f0e33ae7-17e8-4dc5-8348-6da49984fd6a%40sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10657628&db=neh>

Tracy Clark's Books

Chicago Mystery

1. Broken Places (2018)
2. Borrowed Time (2019)
3. What You Don't See (2020)

If you liked **Broken Places**, try...

- [Long Fall](#) – Walter Mosley
- [The Dime](#) – Kathleen Kent
- [Land of Shadows](#) – Rachel Howzell Hall
- [Cop Town](#) – Karen Slaughter
- [Never Tell](#) – Lisa Gardner
- [The Highway](#) – CJ Box