

HEARTBREAKER | BOOK CLUB GUIDE

1. Why do you think Claudia Dey chose to structure the novel in three voices? Would the outcome have changed if HEARTBREAKER had instead been told from a single perspective? Were all three voices needed to arrive at the truth of the ending?
2. The people of the territory are the descendants of a cult. How does the cult still determine the lives and fates of the residents in the territory? Can you think of a dangerous and legendary “John” operating in the world today?
3. The epigraph of the novel is a line from an Alice Notley poem. It is also a line from Anaïs Nin’s diaries. In full, it reads: “In love there is no because, no reason, no explanation, no solutions.” An epigraph often functions as the writer’s way of guiding the reader into a certain way of thinking about the book. Where do you see this feeling of love—in its senselessness—at work in the novel? Is this a theme throughout HEARTBREAKER?
4. The past plays a strong role in the lives of the characters. How are The Heavy and Billie Jean shaped by the past? How do they attempt to reconcile with their own pasts and with each other’s? Do they make peace with their pasts? Do they try to outrun them? Is outrunning the past deemed possible in HEARTBREAKER?
5. After reading HEARTBREAKER and looking back on its world, would you consider it to be a dystopian novel? Or could this society be only a two-thousand-mile drive away and just as real as your own? Do the rules and practices—and the sinister economic resource that allows the territory to survive—feel possible in our current world?
6. How does Claudia Dey write about motherhood and secrets in the novel? Look at the relationships between Pony and Billie, Gena and her mother, Lana and her mother—as well as the role of the “Mother Trick.” What is left unsaid and how do those secrets affect the actions of the characters and the dynamic between them?
7. Adolescence is a period of great change in a person’s life. Look at Pony and Supernatural. How are their worlds different? How are they alike? How are they viewed by the other teenagers of the territory? What gives them a sense of power or powerlessness? Now look at the adults in the novel—are they also in a state of flux? Would they also play the game in the novel called “Wanting”? If so, what might they “want”?

8. The second part of the novel is narrated by a dog. Gena is a confessional and a guard for Billie Jean. Do you believe that we can be more at home, more *ourselves*, in the presence of an animal than another human being? What is the role of the animal world in HEARTBREAKER?

9. The book is set in 1985. Why do you think the author chose this time period? Discuss the culture that comes with that year—the music, the style, the expressions—as well as the role of time in the novel. Would the story of HEARTBREAKER be possible if it was set post-Internet? With cell phones?

10. There is a line repeated in the novel, “Why can’t a woman be more than one person in a lifetime?” It is spoken by Billie Jean and Debra Marie. Are these women more alike than they appear? They experience a terrible loss—how differently do they respond to their grief?

11. The novel portrays an affair between a married woman and a teenage boy. We traditionally see this story played out with the gender roles reversed. Do you consider HEARTBREAKER a feminist novel? Do the women in the novel—particularly Pony, Billie, and, in her animal way, Gena—demonstrate autonomy and courage in their choices, however destructive the outcomes?

12. It has been said that a title functions as a “spirit guide” for a novel. Is this true of HEARTBREAKER?

13. Was the ending what you expected? Was it the outcome the one that you wanted for these characters? Would you describe it as redemptive? If the book continued for one last section, would Billie Jean or The Heavy narrate it? And what might happen to their foursome?