

# The Museum of Broken Things

AUTHOR

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Drug/Alcohol References)



## SYNOPSIS

*I didn't always live here. Not so long ago I was living in a thriving metropolis with more than one coffee shop on each block and four full bars of reception. I went to Heathmont High School, home to one thousand students, two best friends, a deeply average orchestra, and one cursed statue. Well, allegedly.*

Reece still isn't used to living in the small beachside town of Hamilton—she misses her old school, her old friends and her old life. She can't go back and she can't move forward—nothing feels right anymore. Not that she's trying very hard—she hasn't even unpacked yet, and the only new friend she's made is a middle-aged barista.

But when Reece inherits a strange artefact that belonged to her beloved grandmother, she begins to unravel a mystery that might change the way she feels about everything around her, including her charismatic classmate Gideon...

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Draper is a Melbourne-based writer and marketing professional. She is a graduate of RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing program and now works in children's publishing—she loves nothing more than a story infused with magic, hijinks and a touch of nostalgia. *The Museum of Broken Things*, her debut novel, was acquired after it was shortlisted in the 2020 Text Prize. Her work has also been longlisted in the 2019 Richell Prize and has appeared in various non-fiction publications. She grew up in Western Australia, mostly on land but often in water. She now lives in Melbourne with one struggling coffee machine and a moderately behaved golden retriever.

## BEFORE READING

- Reece's story takes place in her final year of high school, which is complicated even without everything else that happens. Discuss some of the unique challenges of year twelve and your hopes and fears for your own final year.
- The title of the book—*The Museum of Broken Things*—is quite poetic, and might mean many things. What do you think it means?
- Read the blurb of the book. What is the story about? What kind of problems do you think Reece will have to overcome? Make a list of some of the themes you think the book might explore.

## WHILE READING

- Who is Queen Mab? What does she have to do with Reece's curse?

- Why are Reece’s parents so concerned about her? Is their concern valid?
- How do Gideon and Reece meet? Who is Bruce?
- What is ‘The Terrible Thing That Happened’? What makes it so terrible?
- Why won’t Nina talk to Reece?
- Why do you think Reece chose to leave in the way that she did?
- Why does Reece push Gideon away the first time he kisses her?
- What is Miles’ motivation for playing piano? How does this cause conflict between him and Ava? What does he ultimately decide about going to music school and why?
- Why is Reece’s mum so upset when she finds out about the exhibition? Would her reaction have been different if Reece had told her about it sooner?
- Who steals the apothecary’s curio, and why do they take it? Is Reece justified in her anger towards the culprit when she finds out?
- Why does Theo think his dad won’t accept his sexuality? Is he right? What does Theo’s dad say when he finds out?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

- How would you describe Reece’s relationship with Theo? How does this compare to Miles’ relationship with Ava? Discuss the way these siblings support each other, as well as the conflicts between them.
- Both Willow and Reece’s nan, two characters who aren’t physically present in the story, have a significant impact on the decisions Reece makes. Find one example of this, and discuss the way that Reece’s life is shaped by the influence of these absent but significant figures.
- The adults in this book are imperfect—they keep secrets, get angry, and need to be taken care of. Does this surprise you? Is this different from the way that adults are portrayed in other books you read? Choose one interaction where an adult behaves in a way that surprises you, and discuss your response to it.

## THEMES

### Secrets

- Why do people keep secrets? Reece assumes that Nina will hate her for texting Willow the night of the accident. How does Nina actually react? What secret has she been holding on to? How do they both feel after they’ve shared their secrets?
- Why doesn’t Gideon want anyone to know how much he’s struggling to look after his mum? What are the implications of him keeping this a secret?
- The author of the book also keeps secrets, waiting until midway through to reveal ‘The Terrible Thing That Happened’ and its implications. Why do you think she has chosen to do this? What impact does it have on the way you read the story?
- Nan’s secret is a big one, and is only fully revealed in the final pages of the book. What are the legal and ethical issues surrounding what she did for those women? Why was she forced to keep her actions a secret? What impact did her choices have on the women she helped and their families? How does the writer resolve these issues?

### Friendship

- What makes Miles initially reach out to Reece? Why do you think she is so reluctant to make friends at her new school? What are some of the key elements of friendship that you see demonstrated between them as the story progresses?
- How do friendships change after high school? What challenges will Reece, Ava, Gideon and Miles face in their friendship in the time after the story ends? What do you think will happen to them?
- Reece keeps calling Willow and leaving voice messages even though Willow never answers, but she never calls Nina. Why not? How does it make Nina feel? What eventually changes that brings them back together? What role does forgiveness play in their friendship?

**Loss**

- ‘I cycle home. I do my homework. I wake up in the night and stare at the ceiling fan. The rest of the week passes in a blur. I sit in class without hearing what’s been said.’ (p 21) How does this passage capture Reece’s experience of losing her nan? Underline the words that describe the way she’s feeling. Does everyone feel loss the same way?
- Gideon is angry with Reece for submitting his application to art school because it reinforces his feelings of losing something he wants so badly—‘I’m tired of wanting more and never having it.’ (p 307) What’s standing in the way of him following his dreams? Do you think that Reece did the right thing in submitting his work, or is it worse to be given hope only to have it taken away again?
- The flip side of loss is starting over, or rebuilding. Reece has to rebuild her life without her nan and without Willow. Gideon will have to figure out what his life looks like without being responsible for his mum. The women Nana Blackwell helped would have had to rebuild their lives from scratch with a newborn baby. What other examples of starting over can you find in the story? Is loss a necessary part of this process?

**RESPONDING**

- ‘Nana Blackwell did not believe in storage. Her house is a squat little cottage that leans to one side, and inside it’s full of dusty furniture and old books. Books in impossible numbers, their pages yellowed and frayed, the text sometimes hardly legible. Drawings rim-marked by errant cups of tea, diagrams with pencilled scribbles in the margins, pages dog-eared mid-chapter and forgotten about. Books in the kitchen, stacked in piles in the hall, shoved between couch cushions and scattered across the floor.’ (p 86)
  - Read the excerpt above—what does Nana Blackwell’s home tell you about who she was as a person?
  - What else do Reece and her mum find that reveals something about Nana Blackwell’s character? What surprises them about her life?
  - Look around your own room and describe what you see. If someone else read your descriptions, what conclusions might they draw about you and your life?
- Write about a time you’ve had to say goodbye to someone important to you (they might have moved somewhere far away, or perhaps it’s a friendship that’s ended, or losing a pet). Describe the way you felt going through a normal day without them close to you. What was different? Where or when was their absence most noticeable?
- Imagine that Nina answers Willow’s phone one of the times that Reece calls. Write the conversation they might have had.
- Take a walk in someone else’s shoes. Choose a character in the story who is very different from you and rewrite one of the scenes from their perspective. Now reflect on the way that thinking about their experience changes the way you see them.
- Why did so many pregnant girls need Nana Blackwell’s help to escape their families? Research the 1940s—what was life like for girls and women in Australia during this time? What were the laws regarding unmarried mothers? What other challenges did they face? How have things changed? Why do you think Nan felt that she had to help them?