

BREAKING BUTTERFLIES BY M. ANJELAIS

SYNOPSIS

Two teens are drawn together, promised to each other since childhood by their dreaming mothers. The girl (Sphinx) is sweet, empathetic and ordinary. The boy (Cadence): brilliant, charismatic - and ill.

No one knows it yet, but Cadence is incapable of feeling. After an incident in which he purposefully scars Sphinx, Cadence moves away to England with his Mother (Leigh). Years later, after being diagnosed with terminal Leukemia, Leigh contacts Sphinx's mother (Sarah) and the two teens are reunited; Cadence having requested Sphinx's company during his final year. With Sphinx initially reticent to become reacquainted with Cadence, their relationship twists and turns to a terrifying climax about making the ultimate sacrifice ...

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...

This is a gripping, poignant and intensely moving first novel by a young writer who is barely out of her teens herself. Like Jane Eyre or our own agonised youthful diaries, it's about intense relationships - and passion that can't express itself. It's brilliant and thoughtful and a little frightening.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE



www.doublecluck.com

 Chicken House UK

 @Chickenhsebooks



AUTHOR BACKGROUND

M. Anjelais began writing at the age of seven and has since won numerous writing competitions with her work. Now, at 20 years of age, she has chosen to forego college in order to pursue her career as a writer. She lives with her family in Nesco, New Jersey and enjoys drawing, public speaking, studying history and living life as a proud, happy eccentric.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

“My goal for my writing has always been to use dark subject matter as a tool to focus on the good in the world. Light is always brightest when it’s surrounded by the dark. I wrote Breaking Butterflies with that phrase in mind. This is a story about sacrifice, love, and the beauty that can be found in the most twisted of circumstances.” **M. ANJELAIS, AUTHOR**

THEMES

- Destiny
- Friendship
- Love
- Relationships
- Life/Death
- Family

WRITING STYLE

Breaking Butterflies is a no-holds-barred account of a relationship between a teenage girl and boy. It is told through the eyes of Sphinx, who details her feelings towards Cadence – a boy with sociopathic tendencies who she is both attracted to and repelled by. It is set, firstly, in America, but switches to England for the bulk of the novel. The focus is on the development of the relationship between the two characters over time, but there is also



a strong emphasis on ideas of fate and destiny. Thematically, the book discusses morality, and alongside dealing with grief, the issue of suicide is central. 26 chapters, 257 pages, age 14+.

PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1: The Bucket List

On page 81, Sphinx cannot believe Cadence is unable to think of anything to do with his day. She remarks; 'If I had been in his place, knowing that every second brought me that much closer to dying, I would have had so many things on my list. So many little, last-minute, hurried things.' Pupils could be tasked with coming up with their own 'bucket lists', in which they are required to write down ten things they would aim to do before they die. Pupils could then work in groups, sharing their lists and explaining why they made their choices and why the things on their lists are important to them. This is, potentially, a very personal subject, and therefore it would be important that pupils felt safe in revealing their choices. However, it would be interesting to compare the pupils' choices, particularly noting any common choices, and those that are a little more unusual.

2: Life Markers

Sphinx reflects on the things that Cadence will leave behind after he has gone. On page 44, she says, 'suddenly I was thankful for the picture of him with the Christmas tree, the old magazines in the boxes in our attic, the videotapes of us as toddlers, even the scar on my face. They were all markers, pages in a life scrapbook that would remain, reminding everyone, reminding me.' Pupils could be encouraged to think about how they would like their lives represented to others in terms of objects they might leave behind for future generations to discover. How would they like to be remembered, and what items would they leave behind to enable this? As Sphinx reveals when thinking about Cadence's life, this could include particular photographs or videos, but it might also include objects that reference important events in the pupils' lives so far (or even in their lives to come). Depending on time and resources, pupils could attempt to collect these items in reality (sharing them with their class), or they could



simply describe the items – perhaps making a list of 5 or 6 that would symbolise the sort of person they are. It would be fun for these collections of ‘markers’ to remain anonymous, with other pupils having to identify the person the items relate to.

3: This Was Your Life

Sphinx resolves to record as much of Cadence’s last weeks on his old camera as she can – although she realises that she must do this without Cadence’s knowledge (as he would likely forbid her from recording his life like this if he found out what she was doing). She records him playing piano when he is not looking, and observes him when he is painting. Sphinx’s video would likely suggest Cadence was an artistic but private person, but videos focussing on other subjects would reveal different things about different people. Pupils could think about how a video montage, such as the one Sphinx embarks on, would ‘immortalise’ the subject. Providing camera equipment is available, pupils could work in groups to devise montage videos revealing something about the personality and character of a particular subject. Groups could think about what sort of a person they would be documenting, or perhaps groups could each be given a different brief and character profile. They would then need to decide how they could best demonstrate the character’s personality through a five minute video montage. One member of the group might like to act as the subject, with other pupils offering cameo roles where necessary. Ultimately, each group should come up with a video montage that, through content, editing and musical score, demonstrates as much about each subject’s qualities and characteristics as possible so that, when shown to the rest of the class, the other pupils are able to identify what each subject was like as a person. When pupils give their feedback, it would be useful to encourage them to talk about what specific elements of the montage made them feel the way they did about the subject’s character.

4: Mega-metaphors

In her writing, M. Anjelais uses a number of metaphors to enhance her storytelling. She also employs metaphors as a means of giving the reader a hint of what is to come. An example of this can be found on pages 134-135, when Cadence and Sphinx play ‘raindrop chasers’ in the back of the car – the raindrops



reaching the bottom of the window at the same time signalling Cadence's request later in the novel that Sphinx should take her own life when he dies. This provides an opportunity for pupils to explore how metaphors work as a versatile storytelling device. In the same way that the raindrop chasers episode foreshadows the later events in *Breaking Butterflies*, pupils could be given a writing task that requires them to create an extended metaphor that in some way hints or runs parallel with the physical events in a narrative. To aid this work, pupils could even be given metaphorical 'events' (such as a game of 'raindrop chasers') as a starting point to their writing; the pupils having to devise a short story that is inspired by the metaphor. Alternatively, pupils could all be tasked with writing about the same event - having to find their own metaphors to enhance their writing. It would be interesting for pupils to compare the different metaphors they have come up with to help them write on the same topic.

5: Cadence's Journal

We learn, through Sphinx's narrative, that Cadence is diagnosed as being a sociopath. We begin to understand what this means for both Cadence and those around him as we follow the events of the novel. Significantly, Cadence is unable to experience emotions in the same way as those around him experience emotions, and this causes problems in his relationships with people (particularly Sphinx and his mother). Although he takes part in some of the same activities as Sphinx, his reaction to these is often different to the reaction Sphinx has. Because he cannot respond to the things that happen on a similar emotional level his documentation of the moments he and Sphinx share together are likely to be very different. With this in mind, it would be interesting for pupils to attempt to describe some of the events in the novel using Cadence's voice instead of Sphinx's. Pupils could each concentrate on a specific section of *Breaking Butterflies*; attempting to retell it from Cadence's point of view. His version of events is going to be affected by his condition, and this would provide an excellent opportunity for pupils to research what it means to be a sociopath and how it would alter Cadence's perception of his own life and those he encounters. In doing this, pupils should also consider, not only how the narrative voice may change significantly from the one Sphinx's character offers, but also how the format and structure of the narrative itself may be altered to reflect Cadence's outlook.



6: The Gallery

One of the things we learn about Cadence is that he is a talented painter who works tirelessly on his paintings in the attic. Perhaps following on from some of the research carried out in relation to the previous activity, pupils could be encouraged to delve into the psyche of this character as he paints. We are given some clues about what Cadence's painting looks like (namely that he prefers blue), but the actual designs we must imagine for ourselves. Considering what they know about Cadence's character and his experiences, pupils could attempt to paint 'in the Cadence style'. Pupils would need to question what Cadence might be trying to confer through his painting and use this to inform how the painting looks. Further to this, other pupils could inspect this work and offer an assessment (what it 'means' perhaps, as opposed to how 'good' it is). It might be fun if this comes in the form of the art gallery owner's feedback email that Leigh receives at the end of the novel – the content of which we don't discover. How would a gallery owner react to the pupils' paintings, and what might he or she say about the artist behind them?

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Cadence refuses to accept chemotherapy treatment for his leukaemia. Discuss the reasons for and against Cadence's decision.
2. Why do you think Sphinx is fascinated to the song lyric, 'love is watching someone die'? What do you think it means, and how do you think it relates to the novel?
3. Do you think it is possible to feel empathy for Cadence? Why? Why not?
4. Leigh and Sarah's childhood plan shapes much of their lives (it is certainly something that affects the expectations of their children). Do you think it is a good idea for people to formulate (and then try to follow) plans like these? To what extent do you think people should try to plan their lives, or the lives of those around them?

