ABOUT THE BOOK

Charlotte Davis is in pieces. At seventeen she’s already lost more than most people do in a lifetime. But she’s learned how to forget. The broken glass washes away the sorrow until there is nothing but calm. You don’t have to think about your father and the river. Your best friend, who is gone forever. Or your mother, who has nothing left to give you.

Every new scar hardens Charlie’s heart just a little more, yet it still hurts so much. It hurts enough to not care anymore, which is sometimes what has to happen before you can find your way back from the edge.

A deeply moving portrait of a girl in a world that owes her nothing, and has taken so much, and the journey she undergoes to put herself back together. Kathleen Glasgow’s debut is heartbreakingly real and unflinchingly honest. It’s story you won’t be able to look away from.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Girl in Pieces is Kathleen Glasgow’s debut novel. She lives and writes in Tucson, Arizona. To learn more about Kathleen and her writing, go to her website, kathleenglasgowbooks.com, and follow her on Twitter @kathglasgow.

BEFORE YOU READ . . .

Change.
Have you ever been stuck in a pattern of behavior that was negative, or needed to make a change in your life?
How did you break the pattern?
Who helped you make the positive changes that you needed to make?

Family.
How do you define a family?
What are the bonds that make up your family?
Who are the people you would go to for help, if you were ever in trouble?
**DISCUSSION**

**Alone.**

Charlie notes, “There is being alone, and then there is being alone. They are not the same thing at all” (p. 108).

- What does Charlie mean by this difference?
- What are the times in her life when she feels most alone, and why?
- How does she feel about being alone?

**Darkness.**

As Charlie describes Ariel’s paintings, “It seems like the darkness is almost trying to leave the whole thing, because the little light is back there, and it’s turning its back on the light” (p. 134).

- What does the idea of darkness represent to Charlie? To Ariel? To Riley?
- What are the dark places in Charlie’s life, and where does she find a little light?
- Do you think Charlie will ever be completely free from her dark places?

**Cross.**

After meeting Ariel, Charlie steals a cross from her house: “Ariel has taken a little from me tonight and so I am taking a little of her” (p. 136).

- Why do you think Charlie feels compelled to take Ariel’s cross?
- What do you think the cross represents to Charlie, and how does its meaning change for her over time?
- Why does Charlie ultimately return the cross to Ariel, and what does that reveal about her journey?

**Kindness.**

Ariel explains to Charlie, “The world runs on kindness” (p. 200). In the depths of her pain, Charlie still has people who try to save her.

- Who are the different people in Charlie’s life who reach out to her with kindness, and how do they do so?
- What motivates them to help her?
- How does Charlie respond to their kindness, and how do her responses change throughout the novel?

**Shame.**

As she watches Riley’s alcoholism escalate, Charlie remembers Ellis: “My stomach churns with shame. I didn’t help her and I lost her” (p. 207).

- Why does Charlie feel responsible for what happened to Ellis?
- How do her feelings about Ellis shape the choices that Charlie makes throughout the novel?
- Do you think Charlie should have done more to help the people who needed it most, like Ellis, or Louisa, or Riley?
- Could she have done more to help herself?
**QUESTIONS**

*Losing.*

During difficult times, “I’m always losing things” becomes a refrain for Charlie (p. 293).

- What, or whom, might Charlie be thinking of as her lost things?
- What do you think are Charlie’s most significant lost things—mental, physical, or emotional?
- What are some of the ways, including self-harm, that Charlie tries to cope with her losses, and what are their effects?

*Using.*

Linus warns Charlie, “He’s in a downward slide and in that slide, we users will take everybody we can down with us. Because if we land in shit, we don’t want to be alone in the shit” (p. 299).

- Consider the many people in the different stages of Charlie’s life—from home, to the streets, to Creeley, and then to Arizona. How do they use her, and for what reasons?
- What are the consequences for Charlie, and for others?
- Does Charlie recognize that she is being used?
- In what ways might Charlie be using others in return?

*Mirror.*

After meeting Blue, Riley tells Charlie, “Everybody you meet is like a little mirror of you” (p. 318).

- What does Riley mean by this statement?
- In what ways do the different people Charlie meets mirror her, in both good and bad ways?
- What does Charlie come to learn about herself through her relationships with others?

*Momentous.*

Felix suggests that “Everyone has that moment, I think, the moment when something so . . . momentous happens that it rips your very being into small pieces” (p. 355).

- What are the times in Charlie’s life that have been momentous, and for what reasons?
- How does Felix’s advice help Charlie to understand herself as a “girl in pieces”?
- Have there been times in your own life that were “momentous,” in either good or bad ways?

*You.*

As Charlie prepares to leave Creeley, Casper tells her, “You own all of yourself, Charlie. Every last bit” (p. 95). Much later, Felix tells Charlie, “You be you, Charlotte. You be you” (p. 367).

- What does it mean for Charlie to own herself, and to be herself?
- Why do these mentor figures give her this advice? In what ways does Charlie succeed or fail in trying to follow their advice?
- Do you think that by the end of the novel, Charlie finally achieves it?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

Mother.
Charlie doesn’t believe Linus when she tells her, “I don’t know the story of your mom, but I have to believe she’s hoping somebody is looking out for you” (p. 368).
• Do you agree with Linus?
• Why does Charlie disagree with her?
How has Charlie’s relationship with her mother affected her, and her life?
• How might Charlie’s story look different if were told from her mother’s point of view?

Choice.
Blue explains to Charlie, “Sometimes with people, you just become something, like, your role happens to you, instead of you choosing it” (p. 371).
• What does Blue mean by this statement?
• How might this statement apply to Charlie’s experiences, too?
• What are the choices that Charlie makes for herself throughout the novel, versus the choices made for her by other people?
• How do the choices that Charlie makes reflect her character development?

Love.
Julie says, “Love is a real shit show, Charlie, but it’s not that” (p. 373).
• What role does love, or the lack of love, play in Charlie’s relationships with others? With herself?
• How does Charlie’s understanding of love change throughout the novel?

Voice.
At the start of the novel, Charlie exhibits selective mutism, and she continually struggles to talk to others. However, once Charlie finishes drawing Louisa’s story, she says, “I have a voice. I have a place for my voice. . .. It’s time for me to speak again” (p. 365).
• Why does Charlie refuse to speak at the beginning of the novel, and what does that reveal about her character?
• How do other characters respond to Charlie’s silence?
• Why do you think Charlie is finally ready to speak again?

Cereal.
Charlie takes the advice to heart when Blue tells her, “Don’t let the cereal eat you. It’s only a fucking box of cereal, but it will eat you alive if you let it” (p. 94).
• What does Blue’s warning mean to Charlie?
• When are the times Charlie becomes worried that the cereal is “eating her alive,” and what does that represent?
• Why do you think Blue uses cereal as a metaphor for her feelings?
• Has there been a time when you could relate to that feeling?

Lyrics.
Each part of Charlie’s story begins with music lyrics that reflect her feelings, and she finds deep meaning in the lyrics of musicians like Regan and Riley. Write your own song lyrics that reflect the feelings of a character in the novel, or write lyrics to communicate your own feelings.
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Comics.
Charlie finds strength in creating comic books to tell Louisa’s story. Choose a scene from the novel that was powerful to you, and draw a comic book spread that tells the story. Or create a comic book that tells a story from your own life that you want to give voice.

Music.
The music that she shared with her father, with Ellis and Mikey, and with Riley becomes a powerful source of memory for Charlie. Create your own playlist with songs that have rich memories and meaning for you. Ask a friend to create one too. Then exchange playlists or listen to each other’s music together.

Facebook.
Blue helps Charlie use Facebook to reconnect with people in her life. Create your own version of a Facebook page for Charlie or another character from the novel, including photos, hashtags, status updates, friend lists, and favorite quotes, movies, and music.

Color.
Making art is a force of healing for Charlie as well as for Ariel, Tony, Felix, and Linus. Ariel explains, “Colors by themselves can be a story, too” (p. 200). Use a line art coloring book with markers, paint, or colored pencils to create your own art that tells a story through color.

Streets.
Although she avoids talking about it, Charlie’s time living on the streets was a major part of her life. Use the Internet or library resources to research teen homelessness in your area. Share what you have learned with a friend.

PRAISE

★★“In Glasgow’s riveting debut novel, readers are pulled close to Charlie’s raw, authentic emotions as she strains to make a jagged path through her new life. . . . Her will to survive is glorious.”—Booklist, Starred

★★“Glasgow’s debut novel is a dark read, but the engaging writing will win an audience for her next one.”—VOYA, Starred

“Heartbreaking and thick with emotion.”—School Library Journal

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