

***Damaged Like Me* by Kimberly Dark**
Discussion Guide

1. What does the word “damage” mean to you? Has your understanding changed while reading this book?
2. “That which is common comes to be seen as normal” (1). Dark gives the example of the homogeneity of US Presidents, among others. Can you think of other examples of something, either within the book or within your own life, that is part of “common sense” even though it doesn’t make *good* sense?
3. Discuss confirmation bias, and how it works (see page 11). Can you also discuss unconscious bias, based on these essays?
4. How does Dark discuss the word “recovery,” and the implication of brokenness? (30-31) What might healing and recovery look like not only for an individual, but also a culture?
5. Have you ever heard the term “fat” used as a “neutral descriptor” (not an insult)? How do you experience that usage in this text?
6. What does Dark mean when she says that “niceness is complex” (48)? When is “niceness” an appropriate choice, and when do you notice “niceness” appearing as a habit or a shield?
7. What kinds of bodies are in/visible? How is your body visible, and is your visibility an asset or a problem?
8. Can you think of ways that you are both oppressed and oppressor?
9. What happens when you mess up? Do you fear hurting someone you care for, or maybe having strangers judge you poorly? How can we learn from that fear, channel it into “making new land” (75), new possibilities? Can you think of times when fear guided you? What did you do to regain your power?
10. What is the difference between comfort and love? (85) Does love have the power to transform us?
11. What is the relationship between an individual’s body and the culture? Between your body, and systems of power? (97) What are some racist narratives that you’ve had to unlearn, improve upon?
12. How and when do you talk about patriarchy (the many ways in which men are in charge of culture and resources)? Why don’t people talk about it more often, given that it harms people of all genders? How do we explore different experiences to embody new futures? (104)
13. Discuss the differences between Grammar Police and Language Altruists. Can you think of examples of each? Have you ever questioned the rules of language, or perhaps purposefully broken them?
14. What does it look like for the vulnerable body to be powerful? How do you handle your own body’s vulnerabilities? (129) Do you hide them? Is it easy to ask for help?
15. Why is speaking up in social situations so hard? Why does it feel so risky, and how might we encourage ourselves to speak up anyway? (164)
16. How do you relate to the culture that you were given? (170) How do you see yourself as a cultural creator?
17. What does it mean to be superficially involved in social issues? Discuss the shifting ways in which people understand tattoos and other body modifications.

18. Consider a time when you felt shame. What was the role of cultural expectations? How can overcoming shame (of being sexually abused, for instance) change harmful cultural norms and values?
19. How do you relate to your body? Is it a friend or burden, or even a machine? Perhaps a source of wisdom? Maybe take a moment to now, with a few deep breaths into the belly, feet flat on the ground, eyes gazing at one fixed point. What do you notice?
20. In what ways is incest a cultural problem, rather than (solely) a familial or individual problem? How might collective social accountability change the way we address child sexual abuse?
21. How do you feel about lying? And do you use different criteria to judge your lies, versus the lies of others? What is the difference between lying for benefit and lying to save oneself? What if we discussed lying as a human trait rather than an aberration?
22. How does your life and unique perspective contribute to the world in which we all live? How can you take responsibility for yourself as both a cultural consumer **and** creator?