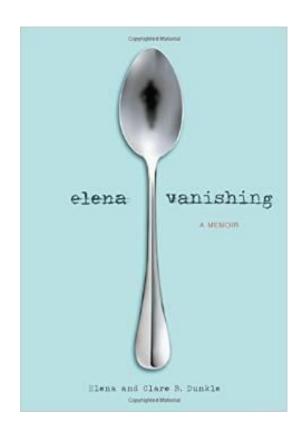


Children and Young Adult Book Review Middle School Elena Vanishing

Educator Reviewer: Helene Halstead Student Reviewer: Lindy Buxton



Dunkle, E. & Dunkle, C. (2015). *Elena vanishing*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

ISBN: 978-1452121512

Pages: 288

Educator Review:

I had the pleasure of seeing daughter Elena Dunkle and mother Clare Dunkle speak on a panel at the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) conference of 2014. Their stories, narrated in *Elena Vanishing*

Elena's matter-of-fact narrating style explains what her experience was like, but makes no claim that others have had the same experience. (2015) chronicles primarily Elena's experiences with Anorexia Nervosa. Their heartfelt talk piqued my curiosity, yet I was hesitant to read another tale of a struggling teen dealing with an eating disorder. I say this not because the market has been overwhelmed with books on this topic, but from the perspective of one who as faced this battle herself and read extensively on the topic. Memoirs and fictional tales dealing with the topic, as Elena herself points out in her Afterward, often glorify the topic or focus less on the day-to-day experiences and more on the recovery.

Elena Vanishing does neither of these things. Her story is both engaging and off-putting, as a story dealing with this topic cannot help but be. On page one she plops the reader down in the middle

of one of her many hospital visits, immediately exposing the reader to the conflicts she felt between dealing with intense pain and craving the admiration of the hospital staff. In the three-page chapter, Elena spells out the dichotomy she faced daily: fears of eating and a loss of control, the need for outside validation of her perfection and the agonistic pain that comes from starving.

Elena's matter-of-fact narrating style explains what her experience was like, but makes no claim that others have had the same experiences. She interacts with others in an out-patient facility dealing with the same mental illness and manages to show similarities and discrepancies between the patients living there. She succeeds in personalizing her experiences while including enough information that others can see themselves in her story.

This brings us to the question of who might enjoy or benefit from reading *Elena Vanishing*. It is often the case that readers of books about eating disorders experience the disease themselves or know someone who has. These books become a guide for recovery or a validation of one's own trials. Dunkle's story is different. It does provide us with an understanding of the experience. However, it also tells a story of being human and how we manage terrible incidents in addition to our concerns of how we are perceived by others. It is, thus, a book that can be read by anyone, as well have all lived; and, therefore, have all struggled.

That being said, there are over 24 million individuals in the United States alone who cope with this mental and physical illness. It has the highest mortality rate of young girls, aged 15-24, than other causes of death combined (retrieved from: https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/general-information). It is likely that educators will interact with students who are, in some way, dealing with an eating disorder. Reading this book provides an understanding of what these young people may be feeling as well as the seriousness of the disease. This understanding will help anyone who feels overwhelmed or combative as they live their lives with this or other struggles.

Helene Halstead The University of Georgia, Athens, GA

Student Review:

Elena Vanishing is truthfully one of the best books I have ever read. The book was about a seventeen year old girl who struggled with the eating disorder known as Anorexia Nervosa. The book is based on a true story of how Elena lived with her eating disorder. My favorite thing about the book is probably the choice of wording the author uses. The details were incredible and so pure.

I found this book to be extremely well written with attention to small details that brought the story to life. I personally really connected with the book, as I am also a teenage girl struggling with an eating disorder. The book is very emotional and could possibly be too upsetting for some people, so I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone under fourteen.

This book is amazing and I highly recommend it.

Lindy Buxton Hilsman Middle School, Athens, GA 7th Grade