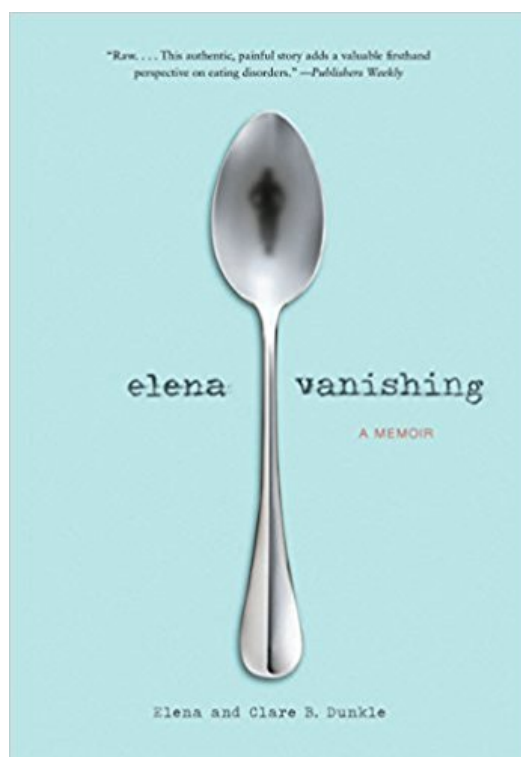


JoLLE@UGA[®]
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

**Review of *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*
By Elena Dunkle & Clare B. Dunkle**

Adult/ Educator Reviewer: Heathcliff Lopez
Edgewood ISD
Student Review: Brisa Anzures, 11th Grade



Dunkle, E. & Dunkle, C. B. (2016). *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

ISBN: 9781452152141

Adult Review: Heathcliff Lopez

Elena Vanishing
by Elena and
Clare B.

Dunkle is a memoir written from Elena's perspective, a teenage girl suffering from an eating disorder. The book follows Elena's life beginning in her later high school years into her early college years, and how her anorexia affected her life both in and out of school. Elena is a high-achieving student, often boasting a near-perfect GPA, a love for community service, and lofty career goals. To provide the reader with a deep sense of her struggle, her eating disorder is well personified throughout the story as the voice in her head, providing insight to the conflicts Elena faces every moment of her day. This voice continually makes Elena feel less than worthy for happiness and satisfaction, and I felt myself rooting for her to not give into it. Everything described in her life is centered on the idea of how she can either avoid eating or how she can deflect attention from any eating she does around others.

As a reader, I can say she pushed the right buttons. Even while hospitalized, Elena had crafted very sly ways of removing any feeding tubes or hiding any food provided to her. I felt frustrated to see her continually harm herself through starvation, and at times intentionally throwing up any food she did eat. She allows

"I would recommend teachers read this book as a reminder to consider the struggles all students face, especially those with perfect behavior and a smile every time we look their way."

us to follow her tricks for avoiding any food consumption, and she does a great job at building frustration in the reader in this way as the story progresses. I wanted to jump in and help her, while also seeing how little help she wanted from others.

In her college years, however, we see Elena confront new situations, from almost being sexually assaulted in a party, to being fired as an RA at the dorms for admitting she had an eating disorder. I found it easy to sympathize with her because after all, she is a normal girl living a normal life who just so happens to have an eating disorder. The story climaxes after Elena finds out she is pregnant, and her baby's father tells her to get an abortion. She disregarded this as she reveals she was also told by her doctor that her eating disorder had damaged her body to the point that he was surprised she hadn't already miscarried. Later, by herself in her bathroom at home, Elena had a miscarriage in secret. This experience substantially changed the way Elena perceived herself and her eating disorder, pushing her to realize that she needed to change her behavior if she were to ever make up for the miscarriage of the daughter she never knew. Though the road was still difficult for her, the book ends with her coming to terms with the root of her eating disorder.

The memoir is written in such a way that it allows the reader to track Elena's difficulties in a very tangible and visceral way. Young adults can gain much from reading a book in which a girl struggles to admit her problems, yet is very clearly aware of her own suffering. While some of the scenes are a bit

graphic, not to mention the casual profanity throughout, this is a memoir about not only trying to overcome an eating disorder, but about self-perception and meeting the expectations others have of us. I believe high-school aged students in particular would have the most to gain by reading *Elena Vanishing*. In my book discussion video with my student Brisa, as a clear example of how book discussions often go in school, we got cut off by the bell before we had a chance to discuss the appropriateness of this book as an addition to my classroom library, but I am an advocate of doing so. I would recommend teachers read this book as a reminder to consider the struggles all students face, especially those with perfect behavior and a smile every time we look their way.

Student Review: Brisa Anzures

*E*lena *Vanishing* by Elena and Clare Dunkle was a very intriguing story. It helps the reader to view anorexia from the perspective of the anorexic. Elena's story is important for people to know about because it helps us view all people differently.

I would definitely recommend this book to someone because it's good to see both sides of the story. Elena's struggles and allowances with anorexia show that we need to show patience and love towards those with eating disorders. This memoir allows readers to

sympathize with Elena and make us want to help her.

People that enjoy studying or reading about human behavior, psychology, and anorexia would enjoy *Elena Vanishing*. The book includes the psychologists trying to help Elena but she is reluctant to tell them too much, which I thought was very interesting.

"Elena's breakthrough pulled at my heart strings and made me feel compassion towards her."

The best part of the book was when Jen, the therapist, tells Elena to look deep into her feelings to find the reason why she feels critical of herself. Elena's breakthrough pulled at my heart strings and made me feel compassion towards her. It also made me feel glad that Elena now knows why she thinks a certain way which will help her improve.

Elena Vanishing is a great book. I believe students around my age (16) will really enjoy it. It provides good insight about how to deal with anorexia.

Book Talk Conference with Both Reviewers

To hear more about what these reviewers thought about this book, follow [the link](#) to see them engage in a book talk.