

A Reading Group Guide to

The Apocalypse of Elena Mendoza

By Shaun David Hutchinson

About the Book

Elena Mendoza did not mean to start the apocalypse. But when the voices inside her head told her she could heal the girl who was bleeding to death at her feet—the girl she had a crush on and had finally worked up the courage to talk to—she knew that she had to try. Until that very moment, Elena hadn't known that she had the power to heal others, nor that there would be terrible consequences each time she used this power. She didn't know that healing Freddie would force her to make impossible choices on a daily basis, or that she would end up endangering everyone that she cared about. All she knew was that Freddie was dying, and she had to try to do something. So she healed the gunshot wound and inadvertently started the apocalypse. Now she just has to figure out what comes next.

Discussion Questions

1. Why doesn't Elena tell Fadil about the voices she hears until after healing Freddie? Why does she leave this part out when telling her mother about the miracle? Why does she become more open about the voices as the story goes on?
2. Elena does not believe in God. How does this affect the decisions she makes regarding her healing powers and the voices' demands?
3. Why do you think David shot Freddie? Why is it so important to Elena that she have this information? Would knowing the cause help Elena or Freddie deal with the aftermath of the shooting? How does Elena's search for answers affect David's family? Do you think it is significant that David was raptured immediately after Freddie was healed?
4. How has being the product of parthenogenesis affected Elena's life? In what ways did it prepare her for the events of the story? What effect does it have on her relationship with her mother?
5. What does Elena see when she heals someone? Why does everyone have a different look to their energy?
6. Why is Fadil friends with Elena? Are there times when she unknowingly tests his friendship? Why have they never become romantically involved? What makes him particularly well suited to help Elena deal with her healing powers?
7. Discuss Javier's relationship to Elena. Why did they break up? Is he a good person?

8. Is Freddie grateful to Elena for saving her? How is her life different now that she has been healed? What are her reasons for being angry with Elena's actions?
9. Why does Fadil think that the natural disasters and unexplained phenomena happening around the world are connected to Elena's actions? Why does Elena doubt that this is true?
10. Both Freddie and Fadil mention how beautiful Elena is in her Valkyrie costume. Why does this particular outfit make such an impression on them? In what ways is Elena like the Valkyrie?
11. Elena says, "All that ambient light overwhelms the stars in the sky, but they're still up there, millions and billions of light-years distant, waiting for us to see them. They're a lot like life that way. The constant noise of our own personal problems drowns out what's happening in the rest of the world. We get caught up in our day-to-day struggles and can't see that everyone is fighting their own battles. But they are." What battles are the people around her fighting? Is Elena aware of their struggles, or are they drowned out by her own problems? Can she help to solve any of these problems?
12. Why did Carmen Ballard and Harrison Bartlett try to force Elena to use her powers? How are their tactics different from others who have asked Elena for help? Why does Sean agree to help Carmen Ballard?
13. Both Elena and Freddie are careful to differentiate between having a crush on someone and being in love with them. What do they say the differences are? How do these differences impact the relationship between the two girls? Do you think there is a point when their feelings begin to shift from a crush to something deeper?
14. Why does Mrs. Haimovitch feel that she doesn't deserve a miracle? Why does Elena heal her anyway? Do you think people can act in such a way that they deserve to suffer?
15. Why does Elena have a hard time believing that her actions are saving the human race? Do the opinions of those around her sway her feelings on the subject? Are there problems that Elena should not solve, or people that she should not save?
16. Elena's mother believes that life is one long tunnel with no light at the end. She says "There are lights along the way. Sometimes they feel spread farther apart than others, but they're there . . . but walking through a stretch of dark doesn't mean you can't be happy. And if you're lucky, you'll bump into someone willing to walk through the darkness with you." Do you think there are other characters who share this philosophy, even if they wouldn't describe it this way? Do her mother's words help Elena with the decisions she has to make?
17. The ability to choose our own actions is a common theme throughout the book. Who was faced with a difficult choice and had to live with the consequences of their actions?

Does Elena feel that the motivations behind decisions matter, or just the outcome? What makes Elena's choice to use her powers especially difficult?

18. Why are the voices so upset by Elena's decision to leave the portals open and let people decide for themselves whether or not to cross over? Why does this seem like the best option to her? Is it worth the sacrifice she makes? Are you surprised by the people who choose to cross over?

Extension Activities

1. Elena has the special gift of healing. Take a class on basic first aid, talk to the school nurse, or research the basics on the Internet so that you, too, can help to heal those who are suffering.
2. Music is very important to Freddie, particularly because it provides a link to her father. Find music by some of the artists that are mentioned in the book and listen to it. Does hearing the music add to your appreciation of the story? Create your own soundtrack for a particular period or event in your life.
3. When Elena heals an illness, it appears to her as a visual representation of what is actually wrong with the victim's body. Choose an illness or physical issue and draw a picture of how it might look to Elena. Write a short paragraph explaining how it could be remedied.
4. Elena and her mother volunteer at a dog shelter, walking and playing with the dogs. Find a shelter in your area that could use a hand and help out.
5. Several characters from Shaun David Hutchinson's other books make an appearance in *The Apocalypse of Elena Mendoza*. Choose a character that doesn't interact with Elena and write a short story in which they meet. If you haven't read Hutchinson's other books, choose another character from a favorite book.
6. Freddie creates a beautiful sculpture out of found objects and other items that others would consider to be garbage. Gather together items that are no longer being used and create your own work of art. If sculpture doesn't interest you, try a collage or installment art piece.
7. Elena dresses up as a Valkyrie for Halloween. Research this group of strong women and write a short essay about their place in Norse mythology.

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