



## **Eating Disorders Graphic Medicine Discussion Guide:**

*Lighter Than My Shadow* by Katie Green

From the publisher... “A poignant, heart-lifting graphic memoir about anorexia, eating disorders and the journey to recovery. Like most kids, Katie was a picky eater. She’d sit at the table in silent protest, hide uneaten toast in her bedroom, listen to parental threats that she’d have to eat it for breakfast. But in any life a set of circumstance can collide, and normal behaviour might soon shade into something sinister, something deadly. *Lighter Than My Shadow* is a hand-drawn story of struggle and recovery, a trip into the black heart of a taboo illness, an exposure of those who are so weak as to prey on the vulnerable, and an inspiration to anybody who believes in the human power to endure towards happiness.”

### **Why a Graphic Novel?**

- Research suggests that we are better at understanding and absorbing information presented in visual forms, such as comics.
- Stories are more engaging than factual information alone. How much easier is it to remember and empathize with something a friend experienced versus hard statistics alone?
- Coined by Ian Williams, a physician in the UK, Graphic Medicine “is the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare.”
  - Graphic medicine, then, combines visual storytelling and medicine, creating a unique opportunity for readers to experience and learn about healthcare experiences through comics.

### **To Learn More...**

- [www.graphicmedicine.org](http://www.graphicmedicine.org) – The home base for all things graphic medicine.
- *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec et al. Available from Penn State University Press.



Created by Lauren Laumas as part of the NNLM Region 7 Graphic Medicine Initiative.

## Questions for Discussion

1. *Lighter Than My Shadow* makes use of neutral-colored panels with the occasional use of color. How did the colors or lack thereof affect the way you thought about the story?
2. Katie talks to many people about her eating disorder including friends, family, and therapists. What are some of the things people tell her that resonate with you as being the most helpful?
3. Can you point to specific passages/panels that struck you personally? Why?
4. Does the book remind you of an aspect of your own life? A particular event? A person – like a friend, family member, co-worker, etc.?
5. Did you appreciate the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is more or less effective for a memoir than for a fictional account? How is it different than a memoir written in prose?
6. How do Katie's friendships and peer relationships affect the way she sees herself?
7. Green uses imagery in the book that make her internal struggle with anorexia more visible. What images resonated with you the most? How do the black squiggle marks used in many panels show Katie's emotional state?
8. Katie's friends, family, and doctors try to help her overcome her eating disorder in different ways. What helps her? What does not work for her? What do you think are some of the things people need in order to overcome their eating disorder?
9. How did Katie's relationship with food evolve over time?
10. After experiencing sexual assault, how does Katie come to terms with what has happened to her? What are some of the negative coping strategies she develops and how does she develop more positive ones?
11. Eating disorders are sometimes stigmatized in our society, which makes people feel hesitant to talk about them. How do you think this can affect an individual's illness and recovery? How did *Lighter Than My Shadow* challenge your knowledge and opinions of eating disorders?

**Remember:** These are just suggested questions and there could be many, many more. Don't feel tethered to these – let the conversation flow naturally and use these questions as starting points when conversation stalls.