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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

I Am the Messenger by Markus Zusak

Summary

Meet Ed Kennedy—underage cabdriver, pathetic card player, and useless at romance. He lives in a shack with his coffee-addicted dog, the Doorman, and he's hopelessly in love with his best friend, Audrey.

His life is one of peaceful routine and incompetence, until he inadvertently stops a bank robbery. That's when the first Ace arrives. That's when Ed becomes the messenger.

Chosen to care, he makes his way through town helping and hurting (when necessary), until only one question remains: Who's behind Ed's mission?

Discussion Questions

1. There are many ironies in Ed Kennedy's life. One is in the name of the company for which he works—Vacant Taxi Company. What is "vacant" in Ed's life? Explain the irony in Audrey's statement, "You used to just be.... Now you're somebody, Ed." (p. 232) Discuss how Ed resolves the ironies in his life.
2. Describe Ed's family. Explain what his mother means when she says, "Believe it or not—it takes a lot of love to hate you like this." (p. 245) Ed's mother says that his father promised to take her away. She resents the fact that he never did. Debate whether his mother is simply looking for someone to blame for her unhappiness. How is Audrey's family similar to Ed's family?
3. Discuss Ed and Audrey's relationship. Audrey says that she likes Ed too much to have sex with him, and he says that he wants more than sex from her. Why does Audrey think that sex would ruin their relationship? What does Ed want from Audrey? It is obvious that Audrey is having sex with other guys. How does her attitude toward casual sex indicate disrespect for herself? Ed eventually learns that Audrey is in love with him. Why is she reluctant to reveal her love for him? What might Ed offer her at the end of the novel that he was incapable of offering in the beginning?
4. Ed and his friends are in a bank when it is robbed. Debate whether Ed is in the wrong place at the right time, or the right place at the wrong time.

5. After the robbery, Ed begins receiving the cards in the mail. Explain how Ed knows that each mission he is handed is serious business.
6. One of Ed's first messages is to soothe Milla Johnson's loneliness by posing as her deceased husband. How does this experience show Ed the real meaning of love? Then, Ed delivers a message to Sophie, the barefoot runner. Explain the courage that Ed learns from Sophie. What does Ed learn from each of the twelve messages that he delivers? How is each mission a lesson for the heart?
7. There are times when self-hatred is almost debilitating to Ed. Who is most responsible for his poor self-concept? How do the cards help Ed gain a more positive sense of self? Explain how Ed is both the messenger and the message. How does this support the theory that by helping others, a person helps himself? What does Ed mean when he says, "If I ever leave this place, I'll make sure I'm better here first?" (p. 283)
8. Ed says, "I want words at my funeral. But I guess that means that you need life in your life." (p. 298) How do the missions slowly put "life" in Ed's life? Think about the words that each of the characters might offer Ed by the end of the novel.
9. Some readers like open endings, and others like distinct conclusions. What is your preference? Why do you think the author ended the novel the way he did? Make a case for both types of endings.

Summary and Discussion Questions from the Publisher