

Reader's Guide
For
The Possibilities of Sainthood
by
Donna Freitas
A Debut Young Adult Novel

About the Book

Antonia Lucia Labella has two secrets: at fifteen, she's still waiting for her first kiss, and she wants to be a saint. An *official* one. Seem strange? Well, to Antonia, saints are royalty and she wants her chance at being a princess.

All her life she's kept company with these kings and queens of small favors, knowing exactly who to pray to on every occasion. Afraid of tripping in gym class? Try Sebastian, athletic and golden. Working in the family store? Light a candle for St. Leonard, Patron of Grocers. A good all-purpose one for school-day sneakiness: St. Jude, Patron Saint of Desperate Situations and Hopeless Causes.

Unfortunately, the two events Antonia's waited for her whole life seem equally unlikely to happen. It's not for lack of trying. Every month for the last eight years, Antonia has sent a petition to The Vatican proposing a new patron saint and bravely offering herself for the post. (So what if she's not dead?) And for how long has she been praying for the attention of the love of her life—the tall, dark, and sooo good looking Andy Rotellini? Too long to mention.

But as Antonia learns, in matters of sainthood, things are about as straightforward as wound-up linguine, and in matters of the heart, she's on her own.

About the Author

Donna Freitas is a professor at Boston University. Her writing has appeared in many newspapers and magazines, including *The Boston Globe*, *Newsweek*, *Salon*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. She contributes regularly to "On Faith," an online panel co-sponsored by *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*, and she is an occasional commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered*. Growing up, Donna could often be found covered in flour in the wee hours of the morning making pasta from scratch with her Italian mother and grandmother, listening to them pray to one saint or another. She lives in New York City. This is her first novel.

Discussion Questions

1. Antonia Lucia Labella loves the saints for their strange variety of talents—you can find a saint to help you in *almost* any situation, even gym class. But then, there are so many saint specialties missing, too: Antonia wonders why there is no Patron Saints for Secrets and Secret Keeping, or a Patron Saint for Using-Your-Words when you can't seem to find the right thing to say. What kind of saint specialization would you find useful?
2. Antonia lives in a very Italian household, above her family's Italian market, in a very Italian neighborhood in Rhode Island. Her mother, grandmother, cousins, her best friend Maria, and even her neighbors are constantly in and out of each other's lives and know everyone else's business. Sometimes they drive her crazy, but in the end, Antonia loves her great big Italian life. Where is your family from originally? What about your neighbors? Does your family and your community's cultural background influence your life? If so, how?
3. Antonia is caught between two boys and she's never been kissed. Andy Rotellini is the boy she's had a crush on for years from afar, but who she barely knows. Michael McGinnis is the best "friend" who has loved her for years, but for whom she has a hard time understanding her true feelings. Antonia's best friend Maria seems to know who Antonia should be with better than Antonia herself! Who did you want Antonia to end up with? Have you ever been confused about your true feelings for someone, like Antonia? Do you have a best friend who can help you discover how you really feel when it comes to romance?

4. Antonia brings her Saint Diary with her everywhere. She pours all her deepest hopes, secrets, and wishes onto its pages. Have you ever kept a diary? What does yours look like? Do you decorate it with as much care as Antonia? Why do you think some people keep diaries? What are diaries for?
5. Does Antonia finally get her wish—to become a saint? Who plays an important role in how she understands sainthood by the end of the story and how? Do you think Antonia is satisfied with her quest for sainthood, or is there more to come in the sainthood department for Antonia?

Activity

Antonia is always writing the Vatican proposing what she thinks are overlooked saint specializations and then nominating herself as the ideal candidate. If you were to become “royalty” for a talent of your own, what would it be? Or if you could call upon someone for help in your own life, for what would you call on them? Write your own “petition” to someone, arguing for why your unique saint needs to be added to the list of the almost 6,000 women and men, girls and boys, who are considered “official” saints.