



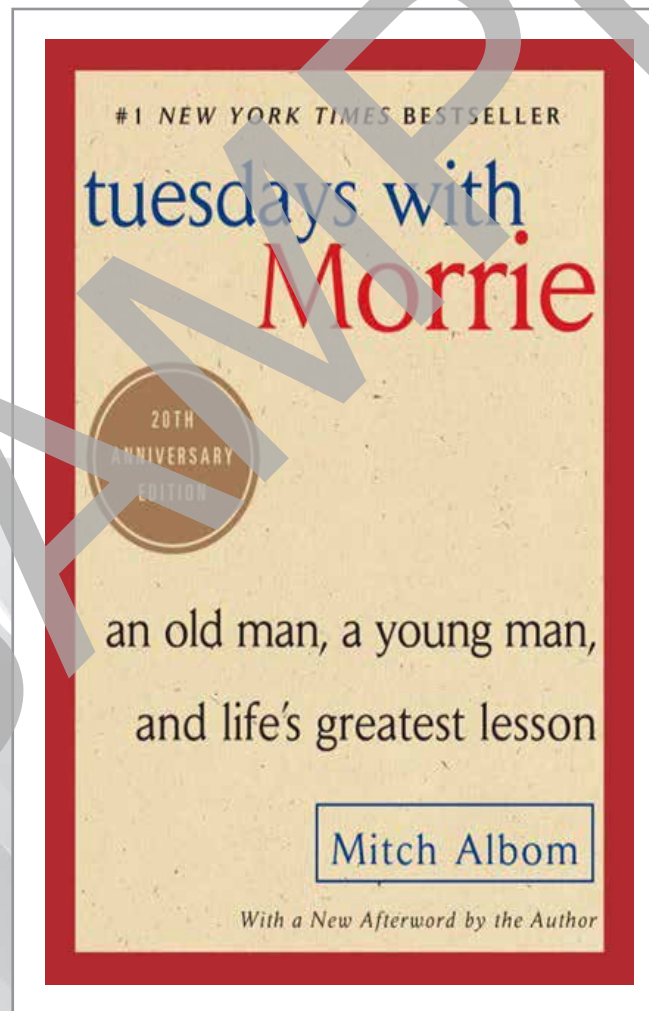
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Tuesdays with Morrie

Mitch Albom



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Tuesdays with Morrie

Mitch Albom

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, brainstorming,
research, compare/contrast,
critical thinking

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
inference

Writing

Poetry, script, review, sequel

Literary Elements

Characterization, symbolism,
simile, metaphor,
personification, theme,
universality

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
application

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, interview,
oral report

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage; Music—lyrics;
Drama—writing/acting;
Current Events

Genre: nonfiction—biography

Setting: West Newton, Massachusetts (suburb of Boston); mid-1990s

Point of view: first-person

Themes: love, friendship, family, aging, forgiveness, death, grief, acceptance

Conflict: person vs. death

Style: narrative interweaving the past and the present

Tone: emotional, contemplative, nostalgic

Summary

Mitch Albom, successful sports writer and radio journalist, first learns of the terminal illness of his former professor and mentor, Morrie Schwartz, on the TV program “Nightline.” Morrie is telling Ted Koppel he is learning how to die after being diagnosed with the fatal disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. On his graduation day from Brandeis University in 1979, Albom promised Morrie he would stay in touch but has failed to do so. He visits Morrie, and the two begin their Tuesday “classes.” The curriculum covers “The Meaning of Life,” with Morrie Schwartz as the teacher and Mitch Albom as the student. The lessons continue on Tuesdays for three months, culminating the week of Morrie’s death.

Characters

Morrie Schwartz: the “teacher”; writes his own epitaph, “A Teacher to the Last”; dies at age seventy-nine

Mitch Albom: the “student” whose life is forever changed during his Tuesday classes with Morrie

Charlotte: Morrie’s wife of forty-four years; a professor at MIT

Rob and Jon: Morrie’s sons

Janine: Mitch’s wife; sings for Morrie

Peter: Mitch’s brother who lives in Spain; seeks treatment in Europe for pancreatic cancer; rarely communicates with Mitch

Maurie Stein: Morrie’s friend who sends some of his aphorisms to the *Boston Blade*, leading to Morrie’s first appearance on “Nightline”

Ted Koppel: newsman who conducts three interviews with Morrie for “Nightline”

Connie: Morrie’s compassionate home health care aide

Charlie: Mitch’s austere Russian immigrant father; marries Eva after his first wife dies

Eva: Morrie’s kind, loving stepmother

David: Morrie’s younger brother; crippled by polio

Al Axelrad: rabbi from Brandeis who speaks at Morrie’s funeral service

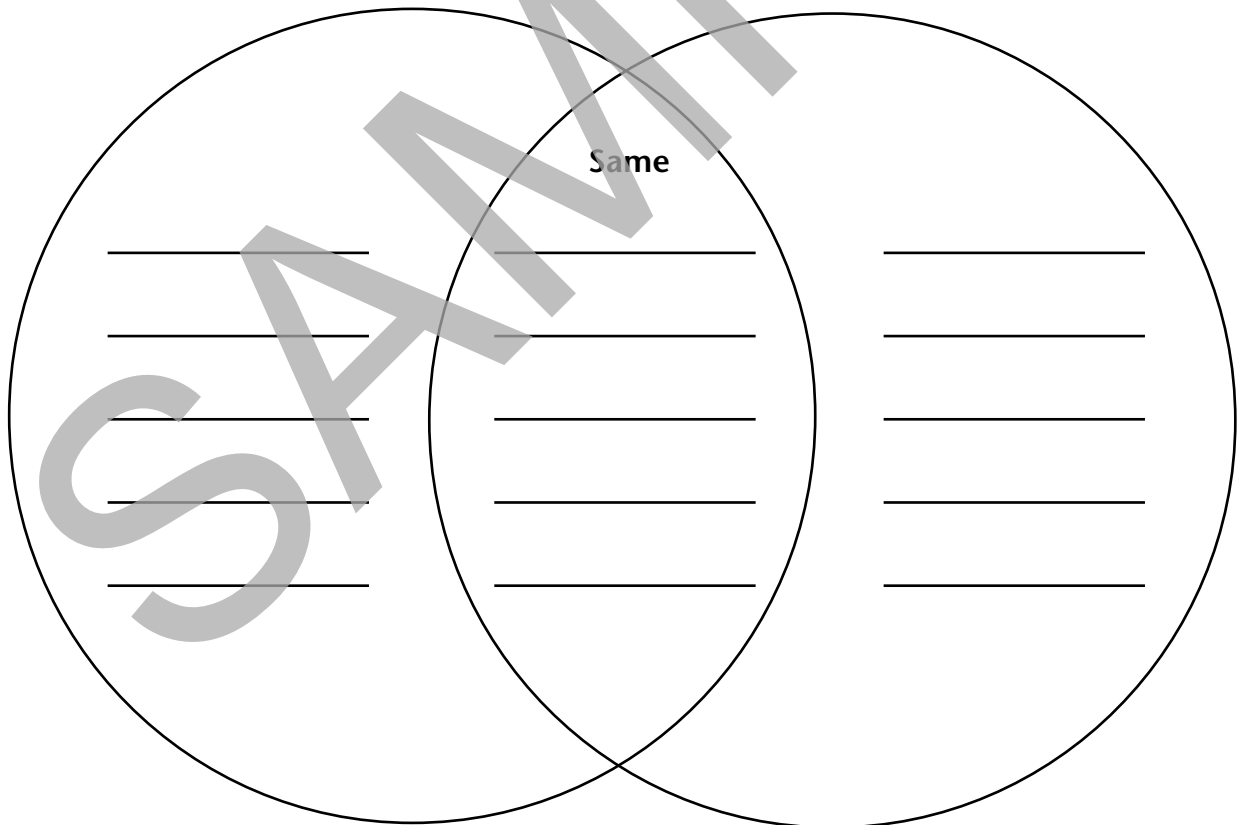
Initiating Activities

Use one or more of the following to introduce the novel.

1. Read aloud the poem “Death Be Not Proud” by John Donne. Brainstorm with students concerning their impressions of death and the process of dying.
2. Place Morrie Schwartz’s aphorism, “Death ends a life, not a relationship,” on an overhead transparency. Elicit students’ responses.
3. Preview the book. Have students note the title and subtitle, the dedication, the recommendations on the first four pages, and students’ prior information about the book or the TV movie by the same name.
4. Read aloud Morrie’s aphorism, “Death is as natural as life. It’s part of the deal we made.” As a class project, create a diamente poem contrasting “Life” and “Death.”
5. Bring to class a small pink hibiscus plant for students to observe as they read the book (see page 1 of the novel).

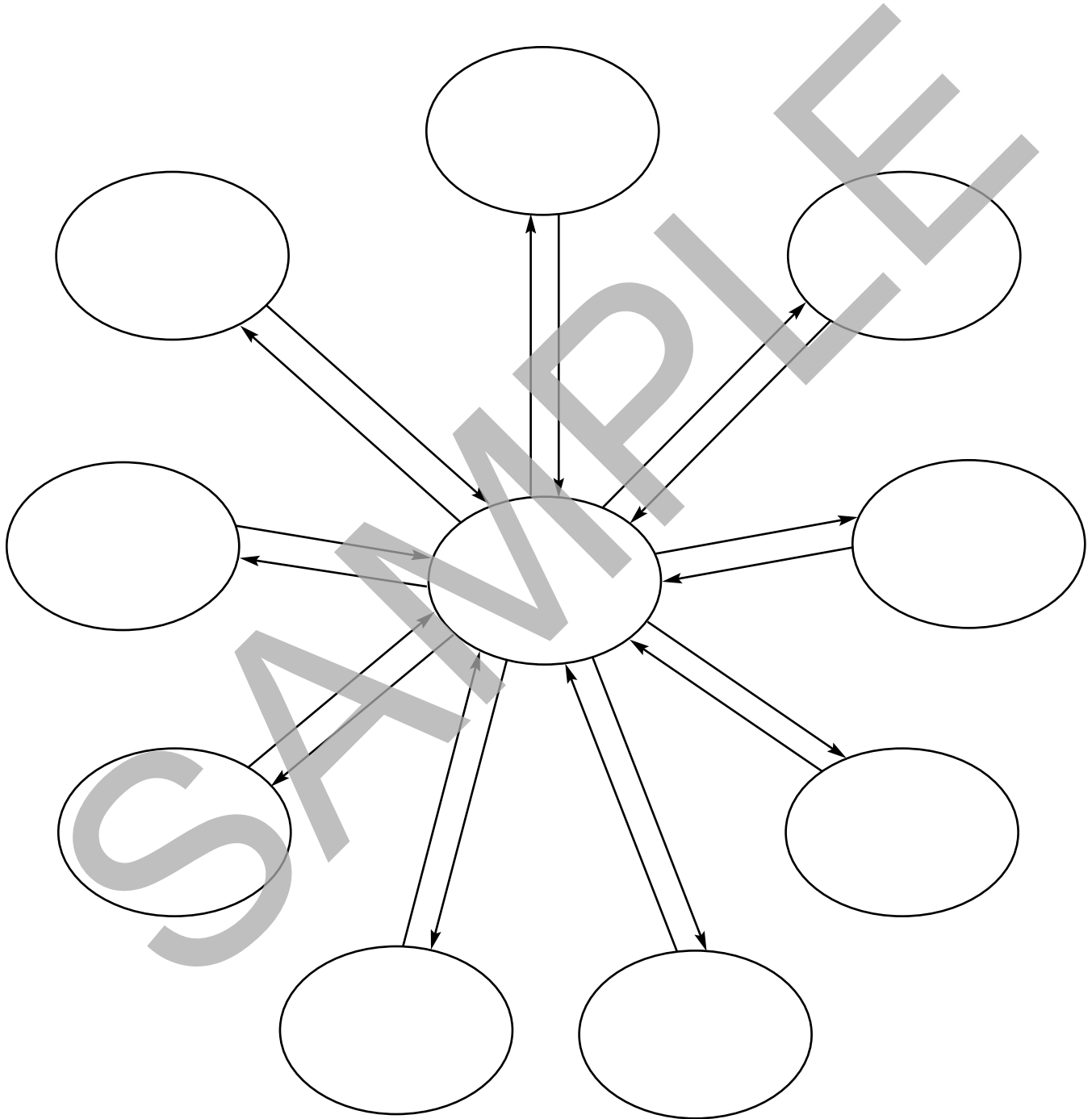
Mitch Albm

Morrie Schwartz



Sociogram

Directions: Write "Mitch's Issues" in the center oval. Identify each issue in the surrounding ovals, then discuss Morrie's lesson on that issue.



Bio-poem

Directions: Using the format below, write a bio-poem about either Mitch or Morrie. Then, write a bio-poem about yourself using the same format. Write a paragraph about the characteristics you identified in yourself.

- Line 1: Name
- Line 2: Traits (list four traits of the character)
- Line 3: Designation (e.g., son, father, friend, husband, teacher of, etc.)
- Line 4: Feels (list three things character feels)
- Line 5: Needs (list three things character needs)
- Line 6: Gives (list three things character gives)
- Line 7: Fears (list three things character fears)
- Line 8: Regrets (list three things character regrets)
- Line 9: Primary goal in life

Title _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

The Curriculum–The Syllabus, pp. 1–13

Morrie Schwartz faces the inevitability of his death from ALS. Mitch Albom recalls his first meeting with Morrie.

Vocabulary
syllabus (5)
sociology (5)
inexplicably (6)
amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (7)
theology (8)
demise (10)

Discussion Questions

1. Read aloud “The Curriculum.” Discuss the curriculum to which Albom refers and analyze its significance. Note the symbolism of the hibiscus plant. *(The curriculum: “The Meaning of Life.” Albom introduces the book by referring to the topics he and Morrie Schwartz cover during their weekly Tuesday classes. Just as Morrie had been Mitch’s professor at Brandeis, he now becomes Mitch’s teacher for the most important lessons he will ever learn. Mitch alludes to the gradual deterioration of Morrie’s health, culminating in his death. The hibiscus plant becomes symbolic of the cycle of Morrie’s life. Both are fragile and require tender care. As the plant sheds its leaves, Morrie’s body deteriorates. pp. 1–2)*
2. Examine Albom’s recapitulation of his final day with Schwartz in 1979 and what this reveals about each of them. *(Albom has graduated from Brandeis University. He introduces his parents to Schwartz, his favorite teacher. Mitch gives Morrie a briefcase as a parting gift, and Morrie tells him he is one of the good ones, hugs him, and asks him if he will stay in touch. Morrie is crying as he tells Mitch goodbye. The two men have developed a friendship based on mutual admiration and respect. Mitch intends to stay in touch; Morrie’s tears imply his feeling that he may not see his young friend again. pp. 3–4)*
3. Discuss Morrie’s “death sentence.” Examine early symptoms of his disease and the progression after the diagnosis. Compare with the prognosis of the disease as given in the Background Information section of this guide. *(Morrie first realizes something is wrong when he has to give up dancing. Early symptoms include labored breathing, difficulty walking, extreme weariness, and trouble sleeping. He quits driving when he can barely push the car brakes. He loses his privacy when he must hire a young man to help him in and out of the swimming pool and to help him dress. He progresses from a cane to a walker to a wheelchair as his legs become increasingly useless. The clinical prognosis includes degeneration and death of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. As this occurs, nerves lose the ability to transmit impulses to the muscles, and they gradually waste away from disuse. Progressive weakness and paralysis lead to the patient’s death when the muscles that control breathing stop functioning. pp. 5–12)*
4. Examine Charlotte and Morrie’s initial reaction to the diagnosis. Note Charlotte’s primary concerns and analyze the simile that describes Morrie’s reaction. *(They are stunned. Charlotte wonders how much time they have left, how they will manage, and how they will pay the bills. Morrie wonders how life can be so normal for everyone else when he has just learned he is dying. Simile: “...he felt as if he were dropping into a hole” indicates his sensation of falling into an abyss, i.e., fear of the unknown, from which he cannot emerge, i.e., his impending death. pp. 7–8)*
5. Analyze Morrie’s approach to dying and discuss how he incorporates his years of teaching. *(After asking himself whether he will wither up and disappear or make the best of the time he has left, Morrie chooses to face death unashamed and make it his final project. He decides to be a human textbook, to offer himself as research, and to narrate his final trip. As his body weakens, he entertains a steady stream of visitors and holds discussion groups about dying. He remains a teacher, one who will teach others about the process of dying. pp. 10–13)*
6. **Prediction:** What will unfold during the most unusual part of Morrie’s life?

Supplementary Activities

1. Working in small groups, have students research when Lou Gehrig developed ALS, the symptoms, the immediate effects on his life, and how long he lived. Assign students to act the parts of Lou Gehrig and the moderator, and have other students act as members of the press as they conduct a TV interview with Lou Gehrig after he learns of his illness.
2. Have students list two metaphors and two similes from this section and continue this activity throughout the book. Examples: **Metaphors**—graduation: final curtain on childhood (p. 3); Morrie’s diagnosis of ALS: death sentence (p. 5); body attacked by ALS: a limp husk (p. 10); **Similies**—Morrie “looks like a cross between a biblical prophet and a Christmas elf” (p. 3); Morrie “waved his arms like a conductor on amphetamines” (p. 5); ALS is “like a lit candle” (p. 9). See also pp. 4, 6, 11.

The Student—The Orientation, pp. 14–31

Mitch reflects on his life since he last saw Morrie. He learns of his former professor’s illness when Ted Koppel interviews Morrie on “Nightline.” Mitch visits Morrie for the first time in sixteen years.

Vocabulary
insatiable (16)
philosophies (18)
aphorisms (18)
narcissist (21)
insidious (22)
gaunt (27)
deferments (30)

Discussion Questions

1. Introduce the characteristics of Type A and Type B personalities and use these to contrast Mitch Albom and Morrie Schwartz. (*Mitch—Type A: highly competitive, keenly ambitious, always in a hurry, easily annoyed, feeling of being under constant time pressure, impatient. Morrie—Type B: noncompetitive, less driven, patient, easy-going, relaxed, at peace with themselves and their surroundings. Responses will vary.*)

2. Examine Mitch’s reflections on the 16 years since he last saw Morrie and discuss what event most impacts him. (*He has not kept in touch with Morrie and has lost touch with most of the*

people he knew during his college years. During the years after college, Mitch pursues his dream of becoming a professional musician but fails to achieve the success he desires. When his favorite uncle and role model dies of pancreatic cancer, Mitch re-evaluates his goals and gives up his dream of fame as a musician. pp. 14–15)

3. Analyze the changes in Mitch’s life after his uncle’s death. Discuss the chance circumstance that will alter his life. (*He returns to college, earns a master’s degree in journalism, and becomes a sports writer. He begins living and working at a frenetic pace. His hours working for newspapers and freelancing culminate in a job as a columnist for the Detroit Free Press. In addition to writing his column, he begins to write books and to appear on radio and TV shows as a sports commentator. Sixteen years after leaving college, he has achieved financial success, bought a house and cars, built a portfolio of stocks, and married Janine. He drives himself relentlessly in everything he does, hoping to experience life to its fullest before he dies in the prime of life as his uncle had done. While surfing through the TV channels one night, he happens to hear Ted Koppel ask, “Who is Morrie Schwartz?” pp. 15–17, 23)*