

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Tuesdays with Morrie

by Mitch Albom

written by Michelle Ryan

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Background Notes

Tuesdays with Morrie is a true story about the relationship between Morrie Schwartz and his former student Mitch Albom. As Morrie is on his death-bed, suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease, Mitch and Morrie discuss aspects of life, including, aging, death, relationships, marriage, and most importantly love. The book chronicles the time that Morrie and Mitch spent with one another before Morrie's death.

The book is one that anyone can enjoy and benefit from reading. While the book does not contain any inappropriate words or situations, the teacher should be prepared to discuss sensitive issues, especially those that deal with death. Some students may have difficulty verbalizing emotions that may be associated with the death of a loved one.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain how Morrie Schwartz feels about death and dying and what he feels society's approach is to those who are dying.
2. explain Morrie's struggle with death throughout the novel.
3. discuss the characterization of Mitch as a man who is defined by society's idea of a successful man.
4. demonstrate an understanding of the variability between people and their experiences with death.
5. define and cite example(s) of:
 - imagery
 - motifs
 - flashback
 - symbols
 - foreshadowing
6. understand how popular culture may influence people's viewpoints about issues such as aging and death
7. define the way in which Morrie has created his own culture.
8. compare and contrast Mitch and Morrie and their beliefs about life.
9. explain the importance of love in Morrie's life.
10. understand Morrie's understanding of and use of religion in his life.
11. explain the use of reincarnation as a theme in Morrie's and Mitch's lives.
12. characterize Peter, Mitch's brother, and explain his purpose in the memoir.
13. explain the duality of media in current culture and justify an opinion about its benefits or detriments.
14. explain the conflict that drives the book.
15. describe the purpose and effect of the flashbacks throughout the narrative.
16. explain how themes of love, rejection, and acceptance function throughout the narrative.
17. explain the use of figurative language and rhetorical techniques within the text and how they function.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Trace the mention of the pink hibiscus plant throughout the memoir. For each instance, explain the situation in which it is mentioned. How does it serve as a metaphor for Morrie's life? Explain its use as a motif in the memoir and how it may be a metaphor for the cycle of life.
2. Throughout the memoir, Morrie refers to the poet W.H. Auden. Explain why Morrie relishes this poet and relies on Auden's poetry as a way of illustrating his mantra, "Love or perish."
3. Explain the development of Morrie's religious beliefs. How does Morrie use religion in his life?
4. Throughout the memoir, the reader is given an insight into Morrie's relationship with Mitch Albom and Ted Koppel. Explain the relationship that Morrie has with each person. How does each person change as a result of a relationship with Morrie?
5. Even though this is an autobiographical work, explain the impact of the subjective point of view as Morrie's life is documented through Mitch Albom. How might Mitch have influenced the way in which Morrie's story is told? How would the memoir be different if it has been written by Morrie?
6. Morrie uses detachment as a way of coping with his disease. Explain Morrie's idea of detachment and how he utilizes it in his life.
7. Explain Mitch's relationship with his brother.
8. Describe Morrie's beliefs about the media and its importance in society. How does Morrie use media to his advantage?
9. Characterize the person Mitch Albom was before his Tuesday experiences with Morrie. Describe how Mitch changes.
10. Each reader will come to this text with a different belief about aging and dying. Explain your thoughts about aging, dying, and death before you read the memoir, and then describe how you feel after reading the book.
11. Explain the "effect of silence" exercise that Morrie uses in his classroom. What is a person supposed to learn through the exercise?
12. Explain the tension of opposites that Morrie describes to Mitch.

Tuesdays with Morrie

The Curriculum

VOCABULARY

hibiscus – a plant with large flowers
lieu – instead of

1. Explain the subject of the old professor's course.

2. How does the course operate? How is it unique from other courses with which you may be familiar?

3. Describe the narrator of this memoir. How does he frame this book?

4. How does the use of "I was the student" add credibility to the memoir?

5. The text at the end of this chapter is in italics. After reading the text, decide how it functions in the book. What do you call this literary technique? How does the narration change during these passages?

The Orientation

VOCABULARY

gaunt – painfully thin
emerge – to come into view

1. Contrast Morrie's life with Mitch's life at the very beginning of this "final class."

2. Why might Mitch be uncomfortable meeting Morrie again?

3. Explain how you know that Mitch recognizes that he is not the same person he was in college.

4. Explain the metaphor of the food and meal that Mitch receives when he first visits Morrie.

The Fourth Tuesday: We Talk About Death

VOCABULARY

indecipherable – incapable of being understood

solidarity – unity

agnostic – a person who is not convinced that God exists

transcend – to overcome

exuberance – extreme joy

quivered – shook

ambitious – motivated

deficient – lacking

materialistic – characterized by a belief that importance comes from only money

1. Describe Morrie's mood as the chapter begins.

2. As Mitch and Morrie sit to talk about death, what is going on in the world?

3. What imagery is used to describe Morrie's plastic breathing tube?

4. What does Morrie believe are people's attitudes about death?

The Tenth Tuesday: We Talk About Marriage

VOCABULARY

intuitive – natural
commode – a toilet
supplements – nourishment
puree – a blend
crescent – curved, like a half-moon

1. How has Morrie's condition worsened since Mitch's last visit?

2. Who is the new visitor that comes to see Morrie? What do we learn about this person based on this visit?

3. What does Mitch discover when he and Janine come to visit Morrie? How does Mitch react to this discovery? What does he decide to do instead?
