

The Mystery of Love:
Teaching Guide

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***The Mystery of Love*: Teaching Guide**

This guide details three ways in which you might want to use *The Mystery of Love* in your classroom. Part One recommends a series of clips from the film that you can use to practice a variety of nonfiction reading skills with your students, and Part Two suggests clips that might work well for you to practice specific analytical and writing skills. The best ways to use Parts One and Two are to identify specific concerns that you have for your students' abilities to read and write about nonfiction texts and then locate a particular activity below that might assist you in helping your students with those concerns.

If you choose to show the entire film to your class, Part Three includes previewing activities, summaries of each of the three viewing days, discussion questions, and post-viewing activities. In whatever way you choose to include *The Mystery of Love* into your classroom, hopefully you will find the materials here useful in assisting you and your students to engage actively with this thought-provoking film.

Part One: Practicing Nonfiction Reading Strategies

COMPARE/CONTRAST

Comparing and contrasting is an essential skill that students need to improve in any number of subject areas. The ability to see the similarities and differences between two subjects, genres, themes, and so on is crucial for understanding nonfiction. Venn diagrams continue to be one of the most effective graphic organizers, though it's important to note that the Venn should not be an end point, but rather a tool used to generate a topic or thesis statement about the subjects being compared. The following clip is a great one for compare/contrast:

Chapter: Love & Marriage

In this sequence Emily Lodine, an opera singer from Chicago, meets and falls immediately in love with Gary Overguard, a farmer from Minnesota. Their past lives and experiences could not be more different, but they have many qualities in common that allow them to have a happy marriage. As students watch this clip, have them create a Venn diagram with one side labeled "Gary" and the other "Emily" in order to compare and contrast them. Afterward, be sure to ask students what the producers of the film might be trying to say about love considering the similarities and differences between them. Surely the producers could have found two people more alike, so why include these two?

CAUSE AND EFFECT

This type of nonfiction reading skill asks students to identify and to evaluate logically what they read. If an author makes the claim that peanut butter sandwiches cause attention deficit disorder, a reader needs to be able to determine whether one element does in fact *cause* the other, or whether lots of kids just happen to both eat peanut butter and have ADD. As students develop their cause/effect reading skills, it is important for them to learn to evaluate the connection between the stated cause and the effect. Most important, students need to practice the ability to read nonfiction texts critically in order to identify exactly what the writer or filmmaker is trying to say about the underlying causes of a situation. A clip from *The Mystery of Love* that works well for this skill is:

Chapter: Love & Altruism

This is an excellent sequence to examine the effect that one can have on another. The beginning of the clip focuses on BACA, a group of bikers who assist abused children, and about halfway through we meet "Daredevil," a teenage girl who is in trouble. Ask students to examine the cause of Daredevil's actions and the effect that BACA has on her and her family. Also, ask how the filmmakers illustrate this effect. What images and music lead the audience to this conclusion?

LEVELS OF QUESTIONS

A reading strategy that should be a part of every student's toolbox is the Levels of Questions. Students spend most of their days being asked questions, but they rarely get a chance to frame the discussion with questions of their own. This strategy gives students the knowledge and confidence to engage with a text independently by presenting them with the three types of questions that can be asked about a text. The Three Levels of Questions are:

Level One – questions of fact.

Level Two- questions of interpretation.

Level Three—questions that go beyond the text.

By teaching them how to write good and varied questions, all students have a way into any text, regardless of their own initial understanding. The questions they generate can be used in a number of ways: reading quizzes, class discussions, Socratic seminars, journal entries, and so on. A good clip from the film that allows students to practice their questioning skills is:

Chapter: Love & Friendship

This scene illustrates the decades-long friendship between Camilla Williams, an African-American opera singer, and Borislav Bazala, a white European piano player. There are a number of opportunities for students to construct their own questions about race relations in the Jim Crow South or about the nature of friendship presented in the clip. See below for sample questions at each level:

Level One: what distinction did Camilla achieve at the opera company?

Level Two: why were Camilla and Boris able to remain friends?

Level Three: why are friends important in our lives?

CORNELL NOTES

Another strategy that is effective with students as they engage with nonfiction texts is the Cornell Notes process of note taking developed by Walter Puck and presented in his *How to Study in College*. This method is a backbone strategy of the AVID program and is often given to students as a tool for taking notes during a class lecture or discussion, but it is also applicable to the reading of challenging nonfiction texts. Students, before taking notes on a difficult nonfiction text, divide their paper into three areas, each of which has a separate purpose.

Section 1 is a large space in which students write down the information they feel is important in the text.

Section 2 is the place where students write a brief summary of all the information found in section 1.

Section 3 is where students write questions or “cues” about the information that can be found in section 1.

Chapter: Love & the Animal Kingdom

This clip works well to practice Cornell Notes because there is so much information that is presented about primates and their emotional development. As they watch the clip, students should take careful notes in section one, but be sure to give students time to complete sections two and three. If this is the first time that your students have used this note taking system, give students an opportunity to discuss with their classmates what they wrote in each section.

Part Two: Practicing Nonfiction Writing and Analytical Skills

THEME

Each of the previous skills that were presented above leads students to the point where they should be able to interpret the message or theme of a text. This message can be clearly stated or it may only be implied, but students need to be able to synthesize what they have read or seen and create a statement with which the author of the text would probably agree. The ability to discern the point that an author is trying to make is a valuable one for typical standardized tests, but it becomes even more important as students encounter texts in the media that have inherent messages about public and social policies that can influence their lives to a large extent. A clip from *The Mystery of Love* that works well is:

Chapter: Love & Family

In this sequence, we see the role that family can play in one's life. As they watch the clip, some of your students should keep track of what is said during the scene, some keep track of the visuals, and some keep track of the music.

Afterward, put them together into groups of three and ask them to write about a theme in this clip, by filling in the blank for the following statement: "According to the filmmakers, family is ...". When students present their thematic statements to the whole class, be sure that they can support their statements with visual and sound elements from the clip.

TONE

Tone is always difficult for students, but it is essential that they be able to discern the tone of a nonfiction piece since the author's tone often helps to reveal his or her purpose. Practicing with a documentary clip first, like the one from *The Mystery of Love* below, helps students to understand that tone is best defined as the author's (or filmmaker's) ***attitude*** toward the subject:

Chapter: Love of War

There are several topics explored in this sequence, though it mainly focuses on our love of war and what war can do to create love. When working with this clip in class, assign students to look closely at one of the subjects listed below. As they watch the clip, students should note the visual images that relate what James Hillman, the interview subject, says about the subject, and what sound effects and music they hear while their subject is being discussed. In each case, students should be able to write a statement about the filmmakers' attitude toward their assigned subject. They should also be able to support their statements with evidence (visual and sound) from the clip. Topics that work well are:

- a. Film's attitude toward war in general.
- b. Film's attitude toward the military rituals.
- c. Film's attitude toward soldiers.
- d. Film's attitude toward the community that war creates.

RAFT

This is one of the most effective strategies to help students to write analytically about nonfiction texts and is an acronym that stands for:

R: role of the speaker of the text (child, newspaper reporter, teacher, etc.)

A: audience (to whom the text is being communicated)

F: format (editorial, billboard, commercial, etc.)

T: topic (and purpose)

When students can use each of the components of each of the RAFT, they are better able to understand how audience, the choice of format, and so on affects the final product. A clip from the film that works well to practice this strategy is:

Chapter: Brotherly Love

This section of the film deals with two men who become friends through forgiveness after one man's grandson killed the other man's son. After watching the clip, rewind to the part where they show the film to the group of students and complete a RAFT of just that portion, so that your students can learn the key elements of this strategy. Their RAFT will probably look something like this:

R: filmmakers

A: elementary and middle school students

F: film in a rap-video style

T: to convince kids not to join gangs or use violence

Now, ask students to create their own piece in which they use a RAFT to vary either the audience, role, format, or purpose. They might, for instance, want to write a letter to the editor, create a poster, or compose a song about the ideas of violence and forgiveness in this sequence.

Part Three: Teaching the Complete Film

Previewing

1. Brainstorm different types of love with your students. Who are the different people we can love and who can love us? Besides people, what else can we love? Try to work with your students to write a definition of “love.” What are the feelings associated with love?
2. Assign students one of the following quotes about love and ask them to explain what it is saying about love and why they agree with it or not:
 - a. Love means never having to say you’re sorry. (*Love Story*)
 - b. All you need is love. (The Beatles)
 - c. Love is patient and kind. Love doesn’t envy. Love doesn’t brag, is not proud ...bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:4-8)
 - d. Love is higher than a mountain, love is thicker than water. (Andy Gibb)
 - e. If you love somebody let them go, for if they return, they were always yours. And if they don't, they never were. (Kahlil Gibran)
 - f. There is no remedy for love but to love more. (H.D. Thoreau)
 - g. I never loved another person the way I love myself. (Mae West)
 - h. Love: a temporary insanity, curable by marriage. (Ambrose Bierce)
 - i. Love stinks, yeah, yeah. (J. Giles Band)
 - j. There is only one happiness in life: to love and be loved. (George Sand)
3. Ask students to write about how love is presented in movies and in popular music/culture. Direct them to consider specific films, music videos, or songs that show or discuss people in love. What is love like? Is it cute, funny, scary, dangerous, painful, etc.?

Viewing Day #1: 0:00:00-0:36:43; This includes chapters Love & Marriage, Love & Family, and Love & Altruism on DVD (about 36 minutes)

Things to Notice

After the opening quote from Carl Jung about the mystery of love, the producers of the film chose to have an extremely articulate high school senior ask the questions that the rest of the film will attempt to address. Also note the music on the soundtrack (“The First of My Lovers,” which we will see performed later in the film) and the immediate calming and almost angelic tone it creates. Once the host, playwright and actress Anna Deavere Smith, explains that this film will go beyond the limited Hollywood definition of love as romance, the film visually sets out its thesis with a neat visual trick of transforming the text on a billboard-sized news ticker from the words “War on Terror” and “Use Caution” into words like “Romance,” “Altruism,” and “Community.” In other words, love is necessary to survive in our dangerous, modern world. On the B-roll track, we see a montage of the people we will meet throughout the film, smiling, hugging, and communing.

Next, the film establishes its credibility by including a portion of an interview with James Hillman, one of the foremost Jungian psychologists and author of *The Soul's Code*, among many other texts, who wonders aloud about love and one's choices to save another. From here, the film settles into a pattern that will define its structure: we will see a sequence of approximately ten minutes that illustrates a particular aspect of love, after which we will have further commentary by host Smith and other outside experts.

The producers of the film chose to begin with a sequence about what most people assume is the most common form of love: romantic love. As the couple, Emily Lodine and Gary Overguard, talk about their first meeting, notice the B-roll of the picturesque, but rugged farmland and the ways that the producers almost always film Ellen sitting down and Gary in motion to emphasize the differences between the couple. Despite their surface differences, the film suggests, love has brought them together. There is certainly a spiritual element of love that the film promotes throughout, but notice how the producers try to maintain a nondenominational approach to religion; it can be seen here as Rabbi Alan Lew recounts a Buddhist wedding ceremony.

An upbeat swing tune on the soundtrack signals a switch to a different kind of love: family love, as illustrated in the sequence about the Swann family from Baltimore. Our first images of the family are B-roll shots of them holding hands and praying before eating. Notice the shift in tone (first through music, then in B-roll) the grandmother is killed and the brothers all receive their deployment orders to Iraq; the images from Iraq are dark, frightening, with a foreboding soundtrack. The music shifts again to the softer tone when all the brothers return home safely and visit their grandmother's grave. While it's not mentioned in the film, the mother, Ann Swann, wrote a letter to the White House in 2004 asking for a review of the policy that allows for siblings to serve concurrently in a combat zone. It might be interesting to discuss how the inclusion of this background might have affected the tone of this segment.

Depending on the age of your students, you may want to pause for a moment before the next sequence to define and discuss the word "altruism." Also, please note that the next sequence deals with child abuse, which can be an extremely sensitive subject in the classroom, so be sure to prepare your students for some of the descriptions of abuse that follow; use your professional judgment about how to use and prepare students for this sequence. This is an interesting sequence because it plays off the audience's preconceived notions about motorcyclists. The B-roll contains lots of images of bikes, leather, and tattoos, but the soft music and the clear concern of J.D., Thumper, and others make the audience question its own expectations. The filmmakers show an actual BACA "adoption" where we can see the positive effect that the group has on the girl called Daredevil.

Discussion Questions

1. How does this film represent romantic love? How is it similar or different from Hollywood films you have seen?
2. Why was the Swann family selected for this film? How are they similar and different from what some might call the "typical American family"? What images were selected to present the family and why?

3. In the sequence on child abuse, Thumper says that she sees a piece of herself in the children she helps. What role does empathy play in love? How do the filmmakers illustrate “empathy” visually in this sequence?

Viewing Day #2: 0:36:43-1:15:18; This includes chapters Love & the Divine, Love & the Animal Kingdom, and Love & War on DVD (about 39 minutes)

Things to Notice

After our established experts weigh in on the necessity for broadening our definition of love, we see and hear clips from classic Hollywood films to establish the influence that films and the media have on our sense of romantic love: it is not as sudden, easy, or idealized as the media suggests. The next sequence shows how love can take a circuitous course as Mark and Monica each had other relationships prior to committing to one another. The filmmakers establish, through interviews and archival still photos, that Mark (and Monica to a lesser degree) has grown emotionally and is now prepared in a way he wasn't before for marriage. To confirm this, a song that Mark wrote for Monica plays on the soundtrack during their wedding vows. Applause fills the soundtrack at the end of the sequence, clearly signaling that their marriage is going to be a success.

Hillman and author Betty Sue Flowers then discuss why love can be fleeting and painful, as the filmmakers use scenes from a film version of *Romeo and Juliet* to illustrate and connect to their audience, contrasted with the sexual side of love in scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Interestingly, when Hillman is asked to describe the feelings he had when he was in love, he uses words that might normally have negative connotations: obsessed, crazy, possessed, and unstable.

To frame the next segment – about “divine love” – the filmmakers use the story of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; though some context about the story is provided, you might need to add more, depending upon your student population. In this sequence, we meet Harriet Rubin, a Dante scholar, who falls suddenly in love with Steven, a Virgil scholar, and finds herself reenacting – metaphorically – the Divine Comedy. To show this connection visually, the filmmakers cut often between pictures of the couple and illustrations and excerpts of Dante's story. The connection, however, is not fully clear to the audience until we learn that Steven is terminally ill and the “hell” Harriet describes becomes real; note the shift in music signaling the shift in tone during their wedding ceremony in a hospital. This is also a segment that you will want to preview carefully, bearing in mind your own local and school policies concerning religion in school in mind because the lesson that Harriet says that she has learned through her ordeal is that the “object of our love is always God.” This statement, though given in a thoroughly nondenominational spirit, may have different effects, depending upon where you teach.

Though Hillman dismisses the idea that science can teach us about love that aren't better gleaned through poetry and art, the next sequence does focus on scientific research that illustrates the ways that animals love and hate, which serves as an interesting segue to the sequence that follows: man and war. Using an idea proposed in Hillman's *A Terrible Love of War*, the film shows the scene from the film *Patton*, where the actor playing the general says about war: “God help me, but I do love it so. I love it more than my life.” Cleverly, the film cuts seamlessly from World War II era tanks in the fiction film to contemporary military Humvees in Iraq in order to bring the topic into today's

world. As Hillman discusses the attraction we have toward war, we see fiction and nonfiction images of wars contemporary and past. Throughout this segment, we see this constant switching back and forth between time period and mode in order to illustrate that war is pervasive. Notice the startling juxtaposition of images and Hillman's words about love as we see and hear American soldiers storming into an Iraqi home at night. War, Hillman also suggests, creates a love of community where everyone has to rely on another for survival; B-roll images of various wars throughout American history show men caring for each other; the sequence ends with shots of soldiers of the Iraq war, crying and hugging each other.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the film suggest in this viewing day about romantic love? Is there such a thing as "love at first sight" according to this film? Do you agree or not?
2. How does sound and music affect the tone of the film? When have you noticed shifts in the music and for what effect?
3. Why did the filmmakers decide to place the segments on animals just before the segment on war? What are they trying to say about this connection?
4. Is the military held in a positive or negative light in the sequence on love of war? What images and sounds create this impression? Do you agree or disagree with Hillman's – and the film's – assertions about our love of war? What are the most persuasive images the film includes to illustrate its position?

Viewing Day #3: 1:15:18-1:55:03; This includes chapters Love & Friendship, Unconditional Love, The Communal Heart on DVD (about 40 minutes)

Things to Notice

Today's viewing starts with a Hindu proverb: "I met 100 men on the road to Delhi and all were my brothers" and quickly moves into a sequence titled "Brotherly Love," though it might best be described as "love and forgiveness." We learn the story of Azim Khamisa, whose son was murdered by the grandson of Ples Felix. Notice how the filmmakers match the two men by having both of them, separately, look through childhood pictures of the boys involved in the tragedy. The filmmakers show Azim, a Sufi Muslim, meditating and invoking his faith to help him through by vowing to forgive and to love all the victims in this case, including the family of his son's killer. Together, Azim and Ples work to prevent more violence and we see a depiction of the murder being shown as part of an anti-gang message to young children. We also see images of the two men working and being together as friends who have come together only through forgiveness.

A sequence to which students can relate is the next one on love and friendship, which focuses on the usual (for the time period), but powerful friendship between Camilla Williams, an African American opera singer, and Borislav Bazala, a white European piano player. It starts with a shot of the two of them playing in the 1950s and cuts to a scene of them today, still playing. Throughout their lives, they each had spouses and children, and dealt with Jim Crow South racism, but as they age and their spouses die, they move in together as friends. Notice how the filmmakers continue to cut between

the past and present images of them in order to illustrate the depth and length of their commitment.

Another segment that students can relate to is the next one about the love parents have for their children, which asks the question: can love really be unconditional? To explore this topic, the film introduces us to the Johnson family, whose son Ryan is a musician and who sometimes comes into conflict with his parents' expectations. Be sure to note how much of this segment's B-roll takes place in the family's church and with the church's choir providing much of the soundtrack. While Ryan is going through his questioning of his faith, these Christian images and history loom large for him, just as his parents' expectations do.

The final segment, "Communal Love," appropriately brings back the song "The First of My Lovers". We learn that the song is performed by the choral group Conspirare, whose singers are dedicated to being part of a "communal heart," and whose director was inspired to write the song after his partner's dying words about the meaning of love. The B-roll certainly seems to show them being successful at creating this community: it is an extremely culturally diverse group. The film ends with the group singing in a more formal setting, and we see most of the people interviewed for the film in the audience. This clearly has the effect of bringing together all the disparate elements of love explored in the film.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do the filmmakers include the "experts" between each of the segments? What role do they serve for the audience?
2. Could you forgive in the way that Azim did? What makes this type of forgiveness so difficult? How was Azim able to do it and what did he gain? How did the filmmakers construct this sequence so that we know that forgiveness is better than revenge?
3. How are the conflicts that the Johnsons face similar and different from those you face? How do your parents/guardians react to you as compared to Ryan's parents?
4. Think back on the racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the subjects and those interviewed for this film. The producers clearly wanted wide cultural representations. Why do you think they wanted this and how successful do you think they were?
5. Look back closely at the graphics that introduce each of the segments. We learn that these represent what the Hindus call "the net of Indra." What are the patterns like and what effect do they have on you as a viewer?
6. Is "love our highest destiny"? How does this film illustrate that it might be our highest destiny? How are we always on a "quest for love"?

Closing Questions/Activities

1. Look back at the list of types of love that you created before viewing this film. Which ones did the film present and which ones did it not? Create a segment that the film did not present called "Teenage Love." What point would you want to make in this segment? Whom would you interview? What images would you show? What songs would be on the soundtrack? What other segments could have been added?

2. Look back at the quotes about love you examined before watching the film. Which ones are most appropriate to the themes and tone of this film? Why? What other ones could you add?
3. There are a number of compelling true stories that are recounted in this film: the three brothers serving in Iraq, the killing of the pizza delivery boy, the fifty-year friendship, and so on. Which one of the segments could be made into a successful fiction film? Why? What would Hollywood change and why? What would be gained and lost in the translation to a fiction film?
4. Create a soundtrack for this film with popular songs. Write an explanation of where each song would go and why. Also, make a list of songs that would probably be rejected by the producers. Write an explanation of why each would be rejected.
5. Research the history of love. When did romantic love begin to take hold? How have the definitions of love changed throughout time and among cultures?