



19 Love Songs

DAVID LEVITHAN

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

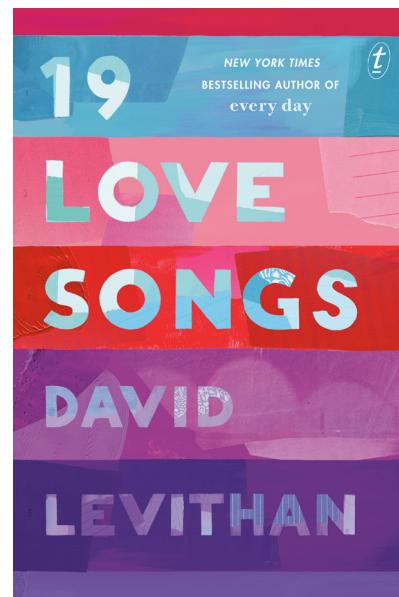
The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

In this collection of old and new short stories, David Levithan explores the different kinds of love we experience in our lifetime: romantic, familial and platonic.

He reveals through his characters and personal experiences how love can shape us and make us who we are. Structured like a playlist of music, readers are encouraged to feel the changing seasons of love and consider how we learn to love ourselves, others and the world.

This partly autobiographical work is also a testament and love letter to Levithan's own epic love story—his lifelong love affair with words and language.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Levithan is an award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling author of young adult books, including *Boy Meets Boy*, *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* (with Rachel Cohn) and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (with John Green). He lives in New Jersey and spends his days in New York, editing and publishing other people's books.

BEFORE READING

- Facilitate a classroom discussion and exploration about the experience and theme of 'love'. Encourage students to brainstorm classic love stories embedded in their own culture. Ask students to consider what these stories teach us about love.
- Invite students to consider the different types of love that can exist. In their workbooks, get students to consider familial, platonic, romantic but also love for the self and love for life.
- Before reading the collection of stories, get students to read through the unique 'chapter' titles. From the titles, get students to infer and predict what these stories will be about. To extend students, ask them to consider why Levithan chose to title his chapters as song tracks and how this operates as a visual metaphor.

WHILE READING

- 'An unarticulated crush is very different from an unrequited one, because at least with an unrequited crush you know what the hell you're doing, even if the other person isn't doing it back.' (pg. 3) In *Track One*, the protagonist Alec describes his crush as an 'unarticulated crush'. Look up the definition of 'articulate'. What might an 'unarticulated crush' mean? Why is it perhaps more difficult to understand than an unrequited love?



2. In *Track Four*, Levithan communicates that 'maybe Cupid's arrows aren't arrows at all. Maybe, in the right hands, they're keys.' (pg. 59) What does he mean by this metaphor?
3. 'I am so worried about being in love, because it involves asking so much.' (pg. 90) In *Track Six*, the protagonist describes the fear of falling in love. Why do we get scared about falling in love?
4. 'Writing stories and telling stories are two very different things.' (pg. 100) How does a story change if we were to tell it in two different ways, verbally or written? Consider the conventions of a verbal and written narrative in your response.
5. 'Especially when we're in love, we play hide-and-seek with ourselves.' (pg. 125) In *Track Nine*, Levithan considers the impact love has on our identity. Why does love sometimes distort our perception of who we are?
6. 'Sometimes all we need is a little attention to open up.' (pg. 209) In *Track Fourteen*, Levithan explores the importance of communication and honesty. What authorial messages is he communicating about being open and honest in a relationship?
7. 'The leaves have fallen, and we need to decide if the bare trees are beautiful.' (pg. 241) In *Track Fifteen*, Levithan structures a love story around the metaphor of seasons changing. Is it beneficial to view love as changing and developing like the seasons?
8. 'All of these histories overlap in us, and they are the fuel to our fire.' (pg. 299) In *Track Seventeen*, Levithan's characters fall in love against the backdrop of an American protest. What protest is this? What were people marching for? Why are the characters left feeling so empowered from the experience?
9. 'If they do not have parents and schools that will teach them that all human beings are created equal, you give them words to know that all human beings are created equal.' (pg. 304) How do words encourage us to see each as equals? Can language be that powerful?
10. 'By learning the ways other people have told stories, we learn to tell our own. By telling our own, we become free.' (pg. 306) Which story have you connected the most with in *19 Love Songs*?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. In *Track Seventeen*, Levithan tells the story of how his parents came to meet and fall in love. How does he characterise his mother and father but also, how does he characterise their love story?
2. How does Levithan employ archetypes in his collection? Additionally, how does he personalise

these archetypes to ensure they are universally relatable but also realistic?

3. Levithan employs first person narration to indirectly characterise his protagonists. Why is this effective in engaging the reader?
4. Which characters in the short story collection are based on Levithan's personal experiences? What clues are there in the text to support your claims?
5. Which character do you connect the most with in the collection? What about this character draws you to them?

STYLE & STRUCTURE

1. In *Track Thirteen*, Levithan has changed the page layout by moving text to various sides of the page. Why does Levithan choose to do this? How does it reinforce the ideas in his story? What might the space and shapes of the text symbolise?
2. Leviathan uses the 'seasons' as a stylistic and structural technique. Use one, two or all of the four seasons as a simile to compare with love in an extended writing piece.
3. Levithan includes various aphorisms in his short stories about love. Select one of these aphorisms to design a Valentine's Day card around.

THEMES

Love

1. 'I learned early, and learned well, that the person you talk to about the crush is much more important than the crush itself.' (pg. 42) Why do we often underestimate the power of friendship? Should we think of love between friends being just as important as romantic love?
2. 'When you get older, red becomes more complicated, just as hearts become more complicated.' (pg. 31) Why does love become more difficult and complex as we get older?
3. 'And I think: love. I know then, without being able to articulate it, that love is the gravity.' (pg. 37) What does Levithan mean by this metaphor? How does love ground us?

Storytelling

1. 'This is why we love stories, and love them from an early age: Nothing bad ever lasts in stories. And this is ultimately why we love life, too—because nothing bad ever lasts in life, not in the same intensity with which it initially appears. If we pay attention, stories can teach us that.' In what other ways can stories or storytelling be comforting?
2. 'Sometimes the power of the articulation is stronger than your own experience.' (pg. 123) Why does it help to write down our feelings or express our emotions out loud?
3. 'You give them words.' (pg. 303) In *Track Nineteen*, Levithan explores the important role we play in



'giving words' to others. What is the transformative power of language?

Music

1. '...that our lives, even when they're silent, always contain music. From that, we make our mixes.' (pg. 127) How do our lives always contain music? Why is it comforting to know that the music will keep playing?
2. 'A song can give you a place to be, a place to live for three and a half minutes.' (pg. 195) How does music provide comfort for people in times of need?
3. Allusions to music are used throughout the short story collection. Find four examples of this and explain what the symbolism of these allusions mean.

RESPONDING

1. In his author's note, Levithan explains that a number of the stories in his collections were originally written as gifts for his friends on Valentine's Day. Write your own love story to give to a friend on Valentine's Day.
2. Levithan examines all types of love in his story collection. In an expository piece of writing, explain what types of love exist in the world. Use examples from the text to illustrate your ideas.
3. 'Already, the heart in my hand is forming a personality in my head.' Using *Track Two* as inspiration, write a story about a person that jumps in and out of other bodies. As you write as these different people, consider how our body can mold our perceptions and feelings.
4. 'Reading is a conversation between you and an author, held inside the pages of a book.' (pg. 71) Using this analogy from *Track Five*, write a conversation between yourself and David Levithan. What ideas about love would you discuss?
5. In many ways, *19 Love Songs* is an autobiography of David Levithan. Reflect on your own life and the 'themes' that have dominated your narrative. If you had to write short stories with that theme, what stories would you tell? Select a theme and write your own short story collection.
6. In *Track Eight*, the protagonist exchanges stories with another student in a creative writing class. Write your own short story (topic and theme of your choice!) and exchange it with a classmate. Re-write each other's stories using your own style. Swap your stories back and see how your stories have changed and developed.
7. *19 Love Songs* is also a love story from Levithan to books, reading and writing. If you had to write a love story to one of your life passions, what would it be? Write a love letter to this passion and focus on authoring similes and metaphors that compare this passion to love.

8. Using the style and structure from *Track Nine*, create your own list of songs to embed in a prose poem. Accompanying excerpts of the song lyrics, insert your own prose, exploring the ideas from the songs from your own perspective.
9. *Track Twelve* includes a comic story. Using this as inspiration, create your own comic book story about love.
10. Allusions to music punctuate most of Levithan's short stories. Create your own playlist featuring various love songs. Additionally design a cover and accompanying notes to explain the significance of the lyrics and your own text to self connections.