

The Four-Letter Word



- In your expert groups (e.g., scientist, psychologist, writer, priest) discuss new vocabulary and summarize the text.
- Contrast the indefinite articles [a] and [an], and determine the difference between the use of definite [the], indefinite, and zero articles.
- Return to your home groups and share your findings.

The scientist: 'Love is chemistry'

Biologically, love is a powerful condition like hunger or thirst, only more permanent. We talk about love being blind or unconditional, in the sense that we have no control over it. But that is not so surprising since love is chemistry. While lust is a temporary passionate desire involving the release of chemicals such as testosterone and oestrogen, in true love, or attachment and bonding, the brain can release a whole set of chemicals: pheromones, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and vasopressin. From an evolutionary perspective, love can be viewed as a survival tool – a mechanism that helps to promote long-term relationships, parental support of children, and feelings of safety and security.

The psychologist: 'Love has many guises'

The ancients had several terms to describe “love.” *Philia* is an intimacy between friends and family members or a deep bond between soldiers who fought together in battle. *Ludus* describes a more playful affection found in flirting. *Pragma* is the mature love that develops over time between long-term couples and involves commitment, compromise, and understanding. *Agape* is a more general kind of love, it's about love for all humanity. *Philautia* is self love; in order to care for others, you need to be able to care about yourself. *Eros* is about passion and desire. It unrealistic to expect to experience all six types with only one person.

The writer: 'Love drives all great stories'

What love is depends on where you are in relation to it. Secure in it, it can feel as ordinary and necessary as air – you exist within it, almost unnoticed. Deprived of it, it can feel like an obsession; all consuming, a physical pain. Love is the driver for all great stories: not just romantic love, but the love of a parent for their child, family, or country. It is the point before consummation of it that fascinates: what separates you from love, the obstacles that stand in its way. It is usually at those points that love is everything.

The priest: 'Love is free yet binds us'

Love is more easily experienced than defined. As a theological quality, by which we love God above all things and our neighbours as ourselves, it seems far away until we encounter it in the life of another – in acts of kindness, generosity, and self-sacrifice. Love's the one thing that can never hurt anyone, although it may cost very much. The irony of love is that it is supremely free yet joins us with connections stronger than death. It cannot be bought or sold; there is nothing it cannot face; love is life's greatest blessing.