



Love You to Death

Elizabeth Ruth

Reading Level: 3–4

Interest Level: Adult

Book Summary

One evening, Ivy goes out for dinner with Robin and Phil, a married couple. Phil's old friend, Mark, joins them. Mark has just moved to town. He needs a place to live for a few weeks, until his condo is ready. Robin asks Ivy for a favour: can Mark stay with her?

At thirty, Ivy longs for her first real boyfriend. With Mark in her house, her wish soon gets her into trouble. But Mark has stepped into trouble, too. He has never known a woman like Ivy—and he never will again. Ivy makes sure of that.

Author Biography

Elizabeth Ruth has written three bestselling novels. Her first novel, *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*, was a finalist for three awards. Elizabeth has worked in shelters with homeless women and children and in community-based mental health centres. Elizabeth lives in Toronto with her family and teaches classes in creative writing.

Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK**Book Cover and Title**

- (a) Read the title to the students. Ask the students what they think the phrase Love You to Death Means. Ask the students what they think the story might be about.
- (b) Ask them to describe what they see on the front cover. Ask them how the photo makes them feel, and why.

WORKING WITH THE BOOK**Characters**

Explain that the novel contains references to Ivy's childhood. Ask the students to describe how Ivy's childhood experiences might have shaped her character. As they read the book, have students fill in the following chart by noting details of Ivy's childhood.

Ivy's Childhood	How did this experience shape her personality?
<i>She was an only child.</i>	She was used to being alone.

Plot

The plot centres on Ivy's relationship with Mark. Ask the students to fill in the chart below by noting examples and quotes that illustrate Ivy's relationship with Mark.

Ivy's relationship with Mark	Examples
Her first impressions toward Mark	<i>"I enjoyed the smooth, deep sound of his voice."</i>
Her feelings about and hopes for their relationship	<i>"I could already feel interest bubbling up between us—even if he couldn't."</i>
How Ivy shows her feelings for Mark	<i>Ivy soaps herself all over with Mark's soap.</i>
How Ivy ends the relationship	

After reading the entire book, have students work in small groups, share their notes, and discuss the following questions:

- (a) What feelings and thoughts did you experience when you read about how Ivy killed Mark? Why do you think you had this reaction?
- (b) Describe to what extent the events in Ivy's childhood affect Ivy's thoughts, feelings, and actions in her relationship with Mark.
- (c) Do you think Mark betrayed Ivy? Provide reasons that support your opinion.

Setting

Explain to students that the setting provides details of when and where events take place. The details of the setting add to the story in some way. Have students discuss the following questions after they read pages 40 and 41.

- (a) Make a list of the words in these pages that are connected to cemeteries in some way. Read the list of words. How do they make you feel?
- (b) What details on these pages make you feel uneasy? Why?
- (c) Why do you think the writer used a cemetery as the setting on these pages rather than something like a city park or schoolyard?
- (d) Death is a main theme in this story. Describe other times when death is part of the story.
- (e) Describe Ivy's attitude toward death. How do you think she developed this attitude toward death? To what extent was Ivy's attitude toward death healthy? Unhealthy?

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. “Liz is my other friend.” (page 9)
 - (a) Compare Liz with Robin. Think about their physical appearance, their jobs, their personalities, and their relationships with men. How are the two women the same? Different?
 - (b) People can be different from each other, yet be friends. Why do think that is possible? How would having someone like Liz as a friend affect you?
 - (c) Think about your best friend. How are you the same? Different? How do your similar qualities bring you together as friends? How do your differences bring you together as friends?

2. “Now Robin and Phil live in High Park, in a great big house facing the pond.” (page 11)
 - (a) How do you think Ivy feels when she says these words? Why do you think she feels that way?
 - (b) Have you ever passed up a chance to get to know someone or be in a relationship with someone? Why did you pass up the chance at that time? If you had a chance to do things differently, would you? Why or why not?

3. “Thrillers filled with mind games and dark, empty lives—they’re my favourites.” (page 13)
 - (a) Explain the term mind games. Why do people play mind games? To what extent did Ivy play mind games?
 - (b) What do you think Ivy means when she describes lives as dark and empty? Describe in what ways Ivy’s life was dark and empty.
 - (c) Why do you think Ivy liked reading thrillers?

4. “Truth is, I’ve never been comfortable when someone says something nice to me. I feel I don’t deserve it.” (page 15)
 - (a) Why does Ivy feel that she does not deserve someone saying something nice to her? Do you think Ivy is right to feel undeserving of a complement? Explain why or why not.
 - (b) How do you think Liz would react if someone said something nice to her? Why do you think she would she react that way?
 - (c) Think about times when people give you compliments. What do you say in return? How does getting the complement make you feel? Why do you think you react that way?

5. “Then, when I read the typed pages, I had seen its brilliance. Me!” (page 26)
 - (a) Why is Ivy emphasizing the words I and me?
 - (b) What does Ivy recognize about herself at this moment?
 - (c) How does Ivy finally respond to Robin? Why? How do you think Ivy feels at that moment? Do you sympathize with her? Why or why not?
 - (d) How do Robin, Liz, and Ivy’s boss treat Ivy in this scene?
 - (e) Explain to what extent you think Ivy was a close friend to Robin and Liz.
 - (f) If you had been Ivy, would you have spoken your mind? Acted differently? Explain why or why not.

6. “I felt ashamed saying that word out loud: ‘single’, as if I were confessing some terrible sin.” (page 32)
 - (a) Do you think Ivy should have felt ashamed at being single? Give reasons for your answer.
 - (b) Think about your friends. How many are single? What are the advantages of being single? What are the disadvantages?
 - (c) Do you think society sees single people in the same way as it sees people who are married or in a long-term relationship? Provide examples that support your opinion.

7. “Dad said he was sorry, over and over.” (page 35)
 - (a) What is Ivy’s dad apologizing for?
 - (b) Describe other instances of betrayal in the story.
 - (c) How do those instances of betrayal affect Ivy’s relationships with others? Provide specific examples.

8. “In his eyes, I saw anger and envy. I knew that look. It belonged to me.” (page 67)
 - (a) Why does Ivy see anger and envy in Mark’s eyes? Do you think Mark was feeling angry and envious at that moment?
 - (b) Give examples of other times when Ivy feels angry and envious in the story? Why do you think Ivy feels so much anger and envy?
 - (c) We see the world through our emotions and states of mind. What does that statement mean to you? Do you agree with statement? Explain why or why not.

9. Sometimes words take on a deeper meaning once you know the whole story. How does the meaning of these words change once you know the whole story?
 - (a) “Really? She doesn’t look scary enough,” Phil said. (page 10)
 - (b) “You don’t find many trusting people anymore.” (page 12)
 - (c) “Ivy, you’re a life saver.” (page 20)
 - (d) “Liz does everything boldly. No air of doubt. No hesitation. She gives me hope.” (page 29)
 - (e) “I clenched my jaw. “That won’t work,” I said. “I have to be the only one.” (page 39)

10. “I love you to death.” (page 46)
 - (a) Who says these words? When?
 - (b) Do you think it is possible to love something or someone to death?
 - (c) Do you think “Love You to Death” is a good title for the story? Explain why or why not.

WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Choose a character or event from the novel that you connected with in some way. For example, did the character or event remind you of something in your life? Cause an emotional reaction in you? Teach you something? Describe how and why in a paragraph.
2. Imagine you are Ivy on the day she finds out that Robin has won the Yorkie Award for *The Fallen Affair*. Write an entry in your journal about what happened at the meeting. Include your thoughts and feelings.
3. Think of one happy childhood event that you remember clearly. Write a paragraph describing the event. Include your thoughts and feelings. Do you think this event helped to shape your character? If so, in what way?
4. Robin wins the Yorkie Award for best editor of the year. Think of something great that you did. It could be an act of kindness to a stranger, throwing a fun party, overcoming a fear—anything that made you feel good about yourself. Come up with a name for an award for what you did. Imagine you are presented the award in public. Write an acceptance speech for the award.
5. Choose a close friend. Write a list of what you like about your friend. Write in complete sentences. List at least ten things. Then look at the list and tick the things that are also true about you.
6. Go to Elizabeth Ruth's official website and send her an email. Share your thoughts with her about her book.

PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

1. Find out about Edgar Allen Poe

Have students research Edgar Allen Poe and his story *The Black Cat*. Then read a simplified version of the story out loud to the class. (One simplified version can be found at http://e-book.webpark.cz/pdf/the_black_cat.pdf)

2. Start a journal

Dr. Stamp wants Ivy to keep a journal. Encourage students to keep a journal. Ask them if they keep or have ever kept a journal. Discuss what kinds of things people write in journals and why. Have students think about where and how often they could do quiet journal writing.

3. Write a tongue twister

Ivy has her own tongue twister: FrigidIvyFrigidIvyFrigidIvyFrigidIvy. Find out what students know about tongue twisters: what tongue twisters are and which ones they know. Then have students research more tongue twisters. After looking at and trying out various tongue twisters, have students discuss why tongue twisters are hard to say quickly. Then have the students try their hand at writing their own tongue twisters, which can be modelled on well-known tongue twisters.

4. Conduct a survey

Ivy said she liked reading thrillers. Have students conduct a survey of what kinds of books people like to read (or what kinds of movies people like to watch). Have the students create a simple chart to use as a survey form.

Survey Question: What is your favourite kind of book to read?		
Kind of Book	Tally	Total
Thrillers	√ √ √	3
Comedies		
Mysteries	√ √	2
Romances		
Ghost Stories		
Biographies	√ √ √	3
Histories	√	1
Self-help	√	1
TOTAL		10

Encourage students to ask at least ten people to answer the survey question. Have students tally and total their surveys. As a class or in small groups, have students combine their results on a master survey form. Then have students answer the following questions:

- What kind of book do most people like to read?
- What kind of book is least popular?
- Do most people like to read fiction or non-fiction?
- What kind of book do you like to read? Are you part of the majority?

As a follow-up, introduce bar graphs and assist students in constructing a bar graph, using the results of the survey.

FURTHER READING available from Grass Roots Press

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Home Invasion, Joy Fielding, Good Reads, Grass Roots Press

The Break-In, Tish Cohen, Good Reads, Grass Roots Press

The Stalker, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Grass Roots Press

Chicken Feed, Minette Walters, Quick Reads, Grass Roots Press

The Middle Ground, Zoe Whittall, Rapid Reads, Grass Roots Press

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