Tuesdays with Morrie

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MITCH ALBOM

Mitch Albom was born in Passaic, NJ. His family moved and settled in Oaklyn, NJ. Albom taught himself to play piano as a child and played in several bands throughout his adolescence. He skipped his senior year of high school and left for Brandeis University, where he received his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 1979. After a brief stint in Europe and New York City playing music, he developed an interest in journalism, which led him to pursue a Masters in Journalism from Columbia University and then an MBA, also from Columbia University. He settled in Detroit, MI in 1985, and earned national acclaim working as a sports journalist in newspaper, television, and radio. He married his wife, Janine, in 1995, the same year he reconnected with his fomer Brandeis professor Morrie Schwartz, which led him to write *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which became a bestseller. Since writing *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Albom has written several other books in the same thematic vein, including *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. He has also founded eight charities, most of which serve the Detroit area. He lives with Janine in Detroit and hosts a daily radio talk show.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

ALS was discovered in 1869 by Jean-Martin Charcot, a French neurologist, although it didn't garner international attention until US baseball player Lou Gherig went public with his diagnosis in the late 1930s. In 2016, 21 years after Morrie's death, donations raised from the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge led to the discovery of NEK1. NEK1 is one of several genes believed to be responsible for ALS, paving the way for new developments in treatment.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Since writing *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom has written several other books. His second nonfiction book, *Have a Little Faith*, is written in a similar style of recorded conversations. *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* was his first foray into fiction and deals with similar themes of life, death, and spirituality. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is one of several memoirs dealing with living with ALS, such as *I Remember Running* by Darcy Wakefield and *Tales From the Bed: On Living, Dying, and Having it All* by Jennifer Estess, written in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Tuesdays with Morrie
- **When Written:** 1995-96
- **Where Written:** Detroit, MI
- **When Published:** 1997
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Brandeis University, late 1970s; West Newton, MA, 1995
- **Climax:** When Mitch visits Morrie for the final time and says goodbye
- **Antagonist:** Death, ALS
- **Point of View:** first person, narrated by Mitch

EXTRA CREDIT

Morrie on TV and Broadway. Tuesdays with Morrie was adapted into a TV movie in the winter of 1999. It was produced by Oprah Winfrey and won four Emmy awards. Albom also wrote the script for an off-Broadway production.

Unexpected worldwide success. While the book was originally published in an edition of 20,000 copies to help pay Morrie's medical bills, it has since sold over 41 million copies and been translated into 45 languages (as of 2015).

PLOT SUMMARY

The primary story arc takes place over the course of 14 weeks in the late summer and fall of 1995, beginning when the narrator Mitch discovers that Morrie, his beloved sociology professor from college, is dying from ALS. When Mitch's **newspaper** union strikes, putting him out of work for an extended period, Mitch travels each week on Tuesday from his home in Detroit to Morrie's home outside Boston for what he calls his final class with Morrie. His final thesis is the full, completed book.

Morrie grew up in New York and his family was very poor. When he was nine, his mother fell ill and died, which haunted Morrie throughout the rest of his life. His father, Charlie, was not an affectionate man, and Morrie struggled through the next two years until his father remarried. Eva, his stepmother, was kind and loving. She gave Morrie both the love he so desperately desired, and instilled in him a love for education. After a failed attempt by Morrie's father to get him a job in a fur factory, Morrie decided to become a teacher.

At the beginning of each chapter, Mitch shares the story of his relationship with Morrie during his college days. Mitch began college in 1976 at Brandeis University, and met Morrie in his

first sociology class. Mitch was one of the youngest students, which he compensated for by acting very tough. Morrie, however, treated him with compassion and kindness, and the two developed a very trusting teacher/student relationship. Morrie convinced Mitch to write an honors thesis on football culture. At his graduation, Mitch promised he'd keep in touch with his professor, which he didn't follow through on.

After graduation, Mitch moved to New York to pursue his dream of being a professional piano player. He was not successful. He lived in an adjacent apartment to his favorite uncle, who died of pancreatic cancer while Mitch was living there. His uncle's death shakes Mitch, who decides he can't waste any more time and then earns a degree in journalism and finally settles in Detroit to work as a sports reporter. Mitch becomes very materially successful, although he isn't all that happy.

Morrie's health begins to decline in his sixties, when asthma begins to make his life difficult. A lover of **dance**, he has to stop when breathing becomes hard and he begins to suffer falls. When he continues to decline, doctors run a variety of tests and in 1994 Morrie is diagnosed with ALS. He teaches his final class at Brandeis that fall, and in the spring he gives the first of three television interviews with Ted Koppel of *Nightline*. Koppel is friendly, yet not warm. In Detroit, Mitch catches the interview on TV and decides to visit Morrie.

Despite the fact that Morrie, now in a wheelchair, welcomes Mitch with open arms, Mitch finds their first visit awkward and uncomfortable as he realizes that he is no longer the kind and idealistic student Morrie knew in college. Morrie offers to tell Mitch what it's like to die, which makes Mitch even more uncomfortable. Mitch struggles to answer questions about how fulfilled he is in his life, realizing that he isn't. When he leaves, he again promises Morrie that he'll come back and visit.

Mitch travels to the UK to cover Wimbledon and finds himself thinking about Morrie the entire time. The day after he returns to Detroit, his newspaper union goes on strike. After sitting around for a week, he calls Morrie and asks to come visit again. At the beginning of this visit and every visit after, Mitch arrives bearing **food** after remembering how much Morrie loves food. When Morrie begins to cry talking about how he's so much more affected by death in the world now that he himself is dying, Mitch is again uncomfortable. Morrie promises that he will show Mitch that crying is okay.

Throughout the next several Tuesdays, Mitch begins to assist Morrie's nurse, Connie, with Morrie's care. The first time he lifts Morrie from his wheelchair to his armchair, he feels how the disease has made Morrie into dead weight, which he is disturbed by. After that, he begins to bring tape recorders and a list of topics for he and Morrie to discuss as a way of keeping Morrie alive in memory once he's gone. This is exactly what Morrie wants. After he found out he was dying, he began to write down tidbits of wisdom about living in the shadow of death. The consummate teacher, he wants to teach the world about life, death, and how to truly live.

Morrie's second interview with Ted Koppel shows Koppel as significantly warmer, and Morrie's celebrity spreads even further after it airs. On the fourth Tuesday, Mitch and Morrie talk about death, and Morrie shares some of his wisdom about creating personal culture by borrowing from different religions. He says he's especially drawn to **nature** now that the end is drawing near, as though it's the first time he's noticing it.

By the next visit, Mitch begins to realize that Morrie craves human contact more and more as the disease takes over. He needs to be constantly adjusted in his armchair to stay comfortable, and needs his microphone for the tape recorder adjusted regularly as well. This leads into a discussion on the importance of family, and Mitch shares with the reader that his own brother, Peter, is living in Spain, battling the same form of pancreatic cancer that killed his uncle.

The next several Tuesdays, Morrie's health declines further. He becomes unable to use the toilet unassisted, and he is no longer capable of eating solid food. Despite not sleeping well due to coughing, he still insists on seeing visitors. Charlotte, his wife, insists to Mitch that their visits give Morrie purpose in light of his disease. Morrie and Mitch discuss how Morrie is dealing with his growing dependence on others by detaching from fear and other negative emotions, and he still manages to maintain perspective about aging thanks to his belief that aging is growth rather than decay. By the eighth Tuesday, Morrie is having good days and many bad days, but still believes that it is important to pursue making people happy rather than making money.

On the tenth Tuesday, Mitch's wife, Janine, accompanies him to visit Morrie. She is a professional singer and agrees to sing for Morrie when he asks, which surprises Mitch. Morrie shows his ability to connect with anyone, and he and Janine get along as though it wasn't the first time they'd met. Morrie then reveals his thoughts on marriage and why Mitch's generation experiences so much divorce. His ideas center on his guiding beliefs of having compassion and understanding for one's partner, and the importance of love.

The following week, Mitch has become even more involved in Morrie's care, and helps loosen the mucus in his lungs by pounding on his back. By this time, Morrie has been slowly breaking down Mitch's walls, and Mitch is becoming more sensitive and compassionate, and less focused on work. Morrie encourages Mitch to create his own personal culture, as Morrie did, that borrows the parts of cultures and religions that Mitch finds useful and helpful. Morrie's culture allows him to focus on his relationships with friends and family, which he believes is even more important given his impending death. When Morrie gives his final interview for *Nightline* the next week, he and Koppel speak like friends, and more than an interview, it is a

"sad farewell." A few days later when Mitch is visiting, Morrie recounts the story of one of his good friends who wasn't there for Morrie when Charlotte got sick, after which they lost contact. The friend died of cancer a few years before the present day, and Morrie regrets deeply not reconnecting with him. He also tells Mitch that if he were to have another son, he'd like that child to be Mitch.

The next week, Mitch asks Morrie what the perfect day would be, and what Morrie describes is shockingly ordinary. He encourages Mitch to try to patch things up with his brother, who is still struggling with cancer and not accepting calls from his family. When Mitch returns on the fourteenth week, Morrie is in bed and doing poorly. Mitch cries as he says goodbye, as does Morrie.

Morrie dies the following Saturday, and Mitch attends the funeral. It is a small affair in a beautiful park, and Mitch thinks it's fitting that the funeral takes place on a Tuesday. Not long after, Mitch is able to make contact with his brother, and their future relationship seems hopeful.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mitch Albom – A sports reporter living and working in Detroit, Michigan. He attended Brandeis University for his undergraduate degree, where he met professor Morrie Schwartz through his sociology classes. The two developed a close relationship while Mitch was a student, but lost touch after he graduated. A few years after college, Mitch is deeply shaken by the early and painful death of his favorite uncle, and becomes fearful that he too will die early. To counteract this fear, he gives up on his dream of becoming a professional pianist and develops extremely ambitious working habits, accumulating wealth and property as a way to feel in control of his life. When he begins to visit Morrie (after learning of Morrie's illness and imminent death), he starts to realize how unfulfilled he is with his materialistic life. Over the 14 weeks of their visits, Morrie stresses to him the value of personal relationships, which leads Mitch to become freer about expressing his emotions to loved ones.

Morrie Schwartz – A professor of Sociology at Brandeis University. His love of teaching and desire to treat others with compassion and understanding make him a beloved friend and mentor to many, including Mitch, the narrator. He loves to dance and doesn't much care for material culture, preferring instead to spend his time cultivating meaningful relationships. In 1994 he is diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or ALS, a degenerative and terminal muscle disease. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, he takes it upon himself to teach the world how to live in the face of death. He remains positive as the disease progresses, allowing himself only a little time in the mornings to mourn his fate. A teacher to the end, he uses the three *Nightline* interviews with Ted Koppel to spread what he learns about life and death to viewers around the US. When Mitch decides to visit Morrie, Morrie takes the opportunity to both impart his knowledge to Mitch, and also supports the publishing of their "final thesis," which is the full text of the book. He sees the book as a way to continue teaching and imparting wisdom long after his death.

Peter – Mitch's younger brother, a free spirit who moved to Spain and remains relatively estranged from his family. He is diagnosed with a rare form of pancreatic cancer and must travel throughout Europe to receive treatment. He is unwilling to converse with Mitch or allow him a place in his life until the end of the text, when Mitch is finally able to talk to him, followed a week later by a friendly and humorous note via fax updating Mitch on his condition.

Charlie – Morrie's father, a Russian man who moved to the US to escape the Russian Army. He worked in the fur industry, spoke little English, and was generally cold towards Morrie and David. After the death of his wife, Morrie's mother, he sent Morrie and David to live at a hotel in Connecticut. He married Eva a year later.

Morrie's Mother – She ran a candy shop in the Bronx until she fell sick with an unnamed illness. She passed away when Morrie was eight, and Morrie was tasked with reading the telegram to his father. He was forbidden from talking about her to David, as Charlie wished for David to believe that Eva was his biological mother. Because of this, Morrie never fully recovered from her death.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Janine – Mitch's wife, a professional singer. She and Mitch married after seven years of dating, and she loves him despite his busy schedule and his unwillingness to prioritize having children. She accompanies Mitch to visit Morrie one week and to everyone's surprise, sings for Morrie.

Charlotte – Wife of Morrie and a professor at MIT. She is a very private person, but tolerates and supports Morrie's desire to have visitors when he receives his ALS diagnosis.

David – Morrie's younger brother. He contracted Polio as a child and suffers from a permanent limp.

Eva – Morrie's stepmother, a Romanian immigrant. She married Charlie a year after Morrie's mother died, when Morrie was nine. She gave Morrie the love and attention he craved from his father, and is responsible for instilling in him a love of learning.

Ted Koppel – Host of the *Nightline* TV show. A tough, brisk man, through his three interviews with Morrie, he softens and seems to take some of Morrie's life lessons to heart.

Connie – Morrie's home health nurse, described as a stout, Italian woman. She helps Morrie use the toilet and performs

other tasks to keep him comfortable, such as massaging his feet and turning him in bed.

Tony – Morrie's first home health worker who helps him with his bathing suit and getting in and out of the swimming pool.

Rob – One of Morrie's sons; a journalist in Tokyo.

Jon – One of Morrie's sons; a computer expert in Boston.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

At various times throughout the book, Mitch describes the book he's written as a "long paper" or a final thesis, written for the final "class" – a class containing only Mitch – that his dying college professor, Morrie, will teach. The entirety of the text, then, is centered around the idea of teaching and learning. The book takes its structure from Morrie's "class" syllabus – each week/chapter is a lecture in Morrie's class on death – and focuses not just on what is taught but on the teacher/student relationship developing between the two men. As the book progresses and depicts how Mitch and Morrie's relationship grows, we're asked to consider where the student/teacher relationship exists, what the relationship consists of, and to what extent a teacher can affect change on his or her students' lives.

Each of the Tuesday meetings is preceded, and sometimes also followed, by one of Mitch's memories from when he was in college. These memories are primarily focused on his interactions with Morrie. This narrative tool serves two functions – first, to provide an opener or intro to the present day Tuesday meeting, and then to chart the development of trust – from their interaction in college to their relationship as Morrie is dying – between teacher and student. By doing this, the book makes it clear that while teaching and learning can be considered just a transfer of knowledge from one person to another, deeper learning and understanding depends on, and is in fact only possible through, a caring relationship between teacher and student. This relationship begins for Mitch and Morrie in Mitch's first class, when Morrie asks him if he'd prefer to be called Mitch or Mitchell. Mitch had never had a teacher before who cared what he wanted to be called.

The reason that Morrie is able to form such lasting and positive teacher/student relationships can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that he's a professor of sociology, or the study of how humans relate to each other. In effect, his job is to study relationships, which he does both within and without the university setting. Many of the college memories Mitch mentions, as well as what he teaches Mitch during their Tuesday visits, focus on the critical importance of relationships, and the importance of "relationship skills" such as love, compassion, and forgiveness. In college, Mitch dismissed many of these ideas as "touchy-feely stuff." However, over time, the relationship between him and Morrie grows from being purely student/teacher into something more familial. As their relationship evolves, Mitch becomes more receptive to Morrie's lessons and begins to apply them to his own life. Thei relationship becomes not just a way to learn, but a model for how to have powerful relationships with others.

As Morrie's death creeps closer, his sense of urgency about the need to teach what he knows and what he is learning about death grows more powerful. He begins by writing simple aphorisms on scrap paper, which develops into a newspaper article about him and then being asked to do *Nightline* interviews with Ted Koppel. The *Nightline* interviews become an opportunity to teach as many people as watch the show, and the attributes that make Morrie a fantastic teacher in the classroom – a desire to understand and connect with people – are evident on television as wel, and he even manages to teach Koppel something about friendship and compassion.

Finally, Morrie's lessons live on in this book, and in Mitch's other books, not just because they are wise and worthwhile lessons, but because Mitch's relationship with Morrie is so profound that it compelled him to share the lessons with an even wider audience. Through the publication of the book, the reader becomes the student, and both Mitch and Morrie become teachers of these lessons.

DEATH

The events of *Tuesdays with Morrie* are set in motion when Mitch finds out his beloved former college professor is dying and decides to visit him. The lessons that Morrie imparts to Mitch arise from Morrie's desire to teach the world about death and how to live when one's dying, as he faces the inevitability of his own fast-approaching death. The book, then, serves as a meditation on death.

Morrie ruminates throughout the fourteen weeks on the effect that other people's deaths have on the living. At the beginning of nearly every lesson, Mitch shares of a story of death from the **newspaper** he reads on the plane ride to Massachusetts, and he regularly notes developments in the high-profile OJ Simpson murder trial going on at the time. While these events have little effect on the actual storyline, they emphasize that death is all around us and affects everyone. Mitch, for instance, is severely shaken as a young man by the untimely death of his favorite uncle, and Morrie never fully recovers from the death of his mother. However, these personal instances of death

serve as catalysts for change. Mitch's uncle's death is one of the primary reasons that Mitch decides to pursue a Masters degree and gives up becoming a professional pianist, and the lack of love and affection in Morrie's life without his mother and before his father's remarriage drive Morrie to build his own family that values affection and the showing of emotion.

Despite a natural human fear of death, Morrie seeks to find a means of facing or engaging with it so he can die peacefully. As part of this quest, Morrie conducts research on how other cultures around the world view death. He is especially interested in cultures that believe in some sort of reincarnation. As a belief that relies on the cyclical nature of birth and death, the idea of reincarnation fits thematically with the other cycles in the text and the world: school years, seasons and the life cycle of plants like the **hibiscus** losing its leaves in Morrie's window, sports, and even the cycle of Mitch's weekly visits to Morrie with their greetings and goodbyes. Ultimately, Morrie develops his concept of detachment, which involves feeling an emotion, recognizing it, and then living through it. This thought process allows him to face his own death without dwelling on it negatively. It instead allows him to use death as an excuse to live his life to the fullest, knowing that if he wants to do or say something, his time to do so is short.

The ideas of death as being part of a natural cycle and that death is better treated not as something to fear, but rather as a motivator to live life more fully, link death with life. In this way, Morrie's lessons about death are not just lessons about how to die, but about how to live life. Morrie's dying with is to pass these lessons on so that others- Mitch and the reader- can also let go of their fears of death and live their lives to their full potential.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

Morrie's guiding philosophy of life is that each person must not simply accept the larger modern (mid 1990s) culture, which he consistently critiques. He takes issue with modern culture's overvaluing of materiality, achievement, and superficial things, which he believes is not conducive to living a happy, fulfilled, and successful life. He instead advocates for the creation of personal cultures, or a system of living life that allows someone to be fulfilled through careful questioning of modern culture and religion. Throughout the Tuesday visits, he counsels Mitch to create his own personal culture so he too can live his life to the fullest.

Throughout his life, Morrie created a culture based on discussion groups, long walks, and spending time with friends. It is focused on interpersonal relationships rather than things and achievements. One way to understand Morrie's culture is through the way he interacts with **television**. Morrie doesn't watch much television himself, but when he is asked to appear on Ted Koppel's *Nightline* show, he agrees (after grilling Koppel about his own personal culture) and later agrees to two more interviews. He sees the interviews as a way to teach the tenets of his own culture and to engage with people, rather than entertain. While Mitch uses the OJ Simpson murder trial to link the way that other people use television directly to material culture, the following that Morrie amasses through the broadcast of the *Nightline* interviews further supports Morrie's idea that everyone is searching for more than what the present material culture has to offer.

Morrie is very interested in religion of all sorts. He was raised Jewish and became an agnostic as a young man after the death of his father. Despite turning to synagogue and religious services for comfort in his youth, he couldn't reconcile the tragedy that had befallen his family with the beautiful ideals of religion. As he began to age, however, he became increasingly interested in other religions and begins to borrow bits and pieces that feel right and true as he works on creating his own culture.

The book presents Morrie's personal religion and personal culture as a clear good, and suggests that it was his freedom from a single religion that allows him the ability to then create his own that works for him. Thus, the book questions how culture and religion shape how we live our lives and what we value. While the book doesn't go so far as to suggest that one must give up religion as a whole or completely forsake the given norms of society, it encourages readers to feel free to focus on the aspects of a belief system or culture that offer personal fulfillment. The parts that don't offer fulfillment or some sort of positive gain should get a hard and skeptical look.

MOVEMENT AND CHANGE

Tuesdays with Morrie is very concerned with the act of moving through time and space. Movement is treated in turn as inevitable, a privilege, scary, and necessary. Morrie is dying of ALS, a disease that progressively limits its victims' ability to move. As such, the text is constantly updating the reader as to Morrie's current ability, or lack thereof, regarding movement. The reader is asked to consider what it means to have the ability to move through space, and what it means to lose that ability. The ability to move through time and change with age, especially, is treated as a very special thing. It is a prerequisite for then being able to love, create one's own culture, and eventually die.

The book consistently references **dance** as it explores movement. Morrie loved to dance in his youth and into his old age, until ALS began to take away his ability to walk. Yet, even after Morrie is confined to a wheelchair and eventually, his bed, Mitch often describes Morrie's hand movements and his thoughts in terms of dance and expressive, physical movement. Through this juxtaposition, the book both shows how age and disease diminish movement and, by extension, diminish life, but also that movement never ceases. The joy of movement

remains available to Morrie, even as it diminishes. Dance and movement symbolize freedom for Morrie. However, he also finds a sense of freedom in being cared for as he loses his ability to care for himself, likening it to being a child and receiving unconditional love and care.

Movement is also explored in more metaphoric ways. At the beginning of the story, Mitch is moving at breakneck speed in his job as a sports reporter. He does a million things at once, trying to get ahead and find some sort of fulfillment. When compared to Morrie's conception of fulfillment, though, Mitch is at zero, and it isn't until he stops moving, thanks to the newspaper strike that puts him out of a newspaper job, that he can start moving in more meaningful ways. The book then makes the point that simply moving for movement's sake, or for the wrong goals, provides no joy. It is purposeful movement, motivated by engagement with the world, with others, and with one's own true desires, that brings joy and fulfillment.

The text focuses as well on movement through time and space in larger increments. Flashbacks take the reader back in time to Morrie and Mitch's younger days, and each week, Mitch travels 700 miles to visit Morrie. Mitch's *physical* travels outside of Detroit also bring him to *internal* places of decision-making, change, and growth. It is through his visits with Morrie that he is able to evaluate his current lifestyle and make changes for the better. The act of physical movement, then, becomes the overarching external action that causes internal reflection and change. In particular, the vignettes from Mitch and Morrie's early relationship stand in stark contrast to the person that Mitch became later in life. The vignettes show Mitch as a sensitive and idealistic person, while the present Mitch is hardened and materialistic. Yet, the book also suggests that he is capable of change, as his relationship and his lessons with Morrie show him returning to a more fulfilling way of living.

The book, then, shows that movement and change are always possible, even when they seem impossible. Just as Morrie's hands and thoughts can still dance despite not being able to roll over in bed or use the toilet unassisted, Mitch is able to change the course of his life despite it seeming as though his choices have locked him into a certain life. The reader is presented with the idea that movement and change are critically important, and that the two are prerequisites for being able to love, interact with and create culture, and ultimately, to face the final change of life: death.

LOVE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

"Love each other or perish" is Morrie's favorite line by poet W. H. Auden, and it is the guiding philosophy of Morrie's life. He believes there is nothing as important as relationships with friends, family, and community. The text provides some nuances as to how that love is expressed by questioning if love is still valid and useful if it's harder to see. Watching Morrie's relationships evolve throughout his life asks the reader to consider the degree of validity for those statements.

Morrie comes back again and again to the importance of community and family, especially in light of his deteriorating health. Morrie's self-created culture is, at its heart, about prioritizing people and relationships over accumulating material things. He makes a point to receive as many visitors as possible and reply to much of the mail he gets following the *Nightline* interview. This interaction with his greater community is vitally important to Morrie, as he uses his community to spread what he's learned about life and death. By interacting with his community in this way, he never has to truly give up teaching.

Family is held up as being immensely important, even more so than platonic friends. The reader is asked to consider the difference between the way that Morrie's family functions and the way that Mitch's family functions. Morrie's immediate family is very close; his sons and his wife, Charlotte, are around to support him through his illness. Morrie believes deeply in familial responsibility, saying that his family can't choose not to support him through his illness like a friend could. Because of this, he places a great degree of emphasis on the decisions to marry and have children when Mitch brings up the topic. On the other hand, Mitch's brother, Peter, moved to Spain and is battling cancer mostly estranged from Mitch and the rest of their family. The text does present a hopeful tone for repairing relationships with family, however. After Morrie's death, Mitch is finally able to reach out successfully to Peter with a message of love and compassion, and Peter is responsive to that.

Love is a central tenet of Morrie's philosophy, and as the book follows the vignettes through his early life, it shows both how he was highly motivated by a desire to love and be loved, and how that desire is universal. When Morrie was very young, his affectionate mother dies and he is left longing for love and affection from his colder and more reserved father, Charlie. He finally receives parental affection from Eva, his stepmother. Later in life, when he creates his own family with Charlotte and has two sons, he vows to give them the love that he never got from his own father. In this way, love is the ultimate motivator for Morrie's actions throughout the scope of the book as well as throughout his life. Mitch as well is motivated by love. His relationship with Morrie while at school flourishes in part because Morrie meets Mitch where he is in life, responding to Mitch's desire to be heard and supported in his dreams and desires.

In the end, it is Mitch's love and respect for Morrie that brings about the positive changes in Mitch's life, and which motivates Mitch to capture and explain the lessons he has learned from Morrie in *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Morrie's love and support allows Mitch to more fully embrace his life, his goals, and his ability to love and be open and vulnerable to those whom he loves. Throughout the text, Mitch notes that Morrie has an

unshakable belief that Mitch is still the kind and sensitive person he was when he was in school, and the love and community he experiences with Morrie allows him to return in some form to that person. The book seeks also to do that for the reader, giving readers the tools to be loving and compassionate, and in so doing to become a more fulfilled individual.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FOOD

Morrie absolutely loves to eat. Besides being necessary for life in a basic sense, Morrie sees food as a means of connecting and fostering relationships, and therefore essential in developing and maintaining his personal culture. After his first visit with Morrie, Mitch remembers Morrie's affinity for food and begins to bring him things from his favorite deli in as an offering. This continues even after Morrie is no longer able to chew and swallow solid food, and becomes a more symbolic gesture of friendship and well-wishing. As Morrie's health declines and eating becomes more difficult, food begins to bring with it the potential for death – Morrie fears he will die by choking.

MEDIA

Tuesdays with Morrie makes it very clear that the world is absolutely saturated in all sorts of media. Mitch works for a newspaper (as well as television and radio), both he and Morrie read newspapers. And yet, the book's depictions of media, with the exception of Morrie's appearances in his *Nightline* interviews, are not at all positive. In fact, the media portrayed in the book is time and again connected with death: television focuses relentlessly on the OJ Simpson trial, while during his weekly travels from Detroit to West Newton Mitch reads about various fatal tragedies in the newspaper. Further, Mitch's own life as a media celebrity is portrayed as full of speed and action, but devoid of meaning or fulfillment. And it is the absence of media, when Mitch's writers' union goes on strike and he suddenly finds himself with the time to visit Morrie weekly, that allows Mitch to reevaluate his life and make positive changes to his personal culture. Media, then, becomes a kind of representation of the unfulfilling and materialistic modern culture that Morrie criticizes.

THE NATURAL WORLD AND MORRIE'S HIBISCUS

Part of Morrie's personal culture includes taking walks outside, and he shows a great appreciation for nature. Even when he is no longer able to go outside, and even gets a chill sitting next to an open window on an 80-degree day, he still insists on sitting by the window in his office. Nature, the changing of the seasons, and the life cycles of plants with the seasons allude to the cyclical nature of life and death. In particular, Morrie takes great interest in the hibiscus plant outside his window. It is full and vibrant when Mitch begins his Tuesday visits. By the time of Morrie's death, the hibiscus well on its way to losing all of its leaves for the winter. There is sadness in this "death" of the plant – a sadness connected to Morrie's own death, of course – but there is also joy in the fact that the plant is part of a cycle, that it will live on when spring returns. This idea of the cycle of life becomes increasingly important to Morrie as he approaches death, and is important to the book as well. After all *Tuesdays with Morrie* can be seens as a kind of rebirth for Morrie, a continuation of his cycle. It comes as no surprise, then, that Morrie is very deliberate in his choice of burial location, making sure to choose a spot that is naturally beautiful. In this way, he ensures that in his death, the living will be able to appreciate life as they admire the beauty around them when visiting his grave. As the weeks progress, Mitch also becomes more attuned to the beauty of the natural world, noticing on his final visit the many plants in Morrie's front yard as he makes the final internal shift towards fully appreciating life in the face of death.

DANCE

Morrie's love of dance is directly tied to his conception of freedom. Dance is a way for him to gain freedom from a culture he doesn't find useful, as when Mitch describes him at the Harvard Square dance nights on Wednesdays. In the group of mostly students, Morrie would dance to whatever music was playing without a care in the world for how he looked. As Morrie's health and his ability for movement decline through his battle with ALS, Mitch describes his hand movements and his thoughts in terms of dance. Dance in this way represents emotional and intellectual freedom. Morrie never loses his capacity to feel emotions or engage in intellectual inquiry, and those capacities become the way in which Morrie finds freedom when physical dance is no longer available to him.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Broadway Books edition of *Tuesdays with Morrie* published in

2002.

The Curriculum Quotes

"Mitch, you are one of the good ones," he says, admiring the briefcase. Then he hugs me. I feel his thin arms around my back. I am taller than he is, and when he holds me, I feel awkward, older, as if I were the parent and he were the child.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch is at his college graduation ceremony and is saying goodbye to Morrie. Morrie's statement that Mitch is "one of the good ones" marks Mitch from the beginning as a kindhearted individual, which creates a counterpoint for the hardened and more materialistic person Mitch will later become after graduation.

At this early stage, Mitch is willing and able to provide physical affection to Morrie, and while he admits feeling awkward during the hug, he's at least capable of showing emotion. This further develops young Mitch as an opposite type of character to the Mitch we'll come to know later in the present. By mentioning a familial relationship between him and Morrie, Mitch sets the scene for further exploration of the father/son relationship as it pertains to the two main characters.

The Syllabus Quotes

Instead, he would make death his final project, the center point of his days. Since everyone was going to die, he could be of great value, right? He could be research. A human textbook. Study me in my slow and patient demise. Watch what happens to me. Learn with me.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Morrie has just received his diagnosis of ALS from his doctor and experiences this thought and decision in the following days. Several important ideas coalesce here—first, we get a glimpse of Morrie's unwavering optimism. He makes the conscious decision to not just wither and be miserable with his fate; he decides instead to embrace it and fully experience what's going to happen. Then, we see that Morrie frames his life through teaching and learning, and this encompasses his greater community as well. By vowing to use himself as research and as a means to teach others about death, this central tenet of Morrie's life philosophy is fleshed out.

This statement can also be considered one of the overarching theses of the book, as through reading the text, the reader does just what Morrie asks— studying him, watching him, and learning with him.

Morrie cried and laughed with them. And all the heartfelt things we never get to say to those we love, Morrie said that day. His "living funeral" was a rousing success.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Charlotte, Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

After attending the funeral of a fellow professor that left him feeling depressed, Morrie organized what he calls a living funeral. While a funeral is also held after his death, holding a funeral before his death allows him to spend time with friends and family and hear the things that are said at funerals, but that the dead never get to hear.

Morrie's personal culture is extremely focused on relationships, building community, and telling loved ones that they're loved and valued. He consistently remarks that he's lucky that he gets so much time to say goodbye, and this event acts as a formal chance for him to do so. While funerals are often community events, the concept of a living funeral allows the event to be one of community building for the dying as well as the living, thereby linking life and death and the living to the dead.

The Student Quotes

After the funeral, my life changed. I felt as if time were suddenly precious, water going down an open drain, and I could not move quickly enough.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, Mitch's favorite uncle has just died a painful death from pancreatic cancer. This is the first instance in the book where we see death as a catalyst for change. After experiencing his uncle's death, Mitch begins to quickly move away from the goal of the idealistic young musician he dreamed of being, and which Morrie encouraged him to pursue. The death of his uncle leads Mitch to move very quickly in a completely different direction, towards a life of acquiring material goods. With this transformation, the idea of movement for movement's sake is introduced. This idea will later be cast as a negative when compared to Morrie's way of living, and as it becomes apparent that Mitch feels little joy moving simply for the sake of moving.

Instead, I buried myself in accomplishments, because with accomplishments, I believed I could control things, I could squeeze in every last piece of happiness before I got sick and died, like my uncle before me, which I figured was my natural fate.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Janine

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Instead of starting a family with Janine, Mitch focuses on work in order to feel in control. Mitch never fully fleshes out why he feels that he will follow in his uncle's footsteps, but Mitch is driven through life by the idea that he too is going to die a horrible death. Rather than look for fulfillment in community or relationships, as Morrie will later suggest he do, Mitch tries to find meaning in his life through accomplishments and accumulating material goods. This early description of Mitch's character gives the reader a baseline for which to then judge Mitch's progress as he transforms through his visits with Morrie.

Seeing Mitch as someone who is successful by the standards of modern culture provides a counterpoint for Morrie's ideas of *personal* culture. Mitch is a living, breathing example of the kind of "success" that Morrie not only rails against, but believes is not true success. Mitch ultimately supports Morrie's belief, as he shares with the reader on several occasions that he felt unfulfilled despite having so much.

The Audiovisual Quotes

Do you prefer Mitch? Or is Mitchell better?

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch is in his first class with Morrie in 1976, and Morrie is calling attendance. By asking Mitch what he prefers to be called, Morrie makes several things clear. First, it's obvious that Morrie sees his students as individuals with individual nicknames and preferences, which Mitch says he's never experienced before. This is one of the reasons that Morrie is a good teacher, as he cares not just about the transfer of information, but puts more emphasis on building trust and a relationship with each student. In this way, this question is also a prime example of Morrie's desire to pay attention to people and make them feel like they matter. By doing this, Morrie continues to build community and strong relationships.

The Classroom Quotes

And you have to be strong enough to say if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch is visiting Morrie for the first time, and after a silence that Mitch describes as awkward, Morrie jumps right into a brief discussion of modern culture. Throughout the text, Morrie consistently critiques the modern American culture of the 90s as materialistic and not conducive to a fulfilled and happy life. He is insistent that in order to become fulfilled, people must reject what modern culture holds up

as important, such as money and accumulating material goods, in favor of building community and relationships.

Morrie's entire outlook on life and death has its roots in this statement. While death is universally unsettling and scary for many, Morrie chooses to completely accept his death and try to learn as much as possible as his health declines. Essentially, he rejects the overarching cultural narrative of fearing and avoiding death in favor of embracing it. Further, Morrie doesn't buy into the cultural worship of youth. Rather than see aging as decay, Morrie chooses to look at it as growth and development, casting a positive light on a subject so often considered negative.

❝ Life is a series of pulls back and forth... A tension of opposites, like a pull on a rubber band. And most of us live somewhere in the middle.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch and Morrie are sitting in Morrie's office in a flashback to Mitch's college days, and Mitch has been complaining to Morrie about the confusion he feels regarding his age and what he should be doing.

The concept of the tension of opposites describes what Mitch struggles with throughout the text. He knows he should be more like Morrie—more open with his emotions and more interested in relationships. Instead, he fills his life with work in the media, which represents the exact opposite way of living. As he works, Mitch accumulates material goods and achievements rather than positive personal relationships. He immerses himself in modern culture, and doesn't begin to return to a more fulfilled way of being until he reconnects with Morrie.

Throughout the book, Mitch mentions feeling at odds with what he knows he should be doing and what he's actually doing. As the weeks progress, Mitch chooses more often to follow Morrie's wisdom, which leads Mitch to a more comfortable and fulfilled place in the middle of the pulls.

The First Tuesday Quotes

❝ I knew there was plenty of food at the house, but I wanted to contribute something. I was so powerless to help Morrie otherwise. And I remembered his fondness for eating.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch has just arrived at Morrie's house bearing bags of deli food. Throughout the text, food and eating are developed first and foremost as a way in which Morrie builds community. Mitch remembers when he and Morrie would eat together in the Brandeis dining hall, and starts bringing food as an offering for the Tuesday visits.

Mitch recognizes the importance of food and eating to Morrie's personal culture. Eating for Morrie is not just a way to nourish his body; it's a way to build relationships and foster community. By bringing food, Mitch is essentially providing an easy way for him to connect with Morrie. The meal that will take place now that food has been procured will help Mitch and Morrie strengthen their relationship as Morrie teaches and Mitch begins to consider Morrie's lessons.

Food and the ensuing meal also allow the reader to see firsthand Morrie's declining mobility. Morrie's mobility is consistently discussed in terms of how and what he's eating, and this meal is no exception.

The Second Tuesday Quotes

❝ Holding him like that moved me in a way I cannot describe, except to say I felt the seeds of death inside his shriveling frame, and as I laid him in his chair, adjusting his head on the pillows, I had the coldest realization that our time was running out.
And I had to do something.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch has this chilling realization when he offers to lift Morrie from his wheelchair into his armchair in his office. This is the second instance for Mitch of death acting as a catalyst for change. Prior to this moment, it's unclear whether Mitch is going to continue visiting Morrie or not, and it's also unclear whether Mitch is going to take any of Morrie's wisdom and apply it to his life. This realization is what truly begins Mitch's pivot from hardened, materialistic, and superficial to someone who embodies Morrie's teachings.

Though this is the second time of death creating a change in Mitch, the change provoked this time around is much slower than the one that followed the death of his uncle. The change brought about by Morrie's death leads Mitch to movement that is purposeful and driven by love, rather than his previous movement for movement's sake that was driven by fear.

The Fourth Tuesday Quotes

"I'm going to say it again," he said. "Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live." He smiled, and I realized what he was doing. He was making sure I absorbed this point, without embarrassing me by asking. It was part of what made him a good teacher.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom, Morrie Schwartz (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Sitting in Morrie's office, Mitch and Morrie are discussing death and the relationship of life to death. Part of what makes Morrie a good teacher is that he can turn the stuff of everyday life into a lesson on leading a more fulfilled life. However, it's often his lessons that are less overt that carry the most weight, as Mitch notes here. Morrie's teaching skills shine, as he carefully makes his point without making the statement something so major and imposing.

Morrie's statement itself can be read as a way in which to understand the book's purpose as a whole. The text is a meditation on death, but death is used as a catalyst for change for the living. Through the Tuesday visits and having to face Morrie's death on a weekly basis, Mitch is able to move to a more fulfilled state of being as he internalizes Morrie's lessons on death. Morrie himself says that now that he has to face his own death, his life is even fuller and more positive than it was before his diagnosis.

This method of teaching—of repetition, rather than overtly stressing a point—is carried throughout the text, as the phrase "once you learn how to die, you learn how to live" is repeated throughout. In this way, the reader is asked to consider the importance of the phrase in exactly the same manner that Mitch is.

The Fifth Tuesday Quotes

"If you don't have the support and love and caring and concern that you get from a family, you don't have much at all. Love is so supremely important. As our great poet Auden said, 'Love each other or perish.'"

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Jon, Rob, Charlotte, Mitch Albom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

This Tuesday, Mitch and Morrie are discussing the importance of family. Morrie is describing his feelings about his own family and how important they are to him, especially now that his health is in decline. Morrie is ardent that family is the most important thing someone can have in life. He places a great deal of weight on the idea of familial responsibility. This idea of responsibility plays out in Morrie's immediate family, as Morrie often speaks very highly of the care he receives from Charlotte. Notably, he never mentions the quality of care he receives from home care workers like Connie, indicating that he values the emotional support and care he receives from his family over the physical duties performed by Connie and his various physical therapists.

Morrie's personal philosophy focuses on ideas of love and the nurturing of close emotional relationships as the basis for a happy life. This quote by the poet W.H. Auden shows that Morrie very much equates the lack of such relationships, and the lack of love, with death and despair.

Additionally, the repetition of the Auden quote further stresses its importance to understanding Morrie and his philosophy. Through repetition, it's made obvious to the reader that it's an important phrase without being overtly heavy handed.

The Sixth Tuesday Quotes

❝ Charlotte glanced again at my food and I felt suddenly ashamed. All these reminders of things Morrie would never enjoy.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz, Charlotte

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch has been bringing food from Morrie's favorite deli for the last several weeks, but on this week Charlotte was home when Mitch arrived. She shared with Mitch that most of the food he's brought is now too difficult for Morrie to eat.

Food is very important to Morrie, although the act of eating itself is possibly even more important than the food itself. Morrie uses the act of eating with people as a way to build community. Mitch mentions fond memories of eating with Morrie in the Brandeis dining hall, which is one of the ways in which the two developed their relationship while Mitch was a student. By bringing food for Morrie each week, Mitch was attempting to recreate that sense of happiness and connection he felt in college.

At this point, however, we see how far the disease has progressed. Morrie can no longer eat the food because chewing is difficult and choking is a real possibility. Thus, this moment is one in which food shifts from being a positive symbol of friendship to a more tragic one, as a reminder of death.

The Professor, Part Two Quotes

❝ Morrie observed that most of the patients there had been rejected and ignored in their lives, made to feel that they didn't exist. They also missed compassion—something the staff ran out of quickly. And many of these patients were well-off, from rich families, so their wealth did not buy them happiness or contentment.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Morrie's first job after finishing his Ph.D. was conducting research in a mental institution outside of Washington, DC. His job was to observe the patients and their treatments. This is the lesson that Morrie takes away from conducting research in a mental hospital, and it will go on to inform how he structures his personal culture. Most of Morrie's concerns, here as well as later in life, are about how we treat others and what sort of an effect our actions have on them. Morrie will later champion the power of simply paying attention and giving someone your full attention, and this point can be seen as the moment in his life when he fully understands the positive effect of paying attention and the profoundly negative effect of not.

Here we also see the seeds of Morrie's later disdain for modern culture through the mention of wealth not being a good measure for happiness. He will go on to link modern culture to the accumulation of wealth and material goods, which he consistently criticizes. The underlying message that Morrie leaves the hospital with is that love and compassion do the most good in the world, as they make people feel seen, heard, and cared for in a way that wealth cannot.

The Seventh Tuesday Quotes

❝ At seventy-eight, he was giving as an adult and taking as a child.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch has this realization after Morrie tells him that although he can no longer use the toilet unassisted, he's learning to enjoy being completely cared for like a child. The text draws a firm connection between the state of being a child and many of the positive aspects of Morrie's personal culture, such as unconditional love, care, and physical affection. As Morrie's mobility declines and he has to rely completely on others for every aspect of daily living, he in effect returns to childhood. Most importantly, he longs for and fully desires these simple pleasures, and sees them as pleasures rather than embarrassing.

At the same time, Morrie continues to give back to community in a very adult way, by listening to his friends and dispensing words of wisdom that can only be attained with age.

The Eighth Tuesday Quotes

❝ When I give my time, when I can make someone smile after they were feeling sad, it's as close to healthy as I ever feel.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

The topic for this week's discussion is money, and Morrie here is stressing the importance of relationships rather than accumulating material goods near the end of Mitch's visit. With this statement, Morrie ties positive and fulfilling relationships directly to physical health. This supports his concept of personal culture, since so much of his personal culture is built on the idea of nurturing these relationships. By this point in the book, Morrie's body is no longer functioning or healthy. Note that while Morrie doesn't go so far as to say that he feels truly healthy when he's able to make someone smile, this statement makes a direct link between physical health and emotional happiness. This also is indicative of Morrie's high level of optimism in the face of his disease. Rather than wallow in self pity, he continues to give time and guidance to friends and family.

The Ninth Tuesday Quotes

❝ When you're in bed, you're dead.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of Morrie's aphorisms, told to Mitch at the beginning of their weekly visit. Morrie comes up with this one when he can barely move, but he still insists on spending each day in his study.

Morrie's insistence that daily life will go on, despite the devastating effects of his disease, are indicative of his positive outlook on life. His positive outlook, in turn, is a direct result of his rejection of modern culture in favor of a self-created personal culture. Morrie's culture does leave room for sadness and grief for his fate, but only a little. He allows himself time in the morning to mourn and be sad, and then shifts to appreciating all the good in his life. He equates staying in bed and grieving with death, which in turn conflates being in his study and engaging with life and people with living.

This aphorism turns Morrie's bed into something of a symbol for death. On Mitch's last visit, it's the first visit in which Morrie is in bed for anything other than physical therapy. As he enters the bedroom, Mitch hears this aphorism in his head and it indicates that this will be the final Tuesday of their visits. Mitch and Morrie say goodbye, and Morrie dies days later in his bed.

❝ I was thinking of this: A Teacher to the Last.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

"A Teacher to the Last" is what Morrie has just told Mitch he'd like to have on his tombstone. Morrie's desire for something that invokes his love of teaching makes it extremely clear just how important his role as a teacher is to him. The words on his tombstone will live on forever. In this sense, they echo the core concept of teaching that the book explores: that teaching doesn't just encompass lectures and the simple transfer of knowledge. Rather, teaching is cyclical, a give-and-take relationship between the teacher and the student, and one that perpetuates itself outward. Further, the book is presented as Mitch's final thesis, written with Morrie's guidance much as his first undergraduate thesis was written. Mitch then becomes the final student of Morrie's life.

The nature of books as objects means that although the actual, physical Morrie is dead, a version of Morrie is able to live on in the pages of Mitch's book. Because of this, the cycle of teaching can continue as long as the book remains on people's bookshelves. Through the publishing of the book and the subsequent immortalizing of Morrie, his "last"

is prolonged, allowing for him to teach far longer than he may have thought possible.

The Tenth Tuesday Quotes

As my wife's loving voice filled the room, a crescent smile appeared on his face. And while his body was stiff as a sandbag, you could almost see him dancing inside it.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Janine, Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Janine has accompanied Mitch to visit Morrie this week. She is a professional singer and usually declines to sing for people, but to Mitch's surprise, she sang for Morrie when he asked.

Mitch describes Morrie's reaction to hearing Janine sing in terms of dance, despite the fact that Morrie is no longer able to move much unassisted. This draws a connection between the physical act of dancing and what dancing means as a metaphor. Morrie never fully loses the joy of movement and dance; he remains capable of experiencing the same type of joy as he experiences music.

The fact that Mitch chooses to describe Morrie here in terms of dance also speaks to the importance of dance and music to Morrie's personal culture. Rather than simply describe the happiness he experiences in this moment, Morrie's happiness is described in relation to dance and movement. The idea of movement, then, is elevated and becomes an essential part of Morrie's conception of happiness and fulfillment.

The Eleventh Tuesday Quotes

"In the beginning of life, when we are infants, we need others to survive, right? And at the end of life, when you get like me, you need others to survive, right?"
His voice dropped to a whisper. "But here's the secret: in between, we need others as well."

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch and Morrie are discussing culture, and Morrie has just made the point that if people saw each other as individuals in need of love and care, the world wouldn't have so many problems.

As the book progresses, Morrie develops the idea of community to encompass not just one's own community of friends and family, but expands it further to include the world. Much of Morrie's philosophy centers on caring for others emotionally and physically. The book stresses strongly the need for emotional care as a child through the glimpses we get into Morrie's difficult childhood due to the death of his mother. It's inarguable that he needed more care as a child than he received. As an old man in the present, Morrie continually returns to the idea that he is entirely dependent on others for everything now that he's sick. However, he also tries to make it very clear to Mitch that even as a younger, healthy man, Mitch too is in need of others to be fulfilled. This statement is an explicit acknowledgement that community is not just for the very young and the very old, which further develops Morrie's concept of community as all-inclusive.

If I could have had another son, I would have liked it to be you.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Morrie says this to Mitch as Mitch massages Morrie's feet. This week they're discussing regrets, and Morrie has just been discussing that while he mourns the short time he has left, he treasures the fact that he has enough time to make things right before he dies.

Throughout the text, the relationship between Mitch and Morrie is presented first as a close student/teacher relationship. As time progresses, however, their relationship develops to become more like that of a father and son. This happens both in the past in Mitch's college days, as well as in

the present. Morrie's statement here is the point at which their relationship makes the final shift to familial, with this acknowledgement that Morrie considers their relationship to be such.

This shift additionally provides evidence of the importance that Morrie places on family over platonic relationships. As Morrie declines, he begins to cancel visits with other friends because he feels he cannot fully respond to them, being as tired as he is. However, although Mitch offers, Morrie refuses to cancel their Tuesday visits. Morrie's refusal to cancel is indicative of the shift of their relationship to that of a father and son, a shift which is finally spoken of and acknowledged in this moment.

The Thirteenth Tuesday Quotes

❝ Then I'd go for a walk, in a garden with some trees, watch their colors, watch the birds, take in the nature that I haven't seen in so long now.
In the evening, we'd all go together to a restaurant with some great pasta, maybe some duck—I love duck—and then we'd dance the rest of the night. I'd dance with all the wonderful dance partners out there, until I was exhausted.

Related Characters: Morrie Schwartz (speaker), Mitch Albom

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Morrie is describing his perfect day for Mitch. The fact that what Morrie describes is so ordinary is indicative of the way Morrie lives his life and practices his personal culture, as Morrie doesn't choose to do something flashy or ostentatious. Instead, he wants to do the most normal of things—swimming, spending time with friends, eating, and dancing. While Morrie's personal culture is focused primarily on finding joy in simple things and relationships, the fact that he would choose to spend his last perfect day in this way points to just how invested he is in this way of living.

This speech also is where we see all three positive symbols (dance, eating, and nature) combine, and see how they play into Morrie's culture. Nature is a way to move, slowly and with the purpose of admiring the beauty of the world. Eating is a way to build community and experience joy, as is dancing.

The Fourteenth Tuesday Quotes

❝ I blinked back the tears, and he smacked his lips together and raised his eyebrows at the sight of my face. I like to think it was a fleeting moment of satisfaction for my dear old professor: He had finally made me cry.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch is saying goodbye to Morrie on his final visit and has just kissed him for the final time. For the entirety of Mitch and Morrie's relationship, one of Morrie's goals has been to show Mitch that crying is okay. Mitch, as a character that works very hard to fit a persona and doesn't fully embrace Morrie's wisdom regarding emotion, resists crying until this point.

Mitch's willingness to cry here shows just how far his character has developed. Through the fourteen weeks he's spent visiting with Morrie, Morrie has been prepping him both to deal with his death and to exhibit emotion in a healthy way. Morrie cries openly whenever he's moved to do so, whether it's because of sadness or music. Mitch initially finds it awkward, but in this final moment of heightened emotion with Morrie, Mitch completes his transformation into a more fulfilled and openly emotional person.

Conclusion Quotes

❝ The last class of my old professor's life took place once a week, in his home, by a window in his study where he could watch a small hibiscus plant shed its pink flowers. The class met on Tuesdays. No books were required. The subject was the meaning of life. It was taught from experience.
The teaching goes on.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final passage of the book. The words here are the same as the opening lines of the text, save for the addition of the final line. This repetition serves several purposes. First, repetition in general is used throughout the text to emphasize and remind the reader of important points, such as Auden's "love each other or perish" and Morrie's mantra "when you learn how to die, you learn how to live." This ties back to Morrie's way of teaching. As Mitch notes on page 82, rather than make a student potentially feel dumb by asking them if they understand a point, Morrie prefers simply to repeat a point for emphasis. Here, although the idea is Morrie's, they're Mitch's words, which further reinforces the idea of teaching as a cycle. Mitch is borrowing Morrie's method and repeating himself, adding the final line as a nod to the nature of books and education as something living that continues after a class is over or a book has been finished. This cements Mitch's role as the new teacher, and allows the reader to also step into that role as they apply what they take away from reading the book to their own lives.

The Professor Quotes

❝ Eva would kiss them good-night. Morrie waited on those kisses like a puppy waits on milk, and he felt, deep down, that he had a mother again.

Related Characters: Mitch Albom (speaker), Eva, Charlie, David, Morrie Schwartz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Mitch is telling the story of Morrie's early childhood experiences. After the death of his mother, Morrie struggled emotionally. His father was cold and not one for showing affection, which Morrie craved. After Charlie married Eva, who is described as warm enough to make up for Charlie's cool moodiness, Morrie felt more emotionally whole and fulfilled.

Showing the profound effect of a mother figure in Morrie's early life sets Morrie up for the kind of family he wanted to build as an adult. When he did marry and have children of his own, Morrie made sure to emulate Eva rather than his father in his interactions with his sons. Morrie's sons never had to long for physical affection the way Morrie did as a child. In this way, it becomes apparent that love, and particularly physical affection, is a major driving force throughout Morrie's life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE CURRICULUM

Thebook begins with Mitch, the narrator, describing the final class of his old professorMorrie's life. He describes where it was taught – Morrie's study, where Morrie could see his **hibiscus** plant, on Tuesdays – and what was taught: The Meaning of Life. Mitch lists the occasional physical tasks he was required to perform, such as adjusting Morrie's head or helping him with his glasses, and then a list of lecture topics (love, community, aging, and death, among others). Rather than a graduation, the class ended with a funeral, and instead of a final exam, Mitch was expected to produce a final paper, which is this book and the story to follow. Mitch is the only student of this final class.

By situating the narrative in terms of a final class, the reader is invited to partake in the class with Mitch and become a student of Morrie's. From the beginning, then, the teacher/student relationship is introduced and brought full circle to not just encompass Mitch and Morrie, but the reader as well. By making it very clear that a death is inevitable, and will be a continuing theme, the text sets itself up as a meditation on death.

The story jumps back in time to the spring of 1979, on the day that Mitch graduates from Brandeis University. Mitch describes the heat, the speeches, and the feeling that childhood has ended.

Mitch has just completed his formal education—a major life change, and a marker of growing up and becoming an adult.

When the ceremony is over, Mitch finds his favorite professor,Morrie, and introduces him to his parents. Morrie embarrasses Mitch by telling his parents that Mitch is special and took every class thatMorrie taught. Before leaving the ceremony, Mitch presents Morrie with an initialed leather briefcase, and Morrie hugs Mitch. Mitch marvels at his own height and how much smaller Morrie is, and says the difference makes him feel old and almost like a parent. When Morrie asks Mitch if he'll stay in touch, he immediately agrees, and Morrie cries.

This is the final vignette of Mitch and Morrie's college days together, and the affection between them is apparent. The nod towards their relationship developing from a mere teacher/student one to a more familial one underscores the importance and depth of their relationship.

THE SYLLABUS

Morrie receives his death sentence in the summer of 1994, but he knows that something bad is coming before that, when he has to give up dancing. The text moves backwards in time to describe how Morrie always loved to **dance**, to all sorts of music, and how it didn't matter to him how well he danced or how good he looked doing it. Mitch describes Morrie's previous weekly trips to a church for Wednesday night "Dance Free," and describes Morrie's comfort in the crowd of mostly students. Morrie was regarded by other attendees as nothing more than a strange old man who danced crazily.

Morrie finds fulfillment and happiness in movement, and dance specifically. He dances because it makes him happy, not because of a desire to look good in front of others. This introduces how Morrie interacts with the greater culture—by using the parts of it that make him happy, and ignoring the parts that don't. When he is no longer able to dance, it is obvious to Morrie that something is wrong with him.

Morrie develops athsma in his sixties, which forces him to stop **dancing**. One day while on a walk along the river, he begins choking and is rushed to the hospital for a shot of adrenaline. Soon after, Morrie experiences several falls. He also begins to dream he's dying, and he is certain that something else is wrong with him. He goes to see doctors and undergoes a variety of tests. Finally, in August of 1994, the doctor tells Morrie and his wife, Charlotte, that he has ALS and is going to die in the relatively near future. As they leave the hospital, Charlotte is thinking about how they're going to pay for Morrie's treatment and how much time they have left. Morrie is stunned that life is continuing to go on around him. He feels a sense of despair, and asks himself "now what?"

Morrie's body is beginning to give out, and moving is becoming difficult. His dreams of dying foreshadow what he knows will come—death, by way of a disease that progressively takes away movement. Introducing Charlotte at this time, when Morrie is receiving terrible news, underscores the importance of family in Morrie's life.

Over the next several weeks, ALS begins to take over Morrie's body. First, he becomes unable to push the brakes in his car, and has to stop driving. He then has to purchase a cane and can no longer walk unassisted. Morrie then finds that he has trouble dressing and undressing himself for his weekly swims, so he hires Tony, his first home care worker. In the pool locker room other swimmers pretend to not stare at Tony helping Morrie, but Morrie senses that the visible aspects of his disease draw so much interest that it means the end of his privacy. That fall, Morrie teaches his final course at Brandeis. On the first day of class, he addresses his students and tells them that this is the first year that there's a risk for them in taking it. He tells them that he is fatally ill and may not live through the semester, and that if they wish to drop the course he will understand. From this point on, there is no longer any secret about Morrie's condition.

By showing the progression of the disease through how Morrie can or cannot move, a relationship is set up between movement and death. Due to his decreasing mobility, he is becoming increasingly dependent on family and community, as well as hired help. However, as we'll see later, Morrie believes that death (just like dancing) shouldn't be embarrassing. He is in some cases unable and in others unwilling to hide what is going on, and he embraces that. Because of Tony's help in the locker room, Morrie can no longer be just another person changing, and by making it clear to students that his death is imminent, he becomes not just another professor, but a dying one.

Mitch describes the usual progression of ALS, and comments that while Morrie's doctors guess he has two years to live, Morrie knows he has less time. Morrie decides that he is going to make the best of his time left, and makes a plan to treat himself as a kind of research subject and textbook on death that can be shared with others, since everybody is eventually going to die.

Morrie is the consummate teacher, and sees his death as an opportunity to continue teaching rather than a tragedy. His self-awareness of his own body allows him to budget the time he has left.

Even as Morrie's life becomes more focused on managing his condition, he continues to see many visitors. As his body weakens and moving back and forth to the bathroom becomes difficult, he begins to have to ask friends to hold a beaker for him to urinate into. Morrie is unembarrassed, and usually his friends are willing to help. During these visits, Morrie encourages his friends to continue to call on him and share their lives and their problems. He tells them that this is how they can help him, rather than just sharing sympathy.

Here, Morrie asserts to his friends that he values community and engagement with the living over sympathy and wallowing in sadness about his death. We see Morrie's belief that death shouldn't be embarrassing play out through asking his friends to help him urinate.

As the new year arrives, six months after his diagnosis,Morrie begins to have to start using a wheelchair. One of his colleagues dies suddenly, and Morrie is very depressed after the funeral because his colleague never got to hear all the nice things that were said at the funeral. Inspired, Morrie hosts his own "living funeral" with friends and family. Morrie gets the chance to tell everyone how much they mean to him, and they get to do the same. One woman in attendance reads a poem she wrote in Morrie's honor, comparing him to a "tender sequoia."

Morrie's living funeral is a perfect example of his personal culture, which values relationships and open communication. Through his presence as a live person at the funeral, it becomes more about life, the living, and community building than death.

THE STUDENT

Mitchgives his life story since graduation. He didn't keep in touch with Morrie or any of his other college friends. Mitch moved to New York City to be a professional pianist,but found to his dismay that the world was uninterested in his talents. Mitch felt like he was failing, and began to give up on his dream.

Mitch is feeling the difficulty of adulthood. He is beginning to change and lose his youthful innocence and optimism as he experiences these failures.

While in New York, Mitch lived in an apartment below his favorite uncle, who falls ill with pancreatic cancer. Mitch felt helpless as his uncle's health declined.

Mitch feels out of control of his life when faced with the impending death of his uncle. This is the first major death he has to deal with, and there's nothing he can do to help.

After his uncle died, Mitch began to feel as though he needed to move faster in order to make sure he didn't fall into the life of corporate drudgery that his uncle had led and hated. Mitch stopped writing and playing music and instead earned a Journalism degree. He took various jobs on the East Coast before settling in Detroit as a sports reporter. As he became more and more successful, he began to accumulate material wealth such as cars and property.

The death of his uncle spurs Mitch to action as he tries to take control of his life. He tries to gain control by moving faster and doing more things, and he identifies the corporate life as one he absolutely doesn't want. Reporting on sports, however, is lucrative and allows him to move fast.

Mitch met and married his wife, Janine, after seven years of dating. While he promised her they could start a family, it never happened. Instead, he concentrated on work accomplishments because it made him feel in control of his life.

Mitch takes steps to build his own family through marriage, but is vague about his reasons for not having children. Work allows him to feel in control, and perhaps he believes that children won't allow him control of his life.

Mitch sometimes thought about Morrie, although he threw away mail from Brandeis University and lost contact with all of his friends from school. He did not know about Morrie's illness until something caught his attention on television one night in 1995.

Here we see how far Mitchhas removed himself from his Brandeis community (and, presumably, his old ideals). He willingly denies participation in that community by throwing out mail and choosing to not stay in contact with Morrie.

THE AUDIOVISUAL

It is March of 1995, and Ted Koppel is on his way to Morrie's house to conduct an interview with him for *Nightline*. By this point, Morrie is in a wheelchair, never to walk again, and **eating** is becoming more and more difficult. However, Morrie refuses to be upset, preferring instead to write down all sorts of ideas about living with death. He shares these with friends, one of whom passes them on to the *Boston Globe***newspaper**, which then publishes a feature story about Morrie.

As Morrie's mobility diminishes, his desire to share what he's learning through his illness only increases. What he's sharing is in demand and interesting, as evidenced by the newspaper's interest in writing a profile on him. We are here introduced to how Morrie uses the media to spread his message.

Ted Koppel discovered Morrie through the article in the *Boston Globe*, and asked to interview Morrie about his life and his condition.With camera crews in Morrie's house, Morrie insists that he needs to speak to Koppel privately before agreeing to do the interview. In Morrie's office, he proceeds to grill Koppel about Koppel's faith and asks him to share something close to his heart. Koppel is hesitant but willing to engage. The two come to an agreement after laughing about Morrie's evaluation of Koppel as a narcissist, and Morrie agrees to the interview.

Morrie's interest in Koppel's personal beliefs will crop up again later, as generalized ideas about the creation of personal culture. Although Koppel is one of the primary faces of the media, which is overwhelmingly portrayed as a negative force in the book, Morrie is willing to engage with him and with the media to further promote his own ideas.

For the interview, Morrie refuses makeup or nice clothes, as he believes that death shouldn't be embarrassing. He discusses how he tries to live now, with dignity, humor, and composure, rather than withdraw from the world. Morrie tells Koppel about how he is becoming increasingly dependent on others to move and **eat**, and Koppel asks what Morrie dreads most about the disease. Morrie replies he's soon not going to be able to wipe himself after using the toilet.

For Morrie, this opportunity is the ultimate teaching moment, as he's going to be able to reach millions of potential "students" through the interview. His refusal of makeup points to Morrie's own acceptance of his death, and his unwillingness to sugarcoat for the masses becomes another part of his lesson.

The text returns to Mitch, who is flipping channels on his television. As he pauses at one channel, he hears Morrie'sname and goes numb.

Mitch's reaction to the sound of Morrie's name shows he's still emotionally invested in his relationship with Morrie.

In a flashback to 1976, Mitch describes the beginning of his first college class with Morrie. Mitch, noticing the small class size, realizes that it will be a hard class to skip and thinks about not taking it. When calling attendance, Morrie asks Mitch if he prefers to go by Mitch or Mitchell, which startles Mitch because he's never been asked before by a professor. When Mitch responds that his friends call him "Mitch," Morrie elects to use that name andtells Mitch that he hopes Mitch will think of him as a friend.

Morrie is immediately marked as kind and understanding by asking Mitch for a preferred name. He's not an average professor, as he seeks friendship rather than just the transfer of knowledge. This is how Morrie functions in his community, and Mitch is surprised by it. This foreshadows Mitch's inclusion in Morrie's community.

THE ORIENTATION

Mitch is in a rental car in West Newton, Massachusetts, on the phone with a radio producer and doing several other work-related things at once as he scans the house numbers for Morrie's. When he comes upon Morrie's house, he stops suddenly, seeing Morrie and two other people in the driveway. Mitch turns the car off and finishes his phone call while Morrie waits. Mitch says that he should have dropped everything and run to Morrie, but instead he pretends to look for something on the floor of his car. Mitch says he isn't proud of what he did.

Mitch is ashamed to be confronted with the fact that he prioritizes work over his relationship with Morrie, andthis scene makes that priority extremely clear to the reader. Again, the media is cast as a negative entity, as Mitch's media work is what keeps him from Morrie.

When Mitch finishes and finally gets out of the car, he hugs Morrie, who is covered with a blanket despite the warm spring day. Mitch is surprised at the amount of affection between them, given that they haven't seen each other in 16 years.Mitch recalls how close they were when Mitch was in college, and realizes that he is no longer the "good, gift-bearing student" in Morrie's memory.

Being with Morrie makes it clear to Mitch how much he's changed since he was in college, and not for the better. However, the affection from Morrie indicates that Mitch can still be a part of his community, and their relationship still exists.

They go inside and Morrie insists on **feeding**Mitch. Morrie's nurse, Connie, brings them food and brings Morrie some pills. Morrie offers to tell Mitch what it's like to die, and the “final class” begins.

Again, Morrie's desire to teach is constant and clear. Mitch remarks that this is the beginning of the final class, which sets the stage for future lessons to take place.

In another flashback to his freshman year of college, Mitch tells the reader how he tries to appear tough in order to compensate for having left high school a year early and being one of the youngest students at Brandeis. He says it is Morrie's gentleness and desire to understand that keeps him coming back for more classes and allows Mitch to relax. Morrie is also an easy grader, and school lore says that during the Vietnam War, Morrie gave A's to the male students so they could keep their deferments.

This introduces the internal struggle of Mitch's youth—he wants to be perceived as tough, but he's drawn to Morrie primarily because he is gentle and understanding.

Mitch begins to call Morrie "Coach," which Morrie likes. Morrie tells Mitch that he will be Mitch's coach, and Mitch can be Morrie's player. Sometimes they**eat** together in the school cafeteria, and Mitch delights in Morrie's sloppy eating habits.

The nickname further reinforces their relationship, as a coach/player relationship is also a guiding and teaching one. Eating together is another act of community building.

THE CLASSROOM

Mitch and Morrie sit in the dining room of Morrie's house while Connie answers the phone multiple times for Morrie. Mitch is impressed by how many friends Morrie seems to have, and thinks about his own friends that he's lost contact with. Morrie says that the newfound interest in him is because he's so close to death, and people want to know what it's like. Mitch tells Morrie that he's always been interesting, which Morrie says is very kind. When Connie asks Morrie if he can take a call, he tells her that they can call back because he's visiting with Mitch.

Morrie's community is rich and involved, while Mitch's community is barely mentioned at this point—he appears to be relatively isolated in his busy, stressful life.

Mitch feels uncomfortable with his own very apparent transformation from an idealistic college student to the successful adult he's become. If it weren't for the *Nightline* show, Mitch might never have known about Morrie'simpending death. Mitch wonders what happened to make him into the person he is, and offers the passing of 16 years, getting older, and experiencing death as reasons, as well as trading dreams for money.

Mitch's discomfort points to self awareness that his life, despite being successful by many standards, leaves him unfulfilled. His awareness of this sets him up for the transformation he'll undergo in the rest of the book.

As Morrieasks questions about love and being human, Mitch struggles to answer them, wanting to show Morrie that he has indeed spent time thinking about questions like that. Mitch wonders again what happened to him, and notes that his days are filled with things to do and all sorts of technology and famous people, but that he himself remains unsatisfied.

The media, as Mitch's work, is further developed as negative. By discussing his unsatisfying work in opposition to emotional and intellectual curiosity, he enforces a dichotomy between these two lifestyles. Again, Mitch is aware of all of this, and is at least willing to admit that he's unsatisfied, showing room for change.

Suddenly, Mitch remembers and says that he used to call Morrie "Coach," and Morrie smiles at the memory. Mitch continues to watch Morrie struggle to **eat**, describing the trouble Morrie has using his silverware and swallowing.

This instance of eating and calling Morrie "coach" mirrors the last flashback, but instead of feeling joy and a sense of community, it makes Mitch feel worse.

After a long silence that Mitch finds embarrassing, Morrie begins to talk to Mitch about how modern culture leads people to live unhappy lives. Morrie urges Mitch to instead create his own culture, pointing to the fact that as a dying man, Morrie is happy and surrounded by loving family and friends. Mitch is surprised by Morrie's lack of self-pity, wondering how his professor can be so accepting of his fate.

Mitch has completely bought into the narrative of modern culture, which makes it hard for him to understand Morrie's point of view.

Morrie asks Mitch a haunting question—if he'd like to hear how Morrie is going to die—and then proceeds to answer it: suffocation. Thinking about that idea makes Mitch uncomfortable, but Morrie is unruffled, and leads Mitch in a breathing test to prove his point. Mitch, at 37, can perform the test very well, while Morrie struggles. Morrie's certainty and acceptance makes Mitch even more uncomfortable, and he thinks he's had enough for one day.As he's leaving, Mitch promises, once again, to come back and visit Morrie, trying hard to not think about the last time he promised to visit.

Part of what makes Morrie such a compelling character is his high level of comfort with death, which is a generally unsettling topic. Mitch is understandably uncomfortable with Morrie's revelation, and is unwilling to embrace the inevitable yet. He seems unsure if he's going to come back, but there's a sense of shame as he's reminded that last time, he didn't follow through.

Returning in a flashback to his college days, Mitch shares the beginnings of his friendship with Morrie. Morrie's passion for learning is contagious, and the two begin to talk after classes. Morrie is genuinely interested in Mitch's life. One day, Mitch is complaining about the confusion he feels about how to balance what is expected of him versus what he wants. In reply, Morrie describes the idea of the tension of opposites, or "a series of pulls back and forth" between things people want to do and should do in life. When Mitch asks Morrie what side wins, Morrie tells him that love does.

The idea of the tension of opposites is a recurring motif and is used to highlight comparisons and difference. The present-day relationship between Mitch and Morrie shows two people living their lives in very opposite ways, and Mitch is constantly at war internally with how he knows he should be—more sensitive and curious, like he was in college—and how he is in the present day, which is more materialistic and hardened.

TAKING ATTENDANCE

A week after his visit with Morrie, Mitch flies to England to cover the Wimbledon tennis tournament. In his free time, rather than enjoying the British tabloids like he usually does, he finds himself preoccupied with thinking about his visit with Morrie.Mitch finds that – as he reads the tabloids and consumes media about celebrities that don't mean anything to Mitch personally – he envies the quality of Morrie's life. Mitch mentions the OJ Simpson trial taking place at the same time in the US, saying that many people watch trial footage on their lunch hours and continue to watch once they get home from work, despite having no personal connection to the individuals involved.

Despite being entrenched in it, Mitch is willing and able to critique parts of modern culture even after one visit with Morrie. He recognizes the strangeness of being so caught up in the lives of celebrities rather than one's own life and relationships.

Mitch compares his own culture of spending hours per day on the computer, doing nothing but work, to Morrie'sculture. Morrie watches little television, and instead spends time writing letters, visiting with his friends, keeping up with new ideas, starting community service projects, and until he was confined to a wheelchair, **dancing**. Mitch knows that Morrie believes that finding meaning in life is accomplished by becoming part of a community and creating meaning, but Mitch doesn't do anything like that.

Again, we see how totally Mitch has bought into the ideals of modern culture, juxtaposed with Morrie's rejection of it. Mitch is willing to admit that Morrie's way of living is more fulfilling, but he's not yet willing to do anything about it. This builds tension between the two opposing cultures that are presented.

The morning after Mitch returns to Detroit after covering Wimbledon in London, his newspaper union decides to go on strike. While he has other work for TV and radio, Mitch feels lost and depressed without newspaper work to keep him busy. The strike continues for days, and there is talk that it could continue for months. After a week, Mitch finally calls Morrie and asks to visit him again.

Mitch is relatively non-functional when his work culture disappears and he's forced to stop moving. Reaching out to Morrie is a way to connect again with some sort of community, albeit a very different one than newspaper work.

In Mitch's second year of college, he and Morrie meet regularly just to talk. Morrie encourages Mitch to be fully human, and advises him that money isn't the most important thing. Mitch doesn't understand all of the wisdom that Morrie tries to pass on, but he loves having the conversations. He confides to the reader that his lack of understandingdoesn't affect his enjoyment of talking to Morrie.

Mitch values the conversations for the connection he feels with Morrie more than the content. Seeing Mitch valuing connection and friendship over other things contrasts again with who Mitch is in the present.

Morrie encourages Mitch to follow his dreams of becoming a professional pianist, rather than a lawyer as his father wants him to be. When Morrie says that if Mitch really wants to be a pianist he can make it happen, Mitch wants to hug Morrie but doesn't.

The tension of opposites appears again here with Mitch's desires contrasted against his father's. Mitch is consistently hesitant to show affection physically despite admitting his desires to do so to the reader.

THE FIRST TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT THE WORLD

Mitch arrives at Morrie's house with a variety of **foods**, and the two sit at Morrie's dining room table and eat. Conversation comes easier this time. At one point, Morrie comments that he doesn't understand why the newspaper strike isn't solved with communication. Morrie is drawing close to the day when he will no longer be able to wipe himself after using the bathroom, which bothers him. He tells Mitch that despite his increasing dependency on others, he's trying to enjoy it, as he gets a chance to be like a child again. Mitch makes a joke about finding the meaning of life through not taking out the garbage, and he is relieved that Morrie laughs.

With his gift of food, Mitch gets to regain his status as a good, "gift-bearing" student to some degree. Morrie's positive outlook and comment about the strike further illustrates how far outside of modern culture Morrie's world exists. The fact that Morrie is bothered by needing help in the bathroom, however, shows that there are still ways in which he has to grapple with rejecting modern culture and the "embarrassment" of death.

Noticing a pile of already-read newspapers, Mitch asks Morrie why he's bothering to keep up with the news. Morrie answers that he feels drawn to the stories of death, and feels for the victims more now that he's dying. Mitch muses to himself that he covers those stories for his job and feels little emotion for anyone involved. When Morrie begins to cry, Mitch is obviously uncomfortable, and Morrie promises him that he will make him see that it's okay to cry.

Mitch's cynical outlook stands in stark contrast to Morrie's overwhelming display of emotion. Here we see just how differently the two men handle emotion—Morrie is in touch and expressive, while Mitch is stoic and repressed. Morrie's promise only supports his next thesis that love, and by extension, emotion, are the most important things in life.

Morrie says that the most important thing he's learning from being sick is how to give and accept love. Morrie quotes Stephen Levine, a poet and meditation teacher, saying "love is the only rational act." Mitch dutifully agrees, kissing Morrie on the cheek before he leaves, and promises to return the next Tuesday.

Mitch agrees dutifully, which indicates he doesn't fully believe Morrie. However, the kiss leads us to believe that he may be taking some of Morrie's wisdom to heart and is more willing to show emotion and physical affection.

In another flashback to the 70s, Mitch describes one of Morrie's classes. During the class, Morrie conducts an exercise on silence and human relations. He enters the classroom and sits in silence for 15 minutes, and then opens a conversation about the experience of sitting in silence. While other students are bothered by sitting in silence for 15 minutes, Mitch isn't, although he doesn't participate in the following conversation. Mitch tells the reader that he's quiet during the discussion because he's uncomfortable talking about his feelings. After class, when Morrie asks Mitch about his lack of participation, Mitch claims he had nothing to add to the discussion. Morrie says that Mitch reminds him of himself when he was younger.

This gives the first indication that Mitch hasn't always been the way he is in the present, and that at one point he didn't believe he had anything worth saying. Explicitly connecting Mitch and Morrie through similarities in their youths provides further basis for the more familial relationship they develop. We also see again the tension of opposites—Mitch surely has things to add to the discussion despite stating otherwise, but is too uncomfortable being openly emotional to share.

THE SECOND TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF

Mitchfinds that he enjoys his visits with Morrie, and begins to take some of Morrie's wisdom to heart. Mitch stops carrying a cell phone around with him and doesn't work in the car to and from the airport. The strike in Detroit is getting worse and becoming physically violent as both sides dig in. Mitch enjoys the kindness he experiences at Morrie's.

Mitch is finally making changes to his culture and way of living. His former newspaper work culture has become toxic, which makes the sense of community he experiences with Morrie seem even more positive in comparison.

Mitch arrives at Morrie's house with bags of **food**after stopping on his drive from the airport at a market that Morrie likes. Morrie is becoming more and more confined to his chair in his office, and now has a bell to ring when he needs help. His body is supported by various foam blocks and pillows.

The gift of food is a small way for Mitch to actively participate in Morrie's community, especially as Morrie becomes more and more dependent on others to go through his day.

When asked about it,Morrie tells Mitch that he does feel sorry for himself, but he only allows himself a few minutes in the morning to mourn before he turns to remember all the good in his life and all the people who are still coming to visit. Mitch muses about how useful that strategy could be for the many people who spend their days feeling sorry for themselves. Morrie says that although the disease is doing horrible things to his body, he is lucky because he gets lots of time to say goodbye to people.

Mitch is willing to voice the value of Morrie's outlook by applying it to other people, although not yet fully to himself. Morrie further denotes his priorities and selflessness with his comment about getting time to say goodbye in exchange for losing control of his body—he valuesrelationships, and thus others, over himself.

When Morrie takes a break to use the bathroom, Mitch picks up a newspaper and reads articles detailing several horrific deaths. When Morrie returns, Mitch offers to lift him back into his recliner. As he lifts his professor, Mitch sees that the disease has turned Morrie's body into dead weight, and that realization shocks Mitch.

Mitch can no longer deny Morrie's impending death after feeling for himself what ALS is doing to Morrie. By placing this positive action of offering to lift Morrie in between past and future death, death becomes a catalyst for change.

In 1978, Mitch is taking a course with Morrie, which Mitchdeems "the touchy-feely course." Mitch recounts a trust fall exercise during the class. All of the students struggle with it, until one girl closes her eyes and truly allows herself to fall. Her partner catches her at the last minute. Morrie steps in to translate what just occurred, and tells the class that by closing her eyes, she was able to believe what she felt rather than what she saw, therefore fully trusting her partner to catch her. He adds that trust, to be real, has to be there even in the dark, while falling.

The idea of complete, blind trust will come up repeatedly.Introducing it in this way, in a controlled classroom setting,allows us to see Mitch's ambivalence and Morrie's wholehearted belief in blind trust.This also further develops the comparison between Mitch as closed and cautious and Morrie as open, trusting, and loving.

THE THIRD TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT REGRETS

Mitch arrives at Morrie's house with his bags of **food** and a tape recorder. He tells Morrie that he wants to have Morrie's voice recorded so he can listen to it later. Morrie adds that later is when he's dead, and Mitch denies that, making Morrie laugh. When Morrie comments on the size of the tape recorder, Mitch begins to feel overly intrusive and moves to put the recorder away. Morrie stops Mitch, tells him to put the recorder down, and says that he wants to tell Mitch his story before he can't tell it anymore.

Mitch has finally accepted that Morrie is indeed going to die, despite not wanting to talk about it outright. A tape recorder, a tool that Mitch uses in his job as a reporter, is now being used in a positive way rather than associated with the negativity of media. Morrie's intensity highlights his desire to teach and share, despite his initial apprehension about the tape recorder.

The narrative pauses and Mitch addresses the reader directly, saying that the tape recorder is more than nostalgia. Everyone—Morrie's family, former students, fellow professors—is losing Morrie, and tapes "are a desperate attempt to steal something from death's suitcase." But Mitch is realizing that Morrie lives life very differently from anyone else, and Morrie's time is short. Mitch says that he knows Morrie wants to share whatever clarity death brings.

While Mitch has always found Morrie to be an exceptional teacher, Morrie's impending death brings some clarity about the true value of what he has to teach. Mitch shows an understanding both for Morrie's desire to teach and the need for that type of teaching in the world.

Returning to their conversation, Mitch says that the first time he saw Morrie on *Nightline*, he wondered what Morrie regretted once he found out he was dying. Mitch turns the question back to himself, wondering what he'd regret if he were in Morrie's shoes. Morrie responds, affirming that the question of "what if it were my last day on earth" is a common one. Mitch imagines himself dying at his desk at work while his editors grab the half-finished story he's working on and medics carry him away.

Mitch, again, is willing to critically consider the depth of his involvement in his work culture, and can admit the absurdity of it.

Morrie picks up on Mitch's hesitation while Mitch has his vision of dying at work, and then offers that the culture at large doesn't encourage people to consider questions like that until death is imminent. He says that everyone is so wrapped up in the daily tasks of living, nobody steps back and asks themselves if they're fulfilled. Morrie finishes, saying that everyone needs someone to push them to consider those things. Mitch takes this to mean that we all need teachers, and his own teacher is Morrie.

With his realization that Morrie is Mitch's teacher for these subjects, Mitch sets himself up to accept the lessons. This also underscores an important aspect of the teacher/student relationship: that in order for a teacher to truly teach, the student has to be ready and willing to accept the lesson.

On the plane ride home, Mitch resolves to be the best student he can be. On a legal pad, he makes a list of questions and issues he feels everyone grapples with. He states that despite the fact that America is overflowing with different self-help methods, there are no clear answers. Morrie, however, seems to have a sense of clarity about what is important in life. Mitch's list includes death, fear, aging, greed, marriage, family, society, forgiveness, and a meaningful life.

Finally, we see Mitch make the change from a reluctant student to an active and engaged student.Mitch is clear about what he wants to learn, and also begins to step into the role of teacher as he notes that these feelings are universal. This begins to foreshadow the idea of the book itself.

At the beginning of Mitch's senior year at Brandeis, he's only a few credits short of a Sociology degree, and Morrie suggests he try for an honors thesis. He takes Morrie up on his suggestion, and writes a 112-page thesis on ritualistic football culture in America. Mitch shares that he's unaware that his thesis is training for his future career; he agrees to the thesis only because it means he takes an extra class with Morrie.

Morrie's suggestion and encouragement here with Mitch mirrors the encouragement Morrie received from his stepmother, Eva, which we'll see in the chapter "The Professor." This reinforces both Morrie as a teacher and the familial relationship between Mitch and Morrie.

In Morrie's office at the end of Mitch's senior year, Morrie congratulates Mitch on completing his thesis. As Morrie flips through the thesis, he remarks to Mitch that he should return for grad school given the quality of his work. Mitch snickers, but finds the idea appealing. Part of Mitch is scared of leaving school while part of him wants desperately to leave.

Mitch is again experiencing the tension of opposites. He's looking forward to the future but also wants to freeze time by staying in school. This outlook stands in contrast to what Mitch becomes after his uncle dies, when he's purposefully moving extremely fast.

THE AUDIOVISUAL, PART TWO

Because of the reception for the first *Nightline* show, Koppel returns to Morrie's house for a follow-up interview. This time, when the crew enters Morrie's house, they already feel like family, and Koppel is warmer. He conducts the interview in his shirt and tie, forgoing his suit jacket; Morrie wears a long-sleeved shirt despite the 90-degree weather outside. To warm up before the interview, Koppel and Morrie share stories about their childhood experiences with each other.

Koppel's transformation shows what an effect Morrie has had on him since their last interview—Koppel is less businesslike, and treats Morrie more as a friend. Morrie, on the other hand, is in obvious decline, as evidenced by needing to wear a long sleeved shirt despite very hot weather.

When they begin filming, Koppel remarks that Morrie looks and sounds fine, and Morrie agrees. Koppel inquires how Morrie knows that he's going downhill, to which Morrie responds that nobody but himself can know, but he is indeed declining. As he speaks, however, it becomes obvious that he's not waving his hands freely, and some words and sounds seem to be difficult to pronounce.

The depth of Morrie's decline is developed further, as now we see that his movement is affected as well as his ability to regulate temperature.

Morrie says that when he has visitors, he feels really good, and that his loving relationships maintain him. He admits to feeling depressed other days, and feeling dread when he sees that he's losing control of his hands, or that speaking or swallowing are becoming difficult. Morrie says the swallowing doesn't bother him, but his ability to speak and use his hands are essential parts of him, and are ways in which he gives to people. When Koppel asks how Morrie will "give" when he can't speak, Morrie shrugs and suggests that people will have to ask him yes or no questions. The answer makes Koppel smile.

Morrie is expressing fear that once he loses his ability to speak and move, he'll no longer be able to participate in his culture and community. This underscores just how connected to his community Morrie feels. We also understand explicitly how Morrie connects to his community—by giving.

Koppel asks Morrie about Morrie's friend, Maurie Stein, who is going deaf. Koppel wonders what it would be like for the two men to sit together, one who can't speak and one who can't hear. Morrie replies that they'll hold hands and feel love passing between them. He says that after 35 years of friendship, they don't need speech or hearing to feel love.

Despite his fear of not being able to participate in his community as the disease progresses, Morrie's answer here further reinforces just how connected he is to that community.

As the interview draws to a close, Morrie reads one of the letters he received after the first *Nightline* interview aired. It is from a teacher who teaches a special class for children who have lost a parent. After reading the letter, Morrie reads his reply to her. He wrote that he was very moved by her letter, and feels her work is very important. He says that he lost a parent very young, and at that point begins to choke up and cry. He continues reading, saying that he lost his mother when he was a child and it was very hard for him. He wishes he'd had a group like the teacher's, and he would've joined because he was so lonely. Koppel interjects, asking Morrie if he still feels the pain of losing his mother 70 years ago. Morrie confirms that he does.

Bringing in Morrie's mother begins to develop Morrie's character independent of his relationship or comparisons to Mitch. It also shows how deaths other than his own have affected Morrie—losing his mother was such a profound loss that he still can cry about it 70 years later. His desire to have been part of a group like the one led by the teacher in the letter also alludes to the fact that Morrie hasn't always had such a strong community as he does now.

THE PROFESSOR

In a flashback, Morrie is eight, and a telegram comes from the hospital. Since Morrie's father, Charlie, can't read English, Morrie has to read the telegram out loud to his father—it says that Morrie's mother

Note that the first time we hear about Morrie's childhood, it's about experiencing death. This serves two purposes. First, it further develops the idea that the book is a meditation on death, in all forms; second, it makes it clear that this is the first extremely important event in Morrie's life. As we already know, he feels the loss even in his old age.

At the cemetery, Morrie remembers his mother while they bury her. Until she got sick, she ran a **candy** store. After falling ill, she slept or sat by the window. When she yelled for Morrie to get her medicine, Morrie, who was often playing in the street, pretended he didn't hear her. He believed he could make her illness disappear by ignoring it. Morrie's father, Charlie, came to America from Russia to escape the army. He was in the fur business, but often didn't have a job. His English was very poor and he was uneducated, so the family relied on public assistance. They lived in an apartment behind the candy store with no luxuries, and Morrie and David would sometimes wash porch steps for a nickel.

Morrie, for all the wisdom he has in his old age, was at this point naïve about death and tried to ignore it, which in the present is exactly what he says modern culture encourages. The symbol of food pops up in Morrie's mother's candy store. Candy, being sweet and a treat, make this an especially positive instance of the symbol. Additionally, in the same way that Morrie is losing his ability to swallow and enjoy food in the present as the ALS progresses, his mother must also give up her candy store when she falls ill.

After the death of their mother, Morrie and David's relatives decided to send them to a hotel in the woods in Connecticut, believing the boys would benefit from fresh air. Morrie and David ran and played in the fields, having never seen that much green before. One evening they went for a walk, and it began to rain. They stayed outside and played for hours in the downpour. The next morning, when they woke up, David found that he couldn't move. He had polio, and Morrie felt responsible after their fun in the rain the night before.

For these events, physical movement of actual distance causes change on a much smaller but more personal scale. Notice that the move out of New York, and the boys' movement out in the rain, culminates in David being unable to move at all.

David was taken back and forth to special hospitals and forced to wear braces on his legs. In the mornings, Morrie attended synagogue by himself and prayed that God would take care of David and his dead mother. Later during the day, he'd sell magazines in the subway stations, giving the money to his family for food. At night, he ate dinner with Charlie in silence, and he hoped for but never received any warmth or affection from his father.

Here we see Morrie's early involvement in organized religion, which will influence his creation of personal culture late in life. We also get a glimpse of what life is like without Morrie's mother. This absence and the lack of affection from his father will influence later decisions about the family Morrie creates.

A year later, when Morrie was nine, Charlie remarried. Eva was a Romanian immigrant with an abundance of energy and warmth. Morrie found her to be very comforting. He and David shared a bed in the kitchen of their apartment. Eva kissed them goodnight, which Morrie loved because it made him feel like he had a mother again. However, the family was still very poor because of the Depression, and sometimes only had bread for dinner. When Eva sang to the boys at night, her songs were sad and poor as well.

As a child, as in his old age, Morrie craves touch—it's one of the primary ways he experiences being loved. Again, these early experiences of either receiving physical affection or not will greatly influence how Morrie gives and receives physical affection later in life.

Eva saw education as the only way to escape their poverty, and wouldn't allow anything but academic excellence from Morrie. Morrie studied every night, and Eva attended night school to improve her English.

Here we see the birth of Morrie's love of learning. Eva here is a fantastic role model, as she shows young Morrie you can learn throughout your life.

Every morning, Morrie attended synagogue and said the memorial prayer for the dead for his mother. Morrie did this to keep his mother's memory alive, as Charlie had told him to not talk about her, so that David would believe Eva was his biological mother. This weighed heavily on Morrie, and he kept the telegram announcing her death for the rest of his life.

Again, Morrie finds comfort in organized religion and uses it as a remembrance for the dead. Spirituality, here and later in his life, is a way for him to deal with and process what's happening in his life—especially negative events.

When Morrie was a teenager, Charlie took him to the fur factory to try to get Morrie a job. Morrie experienced major anxiety and fear standing in the factory. It was dark, hot, and dirty, and as workers frantically sewed, the boss yelled at them to go faster. On his lunch break, Charlie pushed Morrie in front of his boss and asked if there was a job for him, but fortunately for Morrie, there was barely enough work for current employees because of the Depression. Morrie vowed then to not do work that exploited someone else, or make money off others' hard labor. After that, Eva began asking Morrie what he was going to do. He ruled out law and medicine, and by default settled on teaching.

The poverty of the Depression turns out to be what saves Morrie from a life of factory work. Morrie's shock and horror at seeing what life inside the factory is like shows how sensitive of a person he is, and illustrates with more detail how different Morrie is from his father. Notice also that it's Eva, not Morrie's father, who is asking Morrie what he's going to do with his life. She is the real parent providing physical and emotional care and encouragement.

THE FOURTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT DEATH

Morrie is in a businesslike mood today, and suggests that they consider the idea that everyone knows they're going to die, but nobody believes it. Mitch tells the reader that before he arrived at Morrie's house, Morrie wrote down a few notes so he wouldn't forget, and his handwriting is now unreadable to anyone but Morrie himself.

Morrie's motor skills are further deteriorating. Setting this deterioration right next to Morrie's idea that nobody believes they'll die is like seeing proof of Morrie's concept, although Mitch is still in denial about Morrie's condition.

Pausing the narrative, Mitch says that back home in Detroit the strikers are getting ready for a holiday demonstration to show solidarity against management. He adds that on the plane ride to Boston, he read about a woman who shot her husband and two daughters, and read that the lawyers in the O.J. Simpson trial are becoming celebrities. Mitch notes that in the last week, Morrie acquired a portable oxygen machine to use when he has trouble getting enough air to swallow. Mitch hates the idea of the oxygen tank being connected to Morrie, so he tries not to look at it.

By stepping back from the scene in Morrie's office to talk primarily about death, we're given even more evidence of Morrie's ideas. This is further developed through Morrie's oxygen machine, which is a way to postpone death for a while. Mitch doesn't want to face Morrie's death yet, which is why he can't stand to face this very tangible reminder.

Back in the conversation in Morrie's office, Morrie reiterates that everyone knows they're going to die but don't believe it. He says that if people believed it, they'd do things differently, suggesting then that a good approach is to know you're going to die, and be prepared for it at any time, which then allows you to be more involved in life while you're alive. When Mitch asks how someone can be prepared to die, Morrie offers the Buddhist philosophy of imagining a bird on your shoulder asking if today's the day you're going to die.

Morrie's philosophy here shows his research into different religions. Mitch is beginning to ask more questions unprompted, which shows how his development is progressing. He's becoming a more engaged student.

The narrative steps back again from the conversation and Mitch gives a brief account of Morrie's religious situation. While Morrie was born Jewish, he became agnostic as a teenager due in part to the suffering he experienced as a child. While he felt culturally Jewish, he enjoyed philosophies from Christianity and Buddhism. This religious outlook made him more open to the students he taught, and Mitch remarks that what Morrie is saying now, as his life is drawing to a close, seems to transcend religious differences.

Mitch mentions the idea of death as an equalizer, which further supports the text as a meditation on death. Morrie's religious makeup was influenced primarily by death and tragedy, and as a dying man, he is able to combine religious ideas in a way that is appealing to many, given the celebrity he's achieved since the Nightline interview.

Returning to the conversation again, Morrie says, twice for emphasis, that the truth is that once you learn how to die, you learn how to live. When Mitch asks if Morrie thought about death before his diagnosis, Morrie replies that he didn't, recounting a time in his 60s when he told a friend that he was going to be the healthiest old man ever. Mitch asks again why people can't think about it when everyone knows someone who's died, and Morrie replies that people don't experience the world fully, and facing death brings a person out of the haze. Morrie repeats, again, that when you learn how to die, you learn how to live.

Morrie fully believes that, despite being surrounded by the deaths of others, a person can only live once they confront the inevitability of their own death. Morrie realizes that in some ways, he's no different than the people he believes aren't truly living, as he states that he himself once believed that he couldn't die either.

Morrie struggles to put on his glasses and Mitch helps him, and the human touch brings Morrie immense joy. Morrie then tells Mitch that if Mitch listened to the proverbial bird on his shoulder, he might not be so ambitious, and might see his work as less important. Morrie then stresses the importance of spiritual development, although he admits to not fully knowing what spiritual development actually means. He offers a definition that it entails loving relationships, which many take for granted, as opposed to material things. As an example, he nods to the window and tells Mitch that he appreciates the window more than Mitch does because Mitch can experience the natural world outside and Morrie can't. Morrie says he appreciates watching **nature** happen outside the window like he's seeing it for the first time. Both of them look out the window, and Mitch tries internally to understand this point of view.

Morrie thrives on affectionate physical touch, especially now that he needs so much help performing basic tasks. By outright confronting Mitch and addressing the fact that Mitch lives his life very differently than Morrie does, Morrie is able to provide a tangible counterpoint for his personal culture and way of living. Notice too that when confronted, Mitch doesn't become defensive. He tries to understand, which shows that he's beginning to change.

Morrie continues to receive a great deal of mail, and has friends and family to help him read the letters and write dictated responses. On this particular Sunday, Rob and Jon are home to help with the letters. They read a letter from a woman who lost her mother to ALS, and Morrie's response includes sentiments on the healing power of grief. Another letter refers to Morrie as a prophet, which Morrie doesn't particularly appreciate. The final letter is from a former graduate student, is four pages long, and is filled with death in the forms of murder, stillbirth, and ALS. After sifting through the letter, Morrie wonders out loud how to answer, and he grins when Rob suggests that they begin by thanking her for her long letter.

The fact that Morrie takes time out of his day to reply to mail shows how connected he is and tries to be in his community. This connection is also a community event on a smaller scale, as his family is there to help him read and reply to mail. Particularly with the final letter from the grad student, we see how death connects people, as Morrie connects not just with the letter writer, but also with his family as they discuss how to answer.

Mitch and Morrie are in Morrie's office, and the **newspaper** Morrie's been reading has a photo of a baseball player on the front page, leading Mitch to remark that of all diseases, Morrie gets one named after a baseball player. He asks Morrie if he remembers Lou Gherig, to which Morrie replies that he remembers his goodbye speech. When Mitch then asks if he remembers the famous line from the speech, Morrie doesn't, and asks Mitch to do the speech. Mitch imitates Gherig, saying, "Today, I feel like the luckiest man on the face of the earth." Morrie nods, and says that he himself didn't say that.

Mitch has always been interested in sports, while Morrie is portrayed as only ever participating for the connection it allows, as with his coach/player nickname with Mitch. Mitch and Morrie here get to further connect through sports, as well as death and ALS, as the famous baseball player Lou Gherig also suffered from the disease.

THE FIFTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT FAMILY

It's back-to-school week in Boston, and for the first time in 35 years, Morrie isn't teaching. Mitch thinks of football players who finally retire and have to deal with their first Sunday at home, watching the game instead of playing. He says he's found it's better to leave these players alone during their old seasons. For taping his conversations with Morrie, Mitch has by this point switched to clip-on microphones because Morrie is too weak to hold a microphone for any length of time. However, because Morrie is wearing loose shirts, Mitch has to constantly adjust the microphone. Morrie craves physical affection more than ever, so he enjoys the closeness brought by the microphone. Morrie is weak and wheezy.

While Mitch remarks it's strange that Morrie's not teaching, there's no indication that Morrie feels similarly to the retired sports players that Mitch mentions. In a way, Morrie is still teaching, as he continues to see Mitch for this final "class." Morrie continues to crave touch as he declines.

The topic for the day is family, and Morrie motions to photos in his study of his family, saying his family is all around him. He says that he believes, especially now that he's sick, that family is the ultimate foundation and of the utmost importance. Morrie quotes his favorite poet, Auden, as saying "love each other or perish." Morrie expands, saying that if he were divorced or didn't have children, living with ALS would be much harder, because although friends would come visit, it wouldn't be the same as having someone who won't leave, and has an eye on you all the time. Morrie calls this spiritual security, and says that is what he missed when his mother died, and nothing but family can provide that kind of security.

For Morrie, there is nothing more important than family, even friends or his greater community. He'll mention this quote from Auden many times, and it underscores Morrie's beliefs. From the way he talks about what life would be like without family, Morrie seems to believe that he would in some spiritual way perish, as he did when he lost his mother. Note though that not all family can provide this security, though, as Morrie's father was cold and unwilling to give Morrie the affection he craved.

Mitch wonders, if he were ill like Morrie but had no family, if the emptiness would be unbearable. Mitch mentions Morrie's sons, who are, like Morrie, extremely loving and affectionate, but whom Morrie instructed to not stop their lives to take care of him, showing respect for their autonomous lives. Morrie says that when people ask about having children or not, he never tells them what to choose, but just tells them instead that there's no experience like having children because of the deep bond between parent and child. When Mitch asks Morrie if he'd have children again, Morrie replies that he'd definitely do it again, despite the pain he experiences knowing he's going to die and leave them. At that, Morrie begins to cry.

Morrie's display of emotion shows just how important family is to him—the thought of leaving his family brings him to tears. His response to the question of having kids underscores Morrie's feelings on the importance of family in general.

Morrie then asks Mitch about his own family, and Mitch confirms that he has an older sister and a younger brother, both of whom were at his graduation 16 years ago. Mitch pauses as he remembers taking pictures at graduation, and suddenly goes quiet.

Mitch's pause leads the reader to think that Morrie's outlook on family, while rosy and lovely, might not be true for everyone. This further differentiates between Mitch and Morrie.

Mitch steps out of his conversation with Morrie to tell the reader about his brother, Peter. Peter was a dramatic child and wanted to be an actor or a singer when he grew up. While Mitch was a perfect student and child, Peter broke rules and experimented with alcohol and drugs, although he remained the family favorite. He moved to Europe after high school, and when he visited, Mitch felt stiff and conservative in comparison.

Mitch's comparison of himself to Peter complicates the idea of family. Despite being worse behaved and moving far away, Peter is still the favorite in Mitch's family.

After the death of his uncle,Mitch always believed that he was destined to die an awful and untimely death as well. However, the same rare form of pancreatic cancer that killed his uncle struck Peter instead. Mitch battled the thought that it was supposed to be him, not Peter, as Peter fought cancer in Spain and Europe with the help of an experimental drug. After five years of treatment, Peter went into remission.

The fact that Peter gets cancer completely offends Mitch's sense of justice and how the world works. We see in this just how much Mitch aligned himself with his uncle, down to the way he believed he was going to die, and how very different he feels from his brother. Peter rejects family as he battles his illness, exactly the opposite of Morrie.

Peter didn't want any support from his family, insisting that he needed to deal with the cancer himself. Mitch felt immense guilt for not helping like he felt he should be, and also anger because Peter wouldn't allow him to help anyway. To deal with the guilt and anger, Mitch worked, because it made him feel in control of something. Mitch muses that possibly, Morrie was aware of Mitch's emotions regarding Peter, and allowed Mitch to help and be with Morrie in the way that Peter wouldn't allow.

This is happening in the past, several years before Mitch reconnects with Morrie. Notice that Mitch wants to perform his familial duty and help his brother, like Morrie would've wanted, well before Morrie and Mitch have their conversation about family. The comment about Morrie's perception of Mitch's emotions points to their relationship becoming more familial.

Mitch recounts a childhood memory of sledding with Peter. They hit ice as they sled down the hill, and notice a car and try to steer away from it, but the sled is unresponsive. They jump off and roll, sure the car is going to hit them. It doesn't, and the two are exhilarated by this brush with death.

A childhood experience of danger and death brings Mitch and Peter closer together. It's exciting, and the way the anecdote is written makes it seem as though they weren't in as much danger as they thought. This is a major contrast to how they deal with death later—by growing apart.

THE SIXTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT EMOTIONS

Mitch walks up the driveway to Morrie's house, noticing the **plants** planted in front of the house. Charlotte, Morrie's wife, answers the door—an unusual event, since she still works at MIT and isn't often home in the morning. Charlotte seems worried as she lets Mitch in, telling him that Morrie's having a hard day. When Mitch offers her the bags of **food**, she tells him that Morrie still hasn't eaten any from last time. She opens the fridge and freezer, both of which are filled with food. Charlotte says that it's all too hard for Morrie to eat, but that Morrie didn't say anything because he doesn't want to hurt Mitch's feelings. Mitch says he just wants to help and bring something, to which Charlotte replies that Morrie looks forward to Mitch's visits, and they give him purpose.

As Mitch continues to evolve and take on a life view more like Morrie's, he notices nature more than he used to. Food, which up until this point has been a positive symbol of life, is also starting to take onmore tragic connotations, as Morrie cannot enjoy this aspect of life anymore. Morrie is willing to accept it as a token of friendship, but can no longer eat like he used to. However, the ritual of Mitch bringing food is still part of the way that Morrie builds his community, but now the food is purely symbolic in a metaphoric way rather than a literal, tangible way.

Morrie is spending most nights awake coughing for hours, meaning that neither he nor Charlotte are sleeping through the night. Between healthcare workers staying overnight and Morrie's endless stream of visitors, Charlotte doesn't get much time one-on-one with Morrie, although Mitch says she handles it all with immense patience. Mitch helps her put the **food** in the fridge and takes note of all the pill bottles on their counter. Charlotte goes to check if Morrie is ready for Mitch, and Mitch feels a sense of shame as he looks at the food, seeing it as a reminder of things Morrie will never again enjoy.

Charlotte in general isn't given much depth or attention, but this instance makes it obvious that she fully supports Morrie in his community. This scene rounds out her character as wholly supportive of her husband, adding more weight to Morrie's earlier comments that family is the most important element for life. She unselfishly puts Morrie's happiness and fulfillment above her own desires to spend time with him.

When Mitch sits down with Morrie, Morrie's cough is violent and it takes Morrie a while to recover. After making sure the tape is on, Morrie says that he's detaching himself from the experience, which he believes is important for himself as well as for healthy people like Mitch. He invokes a Buddhist philosophy of not clinging to things because nothing is permanent. Mitch questions this, wondering how this fits in with Morrie also saying to fully experience life and emotions. Morrie replies that you must allow an emotion to penetrate fully, because then you can understand what it feels like, step back, and detach.

Morrie is struggling more and more now that the coughing is getting worse. With his ideas of detachment, he's facing his inevitable death increasingly head-on. The fact that Mitch is now questioning Morrie's ideas, rather than just listening, shows how much more he's engaging with these lessons. He's becoming an active student, participating in a discussion rather than listening to a lecture.

Morrie shares his scariest moments of coughing and not being able to breathe, but says that once he was able to recognize the emotions of fear and anxiety, he could detach and step away from the fear. Mitch thinks about how this idea relates to life and other experiences, and suddenly, Morrie starts violently coughing and choking again. Mitch slaps Morrie's back and the coughing subsides. Mitch is shaking and scared, and the two sit quietly while Morrie recovers.

Here we see how someone faces death when they haven't been practicing Morrie's idea of detachment. Mitch is extremely scared, and the scene is mostly about him and his intense reaction to seeing Morrie so close to death. Morrie is, presumably, practicing detachment, while Mitch only experiences fear.

Morrie finally speaks and says he knows how he wants to die: peacefully, not in the middle of a coughing fit. He says that detachment becomes helpful because if he does die in the middle of a coughing spell, he needs to be able to detach so he doesn't leave the world in a state of fright. When Morrie asks Mitch if he understands, Mitch nods, but quickly adds that Morrie can't let go yet. Morrie smiles and agrees.

Morrie's decision here foreshadows what we'll learn about Morrie's father in the next chapter. Mitch is still reeling from seeing Morrie's coughing fit. By telling Morrie that he can't let go yet, Mitch shows that he's not ready to detach and accept Morrie's death.

Mitch asks Morrie if he believes in reincarnation, which Morrie answers with a maybe. When asked what he'd come back as, Morrie replies that he'd be a gazelle, because they're graceful and fast. Morrie asks Mitch if he thinks that's strange. Mitch looks at Morrie and his shrunken, immobile body, and says he doesn't think a gazelle is strange at all.

Morrie's choice of animal shows how important movement is to him, as he chose an animal that is known primarily for the fact that it can move very quickly and beautifully, like a dancer.

THE PROFESSOR, PART TWO

After completing his Ph.D., one of Morrie's first jobs was at a mental hospital in Washington D.C. He was given a grant to observe the patients and their treatments, some of which were horrifying. One patient laid on the floor of the hallway every day while doctors walked over and around her. After sitting with her, Morrie was eventually able to convince her to get up and go back to her room. He realized that all she wanted was for someone to notice her existence. He befriended several other patients, and found that many of them had been ignored in their lives both outside and inside the hospital. They also didn't receive much compassion in the hospital. Many were from rich families, and Morrie concluded that their wealth couldn't make them happy.

These experiences cement Morrie's belief that love and compassion are of the utmost importance. We can't know what any of the official diagnoses for these patients were, but Morrie seems to be of the mind that had they experienced more love, understanding, and connection to others, they wouldn't be institutionalized and so miserable. The fact that Morrie experiences success by simply paying attention to these individuals points to some truth in his belief.

Morrie became a professor at Brandeis in the late 50s. A few years later, the campus was embroiled in the cultural revolution, and many of the students at the forefront of the revolution were in Morrie's classes. As a whole, the sociology department was involved in the movement. When they learned that students would be drafted if they didn't maintain a certain GPA, Morrie suggested that they give all the students As. The department favored discussions over lectures and sent students to the inner city for fieldwork and to the Deep South to participate in civil rights projects. On one occasion Morrie accompanied his students to protest marches in Washington DC, and was amused as women put flowers in guns and then attempted to levitate the Pentagon.

The cultural revolution refers to not just the rise of hippies, but immense cultural changes as well—the advent of the birth control pill, the American Civil Rights movement, opposing war, and experimentation with psychoactive drugs, among other things. By placing the department within the movement, and particularly by keeping male students out of the draft for Vietnam, Morrie championed life and love. Notably, even 30 years before the Tuesday visits with Mitch, Morrie is rejecting modern culture in favor of a countercultural way of living.

Once, a group of black students took over a building on the campus and flew a banner that said "Malcolm X University." The administration worried that the students were making bombs in the chemistry labs in the building, but Morrie believed they just wanted to feel they mattered. After they'd had control of the building for several weeks, a protester noticed Morrie walking by and called for him to come in. When Morrie came back out of the building, he had a list of what the protesters wanted and took it to the administration, which resolved the situation.

Morrie treats these students the same way he dealt with the patients at the mental hospital—by treating them like people who matter. The administration presumably feels the opposite of Morrie about these students, as they are only concerned about their potential for violence.

Morrie's classes were heavy on personal development and light on career skills, but despite experiencing much less financial success than business or law students, Morrie's students continually came back to visit him, especially in Morrie's final months of life.

The text is explicitly asking the reader to consider which is more important—a successful career, or personal fulfillment and friendship. Morrie, we know by now, would (and did) choose the latter.

As the weeks go on, Mitch begins to read about how different cultures view death. He discusses a North American Arctic tribe that believes all creatures on earth have a tiny version of that creature inside them that holds the soul. When the being dies, the tiny version lives on and can either slip into something being born, or temporarily rest in the belly of a great feminine spirit in the sky, waiting for the moon to send it back to earth. Moonless nights happen when the moon is too busy with the souls, although the moon always returns, just like all the spirits.

Mitch's transformation into becoming more like his professor is well underway. Morrie might refer to Mitch's research as spiritual development. The style of writing here, particularly at the end where Mitch stresses that everything returns, alludes to the fact that Mitch is struggling and searching for ways to deal with Morrie's death.

THE SEVENTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT THE FEAR OF AGING

In the time since Mitch's last visit, Morrie's mobility has declined enough that he now has to have someone wipe him after using the toilet. Morrie now depends on others to do everything for him except breathe and swallow. Mitch asks Morrie how he stays positive, and Morrie answers that he's an independent person and originally wanted to fight the dependency and felt ashamed of it. But Morrie told himself to ignore the culture that says to be ashamed, and now he finds that he enjoys the dependency, because he gets to feel like a child again. Morrie then says that he believes that nobody, especially not him, got enough of the complete care and love people receive from their mothers. Mitch realizes that this is why Morrie so enjoys when Mitch has to adjust his microphone or his pillows, saying that Morrie gives like an adult and takes like a child.

Morrie ties several things together in this speech. This new development in his decreased mobility leads him to nearly complete dependency on those around him. Then, by actively rejecting modern culture, he is able to connect the dependency to positive emotions regarding physical touch, and finally relate it back to family, love, and the importance thereof. This allows, as Mitch says, for Morrie to give like an adult, by providing emotional support for many, and take like a child, by primarily desiring complete care and physical affection.

Later in the visit, Mitch asks Morrie about aging, recounting his own experience on the drive from the airport where he counted numerous billboards of beautiful, young models. Mitch confesses that he already feels over the hill. Morrie listens and answers that he knows that youth can be miserable, and young people aren't wise enough to understand life, and therefore he doesn't buy into the cultural emphasis on youth.

Morrie sees youth as undesirable because young people lack wisdom. This insight can provide further reason for Morrie to be a teacher, as he can help impart wisdom to young people as a professor.

Morrie offers instead that he embraces aging, saying that aging means growth and understanding rather than decay. When Mitch counters by asking why people wish they were young again, Morrie says that means those people haven't lived fulfilled lives. He suggests that if one battles getting older, they're always going to be unhappy because they're going to grow old and die eventually.

By rejecting modern culture and embracing aging, Morrie can find fulfillment in his advanced years. He sees the futility of yearning for youth or trying to stay young, and this is another form of his idea of detachment.

Mitch asks Morrie if he envies younger, healthier people. Morrie admits he does, but mostly for the fact that they can move and **dance**, and he practices detachment to deal with the envy. Morrie coughs, and Mitch asks if Morrie envies *him*. Morrie says that of course the old envy the young, but if you look back on life, it becomes a competition, and age isn't competitive. He adds that his current age, 78, is comprised of all the ages he's ever been, and he can't truly be envious of Mitch at 37 when Morrie's been that age himself.

The fact that Morrie's only example of why he envies young people is related to movement underscores just how important dance and movement are to him. He doesn't even suggest young people's ability to eat solid food, for example—something he can no longer do. Dance is the ultimate way in which Morrie finds fulfillment.

THE EIGHTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT MONEY

This week, Mitch has brought a **newspaper** to show Morrie a particular quote from a media mogul who had recently failed to acquire a television network: "I don't want my tombstone to read 'I never owned a network.'" Mitch wondered if this billionaire found himself in the same position as Morrie, if he'd be concerned about such a thing. Morrie says the issue is with valuing the wrong things.

Money here joins the idea of the media as a negative entity. Note also that this mogul is making jokes about his tombstone when there's no indication that he's anywhere close to death, hence Morrie's bemusement at his statement. Morrie sees the ridiculousness because he is close to death.

Morrie is having a good day after having an a cappella group perform for him the night before. Mitch tells the reader that while Morrie has always loved music, after his diagnosis his love of music has become so strong it makes him cry. Mitch continues addressing the reader directly, saying that while Morrie had always been one for simple pleasures, material things now hold little if any significance for him.

This is connected as well with Morrie's love of dance. He can still enjoy music despite not being able to move to it physically. Morrie is also very entrenched in his personal culture, now that he's completely given up on the modern culture that says he must acquire material items.

Morrie continues the discussion about money, saying that people in the US are brainwashed by hearing over and over again that owning things, having more money, and other such things are good and necessary. Morrie says that he interprets people who are only interested in acquiring new, bigger, and better things as really saying that they're so hungry for love that the things became substitutes. He continues, saying that money and power aren't substitutes for tenderness.

Despite the conversation being about money, true to form, Morrie brings it back to people's need for love. Morrie is also railing against modern culture here, which doesn't value love and connection in the same way as he does.

Mitch looks around, noticing that nothing in Morrie's home is new or upgraded. Despite that, Mitch notes that the house changed drastically, and has become filled with love, teaching, friendship, and a variety of visitors. It was a wealthy home in spite of Morrie's rapidly shrinking bank account.

Mitch recognizes Morrie's house as the culminating symbol of Morrie's culture, filled with all the things and people Morrie finds important.

Morrie discusses the difference between wants and needs, saying then that many of the things we want don't provide satisfaction. Instead, to be satisfied, you must offer others what you have to give in terms of time, concern, or skills, which leads Mitch to compare Morrie to a boy scout. Morrie gives examples like teaching computer skills at a senior center or playing cards with hospital patients as places where people are needed. This, Morrie believes, is how you create a meaningful life: by devoting oneself to loving others, one's community, and creating something that provides purpose and meaning. He grins and pointedly notes that none of that includes a salary.

Mitch's boy scout comment is snarky and emphasizes that he's still not completely on board with what Morrie is saying. Remember, though, that Mitch has been doing exactly what Morrie is saying people need to not *do in an attempt to find fulfillment in his own life. His discomfort with Morrie's words indicate that he's uncomfortable having to confront and consider what Morrie is saying and how it applies to his own life.*

Mitch pretends to take notes while ruminating that he's spent much of his life pursuing more, nicer things, justifying it by comparing his desires to those of rich and famous athletes. Morrie interrupts Mitch's reverie to tell him that only being open and loving will allow Mitch to float between people of different statuses.

Mitch's discomfort is obvious, as he pretends to take notes so he can take in what Morrie's saying. Morrie's final thought here acknowledges that Mitch basically has *to exist in modern culture, but that he can use Morrie's culture to exist more happily there.*

Morrie asks Mitch why he thinks it's so important for Morrie to listen to the problems of others even while he's suffering and dying. Answering his own question, Morrie says that giving to people by listening to them is how he feels alive and even healthy. In this way, he says, people can avoid envy and dissatisfaction because giving time in this way provides purpose.

We see the real reason for Morrie's continued optimism as he poses and answers the question. Morrie still feels like he can contribute to his community by giving time and a listening ear.

THE NINTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT HOW LOVE GOES ON

By now, fall has officially arrived and Mitch notices the trees changing color as he drives from the airport. He says that in Detroit, the strike continues and both sides are digging in and accusing each other of not communicating. Mitch says that stories in **the news** are equally depressing—a teenage girl was hit by a thrown tombstone as she drove with her family on a religious pilgrimage, and the US is still entirely obsessed with the coming conclusion of the O.J. Simpson trial, which is being broadcast even in the airport. Mitch even tried calling his brother and left several heartfelt messages asking to talk, but Peter replied that he was okay but didn't want to talk.

Mitch is noticing the outside world and nature more, which aligns him more with Morrie's style of culture. Media culture is again invoked as a major negative entity, and an omnipresent one as the O.J. Simpson trial is now in every airport. There's no escaping the media and its associated negativity. Mitch shows positive change as he's reaching out to Peter, but that situation remains stalled and negative.

Morrie seems to be melting into his chair as he declines. He now has a catheter and can no longer move his head, although he insists on spending his days in his study so he can watch his **hibiscus plant**, saying to Mitch "when you're in bed, you're dead."

Despite being entirely dependent on people or medical assistance for everything, Morrie insists on being as up and aboutas possible. He equates being mobile with life.

Morrie tells Mitch that Koppel wants to do another show with him, but they want to wait a while. Mitch is offended by this and feels they're using Morrie, but Morrie says it's okay because even if they're just looking for drama, Morrie's using *them* to spread his message to millions of people. However, since his voice is now at risk, he told Nightline that they'll have to come back soon. Morrie is already having to turn visitors away because he believes that he can't help them if he's incapable of giving them the appropriate attention. Mitch feels guilty then about the tape recorder and offers to skip the visit, but Morrie declines. He says that this is their last thesis and they have to get it right.

Morrie is very aware of his symbiotic relationship with the media, despite his scorn for it and the book's general negative portrayal of the media. The fact that Mitch is offended shows how far he's come in his transformation—he's valuing a person over profit. Morrie's unwillingness to accept visitors shows just how far he's declined, as helping people has been Morrie's one goal for the entirety of the book. We see, though, just how much Morrie values Mitch and this project, since he doesn't want to cancel Mitch's visits.

Mitch thinks about his first thesis with Morrie and the encouragement he received from Morrie to write it. He considers the current situation, thinking that this time, he's not in so much of a hurry to finish this thesis.

Mitch is valuing the process, relationship, and mentoring he's receiving from Morrie over the finished project. He knows the project will end when Morrie dies.

Morrie says that the day before, someone asked him if he worried about being forgotten after he died. He says he doesn't think he will be because of the close relationships he's had with people. Mitch comments that it sounds like a song lyric, but Morrie counters by asking Mitch if he ever hears Morrie's voice in his head. Mitch admits he does, which Morrie says proves his point that he won't be forgotten. He then reminds Mitch that it's okay to cry.

Morrie understands the power of the student/teacher relationship. He knows that this is how he'll live on, thanks to the impression he made on his students' lives throughout the years, including Mitch. Morrie believes that a good teacher keeps teaching when their students internalize their lessons enough to hear their voice when they're not around.

Morrie has decided what he wants on his tombstone: "A Teacher to the Last."Mitch agrees that it's a perfect phrase for the tombstone.

This sentiment can be seen as the thesis for the entire book, as it brings the teacher/student relationship full circle.

Mitch takes a moment to step out of the narrative and talk about how Morrie makes everyone feel special when they're with him. He knows how to pay attention and listen to people because he believes in being fully present. Mitch remembers that Morrie taught this idea in one of his classes at Brandeis, and at the time Mitch had scoffed at what seemed like such a silly topic. Now though, he sees how self-absorbed his generation is and thinks they could benefit from this lesson.

Mitch's comment about his generation mimics the way Morrie critiques modern culture. Mitch, through the time he spends with Morrie, sees the value in being present and paying attention, and sees what a positive effect it has on those people Morrie spends time with. He acknowledges he's changed and absorbed the lesson, even though it took 16 years.

Mitch returns to the conversation. After motioning for Mitch's hand, Morrie says the problem is that everyone's in a hurry to go and acquire material goods. Morrie relates how when he could still drive, if there was someone who wanted to get in front of him, he'd raise a hand as though to make a rude gesture, and instead, he'd wave and smile at the people in the passing car. He said that they'd often smile back.

Morrie is playing on people's expectations and subverting them, with surprisingly positive results. This shows that despite Morrie saying consistently that the general populace is in some way emotionally deficient, they're open to changes for the better when they receive kindness.

Mitch partly returns to his reverie, saying that Morrie was always ready to display emotion and truly listen to people. People loved him because of the attention he paid to them. Mitch tells Morrie that he's the father everyone wishes they had.

This sentiment underscores the importance of family in the book by conflating this type of extremely positive listening with a family member.

Stepping back in time, Mitch tells the reader the story of Morrie's father's death. Every day after dinner, Charlie would go for a walk, and as a child Morriewatched him go and wished for affection from him. He never received it, and Morrie decided he'd always show affection for his own children when he had them. Years later, while Morrie raised his own family, Charlie continued to live in the Bronx. One night, while he was on his walk, two robbers accosted him and pulled a gun. Charlie threw down his wallet and ran all the way to a relative's house, where he collapsed on the porch with a heart attack and died.

The love, or the lack thereof, that he received as a child is what motivates Morrie to raise his children a certain way as an adult. Notice too that Charlie dies terrified, in a moment of fear, which is exactly what Morrie says he doesn't want to happen to himself. This draws further comparisons between Morrie and Charlie, and adds more depth and nuance to the idea of fathers and how they function within families.

Morrie was called to New York to identify the body. He looked at his father through the cold glass and confirmed that it was indeed Charlie. Morrie was so horrified, he couldn't even cry, but the experience made it clear to Morrie that when he himself died, he wanted it to be warm and for everyone to say the goodbyes they needed to say. He didn't want his family finding out from a phone call or a telegram.

Morrie consciously makes the same comparison between himself and his father. This experience of cold horror renders Morrie unable to experience any emotion but fear, and it further leads him to realize the importance of having his family around when he dies.

Mitch continues to research different cultures' view on death, and he shares the views of the Desana people, a South American rainforest tribe. They believe the world has a fixed quantity of energy, so that every birth equals a death elsewhere and vice versa. Both Mitch and Morrie like this idea, and Mitch says that Morrie seems to feel more and more like the Dasana do as time goes on.

The final statement here raises the question of where Morrie believes his "energy" will go when he dies—perhaps into his family members, friends, and students.

THE TENTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT MARRIAGE

A few days prior to the visit, Mitch callsMorrie's house to see how he's doing. Morrie isn't doing well—one cough sometimes lasts an hour, and he needs to use his oxygen machine almost nightly. Mitch tells Morrie that he'll see him on Tuesday, and Morrie asks if he can speak to Mitch's wife, Janine. Morrie has been asking about Janine since Mitch started visiting, and she and Morrie chat for a minute before hanging up. Janine announces that she's coming with Mitch on Tuesday.

Morrie is declining fast, and his increasing dependence on mechanical interventions show just how bad his case has become. Though Mitch himself is more hardened and materialistic, the people he talks about being close to (Janine, Morrie) are described as extremely kind and open, opening up the possibility that Mitch might not be as "fallen" as he thinks, even prior to his Tuesday visits.

On Tuesday, Janine and Mitch sit with Morrie in his office. Mitch notes that Morrie seems to have more energy than usual, attributing the energy to Janine's presence and Morrie being a flirt. After asking Janine about Detroit, Morrie begins to recount a story of teaching in Detroit in the late 40s. Before he begins, he struggles to blow his nose, and Mitch helps him with the tissue.

While Mitch has been embarrassed by Morrie's physical limitations, he's unembarrassed to help Morrie in front of Janine. Morrie's newfound energy in Janine's presence shows how important fostering community and connections is to Morrie.

Morrie resumes his story. He was in a poker group with other staff members at the university where he was teaching. The group included a surgeon, who approached Morrie after a game and said he'd like to watch Morrie work. The surgeon attended one of Morrie's classes and afterwards invited Morrie to observe a surgery he was performing later that night. When Morrie arrived at the hospital, he was told to scrub down and put on a gown for surgery. He was right next to the surgeon as he started the surgery on the patient, but as soon as Morrie saw blood, he began to feel like he was going to faint. A nurse mistook Morrie for a doctor, and Janine, Mitch, and Morrie laugh. Mitch wonders how Morrie once fainted seeing someone else's illness, but he's so able to deal with his own illness.

This poker group is an example of one of the ways that Morrie has built community throughout his life. His interest in the surgeon's work is genuine and a way to make connections. Retelling the story in the present is a way for Morrie to continue making connections and building community now that he's meeting Janine.

Connie knocks on the office door to tell Morrie his lunch is ready. Morrie is now only capable of eating liquids and pureed foods. Mitch continues to shop at Morrie's favorite deli every week even though the containers of **food**are still uneaten from the last several weeks. Mitch tells the reader that he foolishly hopes that one day Morrie will be able to eat a real lunch again.

Mitch willingly admits he's in denial, which indicates that he's accepting the inevitability of Morrie's death. The weekly deli food is now just an offering of friendship, not also a means of nourishment and life.

Morrie takes Janine's hand and begins to ask her about her profession: singing. Janine is modest and deflects praise, but when Morrie asks her to sing for him, she begins to sing a 1930s love song written by Ray Noble. Mitch is surprised at Morrie's ability to draw emotion from people, as Mitch expected Janine to politely decline, as she usually does when asked to sing. Mitch notes that despite the stiffness of Morrie's body, he can almost see Morrie **dancing** inside to Janine's song. When she finishes, Morrie is brought to tears.

Mitch sees Janine's willingness to sing as a typical response to Morrie's kindness and openness. Janine, who is described by Mitch as very kind and generous, is willing to open up after a very short period of time. Compare this to Mitch, who is still in the process of opening up after ten weeks of visits following four years of mentoring while in school.

Mitch thinks about the struggles he sees his generation having with marriage, and asks Morrie why they have such problems. Morrie answers that he feels sorry for Mitch's generation, because given modern culture, a relationship can make up for some of the gaps not filled by the culture itself. Morrie goes on to say that he thinks Mitch's generation doesn't know what they want in a partner and don't know who they themselves are, and therefore their marriages don't work.

It's not explicit, but Morrie is referring back to his idea of spiritual security, which here he feels can counteract the negativity of modern culture. This shows just how much stock and faith Morrie puts in personal relationships if he believes they can successfully take on culture.

Morrie sighs and says that loved ones like a spouse are so important, saying that a friend, while great, isn't going to be there all night to provide care the way a spouse would. Mitch steps back from the narrative to talk about Charlotte. Morrie and Charlotte have been married 44 years, and Mitch marvels at their communication, which is often just a glance of understanding. Charlotte is a very private person, and the only time Morrie holds back in conversations is when he thinks Charlotte might be uncomfortable if Morrie said a certain thing.

We see how highly Morrie regards Charlotte, as he filters his words to care for her. He also implies here, as we've previously seen, that Charlotte is providing a great deal of emotional and physical care for Morrie, as she is spending nights awake with him.

Back in the narrative, Mitch asks if there's a rule to know if a marriage is going to work. Morrie smiles, saying that things aren't that simple, but offers that a marriage will have trouble if you don't respect the other person, if you don't know how to compromise, if you can't talk openly, and if you don't have a common set of values. Morrie continues, saying the biggest value is one's belief in the importance of marriage. Closing his eyes, he says that he believes marriage is highly important and you miss out if you don't try it. Morrie then quotes his favorite poem again, "love each other or perish."

Morrie obviously practices what he preaches, as it's obvious from the way that his relationship with Charlotte has been described that he believes his marriage is extremely important. By invoking the Auden quote again, Morrie further notes the importance of his marriage to Charlotte specifically, as he's made it clear that he would truly perish without her love and support.

Mitch tells Morrie he has a question. He reminds Morrie of the Book of Job from the Bible. Job was a good man, but God made him suffer to test his faith. God took everything away from him, including his health, and Mitch then asks Morrie what he thinks about that. Morrie coughs, and when he recovers, he smiles and replies that he thinks that God overdid it.

Compare the list of things that God took away from Job to what Morrie suffers—while Morrie has lost his health, he still has his family, friends, and home, and a rounded and diverse concept of faith.

THE ELEVENTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT OUR CULTURE

Morrie is lying in bed, dressed in pajama bottoms, and Mitch is helping Morrie's physical therapist pound on Morrie's back to loosen the phlegm in his lungs. This has to be done regularly. On this Tuesday, Morrie's therapist is visiting earlier than usual, and rather than excuse himself as he usually does, Mitch decides he'd like to be there. Mitch says he's increasingly less self-conscious about the physical embarrassment, which isn't like him, but he notes that much of what goes on at Morrie's house isn't normal for him.

Mitch here seems fully cognizant and accepting of the change he's undergoing. He's fully present, he's willing to do something that involves intimate physical touch, and he's not self-conscious about it. He does note that this isn't normal for him, as if wondering at the new person he finds himself to be.

As Mitch works on Morrie's back, he notices how small Morrie is now, and how pale and limp Morrie's body is. Mitch thinks about how much time people spend working out and trying to shape bodies, only to end life like Morrie. Mitch says the truth is that he was pounding Morrie's back when he'd rather be hitting walls.

While previously we've tracked the progression of ALS through what Morrie can do, now we see what Morrie's body looks like. This shift is disturbing to Mitch.

Later that day, Mitch and Morrie are discussing culture. Morrie says that people are only mean when they're threatened, and the structure of modern culture threatens most everyone, which is why he doesn't buy into it.

Morrie's idea of detachment comes into play here—he can (he believes) detach from the culture, which allows him to exist in it without feeling threatened like everyone else.

Mitch and Morrie are holding hands, and Mitch squeezes Morrie's hand. Mitch tells the reader that they hold hands regularly now, and things like Morrie's catheter bag and the smell of the room after Morrie uses the bathroom no longer bother or embarrass him.

Mitch has made major progress. He is no longer resisting physical contact with Morrie, which strengthens their relationship.

Continuing their discussion, Morrie expands on his idea of building his personal culture. He says he follows basic rules of the community, like traffic signals, but he chooses what he values and how he thinks rather than letting the culture dictate them. He says there's nothing inherently shameful about his condition, for example, although the culture says there is.

Notice that Morrie doesn't see modern culture as entirely evil. He accepts that it does have purpose (keeping people safe, a la traffic signals), but he differentiates between this aspect of culture and the value judgments that the culture makes.

Mitch asks Morrie why he didn't move to a place where people are less selfish. Morrie replies that every society has its own problems and running away wouldn't work. He continues, saying that people don't believe how alike they truly are, and if people saw each other as being more alike, many of the world's problems would be fixed. Morrie has one final piece of wisdom: as infants we need others to survive, and at the end of life we need others to survive as well, but the secret is that we need others in between as well.

Morrie's ideas about culture are very much linked to his ideas about community and love, as he prescribes more community building to heal the ills of modern culture. He advocates a greater sense of collective community, which he believes is lacking in individuals who are not infants or the elderly—that is, not those who unquestionably need care.

Later in the afternoon, Connie and Mitch go into a bedroom to watch the verdict of the O.J. Simpson trial. It's a tense scene, and when the foreman reads that Simpson has been found not guilty, Connie shrieks. The **TV** shows black people celebrating outside the courthouse, and the decision is called momentous. Connie leaves the room, having seen enough. Mitch continues to watch, thinking that everyone in the world is also watching, and hears from the other room Morrie being lifted onto the toilet. The thought makes Mitch smile.

The thread of the O.J. Simpson trial is a very tangible example of modern culture and the media as negative entities in the book. We've seen how the constant media storm has allowed the trial to consume people's lives, but here Mitch emphasizes how little Morrie cares about this major cultural event when he notes that Morrie is on the toilet during the verdict.

In a flashback to 1979, Morrie is at a basketball game at Brandeis, where the team is doing very well. The Brandeis students began to chant "we're number one!", which perplexes Morrie. He finally stands up and yells, "what's wrong with being number two?" The students stop chanting, and Morrie is triumphant.

Rather than be invested in winning and making it to the top, Morrie sees everyone as people, not winners and losers. Morrie's ideas of personal culture shine through here, as well as his desire to seize every possible teaching moment.

THE AUDIOVISUAL, PART THREE

On Friday, Koppel and his crew return to Morrie's house for a final *Nightline* interview. Prior to the interview, Koppel called Morrie several times to make sure Morrie could handle the interview, and said that if Morrie didn't want to do the interview, he'd come and say goodbye anyway. This makes Morrie very happy, and Mitch as the narrator remarks that Morrie coaxed compassion out of the **television industry**.

Koppel has seemingly completed a similar transformation to Mitch. He's become more compassionate with Morrie, and although there's still the implication that he's using Morrie for drama, it's obvious that Koppel has also developed a deeper relationship with and a great deal of respect for Morrie.

The interview takes place in Morrie's study, where Morrie is now confined to his chair. Koppel squeezes in alongside the bookcase and kisses Morrie before he sits down. Before the camera starts, Koppel asks Morrie how bad the disease has gotten. Morrie weakly lifts his hand in answer.

The kiss further supports how much Koppel has changed for the better. We see just how bad Morrie's mobility has gotten—he can no longer comfortably sit in the living room, and he can barely lift his hands.

As the cameras roll, Koppel asks Morrie if he's more afraid now. Morrie isn't, he says—he's less afraid, and is taking more time now to listen to music and look out his office window and is reading the **newspaper** less. Koppel and Morrie discuss Stephen Hawking, who suffers from ALS and speaks through a computer synthesizer. Morrie says he finds this admirable, but tells Koppel that when he can no longer be responsive to other people, he'll know it's time to say goodbye. Near the end of the interview, Koppel asks if Morrie had anything to say to his millions of viewers. Morrie says to be compassionate and take responsibility for each other. He adds his favorite quote, "love each other or die."

Morrie succinctly ties together the tenets of his personal philosophy for the final interview. The way he views Stephen Hawking underscores just how important being able to respond and relate to others without mechanical assistance is to him. It shows just how much he relies on movement to communicate, both in terms of body language and simply the movement required to truly speak. Morrie's final quoting of Auden emphasizes just how important this idea is to Morrie.

The interview has officially ended, but the camera is still rolling. Koppel tells Morrie he did a good job, and Morrie replies that the disease will get his body but not his spirit. Looking up to the ceiling, Morrie says that he's bargaining with God, askingif he gets to be one of the angels. It's the first time that Morrie admits talking to God.

As Morrie draws closer to death, religion is becoming more important to him as a way of dealing with his fate.

THE TWELFTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT FORGIVENESS

The next Tuesday, Mitch is visiting Morrie. As they talk, Mitch is massaging Morrie's feet, something he'd watched Morrie's care workers do for months but now volunteers to do in an attempt to hold on and make Morrie happy. Despite not being able to move, Morrie can still feel pain, and massages help.

Mitch has fully embraced Morrie's desire for human touch. His willingness to perform this act allows us to see that Mitch is accepting how much Morrie means to him.

Mitch's question for the week is the importance of forgiveness. Mitch wonders if Morrie had a need to say sorry for anything before he died. Morrie nods to a bronze bust on his bookshelf, telling Mitch that it's a sculpture of Morrie that a friend made 30 years ago. Morrie and this friend were very close, but Morrie says the story took a sad turn when the friend and his wife moved to Chicago. Not long after, Charlotte underwent a serious operation. The friend never reached out even though they knew Charlotte wasn't well. Over the years, Morrie met the friend several times but never accepted his apology. Morrie begins to choke up and tells Mitch that a few years ago, his friend died of cancer, and Morrie never got to forgive him or say goodbye. Morrie begins to cry.

Morrie hasn't always been so open and forgiving; at one point he had to learn some of the lessons he's now teaching Mitch. This story does, however, emphasize how important his relationship with Charlotte is to Morrie. A lapse in support of their relationship was enough for Morrie to effectively end a friendship.

Mitch continues to rub Morrie's feet, leaving Morrie alone with his thoughts. After a minute, Morrie whispers that we need to forgive ourselves as well as others for the things we didn't do. Morrie continues, saying that he always wished he'd written more books, but he realizes now that thinking like that never did him any good. Mitch wipes Morrie's tears, and Morrie tells Mitch that he needs to forgive himself and others, because not everyone is so lucky to get the time to do so that Morrie is getting.

This is another instance where we see how much Morrie himself has changed throughout his life. He didn't always take what he's now teaching Mitch to heart; he had to learn these lessons too. This helps humanizethe otherwise sometimes saint-like Morrie, as we see that he too has faults.

When Mitch questions Morrie's use of "lucky," Morrie reminds Mitch of the tension of opposites, and says that while he mourns the short amount of time he has, he cherishes that the time he has allows him to make things right. Mitch continues to rub Morrie's feet and notices the **hibiscus plant** is still holding on in the window.

The hibiscus plant is a symbol for Morrie, and both are still hanging on. We also see the tension of opposites again, but this time applied to Morrie. This helps to make it a more universally applicable idea rather than something that just pertains to Mitch.

Morrie tells Mitch to look at him, and when Mitch glances up, Morrie's look is intense. Morrie says that he doesn't know why Mitch came back, but wanted to tell him that if could've had another son, he would've liked it to be Mitch. Mitch feels a moment of fear and betrayal of his own father, but when he sees Morrie smiling, he realizes there's no betrayal in accepting Morrie's words. Mitch says to the reader that all he's afraid of now is saying goodbye.

This is an important moment of Mitch and Morrie's relationship. It makes the shift from purely teacher/student to a familial bond with this admission by Morrie and Mitch's acceptance. Mitch understands that love isn't finite, as accepting the relationship with Morrie doesn't diminish or overshadow his relationship with his own father.

Morrie says that he's picked a place to be buried—on a hill, under a tree, overlooking a pond. He says it's a good place to think. Morrie asks Mitch if he'll come and visit, and tell Morrie his problems. Mitch asks if Morrie will give him answers, and Morrie says he'll give Mitch what he can. Mitch thinks about the grave and sitting there, and tells Morrie that it won't be the same when he can't hear Morrie talk. Morrie says that after he's dead, Mitch can talk and Morrie will listen.

Mitch is being somewhat facetious here because he doesn't really want to think about how life will be once Morrie's gone. Morrie's comment about listening while Mitch talks references a reversal of the teacher/student relationship, in essence foreshadowing the publishing of the book itself.

THE THIRTEENTH TUESDAY: WE TALK ABOUT THE PERFECT DAY

Charlotte and Morrie have decided that Morrie's body should be cremated. They discuss this with the rabbi from Brandeis, who is a close friend and will be conducting the funeral service. Morrie tells the stunned rabbi to make sure they don't overcook him. Morrie's body is so decayed by this point, he can make jokes about it.

With his comment about cremation, Morrie's success with detachment is obvious. He's not tied to his body anymore. The discussion of what will happen with Morrie's body also indicates a growing degree of acceptance among everyone else too.

When Mitch sits down for his visit, Morrie tells him about a book he read about death in a hospital, and how nurses remove bodies extremely fast as though death is contagious. As Mitch fumbles uncomfortably with Morrie's microphone, Morrie assures him that death isn't contagious, it's natural.

This is further proof of both Morrie's degree of detachment and his acceptance of his death. Mitch is still very uncomfortable with the thought, though—Morrie's lessons haven't fully sunk in yet.

Morrie coughs, and Mitch braces for something serious. Morrie's nights are even worse now, and he spends hours coughing. The oxygen tube is now up his nose, and Mitch tells the reader this symbolizes helplessness.

The tension of opposites returns here—Mitch surely knows that Morrie relies on the oxygen to survive, but he sees it as a marker of death and helplessness.

Morrie tells Mitch that the night before, he had a terrible coughing spell and even started to feel dizzy, but he felt peace, like he was ready to go. Morrie tells Mitch that the sensation was incredible, and it made him think about a dream he'd had where he was crossing a bridge into the unknown. When Mitch confirms that Morrie didn't cross over, Morrie says the important part is that he felt like he could. He says that feeling is what everyone is looking for. Morrie continues, saying that when we can have peace with dying, we can make peace with living.

Mitch is shaken seeing how detached Morrie is becoming. Morrie has not only accepted fully that he's going to die, but is finally able to detach in moments when dying seems a likely possibility. By Morrie's logic, now that he's attained this degree of detachment, he's able to make peace with his life as a whole.

Morrie asks to see the **hibiscus plant**, and Mitch holds it up so Morrie can see. Morrie says that dying is natural, and the fact that people make such a big deal out of it is because people don't see themselves as part of nature. However, everything is born and later dies, but Morrie says that people differ from plants and animals because we can love. He says that through love and memories, people can live on in the hearts of loved ones. He finishes his speech, saying that death ends a life, not a relationship.

Here again we see the conflation of Morrie and the hibiscus plant. It's still alive, although it's going to die soon, just like Morrie. Additionally, the hibiscus plant, now that it's immortalized in the book, lives on like Morrie does.

An experimental drug that delays the progression of ALS will soon be on the market, but Morrie dismisses it. Mitch says that Morrie is realistic to a fault about his death. Mitch asks Morrie if someone could wave a wand and make him better, if he'd become the man he used to be. Morrie says he could never go back now that he fully appreciates his body and understands what big questions to grapple with. Mitch asks what the important questions are, and Morrie answers that the questions have to do with love, responsibility, spirituality, and awareness.

Morrie here crystallizes his ideas from the last several weeks into four main concepts. Hearing about the new drug makes the reader hopeful for a moment, but it then serves the purpose of further developing Morrie's degree of detachment.

Mitch tries to imagine Morrie healthy, and realizes it's been 16 years since he saw Morrie standing. Mitch asks what Morrie would do if he had one day to be perfectly healthy. Morrie answers that he'd wake up, do his exercises, have a lovely breakfast, and then see friends in small groups for **lunch**. He'd then go for a walk and admire **nature**, and in the evening they'd go to a restaurant with good pasta and duck, and he'd **dance** with everyone, and then he'd go to sleep. Mitch finds this so simple and average, he feels a little disappointed. But he realizes that finding perfection in such an average day is the entire point.

Morrie's perfect day is completely average, and Mitch grasps the gravity of this. It takes being fully comfortable and happy with the culture he's created to structure his hypothetical perfect day in this way, where everything is average but simultaneously of elevated importance to his life. Notice too that all three of the book's positive symbols (nature, food, and dance) make an appearance in Morrie's perfect day.

Before Mitch leaves, Morrie asks if he can ask about Mitch's brother. Mitch doesn't know how Morrie knows his brother has been on his mind. Morrie says that it can hurt to not be with someone you love, but that Mitch needs to make peace with Peter's desires. Mitch thinks about Peter as a child and how full of life he was, and then thinks about the frail adult he is now. Mitch asks Morrie why Peter doesn't want to see him, and Morrie sighs. Morrie says there's no formula for relationships, but they have to be negotiated in loving ways, making room for both people. He says that in business, people negotiate to win, and suggests that Mitch is too used to that lifestyle. Morrie says that love is when you're as concerned about someone else's situation as you are about your own. Mitch feels helpless and like he sees all the death in the world. Morrie says that Mitch will find a way to his brother, saying that Mitch found his way back to Morrie.

Rather than discussing detachment and relationships as they pertain to his relationship with Morrie, here Morrie is encouraging Mitch to apply what he's learning to his other relationships with the goal of achieving a similar result. Morrie touches on the difference between what Mitch has been immersed in for the last 16 years and what he's learning now, making it very clear that treating relationships like business transactions won't work. We get the sense that Mitch may be as concerned about Peter as he is about himself, but is possibly just unable to show it in a productive way.

Morrie says that he heard a nice story the other day and recounts it to Mitch. The story is about a happy wave in the ocean who then notices that the waves in front are crashing into the shore, and panics when it realizes its fate. A second wave sees the first unhappy wave, asks what's wrong, and the first wave replies that they're all going to crash and become nothing. The second wave tells the first wave that it doesn't understand: it's not a wave; it's part of the ocean. Mitch smiles, watching Morrie breathe.

This references back to Mitch and Morrie's earlier discussions of reincarnation and life energy. The wave is one individual that's a part of a much larger entity, and Morrie is feeling more and more like a wave, in that he sees himself as an individual in a vast sea of humanity who will very soon cease to be an individual.

THE FOURTEENTH TUESDAY: WE SAY GOOD-BYE

The day before, Charlotte called Mitch to tell him that Morrie isn't doing well, but Morrie still wants Mitch to come visit. As Mitch walks up the path to Morrie's house, he notices all the **plants** and details as though he's seeing them for the first time. Connie answers the door and tells Mitch that Morrie isn't doing well at all. Charlotte comes down the hall, hugs Mitch, and tells him that Morrie is still asleep. Mitch helps Charlotte tidy the kitchen, putting the **food** he brought into the fridge. Mitch apologizes for bringing the food, but tells the reader that bringing it is a tradition at this point.

Mitch's thought about seeing the outside of Morrie's house mirrors Morrie's earlier statement about feeling like he's seeing nature for the first time, which provides a marker of Mitch's transformation. Mitch appears to fully understand the role of food—it's an offering and a tradition, brought simply for goodwill and friendship's sake, despite being practically useless for Morrie.

As he waits in the living room, Mitch picks up the **newspaper** and reads about two children who had shot each other with their fathers' guns, and a baby who had been found buried in a garbage can in Los Angeles. Finally, Charlotte comes and tells Mitch that Morrie is ready.

The newspaper contains stories of violent, senseless deaths of youth, which tragically contrasts with what is happening in Morrie's house—the death of a person who's live a long and full life.

Mitch sees a hospice nurse sitting at the end of the hall, and then notices that Morrie's office is empty. He turns around and sees that Morrie is in bed. Mitch hears Morrie's words, "when you're in bed, you're dead" in his head, but puts a smile on as he enters the bedroom. Morrie is having trouble speaking now, and Mitch takes Morrie's hand. Mitch notices that Morrie is unshaven, and wonders how Morrie's beard can continue to grow when the rest of him is dying.

Morrie's aphorism "when you're in bed, you're dead" is coming true. The hospice nurse indicates that Morrie could go at any time. Morrie's beard growth further proves Morrie's earlier point that aging is growth—parts of him are still growing and changing, and from what we know of Morrie, he's certainly still thinking and processing.

Morrie's speaking is labored and hard to understand, but he tells Mitch that Mitch is a good soul. Mitch replies that he doesn't know how to say goodbye. Morrie replies that this is how they say goodbye, and that he loves Mitch. Mitch says "I love you" back. Morrie begins to cry, and Mitch holds him and strokes his hair. When Morrie collects himself, Mitch says that he'll return next Tuesday and expects Morrie to be more alert. Morrie snorts, which is as close to a laugh as he can manage.

The disease has fully taken over Morrie's body. While he can still respond to some degree, it's contingent on Mitch's ability to read and respond to Morrie. This ability on Mitch's part, however, is indicative of his transformation. He is capable now of truly paying attention to Morrie, and he's capable of expressing love and emotion fully.

Mitch picks up his bag and kisses Morrie, holding the embrace longer than usual in case it makes Morrie happy. Mitch begins to cry as he pulls away, and Morrie raises his eyebrows at the sight. Mitch tells the reader he believes it was a brief moment of satisfaction for Morrie that he finally made Mitch cry.

We see in the climax that Morrie has accomplished his goal of imparting emotion and sensitivity to Mitch. Mitch seems unembarrassed at his tears. By crying, he's finally figured out how to say goodbye in a loving and meaningful way.

GRADUATION

Morrie died the following Saturday morning. He fell into a coma two days after Mitch's last visit. Both Rob and Jon were there with Charlotte and Charlotte's cousin. Morrie's family slept in shifts around his bed, and the one time everyone left the room to get coffee, Morrie died. Mitch tells the reader that he believes Morrie died like this on purpose, so that none of his family members would be haunted by his last breath like Morrie was haunted by the memories of his parents' deaths.

While we can't know for sure if Morrie died exactly the way he wanted to, he was able to create the environment for his family that he wished for. Remember how haunted Morrie was by both of his parents' deaths—the way Morrie dies eliminates surprise, shock, and the sense of cold that he himself had to experience.

The following week, Mitch attends the funeral. It's a damp and windy morning, and the sky is the color of **milk**. It's a small gathering, although hundreds of people wanted to attend. As Morrie's ashes are placed in the ground, Mitch looks around and thinks about Morrie talking about how beautiful this spot in the cemetery is. Mitch remembers Morrie telling Mitch to talk while Morrie listens, and Mitch tries it out in his head. Mitch thinks that the imagined conversation feels relatively natural, looks down at his watch, and sees that it's Tuesday.

The comparison of the sky to milk is perhaps a last nod to the symbol of food. The place that Morrie chose to be buried is a beautiful, natural spot, so his connection to nature can continue in death. The teacher/student relationship is brought to a conclusion as Mitch hears Morrie's voice in his head. He's internalized Morrie's lessons, and Mitch can now go on to be the teacher to others.

CONCLUSION

Stepping back from Morrie's story, Mitch tells the reader that he looks back at who he was before he reconnected with Morrie, and he wishes he could talk to that person and offer him some advice. Mostly, he wants to tell him to get on a plane and visit Morrie, before Morrie gets ALS and can no longer **dance**. Mitch says he knows he can't do this, but if Morrie taught him anything, it's that there's no such thing as too late.

Mitch is wishing he could be the teacher for his younger self now that he's completed Morrie's final class. However, because of Morrie's lessons, Mitch knows he can't, but he also knows he can continue changing for the better in the future.

A short while after Morrie's death, Mitch is able to reach his brother in Spain and the two have a long talk. Mitch tells Peter that he just wants to be in touch, and that he loves him. A few days later, Mitch receives a faxed letter from Peter, consisting of a few stories of what he'd been up to that week, ending by sharing that he has heartburn and diarrhea, and signing off "sore tush." Mitch laughs until he cries.

This concludes the subplot of Mitch's relationship with Peter, and Morrie's teachings are clearly being applied. Mitch is finally able to meet Peter where he is, and simply tell him he loves him. The power of these words is reinforced when Peter then chooses to reach back out to Mitch.

Stepping away from the narrative again, Mitch goes back to provide some more information on the book. Mitch says it was mostly Morrie's idea, and that he called the book their "final thesis." Morrie was excited that several publishers were interested, although he never got to meet any of them. However, the advance money paid some of Morrie's medical bills, which were enormous. Morrie enjoyed naming things, and while Mitch and Morrie were suggesting titles, Mitch suggested *Tuesdays with Morrie*. The title made Morrie blush.

Remember Morrie's prior insistence that he and Mitch continue to work on this project, even as he Morrie canceling other visitors. The fact that Morrie prioritizes his final thesis with Mitch over other engagements shows just how important teaching is to Morrie. Also note how philanthropic Mitch is with the money from the book—he's transformed for the better and is helping others, like Morrie would.

After Morrie's death, Mitchsays that he went through boxes of material from college and discovered a final paper from one of Morrie's classes. Mitch and Morrie had scribbled comments to each other on the front page, Mitch's beginning with, "dear coach," and Morrie's beginning with, "dear player." Mitch says that every time he reads those notes, he misses Morrie more.

Mitch is looking for more ways to experience and remember his relationship with Morrie. Using "coach" and "player" again shows how close Mitch and Morrie were, and again situates their relationship as a teaching/mentoring one.

Addressing the reader directly, Mitch asks if you've ever had a teacher who saw you as a raw, precious thing that could be polished with wisdom. He says that if you're lucky enough find such teachers, you'll always find your way back to them, whether it be in your head only or next to their bed.

This is the closing thought on the idea of teaching and the importance of teachers. It reinforces the idea of teaching as a cyclical relationship that students come back to, rather than just the one-way transfer of knowledge.

The last class of Morrie's life took place once a week on Tuesdays, next to a window where Morrie could watch his **hibiscus plant**. No books were required, and the subject was the meaning of life, taught from experience. Mitch says, finally, that the teaching goes on.

By reiterating the opening words of the book, Mitch brings its themes full circle. This mirrors the final idea that the teaching goes on—the reader has now completed the class and can go on to teach others.

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