

A Love for Life

Aim

• To stimulate students to read the book.

- 1 Ask students to name some different genres of books, and write their suggestions up on the board (these might include murder mystery, thriller, ghost story, adventure, horror, romance, science fiction, human interest). Tell students that the title of the book is *A Love for Life*, and ask them what genre they think the book might be. (They may say 'romance,' since the word 'love' is in the title.) Tell them that the genre of the book is human interest, and ask them what they think this means (a book about relationships).
- 2 Ask students to read the Blurb (on handout opposite; teach 'blurb' if necessary). Divide the class into pairs and ask them to discuss and make notes about:
 - a What Rod's problems might be.
 - b What choices and discoveries Fanella might make.
 Pairs should then share these ideas with the whole class.
Optional extra: Students could use their notes to devise role plays, using either Rod or Fanella's situation, or both. These could then be performed in front of the whole class.
- 3 Ask students to read the Blurb again, then, working in different pairs, ask them to discuss and make notes about how the story could be changed into a different genre. (They should pick one of the genres previously identified in stage 1, or, alternatively, you could allocate a different genre to different pairs.) These ideas should then be shared with the whole class.
- 4 Ask students to read Extract 1, which is the beginning of the book. Divide the class into pairs and ask them to discuss what they think has happened immediately before this. Then, working alone, they should write a prologue for the book. (Teach 'prologue' if necessary – an introduction to the book, a passage to capture your imagination before the story really gets going.) When they have finished their writing, ask them to read out their work to their partner, and, if they are brave enough, to the whole class. Discuss the similarities between people's ideas.
- 5 Ask students to read Extracts 2 and 3. Tell students that in *A Love for Life* we mainly experience the story through either Fanella's (Extract 2) or Rod's (Extract 3) viewpoint, although we do also occasionally see events through Teresa's (Fanella's friend) viewpoint too. Ask them what 'seeing something from someone's viewpoint' means.
Suggested answer: We see things as if we are looking through that character's eyes and have access to their thoughts.
 Ask them for examples of books or films that have only one viewpoint and have more than one viewpoint. Do they think having one viewpoint is more powerful, or do they prefer more than one?
- 6 Ask students to read Extract 4 and point out to them that it is written from Fanella's viewpoint. Ask them to rewrite the extract, but this time from Rod's viewpoint – we must only know what Rod is thinking, although the events in

the extract should remain the same. When they have finished writing, ask them to find a partner to read their work to. Their partner should give them feedback on how successful their switch of viewpoint is.

- 7 Continuing with the theme of viewpoints and having access to characters' thoughts, ask students to read Extract 5, which is about Fanella's adoptive daughter Ellie's first morning at Fanella's house. Ask students to write down what they think Ellie might be thinking as she wakes up in her new bedroom in her new home.
- 8 Ask students to read Extract 6, where Fanella is interviewed by a social worker to see if she is suitable to become an adoptive parent. Working in pairs, ask students to discuss what questions the social worker is likely to want to ask Fanella in order to make the decision about her suitability. They should write these questions down.

Example answers: How can Fanella afford to look after a child? Does she have experience with children? What problems does she think she may encounter and how will she deal with them? Who will look after the child when Fanella is at work?

Next, divide the class into two groups – social workers and prospective adoptive parents. The social workers should team up with one of the adoptive parents to ask their questions, and the adoptive parents should answer as if they are really interested in adopting a child. The groups should then swap over, so that the social workers become adoptive parents and the adoptive parents become social workers.

- 9 Ask students whether they think it is right to allow single people to become adoptive parents. Divide the class into three groups – those who think it is right, those who think it is wrong, and a neutral audience. Hold a debate to discuss the reasons for and against single people becoming adoptive parents, then, after a set period of time, ask the audience to vote on the issue.
- 10 Tell students that by now they will have realised that *A Love for Life* is quite an emotional book. Ask them for suggestions of what emotions the characters in the book might experience and write these on pieces of paper or ask the students to write them.

Suggested answers: hope, love, despair, sadness, joy, fear, disappointment, etc.

Now widen the discussion to include any other emotions the students can think of until there are lots of emotions written on pieces of paper. Stick some coloured pieces of paper on the board or the walls or alternatively write the names of colours onto pieces of paper. Now give out the pieces of paper with emotions written on them and ask the students to take it in turns to place them beneath the colour they think is most appropriate for that emotion. Encourage class discussion for each emotion – do they agree with the colour that has been chosen? Some emotions will be easier to place than others (e.g. red for anger, green for envy or jealousy, etc.), but what colour would the class choose for love?

- 11 If there are enough copies of *A Love for Life* for everyone, give them out and ask students to start reading.

A Love for Life

Blurb

Fanella bravely faces the challenge of adopting a child alone after her partner leaves her. But then Rod, a teacher who has problems of his own, comes into her life. Fanella has difficult choices and exciting discoveries to make.

Extract 1

‘Teresa, I wondered if I could come round to see you. Something’s happened.’

It was eight o’clock on a Monday evening. It wasn’t the best time to telephone a friend with a young child. But this was a crisis and Fanella needed to speak to Teresa urgently.

‘Of course you can come round,’ said Teresa, ‘if you don’t mind giving Timothy a good night kiss. He’d be furious if he thought you’d been here and he hadn’t seen you.’

Fanella smiled, swallowing back tears. She loved Teresa’s little boy, but right now it was going to be difficult to see him. ‘I’ll be there in about ten minutes,’ she said.

Extract 2

Fanella went into the kitchen. She was suddenly feeling very emotional. Ordinary parents didn’t have to go through this exhausting procedure – it just didn’t seem fair. All she knew was that she loved children and had the love to give a child who needed a parent. Everything else seemed irrelevant.

Extract 3

Rod woke up to the sound of the alarm clock. It was a Tuesday morning in September. The first day back at school after the long summer break.

He rolled over and looked at his beautiful wife. He admired her as she lay, still half asleep, on the white sheets beside him. It would be nice to stay in bed and spend the morning with her. But he had to be at school in time to prepare the day, before the children arrived at nine o’clock.

Extract 4

Rod glanced at her nervously. ‘Do you fancy a quick walk along the river?’ he asked. ‘I could do with a bit of fresh air. Can we take some time off?’

Fanella hesitated. ‘Well, it is my lunch hour now, so I guess I could go out for a bit. Yes, OK,’ she said.

Despite his quiet mood, she still felt that invisible force which pulled her towards him. She was no more able to refuse an invitation for a walk with him than she would have been able to turn down the offer of a cold drink on a hot day.

She took her coat and followed him down the stairs and out into the windy May morning.

Extract 5

A couple of months later, Fanella’s wish had become a reality. On the first morning after Ellie moved in with her, Fanella awoke, hardly able to believe there was a child in the second bedroom.

It was still early and only just getting light, but she got up and crept across the landing to look in at the bedroom door. Ellie’s untidy hair covered the pillow. Her face, which displayed such adult expressions by day, was smooth and line-free in sleep. She looked almost like a baby, with her round cheeks, and Fanella had the urge to kiss her. But she didn’t, not wanting to wake her from her peaceful sleep.

Extract 6

The social worker was a thin woman, wearing grey clothes and with long grey hair tied up on top of her head. She stepped into Fanella’s sitting room and immediately looked around, taking in the details of the small room.

‘It’s not a very big room,’ she said. ‘Have you imagined how much smaller it would feel, filled with children’s toys? Children need space to move about too,’ she added.

Fanella felt herself getting annoyed straight away. As if she hadn’t thought about this! ‘My friend’s little boy loves playing here,’ she said. ‘He often comes with lots of toys and makes a whole world in here with roads and mountains and a garage.’ She stopped, aware that she was sounding defensive.

The social worker didn’t say anything, but quickly wrote something down. Fanella took a deep breath.

‘Would you like tea, or coffee?’ she asked, trying to relax.

‘Coffee, white, two sugars,’ said the social worker, sitting down on the sofa and continuing to write.