

One Day Study Guide

One Day by David Nicholls (writer)

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

One Day Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1 - 8.....	4
Chapter 9 - 16.....	8
Chapter 17 - 23.....	11
Characters.....	13
Objects/Places.....	16
Themes.....	18
Style.....	20
Quotes.....	22
Topics for Discussion.....	23

Plot Summary

"One Day" is a romantic novel by David Nicholls that spans the breadth of twenty years of the lives of Emma Morley and Dexter Mayhew.

Meeting in college, Dexter and Emma have a one-night stand in Edinburgh and spend the day after together. The evening has lasting implications for both of them, as each falls for the other, but neither one, for various reasons, is poised to commit to the other. For the next twenty years, their paths cross time and time again, between bad relationships, failed start-ups, heartache, loss, and joy. Emma and Dexter each have their ups and downs. Emma struggles with her self-confidence and having to dream a little smaller while Dexter faces internal demons in drugs and alcohol. Dexter even gets married and has a daughter, but the marriage is loveless.

Following Dexter's divorce, Dexter and Emma finally commit to a relationship in 2001 in Paris. They spend the next two years together happily. Dexter opens a cafe and gets his life back on track, while Emma comes into her own as a novelist and a screenwriter for a children's show. They move in together and get married. They also decide to have a baby. But tragedy strikes. While biking and heading out to meet Dexter at the house they want to look at to buy, Emma is struck by a car and killed.

The novel ends with Dexter reflecting on the first night and day that he and Emma spent together when he gives his phone number to Emma so that she will call him and stay in touch.



Chapter 1 - 8

Chapter 1 - 8 Summary

On Rankeillor Street in Edinburgh, Scotland, Dexter Mayhew and Emma Morley lay in bed, talking about future plans after college. Emma asks Dexter where he thinks he'll be when he's forty, and Dexter replies that he hopes he is rich or famous -or both. Emma, a native of Yorkshire, thinks that being famous sounds morbid. Emma wants to change the world somehow. Emma dreams aloud about the future, about Dexter having had three divorces and no children. But Dexter wants an uncomplicated life of success, and he is worried that the one-night stand with Emma will have bad repercussions. Though they have known each other for four years, they really don't know too much about each other. In fact, Dexter has believed Emma's name to be "Anna" until that evening.

Emma is working for Sledgehammer Theater Cooperative on the play "Cruel Cargo", about slavery. Emma works with a kid named Sid, who hates the job, and is very nervous about the production. The year between graduation and the theater is spent with false starts and chance encounters with Dexter here and there. Dexter had opted not to stay in China, but to travel for a year to various party towns. She and Dexter write to one another as they go. Emma now desires to be an actress, and to be in bed with Dexter.

Dexter, meanwhile, is in Rome, teaching English and chasing girls, including his own students, one of which is named Tove. Dexter goes to meet his mother, Alison, at a cafe in the Piazza della Rotunda. Dexter's father, Stephen, is in the hotel with heat sickness. Alison asks her son about his love life, and wonders whatever happened to Emma Morley. She also wonders about his future, and Dexter says he plans to stay in Rome until October. Alison asks his son if he intends to pursue journalism or photography, and when he plans to settle down. Dexter doesn't see the need to rush. Alison is drunk, and Dexter doesn't know why, and she says she will tell him the following day.

Emma is in India, near the Taj Mahal, working at a Tex-Mex restaurant headed up by Scott McKenzie. Scott introduces a new member of the team, Ian Whitehead, and asks Emma to show him the ropes. Ian asks Emma out, but Emma declines. In a letter to Emma from Dexter, Dexter tells her he thinks she is afraid to be happy. Dexter tells her in the letter to meet him at the Taj Mahal on August 1. Dexter has the need to see Emma, but he can't figure out why.

Emma is still working at the Tex-Mex place with Ian and Scott. Scott is moving on to head up a new chain of contemporary Italian places, and has to appoint a successive manager before he leaves. Emma is given the job, but wants the night to think it over. Emma feels as if her life is going nowhere. Two years since college, she has done nothing. But her depression is momentarily stopped when Dexter shows up with what appears to be his current girlfriend. Dexter is happy to see her, and wants to buy Emma a drink, but Emma can't because she is working.



Dexter has been working at Redlight Productions for a weekend magazine program on television, about youth culture, drugs, diseases, music, and so on. He has abandoned the idea of being a photographer because he thinks it would have been too much struggle. Dexter and Emma meet up again later, and Dexter explains that the girl he was with wasn't his girlfriend. The two catch up. Dexter has been drinking more and more, and Emma hasn't had any movement in her love life. She has given up on the idea of being in a relationship with Dexter. Dexter thinks she should come to work for Redlight, and offers to marry her when she is 40 if she is still single. Emma doesn't want to be married.

Dexter and Emma devise rules for their meetings, such as no nudity, sleeping in separate bedrooms, and so on. They are currently headed to Greece on vacation together. Dexter has become a TV presenter, and he has become easily recognizable to people. He finds he enjoys being on camera. In Greece, Dexter claims to have only been able to find a single room for them. Dexter discovers he is still very attracted to Emma. They head out to the beach, only to discover belatedly that it is a nude beach. Dexter wants to go nude, but Emma is reluctant. Back at the room, Emma sees Dexter nude while showering. He watches her get dressed.

Emma decides the two should tell secrets to the other about themselves, or they will run out of things to talk about in eight days. Dexter reveals he once mistakenly kissed a guy while drunk at a club. Emma reveals she wrote poetry about Dexter in college. That night, after dinner, they go skinny-dipping in the ocean. Dexter tries to get Emma to have a fling with him, but she will have none of it. While they are swimming, Dexter's clothes are stolen, but his wallet remains on the beach. He is angry because his underpants were expensive.

Dexter's fame continues to grow, and he is back in the United Kingdom, in England. He and his former roommate, Callum O'Neill, are at a club. Callum is a self-made man, getting wealthy from refurbishing computers. He drinks very little and does no drugs at all, which is a rarity at the upscale club they attend. Dexter drinks copiously and does drugs frequently. Dexter meets a girl named Tara, whom he at once moves to seduce. Dexter suddenly finds himself thinking of Emma, and how much he wants to see her. Back at his room, Dexter no longer wants Tara, who is much older than he thought without the effects of the drugs.

Emma is living in Earl's Court, drinks moderately, and looks after her health. She is now twenty-seven and wonders if she is getting old. She is closer with her family, and has a postgraduate degree in Education so she can teach. Dexter, meanwhile, goes to visit his parents. Dexter's father, Stephen, can smell the alcohol on his breath, and is not amused. He sends Dexter to the garden to see Alison, who is suffering from cancer and has lost her hair to chemotherapy. Dexter brings along a gift of paperbacks for his mother from Emma, and his mother is happy to talk about Emma. His mother disapproves of the way Dexter conducts his show, for example, telling viewers to find Britain's ugliest girlfriend. She wants him to do something good. Dexter helps her to her room to nap, and he also goes to nap.



Later in the day, Dexter and Alison talk some more. She tells her son that he has it in him to be an exceptional young man, and she is worried he isn't very nice anymore. Dexter's father drives him to the train station afterwards, but tells him if he ever returns to the house in such a state, he will not let Dexter inside. Dexter is speechless.

Ian Whitehead has become a standup comedian, but the fame and fortune have not yet come to him. He meets Emma at the Convent Garden branch of Forelli's. This is their second date. Emma has had her first job interview for teaching, and Ian is very happy for her. Emma and Ian get drunk, and they pay for dinner and leave. Emma decides to spend the night with Ian. All the while, Dexter calls Emma, but Emma is not home.

Ian and Emma are in a relationship. Emma is a school teacher at Cromwell Road Comprehensive School, and tonight she is overseeing a production of "Oliver!". Dexter, meanwhile, is preparing to begin his own television show, one that will be broadcast live. He is feeling nervous, and wishes Emma was around to talk to, but she is not available the way she used to be, and Dexter is resentful of this. At the school, Emma has to moderate a fight between two cast members. Dexter does the show drunk, while Emma's show is a resounding success. Dexter's cohost, Suki Meadows, steals the show, and she and Dexter agree to work together better for the next show.

Chapter 1 - 8 Analysis

The one-night stand that Emma Morley and Dexter Mayhew share is anything but one night, and anything but ordinary. It is the beginning of a twenty-year friendship that will ultimately blossom into real romance. For the moment, Emma and Dexter are two normal, average twenty-something kids. Emma is a wide-eyed dreamer who wants to change the world, even if it is only a part of the world that she changes. Dexter, in typical fashion, wants a quiet, uninterrupted life, and to be famous in the process. Emma believes that being famous is a bit of a morbid thing, and Dexter can't imagine being anything ordinary. The feelings that Emma and Dexter have for one another linger, but they cannot order them to be with one another for the next several years.

The tragic is also typical among Emma and Dexter. They are truly two normal kids who want to grow up and do wonderful things with their lives, but that is also the tragedy: youthful dreams are immeasurable and uncontainable. The reader, no matter what age, will sympathize with the aspirations of Emma and Dexter.

While Emma attempts to get her career underfoot, Dexter spends the next year traveling the world and chasing girls, ultimately ending up in Rome. His relationship with his parents seems to be slightly fractious, as they press Dexter to commit to something and to get his life on track. But Dexter is still drifting, still searching for something -but what, he doesn't know yet.

Emma, meanwhile, failing to achieve all of her dreams, believes she is already a failure. Immediately, she has given up on herself and her dreams, believing that her life has come to nothing. Just as quickly as young adults can dream about the stars, so too do



they fall as quickly. As Dexter continues to travel over the next few years, he and Emma continue meeting up; they are growing apart, and they are growing closer as well. Eventually, both Emma and Dexter end up settling for two jobs. Emma's can be considered normal and mainstream -a teacher- while Dexter ends up hosting a popular late-night television show. With that show come the fame and wealth and popularity that Dexter is craving, but his dependency on drugs and alcohol put his reputation in danger from the first show.

While Dexter is struggling to get his bearings straight, he looks around at his former classmates, such as Callum, who are becoming successes in their own right. Callum, for example, doesn't do drugs or drink, and he has made a small fortune refurbishing computers. Hardwork and determination have paid off for Callum. It is a model for Dexter, but Dexter rejects it in favor of pleasurable and quick pursuits, for he has the stars within reach.



Chapter 9 - 16

Chapter 9 - 16 Summary

Emma begins writing another novel, a feminist crime story. Ian is very supportive of Emma and everything she does, while Emma has little faith in herself. Emma, likewise, has little faith in what she is doing with Ian. She realizes she is trying to build a life with a man whom she does not love. Dexter, meanwhile, is suffering from melancholy, and tries to mix music like a DJ to heal the depression, but it does not work. Dexter is toying with the idea of becoming an actor, or beginning his own production company. Emma also wonders why she is still friends with Dexter, and wonders why she doesn't let the friendship just die out. Nevertheless, she goes to dinner with him. Dexter is a little bitter despite all of his successes. Dexter is also slightly condescending with Emma's position as a teacher. Emma storms out of the restaurant, and Dexter races to catch up with her.

Emma is horrified that Dexter is drunk all the time, and Dexter just wants to talk. Emma tells her she loves him, but doesn't like him anymore. She then goes home to Ian.

Emma is now sleeping with Phil Godalming, the principal of the school who is married. It is an affair that began following Emma's rejection of Ian's marriage proposal. But now the excitement of the affair is fading, and at thirty, Emma seems to have no prospects. At home, Ian is waiting for her. Her rejection has sent him over the edge. He is out of work, scruffy, and angry. They shout at each other about love, and then both end up crying, after which Ian leaves. Emma decides to call Dexter the following day, having not had contact with him in months.

Dexter is fired from his late night television program for someone younger and more together. Dexter has to clean himself up and fix his image and heal his reputation. Emma and her old college friend, Stephanie Shaw, go to meet a publisher to whom Stephanie has given Emma's work. Marsha, the publisher, doesn't much care that Emma is a teacher. She mistakenly believes Emma is applying for the position of a nanny, because Marsha has canceled her appointment with Emma. Emma is humiliated, and leaves. Marsha tries to cheer her up, but Emma is inconsolable. It causes Emma to break things off with Phil and to quit her job as a teacher.

Dexter falls in love with a beautiful girl named Sylvie Cope, and meets her family over food. Sylvie brags about Dexter's production company, which has barely gotten off the ground. While playing a game, Dexter accidentally injures Sylvie, which horrifies the rest of the family. Dexter feels as though he is a failure once more. But he laughs, thinking he will have to tell Emma about everything one day.

Wedding invitations come in droves for Emma. Emma is not a very good driver, but she has her first car -a Fiat Panda- and is making the journey to the wedding of Tilly Killick and Malcolm Tidewell in Somerset. It is a wedding that Dexter will also be attending with Sylvie. Many of their old college friends, such as Callum, are there. Following the



ceremony at Church, everyone moves to the lawn where the reception is being held, and the conversations among the old friends turn from memories to weight gain. Callum has started a natural food chain, and offers Dexter a job. Dexter is hesitant. Emma, meanwhile, catches up with her friend Miffy, who talks about how successful their friends are.

Dexter and Emma decide to go through a maze at the estate where the wedding is being held. Emma is writing a novel based on her experiences with the school play "Oliver!". Emma and Dexter are now thirty-four, and Dexter knows he is running out of time to make excuses for being a screw-up. Dexter reveals to Emma he is actually engaged now, to be married to Sylvie. Sylvie is pregnant. Emma and Dexter share a cigarette. Emma begins crying because she feels as though she will be losing Dexter again, to family and responsibilities. Dexter doesn't think so.

Baby Jasmine Alison Viola Mayhew is born in January. Dexter's joblessness is a source of contempt between himself and Sylvie. Nevertheless, they move to Surrey. They live off of Sylvie's family's wealth. Dexter finally takes a job as a supervisor for Callum's company, and Sylvie begins spending more and more time at her parents' house. Though Dexter will be an executive within a month, he has to do the grunt work, as Callum requires of any executive in his company. While Sylvie goes out for a night with her friends, Dexter takes care of Jasmine and watches the house. Dexter's drinking is mostly in check now.

Stephanie Shaw is now married, and Emma is the Godmother of her baby. Emma wonders when she will get married and give birth, and wonders how much she'll love the child. Dexter is now drunk, and calls up Suki, but Suki doesn't want to talk to him. Jasmine cries upstairs, and no matter what Dexter does, he cannot get her to stop crying. Dexter gives Jasmine some medicine, and puts on music from a compilation CD made by Emma one year before. Emma is Jasmine's Godmother as well. Sylvie calls to check in on Dexter and Jasmine, and the reader learns that Sylvie is actually having an affair with Callum.

Dexter meets Emma in Paris. Emma is now a full-fledged novelist. They are happy to see each other. Emma has cut her hair, hoping to be bold, but was unhappy with how shortly it had been cut. Dexter is now divorced. Emma's book is doing wonderfully. Dexter has also, accordingly, quit his job with Callum. Emma is very supportive of Dexter getting his life back on track. Dexter is less than confident about himself. Dexter will be staying at Emma's apartment flat. There, they begin kissing, but Emma stops him, because she is seeing a man named Jean-Pierre. Dexter is jealous and hurt, hoping to have finally begun something of a relationship with Emma. Emma, Jean-Pierre, and Dexter are all going out to eat at eight, and Dexter is not happy about it. But Emma cancels on Jean-Pierre, and commits herself to Dexter.

One year later, Emma and Dexter are still together, and Dexter wants both of them to move in together. At Emma's insistence, and with financial help from Stephen, Dexter opens a food shop and cafe. They decide to call it Belleville Cafe. Dexter relishes in the work, and is finally proud of himself for the first time in years. Emma, meanwhile,



oversees one of her books being turned into a television show, and is working on her next book, and is replying to fan e-mails and letters. While Callum and Sylvie are on vacation, Jasmine will be staying with Dexter. Dexter has emerged to be a wonderful father as well.

Chapter 9 - 16 Analysis

Emma discovers, over time, that she wants to be a novelist, and she begins writing novels. It is a pursuit that she is unsure of, but one which Ian encourages her to pursue. Yet, Emma discovers she is not in love with Ian, and in so doing, rejects his proposal of marriage. Dexter, meanwhile, continues drinking as his fame (and notorious reputation) grow. Dexter is very condescending toward Emma for being a teacher, which causes a coldness between the two of them.

Emma's own life appears to hit a brick wall when she becomes involved in an extramarital affair with Phil Godalming. She realizes her life is going nowhere, and endeavors to make a change. Too much of her life has passed her by, she knows. Readers will again connect here with Emma's character, for her struggles and her trials as she tries to figure out her life -just as the readers may have done, or are in the middle of doing.

Incidentally, just as Emma's life begins to look up, Dexter's life begins a nosedive. His reputation, bad attitude, and drugs and drinking have finally caught up with him. He is fired from his job as late-night host, and he appears without any prospects, until he meets Sylvia, who sets him back on course. Dexter begins dreaming once more, seeking to begin his own production company, but his drinking and deviant ways do not allow him the motivation and the ability to do so. At the same time, Sylvia becomes pregnant, and Dexter agrees to marry her, hoping for a quiet family life. Wedding invitations from all of Emma and Dexter's college friends pour into their mailboxes, as do birth announcements. This gets Emma thinking about the future, and wondering when she will be married and have her own children.

Dexter's marriage is loveless, however, and when Sylvia has an affair, and divorce ensues, Dexter seeks out Emma. Years of intentional and chance encounters, heartache, and joy, have all seeming brought both Emma and Dexter to each other. Their lives have mirrored one another, have branched away from the other, but have ultimately returned to be intertwined. There is a great metaphysical, metaphorical element to the idea that Dexter and Emma end up together. They have been searching for two decades for some modicum of peace, of stability, to find out what they must do with their lives. The search for life is also a search for love, and love proves to be the metaphysical element, while the metaphorical concept of searching is clearly present. Indeed, they have been searching their whole lives for each other.



Chapter 17 - 23

Chapter 17 - 23 Summary

Emma and Dexter are now engaged. Emma is proud of Dexter, and proud to have him meet her family. They holiday at a cottage in North Yorkshire, where Dexter begins working on his wedding vows.

Dexter realizes he is slowly getting old, between more hair on his face and gray hairs on his head. He is also gaining some weight. He and Emma are trying to have a baby. They also take opposing points of view on the Iraq War. Emma is to the left politically, while Dexter is to the right. Dexter is also much more apathetic toward politics, while Emma is enmeshed in them. Dexter is unhappy as well at the thought of turning forty in two weeks. They agree to meet later to view a house. In a rainstorm, riding her bike to the address, Emma is killed when she is hit by a car.

The morning after their first night together, Emma discovers Dexter is getting ready to leave, having not wanted to wake her. They decide to spend the day together.

Ian Whitehead writes Dexter a letter, telling him that Emma would have wanted him to move on, and get his life in order. Dexter is drunk on the anniversary of Emma's death. He goes to a strip club, gets thrown out violently. It is Sylvie who takes care of Dexter after the bar, as does Dexter's father, who brings Dexter to his house and takes care of him.

Emma suggests she, Dexter, and Tilly climb Arthur's Seat, a large hill. Tilly can't go, and so Emma and Dexter go alone. Dexter is impressed with the view.

Dexter has now been seeing Maddy, the manager of the cafe, for two months. Dexter has moved into a new flat, but is still resoundingly sad. Dexter goes through Emma's old things, and finds old photographs and memorabilia. One of them is a photograph of them both at Arthur's Seat.

Dexter, Maddy, and Jasmine are in Edinburgh for a holiday. Dexter brings Jasmine around the city, and shows her Arthur's Seat, bringing her up to the top of the hill. It causes Dexter to reflect on the afternoon with Emma. Following the hillside adventure, Dexter's parents, who have arrived to pick him up, invite Emma out to dinner, but Emma declines. Dexter then gives her his phone number, and tells her to call him.

Chapter 17 - 23 Analysis

As if anything else could happen, not only do Dexter and Emma end up together, they get married and seek to have children. They are opposites in many ways, but strikingly similar in others. While Dexter appears to be right-of-center politically, Emma is clearly left-of-center. Dexter is more reserved and rational about certain things, while Emma is



more passionate and lively. Nevertheless, Dexter and Emma support one another, and watch out for the other, no matter what. Consider Emma's unfailing support in Dexter's decision to open up a cafe.

Just as Dexter and Emma are about to enter middle age, and begin a new phase in their lives, Emma is killed in a freak accident when a car hits her while she is riding her bike to meet Dexter. All of the happiness that they have shared for two years -and most of their lives- has suddenly ended. The consequences of Emma's death, and the immensity of love that existed between them, is discovered in the downfall that Dexter experiences after her passing. What existed between Emma and Dexter was clearly not just friendship, but real love.

The reader is here reminded of Dexter's promise to marry Emma when she is 40, if she is still single. Emma is 39 and married when she dies. The irony is not only tragic, but heart-wrenching as well.

By the end of the novel, Dexter and his father have come to terms, with Dexter's father caring for him in the middle of his depression. The love of family is further contrasted between the love of father and daughter -Dexter and Jasmine- and the love of Dexter and Emma, as shown in the Arthur's Seat episode at the end of the book. Indeed, Dexter's single act of giving Emma his phone number, and asking her to call him, will set the rest of their lives on a course for the other.



Characters

Dexter Mayhew

Dexter Mayhew is one of the two main characters in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls. Dexter is the son of Alison and Stephen Mayhew, and is from a family of wealth. Dexter is thin and handsome when the novel begins, and has an appetite for girls and for fame. He has a one-night stand with Emma Morley while at university in Edinburgh, unaware that the encounter will change the rest of his life.

For the next twenty years, Dexter and Emma keep in touch by letters, emails as well as chance and intentional encounters. Dexter, though, from the start, has serious problems. He has a meteoric rise to fame in the television industry, doing late-night shows that make him all the rage with young people and teenagers. Dexter's rise to fame is accompanied by heavy drinking and drug use, as well as a slew of relationships that never last. Yet, Dexter still retains feelings for Emma, and tries to have a fling with her while dating another woman. Eventually, Dexter's reputation catches up with him, and he loses his job doing late-night show hosting. Dexter's relationship with his father is cold, because his father disapproves of his lifestyle. Dexter's mother soon after dies of cancer.

Dexter nevertheless begins a new relationship with a beautiful girl named Sylvie Cole, whose family is wealthy and suspect of Dexter. Dexter and Sylvie eventually agree to marry, because Sylvie is pregnant with a baby girl whom they name Jasmine Alison. From the start, however, the marriage is loveless, and Dexter's drinking problems come back to haunt him time and again. Sylvie, ironically, ends up having an affair with Callum McNeill, Dexter's old roommate from college. The affair ends the marriage, and sends Dexter to Paris to see Emma.

In Paris, Emma and Dexter begin a real relationship, continuing it on back in England, and they agree not only to move in with one another, but to get married and have children. Emma helps Dexter get his life together, and open a cafe, while Emma becomes a well-received novelist. While biking to meet Dexter to house hunt, Emma is killed when a car hits her. The loss of Emma sends Dexter over the edge, on a downward spiral. Ironically, it is his ex-wife and his father who help Dexter get back on his feet. A few years later, Dexter falls in love with Maddy, who works at the cafe, and the novel closes with Dexter bringing his daughter to see the sights of Edinburgh.

Emma Morley

Emma Morley is one of the two main characters in David Nicholl's novel "One Day". She is described as young, passionate, politically left-wing, and a dreamer. She has a good relationship with her parents, but she insists on not living at home. She is pretty and kind, but lacks self-confidence, a characteristic which shows and is ultimately corrected



in part by Dexter's interest in her. She and Dexter sleep together one night, an event which will change the rest of both of their lives.

For the following twenty years, Emma and Dexter keep in touch with each other, exchanging letters, postcards, e-mails, phone calls, and visiting one another in person. Emma retains feelings for Dexter long after college. She becomes a teacher and an aspiring novelist, and has an unhappy affair with the principal of her school. She watches with sadness the life of Dexter, helping him where she can. She is saddened to learn that he is engaged to be married to Sylvia, but sadder still to hear of the divorce. While in Paris, she invites him to spend the weekend with her, and the two begin a real relationship that ultimately leads to marriage.

Emma's career as a novelist takes off, and she helps Dexter to get his own life back on track, and to open a cafe which becomes very successful and very popular in culinary circles.

On the cusp of turning 40, Emma and Dexter decide that they will buy a house, and have children. On the way to meet Dexter to look at a house, Emma is hit by a car, and killed. Her loss is felt deeply by Dexter, which sends him over the edge into a binge of drinking and poor behavior. Yet Emma's memory helps Dexter to cope, and he is finally able to get on with his life and remarry years later.

Alison Mayhew

Alison Mayhew is the wife of Stephen Mayhew, and mother of Dexter Mayhew. Alison is described as a drinker, but also as a wonderful, caring mother. Alison counsels her son, telling him to make sure his life is on track, and advises him that he should go for Emma. Alison contracts cancer a few years into the book, and later dies. The loss is felt deeply by Dexter and Stephen.

Stephen Mayhew

Stephen Mayhew is the husband of Alison Mayhew, and father of Dexter Mayhew. Although Stephen and Dexter do not get along well throughout much of the novel -mostly because of Dexter's horrendous lifestyle- Stephen proves to be a competent and capable father by caring for his son following the death of Emma. Stephen helps get Dexter back on his feet, and cautions his son to live as though Emma were still with them.

Ian Whitehead

Ian Whitehead is the former boyfriend of Emma Morley, having met her while they both worked at a Tex-Mex restaurant in India. Ian is kind and caring, and aspires to be a standup comedian. He has a relationship with Emma, and proposes marriage to her, but



she rejects it. Ian becomes bitter, but does find love again. When Emma dies, Ian writes to Dexter, telling him that Emma would want him to live and marry again.

Sylvie Cole

Sylvie Cole is the love interest of, and first wife of Dexter Mayhew. She falls in love with Dexter after his fall from fame, and seeks to build a life with him, but she is concerned about his unemployment and his drinking. Nevertheless, the two marry when Sylvie becomes pregnant. Soon after, the marriage dissolves when Sylvie has an affair with Callum McNeill. At the end of the novel, though they are divorced, Sylvie helps take care of Dexter, getting him to his father.

Suki Meadows

Suki Meadows is a famous late-night television star. She is also the former girlfriend of Dexter and a co-host with him on the television show. But Dexter's infidelity and carelessness, as well as his lifestyle, lead to the end of their relationship.

Stephanie Shaw

Stephanie Shaw is the college friend of Emma. Stephanie arranges to have Emma's work reviewed by her boss, a publisher.

Jasmine Mayhew

Jasmine Mayhew is the daughter of Sylvia Cole and Dexter Mayhew. She is treasured and well-cared for her by her parents, especially Dexter. Dexter brings Jasmine to Edinburgh to tell her about Emma.

Callum O'Neill

Callum McNeill is the college roommate of Dexter. Callum is serious and career-driven, and becomes a self-made man. He has an affair with Sylvie Cole, which leads to the break up of Dexter's marriage.



Objects/Places

Edinburgh, Scotland

Edinburgh, Scotland, is the university town where Dexter and Emma attend school. It is where they meet and have their one-night stand. It is the city to which Dexter brings Jasmine to remember Emma.

Rome, Italy

Rome, Italy, is where Dexter travels to live and teach students English. He has numerous affairs there, including with students.

England

England is where Dexter and Emma spend most of their lives and get married. It is where Emma dies following being struck by a car.

India

India is where Emma travels following college. She works at a Tex-Mex place there, and meets Ian Whitehead, who will later become her boyfriend.

Paris, France

Paris, France, is where Emma travels as a fledgling novelist. It is in Paris that Dexter comes to visit her, and the two begin a real relationship.

North Yorkshire, England

North Yorkshire is where Dexter and Emma travel on holiday while engaged. It is where Dexter composes his wedding vows.

Belsize Park, London

Belsize Park, London, is where Emma and Dexter live together and prepare to buy a house. It is also the area of London where Emma is killed.



Letters/E-mails

Letters and e-mails are written and exchanged by Emma and Dexter as a way to stay in touch with one another following their one-night stand in Edinburgh. They exchange countless letters and e-mails through the years.

Books

Books are voraciously consumed by both Emma and Dexter as they leave college. Books become a talking point between both of them; and Emma ends up becoming a novelist and writing books.

Phone Number

Following their one-night stand, Dexter gives Emma his phone number, and tells her to call him. The phone number is how Emma will stay in touch with Dexter, and how the two will remain in touch for the next two decades.

Themes

Love

Of the three major themes in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls, the theme of love is the most resounding and dominant. It affects the lives of each of the characters in the novel, especially that of Dexter and Emma, whose entire existence is predicated upon a slowly unfolding love for each other. Indeed, the entire novel is a love story between Dexter and Emma -though it is a belated love story.

At the beginning of the novel, love doesn't factor into the consciousnesses of either Dexter or Emma. Both believe their one-night stand to be a one-night stand, but both impress the other enough so that one cannot get the other off his or her mind. The nascent romance between Dexter and Emma begins as a casual friendship that grows and grows. Both Dexter and Emma are searching for themselves -and for love- in the novel. Emma believes she may have found love on more than one occasion, including with Ian Whitehead, but only discovers that it is not really love at all. Dexter also searches for love, believing he may have found something in Sylvia Cole, but his assumptions are wrong when Sylvia commits to an affair with Dexter's old college roommate.

Slowly but surely, Emma and Dexter are drawn to one another, to realize each has loved the other all along. The love they share is genuine and lasting. It is evidenced by Emma's care for Dexter when he is down on his luck, and the lengths she goes to to help him get back on his feet. Dexter pushes aside his listless lifestyle in order to settle down with Emma, discovering that she is everything he has been searching for. Further evidence of the bond of love between them is displayed in Dexter's downward spiral following Emma's death. Indeed, Emma mattered so much to Dexter that Dexter's father tells him to live as if Emma were still alive.

Self-Discovery

Self-discovery is one of the three major themes in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls. Self-discovery -the process of learning about oneself and growing because of it -occurs primarily with the main characters, Dexter and Emma. The journey of self-discovery they partake in ultimately leads them to love, and to each other.

When the novel begins, Dexter wants to be famous, and his mind is set on purely pleasurable and earthly pursuits, namely girls and alcohol. Rather than launch into finding a career, Dexter travels the globe seeking girls and adventure. He is self-centered and self-absorbed, discouraging traits made only stronger by his meteoric rise to fame on television. The nadir of this narcissism comes when Dexter insults Emma for wanting to be a teacher. Ultimately, Dexter leads to his own downfall. His marriage falls apart, along with his job prospects. But over time, and with Emma's help, Dexter



discovers that he can be a wonderful father, and can successfully run a business. Indeed, he becomes proud of himself not for his image, but for the things he can do.

At the beginning of the novel, Emma is a passionate girl who dreams big and wants to change the world. Despite her wild dreams, Emma is shy and self-confident. Indeed, she appears to be her own worst enemy as she believes her life is a failure for having done nothing of consequence one year out of college. She discovers, over time, that she has a talent for writing, and begins to do so. It is a talent that Dexter encourages, helping her to gain self-confidence. Emma becomes a stronger and more independent person, but also warms up tremendously toward others. Despite her conceptions of herself as a failure, she does manage to change the world -Dexter's world- and the lives of countless young adults and children who read her novels.

Friendship

Of the three major themes in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls, friendship provides a running undercurrent that pulls together the characters of Emma and Dexter throughout the novel, paving the way for the themes of self-discovery and love.

The one-night stand that Dexter and Emma have is supposed to be just that- a one-night stand. Yet, the night brings together not just their hearts, but their minds as well, as neither one is able to forget the other. Dexter gives Emma his phone number, and impresses upon her his desire to have her call him. Phone calls and letters begin a friendship in earnest, as both Dexter and Emma come to rely on the other for advice and suggestions, as well as a welcome set of arms for consolation and encouragement. As their friendship flourishes, real romance also stirs in both their hearts. Regrettably, over the course of two decades, Dexter and Emma can never seem to be in the same place with respect to that romance, and so their friendship carries on.

Interestingly enough, their friendship serves as a gateway to love, and for both characters to discover who they really are -each other. Indeed, it is the friendship between both of them that compels them to remain in touch with one another, even when all of their other friends have fallen away, grown old, or turned on them. That the foundation of Dexter and Emma's relationship is their friendship reinforces their romance, for Emma and Dexter are completely aware of who the other is, and there are no surprises. The foundation of friendship therefore means that love falls more easily into place, and is stronger than it might otherwise have been.



Style

Point of View

David Nicholls tells his novel "One Day" from the third-person and omniscient narrative. In order to accommodate the great distances and swift passage of time between Emma, Dexter, their maturation, and their encounters and the events of their lives, the third-person and omniscient narrative is engaged to provide a sense of stability. Over time, people change, their language change, and their thoughts and ideas can change. In the case of two dynamic characters like Emma and Dexter, the changes can be profound, and so to avoid confusing the reader with language that varies greatly in a first-person narrative, Nicholls uses a consistent, third-person and omniscient perspective.

Setting

While much of the plot of David Nicholl's novel "One Day" takes place around the world in far-flung places like Rome, India, and Paris, much of the novel occurs in England. In both ways, the settings work well to enhance the plot of the novel. The distance between Emma and Dexter romantically, can be metaphorically viewed as the physical distance between them: one is India, the other in England, one is in Paris, the other in England, and so on. Just as they cannot seem to connect emotionally for long, so too can they not stay in the same place for long. When they finally do connect in Paris, both of them head home and remain there. Such a joining can be viewed metaphorically as the closure of the emotional distance between them.

Language and Meaning

David Nicholls tells his novel "One Day" in language that is intelligent, poetic, and flowing. This is done because both Emma and Dexter are college-educated people who both have hints of idealism about them, be it about their own future or themselves. Youth is predominantly known for dreaming, and there is no shortage of dreams between Emma and Dexter. Dreaming and romance can be poetic things, and David Nicholls makes sure work of composing his prose with poetic touches. This serves to reinforce the tragedy of the plot, and to draw the reader further into the romance of Dexter and Emma, but relegating the reader to being a third-person observer.

Structure

David Nicholls structures his novel "One Day" into twenty-three chapters, organized into five general parts (with each part being a specific time period in the lives of Dexter and Emma), with the chapters of the first four parts being chronological. Each chapter in each of the parts details the events of each July 15, from 1988 through 2007. The final part of the book is a collection of chapters that alternate between July 15, 1988, and



2005, 2006, and 2007. Indeed, the fifth part of the novel, with references to the past, helps in a tragic way to compensate for the sudden death of Emma in the fourth part of the novel. The reader learns through these sad passages just how it was that Emma and Dexter began to talk regularly in the first place and that occurred with Dexter giving Emma his number to call.



Quotes

"Living in her university town felt like staying at a party that everyone else had left, and so in October she had given up the flat in Rankeillor Street and moved back to her parents for a long, fraught, wet winter of recriminations and slammed doors and afternoon TV in a house that now seemed impossibly small" (Chapter 2, p. 20).

"I think you were telling me that my life was going nowhere," and she began to laugh and cry at the same time" (Chapter 4, p. 54).

"I think so. I think our moment passed some time ago" (Chapter 5, p. 98).

"I've tried, I've strained to love him but I can't. I am building a life with a man I don't love, and I don't know what to do about it" (Chapter 9, p. 187).

"And it was at moments like this that she had to remind herself that she was in love with him, or had once been in love with him, a long time ago" (Chapter 9, p. 198).

"He wonders if he still might tell her that he loves her or, more tentatively, that he "thinks he might be in love with her", which is both more touching and easier to back out of" (Chapter 12, p. 261).

"The champagne flowed on and a sense of nostalgia spread across the Great Lawn as old friends met and conversation turned into how much people earned now, how much weight they had gained" (Chapter 13, p. 272-273).

"They sat in silence for a moment, listening to the children shouting in the courtyard, the sound of distant televisions" (Chapter 15, p. 344).

"She sometimes wondered what her twenty-two year-old self would think of today's Emma Mayhew. Would she consider her self-centered? Compromised? A bourgeois sell-out, with her appetite for home ownership and foreign travel, clothes from Paris and expensive haircuts" (Chapter 18, p. 381).

"Let's just say that I think the best thing you could do is try and live your life as if Emma were still here. Don't you think that would be best" (Chapter 20, p. 408).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the importance of communication in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls. Why is communication so important to Emma and Dexter? How do they correspond? What is the effect of this correspondence?

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls. What is love like in the novel? Between which characters does love occur? Where is love strongest? Is the love that exists between Emma and Dexter true love? Why or why not? Provide evidence to support your claim.

In Chapter 5, Emma tells Dexter, "I think our moment passed some time ago." (Chapter 5, p. 98) Is this an accurate statement? Is this a statement repeated again in the book? Why does Emma believe this to be the case?

Discuss the theme of self-discover in the novel "One Day" by David Nicholls as it pertains to Emma and Dexter. In what ways does each character experience self-discovery and grow? How does this affect them and their relationship? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of friendship in David Nicholls's novel "One Day," especially as it persists between Emma and Dexter. Are Emma and Dexter good friends? In what ways? How does this friendship affect each of their lives? How does this friendship ultimately impact their romantic relationship?