

Two Days

By Aimee Bender

Illustrated by Scott Gandell

Curriculum developed by Alex Ehrenzeller



OVERVIEW

Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 15+/10th+
Genre/s	* Young adult literary fiction * Realistic fiction * Romance * Coming of age
Length	2,245 words (15-20 minute read)
Content Advisories	* Allusion to sex * Character drink alcohol

<p>One-Sentence Summary</p>	<p>A young man and woman meet at a bookstore, feel a sense of attraction that they can't quite navigate, and wind up having another date on the beach in Santa Monica.</p>
<p>Lesson Planning</p>	
<p>Topics & Key Themes Overview</p>	<p>Topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Dating * Young love * Youth in L.A. * Lying & honesty * Awkwardness <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Shifting moods & perspectives * Dealing with swift opinion reversals * Measuring self with external variables * Emotional awakening * Making decisions * Navigating romantic feelings
<p>Historic Events/Time Period for Study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reference to WWI, WWII & the Korean War * Story occurs in present day L.A. & Santa Monica
<p>Complementary Text</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Poem: “.05” by Ishmael Reed * Song: “No Hay Nadie Como Tú” by Calle 13 (translated clean lyrics included)
<p>Author & Artist Information</p>	<p>Aimee Bender lives in Los Angeles and teaches creative writing at the University of Southern California.</p>
<p>Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5.A</p>

Author Biography

Aimee Bender is the author of five books: *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt* (1998), which was a *New York Times* Notable Book, *An Invisible Sign of My Own* (2000), which was a *Los Angeles Times* pick of the year, *Willful Creatures* (2005), which was nominated by *The Believer Magazine* as one of the best books of the year, *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* (2010), which won the SCIBA Book Award for best fiction and an Alex Award, and *The Color Master*, a *New York Times* Notable Book for 2013. Her books have been translated into sixteen languages.

Her short fiction has been published in *Granta*, *GQ*, *Harper's*, *Tin House*, *McSweeney's*, *The Paris Review*, and more, as well as heard on PRI's *This American Life* and *Selected Shorts*. She lives in Los Angeles with her family and teaches creative writing at the University of Southern California.

Artist Biography

Scott Gandell wears many hats. He descends from a long line of creatives and business professionals. His experience is as diverse as the subjects he illustrates. You may want to visit Pop Secret Gallery where he has made a home for The Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles of which he is a Board Member. His network is vast and he is a proud alumnus of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

SYNOPSIS

Two young adults meet at a bookstore in L.A., strike up a conversation, and wind up at a neighboring coffeeshop. There is clearly a sense of attraction between Adam and the narrator, causing both to act “out of character” as they come to discover just how they feel—about each other and about a myriad of issues on the periphery. They plan to meet the next day for a picnic on the beach in Santa Monica, and things come to an abrupt end when it becomes clear they are not meant for each other.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

10-Minute Writing Warm-up: Expand upon the following questions in whatever format students desire: journaling, “free writing,” expository writing, free verse, or rhyming.

Option One: What is love? What is necessary in love? What does love look like? Include 10 elements of loving relationships and none of them can be physical descriptions. (Give the following examples if necessary: “Trust, a situation where both partners can freely talk to each other about anything, someone who always has your best interest in mind, etc.”)

Option Two: Does your perspective determine the outcome of events? How so? Cite specific examples from your life and the things you’ve witnessed.

Option Three: Compare and contrast the best and worst first date imaginable—must be school appropriate!

Main Ideas

Sudden Shifts in Perspectives:

10-Minute Discussion: Describe a time in your life when your opinion or perspective about something suddenly changed. What caused the change? How has this affected your life? How can you use this experience to help you move forward in life?

Perspective Activity:

Split a page of paper in half (top to bottom) and list five negatives you've witnessed/been exposed to and come up with at least one positive aspect of each of them. (Example: A negative could be "Seeing my cousin get addicted to drugs" and the positives could be "Learning to value my health, understand what I put into my body, and to value the weight of my decisions," etc.) Have students share a few, including the positive and negative aspects of the same factor. (10 minutes)

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following passages from "Two Days." Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

Passage One:

"I held my finger before page 32. I didn't want to look at the clown first off. It seemed too intimate, even if I was just looking with myself. So I was looking, then, instead, at a washed-up movie star wearing sequins in some kind of aquarium tank emptied of water."

Questions:

- Why else does the narrator hide that she is searching for the clown photo? (Fear of judgement? Embarrassment?) Is she justified in doing so?
- What are the results? (She ends up looking at something even more embarrassing!)

Passage Two:

"We stared at her together, in that tank. "Was she?" I asked. She had giant breasts, ornamented by magenta sequins. I found her painful, so I turned the page to have something to do, and there was the clown, with its big nose and scary mouth makeup and scary eyes and red costume. And I could see what she meant, Terrie. Right off, I got what she was saying. It was trying so hard. That was part of what was so menacing—its enormous effort to amuse. You kind of wanted to hurt the clown, before it smothered you into total suffocation."

Questions:

- How are Adam's attitude toward his Korean War book and the narrator's feeling toward the washed-up movie star similar and/or different? Cite the text.
- How does this relate to each character's stage in life?

Passage Three:

"I felt attractive, talking to him. Next to those big features of his, I could feel myself as delicate. When the conversation waned, I sipped from my bitter little Greek coffee, and told him that my friend Terrie was having surgery the following day. That she was young, still, but they'd found problematic shapes in her bronchitis x-ray. "Lumpy shapes," I said, "inside her lungs."

He stirred his coffee, and nodded with appropriate solemnity. He seemed more measured, now that he was caffeinated.

The cars whisked by.

"You know," I said. "I just lied. That's not true."

"About Debby?"

Questions:

- Make an inference. (Use what you read in the story and what you know about life to come to a conclusion.) Why do you think the narrator would lie about something so serious? What do you think are her motives? What could she possibly accomplish by doing this? Refer to the text.
- Why do you think the narrator doesn't correct Adam when he refers to her friend as "Debby" rather than "Terrie"? What do you think this reveals about the narrator and Adam's relationship?

Universal Themes

Have students discuss these themes in four groups, with an elected spokesperson and recorder to write notes. Once all groups have had a chance to converse about all four topics, have each group share their notes on a specific theme and call upon others to substantiate, refute, and/or build upon others' talking points.

1. Consider what it means to measure oneself with external variables (what the characters are reading, professional accomplishments as a chef, etc.) In what ways do high school students measure themselves? What are the effects of this? How *should* people measure themselves?
2. In this story there are countless 180 shifts (attitudes towards clowns, seagulls, Adam, etc.) What brought about these changes? Was it the place, a specific event, situation, or the people that changed?
3. Awkwardness: (uncontrollable lying, mood swings, Adam throwing his hands up into the air, not really saying much of anything, the lying, their kiss). We can all identify awkwardness, but how can you actually describe it? Write your own definition of awkwardness and share a few to see what concepts they have in common. Are there universal commonalities, or does it completely depend on the observer?
4. Letting go of history (losing a fear of clowns, blasé attitudes towards famous wars and washed-up movie stars) mirrors the characters' growth and development. In what ways is history important (personal and otherwise) and in what ways can it hold you back?

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
delightful	extensively	smother
diabolical	grief	suffocation
retrieved	according	protocol
observing	intimate	bitter

dull	desperation	solemnity
sequins	amuse	reeking
grinning	repulsive	blowzy
grit	betrayed	exclamations
problematic	caffeinated	irreparably
swiftly	waned	wriggled
tense	onset	

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Why does the word “blowzy” stand out so much? What does it mean? What is its part of speech? Consult the dictionary if needed. What other words could be substituted for it and still give the passage the same meaning or effect? Work in groups and compete to see who can come up with the most synonyms or suitable substitutions.
2. How would Adam describe the narrator? Based on what evidence? Using three vocabulary words, write a piece of Adam’s dialogue as if he were describing his date on the beach with the narrator to a close friend.
3. Have students work individually, competing to see who can write one sentence incorporating the most vocabulary words, correctly employed.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. After Adam lies about being a professional chef both characters exhibit a significant mood swing. What do you think caused this? Is any one thing to blame, or are Adam and the narrator drawn together or apart by other forces (like the change in environment—L.A. vs. Santa Monica, the weather, or is it fate)? What leads the narrator to immediately realize that she will not be undressing in front of Adam? Discuss as a class.
2. What role does the environment play in the story? Would the date on the beach have ended differently if they had stayed in L.A.? Consider individually and discuss as a group.
3. After reading “Two Days,” what are four visuals that stick in your mind? Are the visuals in your mind similar or different to those of the students sitting around you? Discuss as a class.
4. Regarding the use of symbolism, what do clowns, wars, and “washed-up” actors all have in common? Why were these elements selected instead of others (magicians, kung-fu movies, and bankers, for example)? What do clowns, actors, and wars represent? How have both characters interacted as “clowns” and “actors” engaging in different kinds of “battles”? Discuss.

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. What personal histories are both characters carrying around? Why do you think the narrator immediately trusts Adam’s face and features? Why do you think Adam is so apologetic about his food? Cite the text.

2. How old do you think Adam and the narrator are? Based on what evidence? In what ways are they mature and immature? How do you know? Cite examples from the text to support your conclusions.
3. After losing her appetite for the food, throwing the cookie in the sand and deciding that all of her clothes were going to stay on in front of Adam, why do you think the narrator feels like crying yet calls the picnic “perfect”? Why do you think they kiss even though they both feel it isn’t “right”? Analyze the impact of Bender’s word choice on the story’s meaning and tone (feeling).
4. Foreshadowing is a literary device that gives readers a hint of what will later happen in the story. What are two examples of foreshadowing in “Two Days”? Cite specific examples and discuss how they are used.

Writing Exercises

Narrative

How would this story be different if told from the perspective of Adam? He, too, lied, experienced swift changes in moods and perspectives, and noticed things weren’t “right” romantically. Rewrite a scene from the story (bookstore, coffeeshop, or beach) in his voice, from his perspective. Use clues given about his personality in order to get a feel for his voice and word choices. This should be at least 250 words, include dialogue, telling details, and sensory language, and can include multiple scenes if desired.

Descriptive

Despite the clear feelings of awkwardness typical of youthful romance, the word “awkward” never actually appears in the story. Instead, it is felt through the characters’ thoughts and actions. Imagine a situation where a new student moves to town, joins a new high school, and there is a clear, understandable feeling of awkwardness (either on behalf of the new student or their classmates) when it comes time to find a location and group to eat lunch with, and depict the situation in detail. This can be done in first person or third person, can include dialogue, and must include at least two metaphors for how the situation feels. (250+ words)

Analysis

Adam and the narrator appear to be in their twenties, at least. They drink champagne; the narrator describes a neighboring group as teenagers, and professes to have had her fill of beach picnics in adolescence, implying that stage of life is already behind her. That being said, neither of them seems to be in total control of their thoughts or behavior. How do they still hold on to their childish ways? How do they act like adults?

Use examples from the story to draw parallels to your own life and experience and expand upon the following questions: Does age determine maturity? If not, what determines it? Is maturity something society values? In what ways? Why or why not? (500 words)

Complementary Text Option

Consider how perspective determines events in Bender’s “Two Days” (once clowns are seen as desperate they are no longer scary, once her attitude towards Adam changes the food at the picnic loses its flavor). [Listen](#) to the song “No Hay Nadie Como Tú” (with the accompanying translated lyrics edited to be school appropriate) and read the poem “.05” by Ishmael Reed, bearing this in mind.

.05 by Ishmael Reed (Teacher note: Point out punctualization—ask why the poet uses lowercase i's.)

If i had a nickel
For all the women who've
Rejected me in my life
I would be the head of the
World Bank with a flunkie
To hold my derby as i
Prepared to fly chartered
Jet to sign a check
Giving India a new lease
On life

If i had a nickel for
All the women who've loved
Me in my life i would be
The World Bank's assistant
Janitor and wouldn't need
To wear a derby
All i'd think about would
Be going home

No Hay Nadie Como Tú (translated) by Calle 13

In the world there are gross and cunning people
There are virgins and prostitutes
Rich, poor, middle class
Nice things and a couple of tragedies
There are fat, medium and skinny people
Horses, chickens, sheep and cows
There are many animals with many people
Sane and insane people
In the world there are lies and falsehoods
Facts, truths and coincidences
There are horizontal, vertical and diagonal mindsets
Accidental defeats and failures
Medals, trophies and world cups
In the world there are vitamins and proteins
There are trees, branches, leaves and flowers

There are many mountains of colors
In the world there are divided decisions
Entries, exits, debut, farewells
There are innocents, there are murderers
There are many mouths and little food
There are rulers and presidents
There is cold water and hot water
In the world there are microphones and loudspeakers
There are six billion inhabitants
There are ordinary people and elegant people
But but but
There is no one like you
There is no one like you my love

There is no one like you
There is no one like you
There is no one like you my love
There is no one like you
In the world the earth always moves
There are oxygen tanks, tanks of wars
The sun and the moon give us energy
You sleep at night and live by day
There are people who rectify what they say
There are many people who contradict themselves
There are carob beans and seaweed
There are vegetarians and butchers
There are sour drinks and sweets
There are diseases and medicines
There are full pockets, empty wallets
There are more thieves than police
There are religions, there is atheism
There is capitalism and communism
Although we look alike, we are not the same
Because, why
There is no one like you
There is no one like you my love
There is no one like you
There is no one like you
There is no one like you my love
There is no one like you
There are very good ideas in the world
There are Don Quixotes and Dulcineas
There are real things and melodramas
There are mazes and crosswords
There are calls that nobody answers
There are many questions and few answers
There are brave people, people with fear
People the world don't give a damn about
People standing, people sitting
People dreaming, people waking up
There are people who are born, people who die
There are people who hate and people who love

In this world there are many people
But but but
There is no one like you
There is no one like you my love
There is no one like you

Discussion & Writing Exercise

“Is the glass half-empty, or half-full?” is a common proverbial question used to indicate whether a person is an optimist or pessimist. “.05,” “No Hay Nadie Como Tú,” and “Two Days” all touch on perspective and how it can affect one’s actions and outcomes. Spend ten minutes discussing your life philosophy. Do you consider yourself an optimist, a pessimist, or a little bit of both? Why?

Spend 10 minutes journaling and then share as a class.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One:

10-Minute Freewrite:

What aspects of the characters' personalities do you identify with? Would you describe yourself as more mature or immature than Adam and the narrator? How so? When you reach their age, how do you foresee your life being the same or different? Why?

Classroom Activity Two:

Record a scene from the book via cellphone camera. Students must include lines of dialogue said in the story but can improvise the rest and include other minor characters (other patrons at the bookstore/coffee shop, people on the beach, etc.) with or without an external narrator.

Optional: You may wish to ask students to post their videos on a class Flipgrid page, as well as watch and comment on a classmates' video.

Home Activity

Find two distinct locations in areas you typically frequent (rooms in your house, parks around your neighborhood, different streets, etc.) and journal about how the environment impacts how you think and feel. Spend 10 minutes in each location and write about the location while you are still experiencing it. Do particular stimuli inspire positive feelings more than others? How? Why? Why not?

Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author, Aimee Bender, to speak to the class about her story and her experience as a writer and a writing professor. Ask her to lead a writing workshop.

Option Two: Invite the artist, Scott Gandell, to speak to the class about the artwork for "Two Days," as well as his experience attending ArtCenter. Ask him to lead an art workshop or virtually tour his studio.

Note: *Locavore Lit LA* helps coordinate and facilitate virtual and pre-recorded author and artist visits during the pandemic.

Field Trip

Tour one of L.A.'s museums—The Getty, Natural History Museum, ICA LA, California Science Center, The Hammer Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art, The Grammy Museum—either virtually or in person, and have students take notes in order to complete the followup activity. [Link for virtual museum tours.](#)

Follow-up Activity: Have students write their own story, beginning in the museum, following the general premise of "Two Days" (two people meet in a common area, feel a sense of attraction and wind up having another date). This can be written from any gender or orientation perspective, in the first or third-person, and the romance does not have to fizzle out as it did in "Two Days." Stories should be proofread, at least 500 words, and can be shared with a classmate or with the whole class the following day.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

This story and its exercises are appropriate for students in 9th-12th grade. Ninth- and tenth-grade standards are cited below.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.C

Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

Text-Dependent Question OptionsCCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

Writing Exercise OptionsCCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Discussion & Writing Exercise)CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

Activity OptionsCCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5

Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2:

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.