SUMMARY

'Four Weddings and a Funeral' was the most successful film of 1993. All over the world, people were charmed by this romantic English comedy. The Penguin Reader version has been written from the novelization of the film, and is a very, very funny book.

Charles is a charming and good-looking young Englishman, with a delightful group of friends. But he has a problem - although he loves women, he just doesn't want to get married. Also, he's rather shy. He meets Carrie, a beautiful and sophisticated American woman, at a wedding, and although it's obvious he likes her, he's much too shy to make advances to her. So Carrie has to make the first move.

A romantic comedy begins, as the couple meet at three more weddings and a funeral. One of the weddings is Carrie's, but it's not Charles who she's marrying. One of the weddings is Charles's but he's not marrying Carrie. Finally, Charles finds the courage to declare his love, when he realises that he can't live without Carrie.

Love - in all its forms - also comes to many of the other characters in the story. Along with the love, a few tears come too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The novelization of the film 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' is based on the screenplay of the film and was published in 1994. The screenplay was written by Richard Curtis, one of Britain's top comedy writers. He is the creator of the world-famous 'Mr Bean', starring Rowan Atkinson, which is both a TV series and a film.

In interviews, Curtis has said that the film was based heavily on his own experiences. He thinks that much of the screenplay's excellence is owing to the fact that he had twelve months in which to develop it, which is unusual in the British film industry. Curtis spent a long time discussing each scene with the film's director and producer, and it is undoubtedly this kind of attention to detail that enabled him to write a screenplay of such unusually high quality.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The theme of Four Weddings and a Funeral is romance - romance and true love.

'Why am I always at weddings but never getting married? What does it mean?' asks Charles, the hero. He wants to know if true love really exists. Should he wait for the right girl, for the 'thunder and lightning' of true love to strike, or just look for a 'nice, friendly girl who likes me too'. Marriage seems too big a commitment to Charles. This is why, although he has plainly lost his heart to Carrie from the moment he met her, he just can't bring himself to tell her - and even when he does, he's far too indirect. Charles pays a huge price for his shyness - Carrie marries someone else, and in despair, Charles gets engaged too. However, in the final scenes Charles declares his love in a very public way: 'I realized for the first time that I totally, completely love one person, with all my heart,' he says.

As the title suggests, it is not just Charles who falls in love in Four Weddings and a Funeral. One of the delights of the book is the way love is treated throughout the story. Overweight Bernard kisses plump Lydia and it is as if the sky has fallen down. Two of Charles' friends, Gareth and Matthew, are homosexuals who live together. Gareth dies, and Matthew's moving speech at the funeral plainly shows how much he loved Gareth: 'He was my North, my South, my East, my West, my working week and my Sunday rest...' he says, quoting from a poem by W.H. Auden.

There are also those who suffer unrequited love, as the proud, wealthy Fiona does for Charles. She suffers in silence for much of the film but by the end she has apparently recovered - it is a comedy, after all. Four Weddings and a Funeral takes a light-hearted look at romantic love - and in the end, the boy does get the girl.

Four Weddings and a Funeral is a very 'British' story. Charles and his friends are typical of a certain kind of British person: they are fast, clever and funny and it is very important to them never to be serious. Charles is typically British in his inability to be direct. 'Are there men who could ask a girl to go out with them on the same day they meet them?' he asks a friend. 'If there are, they're not English,' his friend replies. 'It takes me about three weeks to ask,' continues Charles. And readers laugh, because they recognize this kind of behaviour.

A large part of the skill in telling the story lies in its ability to make readers laugh - both at and with Charles. It is a wonderfully funny book, both in terms of its situations and its spoken humour. It is also beautifully constructed, with
the four weddings and the funeral acting as the focus for the meetings between the various characters. The story is not over-sentimental - the death of Gareth provides a sad backdrop to the gaiety of the weddings, and Fiona nurses a broken heart. Like all really good stories, it creates a world of its own - a world where most people seem to be having a good time; a world which readers would like to be a part of.

‘Four Weddings and a Funeral’ is a British film which was made on a very small budget. It made Hugh Grant, the actor who played Charles, and Kristin Scott-Thomas, who played Fiona, into stars. Today, the film is the second highest-earning British film ever, proving once again how good the British are at humour.

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ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Chapter 1

1. Write the following on the blackboard. Put students into pairs or small groups. Students say how the objects are connected to the story.
   - a large, black hat
   - a small, red car
   - a ring in the shape of a large, brightly coloured plastic heart
   - a fashion magazine
   - a tree
   - a passageway down the middle of a church between the aisles

2. Put students into small groups. Tell each group that they must agree on the four funniest moments/situations in this chapter. Each group then describes these moments/situations to the whole class, and they are written up on the blackboard. From all the suggestions, the five funniest moments/situations can be chosen.

Chapters 2-3

Charles and Carrie give each other very ‘mixed messages’. In other words, sometimes they suggest that they are in love and want to continue the relationship, sometimes they suggest the opposite. Teach the phrase ‘mixed messages’ to the students. Then, put students in small groups and ask them to list the mixed messages under the headings (a) and (b) below. Then have a whole class discussion on the subject.

(a) Charles and Carrie are in love and want to continue the relationship

(b) They are not in love and don’t want to continue the relationship

Chapters 4-5

There are a lot of English and American pop songs about love! Find one that is right for the level of your students and use it as a listening activity. Pre-teach new vocabulary. If necessary, write up part of the song on the blackboard to help students. After students have the words, they can sing the song.

One suggestion is to use the song at the end of the film ‘Four Weddings and a Funeral’: Love is all Around, by Wet Wet Wet.

Chapter 6

Point out to the class that this chapter is divided into six parts. In pairs, students choose a title for each part.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

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It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the Before You Read sections of exercises at the back of the book.

Chapter 1

aisle (n) a passageway down the middle of a church between the seats
best man (n) the man who helps the man getting married at a wedding ceremony
bride (n) the woman who is getting married
bridesmaid (n) a girl who on the wedding day helps the woman who is getting married
communicate (v) to express your thoughts so that other people can understand them
custom (n) something that is done in a particular society because it is traditional
damn! a word to show that you are angry or annoyed about something
elegant (adj) beautiful in a simple way
formal (adj) very polite; not relaxed
honeymoon (n) a holiday taken by two people who have just got married
lively (adj) having a lot of energy and very active
maid (n) a female servant
noon (n) midday
priest (n) someone who is trained to perform religious duties and ceremonies in the Christian church
raise (v) to lift
reception (n) a large party to celebrate an event
smart (adj) wearing tidy, attractive clothes

Chapters 4-5

coffin (n) a box that a dead person is put in
The following passage is the first paragraph of the Introduction. Apart from the first sentence, the sentences/parts of sentences are not in the right order. Put them in the right order. Number them from 1-8. Then check your answers by reading the Introduction.

1. It's a summer Saturday morning, and Charles is still asleep. He should be ...
2. But when he does meet a beautiful woman called Carrie, he wants to ...
3. weddings, never his own. He has had plenty of girlfriends, but he is ...
4. and she marries another man.
5. one of his old girlfriends, thinks that he has a big problem with women.
6. on his way to Angus and Laura's wedding already! Charles is always late,
7. be with her very much. The trouble is, he can't decide quickly enough,
8. worried that he will never find the right woman to marry. Henrietta,

and he is always going to weddings. But they are always other people's

CHAPTER 1

Pages 1 - 11

1. Close your book. Answer the following questions.
   (a) Who shares a flat with Charles?
   (b) Who is late for the wedding and why?
   (c) Who does the 'wedding ring' belong to?
   (d) Who is attracted by a beautiful American woman but can't think of anything to say?
   (e) Who says something very embarrassing to another man? What does he say?
   (f) Who is studying to be a priest?
2. In groups of three, act out the conversation between Carrie, Charles and John on pages 8-9.
3. Why do the guests laugh a lot at Charles's speech? Would you?

Pages 12-21

1. Put the following events in the correct order.
   (a) Charles meets Carrie in the pub.
   (b) Everyone dances.
   (c) Charles and Carrie spend the night together.
   (d) Lydia tells Bernard that no man wants her.
   (e) Charles makes a speech.
   (f) Carrie leaves for America.
   (g) Lydia and Bernard kiss.
2. Do you think Carrie is really joking when she mentions marriage?

CHAPTERS 2-3

Chapter 2

1. Answer these questions. The answers are all numbers.
   (a) How long after the first wedding is the second wedding?
   (b) How many bridesmaids are there?
   (c) How old is Hamish?
   (d) How many old girlfriends are at Charles' table?
   (e) How many old girlfriends are at the wedding (not including Carrie)?
   (f) How much of Scotland does Hamish own?
   (g) How many people are under a table?
   (h) How many months have Charles and Carrie spent together so far?
2. In small groups or individually, invent a suitable background for Charles, using the information in the story - for example, we know he has a brother. What kind of parents do you think he has? What do you think his job could be? Write one or two paragraphs.

Chapter 3

1. In these sentences, the speaker is either lying, or not saying what he/she really means. Write what the speaker really means.
   (a) 'You can buy this one,' says the assistant. She points to a life-size wooden African man.
   (b) 'The young man is thinking about it,' says the assistant, icily polite.
   (c) 'I can be a little bit late.'
   (d) 'Ah -' says Charles.
   (e) 'I work - yes, that's it! Work, work and more work! I'm always working late!'
   (f) 'He wants to know where you're getting married,' Charles pretends to translate.
2. What is your opinion of Carrie? Discuss this question in small groups, then write one or two paragraphs describing her.

CHAPTERS 4-5

Chapter 4

1. Answer the following questions.
   (a) Who says he would like to go to the wedding of someone he really loves?
   (b) Who says he's asked everyone he knows to marry him?
   (c) Who meets someone she says is lovely?
   (d) Who has got a new boyfriend?
   (e) Who is in love with a man who doesn't return her love?
   (f) Who says that she is in love and is obviously happy?
2 Write down the six most important qualities that you would want from your marriage partner. Compare with a partner.

Chapter 5
1 Gareth’s funeral ‘is a big contrast to the three wonderful weddings’. Write down five ways in which it is different.
2 In small groups or individually, think of a love poem you know and like. Translate some of it into English, then read your translation to the class.

CHAPTER 6
1 In pairs or individually, answer these questions:
   (a) Who is with Charles when he wakes up?
   (b) What is the trick that Charles’ friends play on him?
   (c) How is Fiona different at this wedding?
   (d) Why does Charles say, ‘Damn! Damn! Damn and hell?’
   (e) What are David’s first two suggestions?
   (f) Why is David so important at this wedding?
   (g) What does Charles realize as he ‘was standing in the church’?

2 Below are the first and last lines of the first six parts of this chapter, but not in the right order. Match up the first lines (a-f) and last lines (i-vi) of each part and put them in the right order.
   (a) Back in Charles’s kitchen later that afternoon, everyone is still shocked.
   (b) John is one of the first guests to arrive.
   (c) He tries not to look at Carrie as he walks to the front of the church and sits down.
   (d) They’ve got plenty of time now, so they get some coffee and drink it outside on the grass.
   (e) But Charles is no longer in the right mood for his wedding.
   (f) It’s Charles’s wedding day, but even now he’s not awake!
   (i) The wedding is certainly not going to happen today!
   (ii) If they hadn’t played this joke, Charles would have been late for his own wedding.
   (iii) ‘Of course,’ says Matthew, who thinks that Charles wants to go to the toilet.
   (iv) They kiss - and above, in the stormy skies of London, there is thunder and lightning for Charles too.
   (v) Today, perhaps for the first time ever, Charles won’t be late.
   (vi) ‘Yes,’ says Charles, ‘Excellent.’

3 Answer this question:
   Do you think Charles and Carrie will ever get married?

Activities after reading the book
1 In small groups, discuss the following and/or write three or four paragraphs about the questions.
   (a) What is the impression you get of the British in this book?
   (b) Do you think it is true? Have you met any British people? Were they like this?
2 Work in groups. Write five sentences describing a nationality, but don’t write what nationality it is. Groups then exchange sheets of paper. One student reads the description to the rest of the group - the group decides which nationality is described.
3 Work in groups of five or six. Play this amusing game.
   (a) Each person takes a sheet of paper.
   (b) Each person writes the words in italic below on the piece of paper, leaving big spaces between the lines. Do not write the words in brackets. They are an example of what you can write during the game.
   (c) Each person thinks of a story of two people meeting (people from your class, perhaps), what each person says to the other, and what the result was. For example:

   1 (Charles) met (Carrie).
   2 He said, (‘I think you’re great, but I don’t want to get married.’)
   3 She said, (‘Then I’ll marry someone else.’)
   4 And the consequence was, (‘She did marry someone else but in the end Charles and Carrie got together.’)
   (d) On the sheets of paper, each student writes the names of two people in sentence 1. Then they fold the paper over so that their sentence is hidden, and pass the piece of paper to the person on their left.
   (e) Students then continue their story with sentence 2 on the piece of paper their neighbour has given them. Then once again, they fold over sentence 2 and pass the piece of paper to the person on their left.
   (f) Each student continues in the same way with sentences 3 and 4.
   (g) Finally, they unfold their sheets of paper and read out their stories. Are they amusing?