



# The Lover's Dictionary: A Novel

*By David Levithan*

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## **The Lover's Dictionary: A Novel By David Levithan**

*basis, n.*

*There has to be a moment at the beginning when you wonder whether you're in love with the person or in love with the feeling of love itself.*

*If the moment doesn't pass, that's it?you're done. And if the moment does pass, it never goes that far. It stands in the distance, ready for whenever you want it back. Sometimes it's even there when you thought you were searching for something else, like an escape route, or your lover's face.*

How does one talk about love? Do we even have the right words to describe something that can be both utterly mundane and completely transcendent, pulling us out of our everyday lives and making us feel a part of something greater than ourselves? Taking a unique approach to this problem, the nameless narrator of David Levithan's *The Lover's Dictionary* has constructed the story of his relationship as a dictionary. Through these short entries, he provides an intimate window into the great events and quotidian trifles of being within a couple, giving us an indelible and deeply moving portrait of love in our time.

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## **The Lover's Dictionary: A Novel By David Levithan Bibliography**

- Rank: #702626 in Books
- Published on: 2011-01-04
- Released on: 2011-01-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.92" h x .85" w x 5.39" l, .63 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 211 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

**Amazon Best Books of the Month, January 2011:** In his first book for adults, popular young-adult novelist David Levithan creates a beautifully crafted exploration of the insecurities, tenderness, anger, and contented comfort that make romantic relationships so compelling (or devastating). Through sparingly written, alphabetical entries that defy chronology in defining a love affair, *The Lover's Dictionary* packs an emotional wallop. For "breathtaking (adj.)," the unnamed narrator explains, "Those moments when we kiss and surrender for an hour before we say a single word." For "exacerbate (v.)," he notes, "I believe your exact words were: 'You're getting too emotional.'" Ranging from over a page to as short as "celibacy (n.), n/a," the definitions-as-storyline alternate between heart-wrenching and humorous--certainly an achievement for a book structured more like Webster's than a traditional novel. Proving that enduring characters and conflict trump word count, Levithan's poignant vignettes and emotional candor will remind readers that sometimes in both fiction and life, less is truly more--and the personal details of love can be remarkably universal. --

*Jessica Schein*

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### Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with David Levithan



**Q:** What inspired you to write *The Lover's Dictionary*?

**Levithan:** Every year for the past 23 years, I've written a story for my friends for Valentine's Day. It started when I was a junior in high school and remarkably bored in my physics class--I decided to go through the physics book and find all the romantic references I could (opposites attracting, magnetism, etc), and turn it into a love story. My friends liked it, and the next year, they demanded a new story for Valentine's Day. A tradition (or, at least, a deadline) was born.

Two years ago, I hit February 1st and I hadn't started writing my Valentine's Day story. I had a few ideas, but none were kicking in. I sat down at my desk to think something up, and right by my elbow was a book I'd recently recovered from my parents' basement--a book of "words you need to know" that I'd been given as a gift (probably for my high school graduation). I thought it might be interesting to take random words from that book, in alphabetical order, and tell the story of a relationship through those words, in dictionary form. I didn't plan any of it out--I let the words tell the story. And two weeks later, I had the story version of *The Lover's Dictionary*.

**Q:** How (if at all) was the experience of writing what is classified as an adult novel different from writing a young adult novel? Did you approach the emotion of love differently?

**Levithan:** I didn't approach this book any differently from my other books. Because, really, the emotions don't change. Perspective changes (a little, sometimes not even a little), but the emotions are still there. Yes, the twenty-something characters in *The Lover's Dictionary* are facing some issues most teens don't face--moving in together, paying rent. But most of what they're feeling is merely a continuation of the emotions that come to the fore when you're a teenager--wanting to belong, wanting to understand yourself, wanting to understand the person you love, wanting to know what love is. I'd love to say that when we become adults we stop being insecure, that we have answers, that we know the right words for the right moments. But that's simply not true.

**Q:** Were there any words/definitions that didn't make it in to the final book?

**Levithan:** Not that many. I just went back to the first draft and found one:

*haggle*, v. There was no way I was letting the Atlanta Braves lamp to our apartment, and you said, fine, then my lunchbox collection could go back to my parents' basement, where it belonged.

I'm not even sure why it didn't make the cut. Maybe there were already too many entries about decorating the apartment.

**Q:** *The Lover's Dictionary* isn't a linear story and is organized alphabetically, much like a traditional reference dictionary. How (if at all) did you change your writing process knowing that it would unfold this way?

**Levithan:** I loved writing in a nonlinear way. Because it feels to me like a more accurate way of how we recount relationships. They never come back to us as a narrative, told beginning-middle-end. Whether it's over or ongoing, we remember it in flashes. Different moments from the past hit us at different moments in the present. So when the narrator sits down to recount the relationship to the lover, it makes sense to me that the relationship would appear to him in this way, with the words as the catalyst for the memories, and the memories adding up to the truth.

**Q:** Why did you decide to write the novel in first person, directed at a second person?

**Levithan:** The act of writing the book (for the narrator) is as much a part of the story as the story itself. I don't want to explain the book too much, so I can leave it at that. And I wanted it to play like a love song you hear on the radio--the most effective love songs are somehow both specific and universal. You feel you are hearing someone else's story, but at the same time you relate to it so much that their story doesn't preclude your story. I wanted *The Lover's Dictionary* to be like that.

**Q:** Describe how you feel about writing in three words.

**Levithan:** Wonderment. Curiosity. Random.

From Publishers Weekly

This cute "novel" by YA author Levithan consists of a series of words and their definitions, each evoking a phase or theme about a fledgling romance. (e.g., fledgling: "Part of the reason I preferred reading to sex was that I at least knew I could read well"). The entries do gradually unravel a love story: the narrator has met a woman ("you") through an online dating site (aberrant: "I don't normally do this kind of thing," you said).

~Neither do I,' I assured you"). He endures all the writhings of new love, by turns eager, reserved, and hopeful about their evolving relationship, and transported by the joy of mutual exploration, the two move in together (balk: "If it all went wrong, the last thing I'd care about was who was to blame for moving in together") and are eventually undone (livid: "You went and broke our lives"). Levithan attains some heartbreak moments as well as pitches of hilarity with his concise, polished writing. Inherent in such an endeavor (that just happens to hit shelves around Valentine's Day) is an adorableness thankfully grounded by Levithan's wit. (Feb.)

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#### From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Levithan, a popular YA author and an editorial director at Scholastic, has had the inspired idea of writing the story of a love relationship in the form of a dictionary. Each word, from aberrant to zenith, defines the language of love, while adding to the reader's knowledge and understanding of the male lovers' partnership. Interestingly, each definition is told from the point of view and in the first-person voice of only one of the partners. The other partner's voice remains silent throughout except as quoted by the narrator. Nevertheless, both come wonderfully alive, emerging as complex, multidimensional human beings, happy and unhappy, ebullient and angry, sweet and sour, and so—delightfully—forth. Happily, the order of the alphabet does not dictate the order of the story, which moves backward and forward in time. Thus, the dramatic necessity of conflict arises from one partner's infidelity, the impact of which is then explored at various points in the history of the partnership. Nothing is cut-and-dried, however, for as Levithan demonstrates, intimacy is sometimes enigmatic and, as he notes under ineffable, "No matter how many words there are, there will never be enough." So you must clearly pick and choose which to use, an act that Levithan has accomplished artfully and satisfyingly. --Michael Cart

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**Norman Brown:**

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**Lavone Anderson:**

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