Four Weddings and a Funeral

Richard Curtis

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 author 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.

Summary
Four Weddings and a Funeral was the most successful film of 1994. 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 realizes 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 love, a few tears come too.

Chapter 1, pages 1–7: Charles is best man at Angus and Laura’s wedding. Charles and his roommate Scarlett arrive just in time for the wedding. Charles realizes he has forgotten the wedding ring he was supposed to bring for the bridegroom. At the wedding, an American woman named Carrie catches Charles’s attention.

Chapter 1, pages 7–14: At the wedding reception, Charles and his friends talk together and meet others. Charles talks briefly to Carrie, but it is an awkward conversation. As best man, Charles gives a funny speech. He also congratulates the couple on getting married, a step he says he cannot take.

Chapter 1, pages 14–21: After the wedding, Charles and Scarlett are late again for another wedding. This time, Scarlett is the bridesmaid. Lydia and Bernard, who met at the previous wedding, are getting married. Charles is wondering about love and marriage and talks it over with friends. Charles is pleased to see Carrie at the wedding, but is shocked and disappointed to be introduced to her fiancé, Hamish. Charles wonders why he is always attending weddings and never getting married.

At the reception dinner, Charles finds himself seated at a table with four old girlfriends who exchange stories about him. To make things worse, he meets Henrietta, another old girlfriend, who is upset with him. Charles then finds himself trapped in a room with the bride and groom and then has another unpleasant encounter with Henrietta. Immediately after this, he meets Carrie who invites him to her place. They spend the night together again. Charles leaves in silence the next morning.
Chapter 3: Charles is enjoying a Saturday without a wedding when he opens an envelope and finds an invitation to Carrie’s wedding. Before meeting his brother, Charles goes to a shop that is listed on the invitation as a place to go for wedding gifts. Charles meets Carrie there and she asks him to help her choose a wedding gown. They have an interesting discussion about relationships and then Charles races off to meet his brother. In a very awkward way, Charles tries to tell Carrie that he loves her. Carrie tells him he is sweet and walks away.

Chapter 4: Charles arrives late to the wedding of Carrie and Hamish. Gareth tells the group of friends he’d like to attend one of their weddings in the future and asks them to try to find true love. Charles again meets Henrietta who tells him she is happy and involved with someone else. Fiona sees that Charles like Carrie. Fiona tells Charles that she has always loved him. In the midst of the wedding speeches, Gareth collapses and dies.

Chapter 5: Everyone arrives for Gareth’s funeral and listens as Matthew (Gareth’s long-time partner) talks about their friend. After the funeral, Tom and Charles discuss how Gareth and Matthew were right for each other. Charles wonders if he should forget about getting married if he can’t find someone who is just right. Tom says he’s not looking for ‘thunder and lightning’ but just a nice girl he can be happy with.

Chapter 6: Charles has a final gathering with his friends before his own wedding to Henrietta that day. While waiting for the wedding to begin, Scarlett meets an American friend that she met earlier and Tom is attracted to a distant cousin.

Just prior to the wedding, Charles sees Carrie who tells him that she and Hamish have left each other. Now Charles has second thoughts about his upcoming marriage to Henrietta, and talks with Matthew and David. He decides to go ahead with the marriage. However, the ceremony is disrupted by David who says (through sign language translated by Charles) that he suspects that Charles loves another woman. Charles admits to this and is attacked by Henrietta. The wedding of Charles and Henrietta doesn’t happen.

Later at home, Carrie comes to visit Charles. They realize they want to be together, even if they don’t get married.

Looking to the future, we see that the group of friends are all happy in their situations and that Carrie and Charles have a child.

About the film
Four Weddings and a Funeral is a 1994 British romantic comedy film directed by Mike Newell. It was made on a very small budget. It was the first of several films by Richard Curtis to feature Hugh Grant.

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, with worldwide box office in excess of $244 million, proving once again how good the British are at humour.

The original score was composed by British classical composer Richard Rodney Bennett. The film also featured some popular songs, including a cover version of ‘Love is All Around’ performed by Wet Wet Wet. It remained at number one on the British charts for fifteen weeks and is now the twelfth biggest selling single of all-time in Britain. This song would later be adapted into ‘Christmas Is All Around’ and sung by the character of Billy Mack in Richard Curtis’s 2003 film Love Actually.

Background and themes
The theme of Four Weddings and a Funeral is 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’s 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 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 they 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.

**Discussion activities**

**Before reading**

1. **Group work:** Have students talk about wedding ceremonies in their country. Brainstorm what is involved. Consider things such as:

   - **People** (bride, groom …)
   - **Preparations** (buying ring, sending invitations …)
   - **Wedding ceremonies** (coming up the aisle, music …)
   - **Wedding service** (coming up the aisle, music …)
   - **Other details** …

2. **Pair work:** In pairs, have students look at the picture on the front cover and read, *Who’s who in this story* on page vii. Have them match the people in the picture with the characters described. As a whole class activity, have them give their answers and their reasons for those answers.

3. **Guess:** Read the Introduction. Have students guess what will happen. *Will Charles find true love? Will he get married?* Have them share their ideas together.

**Chapter 1, pages 1–7**

**Before reading**

4. **Discuss:** Have students imagine they are the best man (or bridesmaid) at a wedding. The ceremony is at a wedding hall that is two or three hours away in the country. They have never been there before. What should they do to make sure they are at the hall in lots of time for the ceremony?

5. **Check:** In groups, have students compare wedding traditions from their country (from activity 1) with those described in this book. Consider the following people and items: best man, wedding ring, church bells, wedding dress, bridesmaid, father of the bride, wedding vows (I do), wedding photos and wedding reception.

6. **Pair work:** In pairs, have students list what happens, step by step, as Charles gets ready for the wedding ceremony. What goes wrong?

   - Example: The alarm clock rings. → Charles turns it off and goes back to sleep …

7. **Group work:** Have students in each group take one of the characters noted in this section of the book: Charles, Tom, Fiona, Gareth, Matthew, Scarlett, Carrie. Have students introduce themselves and guess what will happen to their characters.

   - Example: Hi. My name is Charles. I am … I think I will …

8. **Discuss:** In groups, students say how the following items are connected to the story: a small red car; the B359; a large black hat; a ring in the shape of a large brightly coloured plastic heart; a fashion magazine.

**Chapter 1, pages 7–14**

**Before reading**

9. **Guess:** Charles will get a chance to talk with Carrie at the reception. *Will they have an interesting conversation? What will they talk about? Will they make arrangements to meet again?*
After reading

10 Discuss: Have students think about their response to activity 9. Were they correct? What words would they use to describe Charles's attempt at conversation with Carrie? How does Charles explain his feeling about this conversation to his brother David?

11 Group work: Have students look at the different people attending the reception. What adjectives would they use to describe them, based on their behaviour? Choose words to describe Charles, Tom, Fiona, Carrie, John, Gerald, David, Serena, Scarlett, Laura, Angus, Gareth, Matthew, Lydia and Bernard.

Chapter 1, pages 14–21

After reading

12 Group work: In groups, have students agree on the four funniest moments and/or situations in this chapter. Then have each group describe these moments to the class. List them on the board. As a class, choose the five funniest moments.

13 Discuss: Have students talk about Carrie's comments about marriage and Charles's responses. Do you think Carrie is really joking? How could Charles have responded?

14 Role play: Have students imagine a conversation between Charles and a friend (possibly Matthew) about Carrie. What advice might the friend give Charles?

Student A: You are Charles. Tell your friend about meeting Carrie. Respond to your friend's comments and questions.

Student B: You are Charles's friend. What would you ask him about Carrie? What advice might you give him?

Chapter 2

After reading

15 Pair work: In pairs, have students make a list of the steps involved in Charles and Scarlett getting to church in time for the second wedding. What problems do they have? How does this compare to their race to the church in Chapter 1?

16 Careful reading: In small groups, have students list the bad things that happen to Charles at the wedding and reception. Have students imagine they are Charles. What could they do or say in each of these situations to make things better?

17 Write: In the story, little information is given about Charles's background. We know that he has a brother but we don't know other things about him, such as his job or his parents. Have students use their imagination and write a few paragraphs about Charles. Then have them share their writing with others.

Chapter 3

Before reading

18 Guess: Have students look at the picture on page 37. What kind of expression do they see on Charles's face? What is he holding? What is he thinking?

After reading

19 Group work: 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, while 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. Have a whole class discussion on the subject.

Chapter 4

After reading

21 Discuss: Have students think about the most important qualities that they would want to find in a marriage partner. Have them share their ideas with another student.

Example: They should be honest.

22 Careful reading: In pairs, have students look at Carrie's wedding speech. What can they learn about Carrie by reading this speech? Have them make a list and then compare their answers as a class.

Chapter 5

After reading

23 Pair work: Gareth's funeral is a big contrast to the three weddings. In pairs, have students write down five ways in which the funeral is different.
Four Weddings and a Funeral

24 Discuss: Look at the passage from the poem by W. H. Auden that Matthew reads at the funeral. Then bring in an English pop song 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 know the words, have them 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

Before reading

25 Guess: Have students look at the picture on page 58. Who is getting married? What advice will the others give this person?

After reading

26 Pair work: In pairs, students work on the following: How does Charles get ready for this wedding? Compare his preparation and trip to the church for this wedding to the other three weddings. How are they the same? How are they different?

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

28 Role play: Have students imagine a meeting between Charles and Henrietta the following week. What might they say to each other?

Student A: You are Charles. What might you say to Henrietta to try to explain your behaviour at the ceremony? Would you apologize?

Student B: You are Henrietta. How would you respond to Charles? Would you accept his apology (if he gives one)?

29 Discuss: Have students think about Charles and Carrie. Will they ever get married? Have students share their ideas.

Extra activities

30 Group work: Put students into small groups. Have students tell the others who their favourite character is and why. Then as a whole-class activity, have students vote for their favourite character. Which character is the most popular? Students can also write two or three paragraphs describing their favourite character and explaining why that person is their favourite. Then they can share their writing in groups.

31 Careful reading: Find a video of the film ‘Four Weddings and a Funeral’ and play a short sequence. Have students find the sequence in the book and say in what way the book version is different from the film.

32 Role play: In pairs or small groups, have students choose a scene that they like from the book. Have them expand on the dialogue and act out the scene together. Have students perform their scenes for the class.

33 Group work: Put students in groups of four and have them play this writing game. Write the following events on the board.

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 that (she did marry someone else, but in the end Charles and Carrie got together).

a Each person takes a sheet of paper.
b Each person writes the four sentences on their paper (leaving blanks, rather than filling in the words that are inside the parentheses). Have them leave lots of space between each sentence. Example: 1 ................. met ..................

2 He said, ‘..........................’ ...
c Then have each person think of two people meeting. (This could be people from the book OR from the celebrity world OR …). Encourage them to be creative.
d Have them write down those names on their paper and then fold the paper over so their sentence is hidden. Pass the piece of paper to the person on their left. Example: (David Beckham) met (Madonna).
e Students then continue the story with sentence 2. They do not know what has been written for sentence 1. Example: He said, ‘(You are the strangest woman I have ever met).’
f Each student continues in the same way with sentences 3 and 4, so that each piece of paper includes writing from all four members of the group.
g Finally, have the students unfold their sheets of paper and read their stories to their group. Are the stories amusing? Share the best stories with the class.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.