



# After

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

**GAYLE  
FORMAN**

# Life

**EDUCATOR GUIDE**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the start of *After Life*, Amber mysteriously reappears—even though she died seven years ago. Once she returns home, her mother, Gloria, is in shock; her father, Brian, calls her appearance a miracle after not believing in God in the past; and her sister, Missy, attempts to bond with Amber. Why do you think that each character reacts differently to the situation? How do you think you would react to this type of situation?
2. One point of view we see in the novel is that of Amber's ELA teacher, Arnold. For his past twenty-eight years as a teacher, Arnold has given students an assignment to write their own obituary, where they envision how they would have lived their future lives. If you were to write about what you want your life to look like in the future, what would it be like?
3. Besides Amber's family, the book also shows the points of view of people who were important in Amber's life when she was in high school. Two of them are Casey, her best friend, and Calvin, her boyfriend. It is revealed that Casey and Calvin had a secret relationship before Amber's passing, resulting in a tough life lesson about the long-term consequences of betrayal. Have you ever been betrayed by a close friend, and if so, how did you cope with it? Did it make you a stronger person? How?
4. Amber's sudden appearance in the lives of people who have been affected by her death shows how everyone copes and reacts differently. Each character deals with their grief in a different way. How do their reactions show how a person can grow and change after a traumatic experience? Explain.
5. Missy shows Amber a box with items that were kept after her passing, such as her clay handprints from kindergarten and a copy of a play she wrote her sophomore year in high school. Surprised by all the items that were kept, she wonders why they were saved. "But maybe what's clutter when you're alive becomes treasure when you are not," she thinks. What would you keep to remember someone? What would you want others to save in a box from your life?
6. Through each character, the book highlights the importance of taking care of one's mental health. Do you feel that speaking to someone about your feelings after a sad situation such as losing someone you love is important? How do you think it would help you and the characters in *After Life*? Do you feel that the way the book represented mental health struggles worked well? Discuss.
7. *After Life* is full of symbols representing Amber's story and, at times, moments that seem to foreshadow what happens to Amber. For example, when Amber gets her graduation picture taken, she stops the photographer and says, "It's my last one, I want it to be good." While she means that it is the last one that is being taken from her time in high school, we can see it as foreshadowing. What other moments in the book do you think symbolize what happens to Amber or foreshadow her tragic accident? Give at least two examples.
8. *After Life* has many surprises, which we see unfold through the past and present actions of Amber and the people around her. How do you feel that the choices the characters made in the past affect their present selves when it comes to their personalities, values, and morals?
9. While the themes of grief and loss in *After Life* are heavy, the book also focuses on the beauty of life and how we should celebrate it. One of the book's lines toward the end is: "Life. Death. We don't know. We can never know. We can just have faith." How do you think this line represents that there is always hope even through hard times and that we should enjoy the present? Why?



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## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### “Dear Diary: When It Gets Tough, I Become Even Tougher.”

We all live in a digital world, surrounded by technology and social media. Consequently, we can forget how important it is to reflect and write down meaningful moments from our lives. The characters in the book went through many experiences in their past and present that will certainly affect their futures.

For this activity, pick a character from *After Life* and document their thoughts in the format of a diary. Using a notebook and pen, or a Google Doc or Word Doc, do the following:

- Write a diary entry for your chosen character showing the thoughts and inner struggles they faced during a challenging situation in the novel.
- Write a second diary entry from that character’s perspective where they reflect on how they could have solved the situation or coped better with their current challenges.

Once you are done with your diary entries, swap notebooks or share the document with a classmate and take notes. Answer the following:

- What details stood out to you in your peer’s diary entries?
- What other advice would you give the character that your peer selected? How else could the character have coped and resolved their issues?

### “Live and Love Life” (Video Lesson)

Lux Narayan: What I Learned From 2,000 Obituaries: Ted Talk Analysis

In the book, Amber’s English Language Arts teacher, Arnold, gave his students a class exercise where they wrote their own obituary. “They say you never read your own obituary,” he told his students. “Here’s your chance.”

Watch this video: [https://www.ted.com/talks/lux\\_narayan\\_what\\_i\\_learned\\_from\\_2\\_000\\_obituaries?referrer=playlist-what\\_death\\_can\\_teach\\_you\\_about&subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/lux_narayan_what_i_learned_from_2_000_obituaries?referrer=playlist-what_death_can_teach_you_about&subtitle=en)

In the video, Lux Narayan analyzes 2,000 *New York Times* obituaries and speaks about how by reading them he learned about the beauty of a life well-lived.

After watching the video, discuss key points and what resonated with you with your classmates.

### “Just Write It Out”: Avril Lavigne’s “Slipped Away”

In *After Life*, the characters deal with the grief that comes with losing Amber.

Similarly, musician Avril Lavigne explores grief in her song “Slipped Away,” which she wrote after the loss of her grandfather while she was on tour.

Listen to the song and read the lyrics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKR0ImOszqc>

Afterward, write a poem or create song lyrics that relate to the feelings that Avril experienced. Then, join three classmates and share your thoughts on Avril’s lyrics and how they inspired your own poem or song.

Lastly, discuss the following questions:

- Do you think that expressing yourself in an artistic way is a helpful way to cope with your emotions after facing a difficult situation?
- After listening to the song and reading the lyrics, why do you think Avril Lavigne chose specific words to express her sadness and grief? Pick two words and discuss why you feel they add to the power of the song and its message.

### “That’s the Power of Love”

Besides writing *After Life*, author Gayle Forman is well known for writing strong and beautiful YA novels centered on themes of loss, grief, the power of love, memories, and connection. One example of these books is *If I Stay*, which was made into a major motion picture.

Watch this short clip in which Gayle Forman answers a question about the power and connection of tragic stories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqFDnaGwdl4>

Afterward, write a 300-word reflection discussing your takeaways from her answer.

Give examples from her response during this panel and respond to the following questions with your own thoughts and opinions based on what you saw in the video:

- Do you think it's important for books to tackle tough topics such as loss?
- How do these types of books create a strong connection and help us best understand the power of the relationships and bonds that we experience in our lives?

### “How it Should Have Ended”

While the ending of *After Life* was beautifully written and honored Amber's character and her journey, here you will be challenged to create your own ending for the book and present it creatively.

Illustrate the ending of the book that you wrote with a scene and quote in a collage using drawings and cutouts from magazines, newspapers, or other forms of print media. You can also create your own cutouts with colored paper.

Make sure to pick a favorite quote from the new ending you created and make it a big part of your poster. Write it on the poster board as you are creating the collage.

Posters will be hung around the classroom. Walk around the room and look at posters your classmates created and take notes on your favorite quotes, what they mean to you. Get ready to discuss in class.

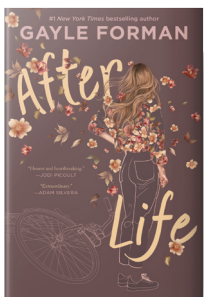
You will need:

- Loose-leaf paper to write down your idea for an alternate ending
- Poster board
- Magazines, newspapers, and other forms of print media
- Glue
- Markers and colored pencils
- Colored paper or colored cardboard paper
- Stickers



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning author and journalist Gayle Forman has written several bestselling novels for children and adults, including *Not Nothing*, the Just One series, and the number one *New York Times* bestseller *If I Stay*, which has been translated into more than forty languages and was adapted into a major motion picture. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her family.



### ABOUT THE BOOK

A family grappling with grief after losing one of their daughters to a hit-and-run bike accident seven years ago finds themselves facing her sudden and mysterious return. Why is Amber back home after her death—as the same seventeen-year-old girl she was before the accident—with no memory of what happened to her? What does this mean for her relationship with her family, which is now attempting to embrace her surprising return after having accepted her tragic passing? Is Amber here to complete unfinished business that she left behind, or to stay? And who is she now? This is a story that tackles themes such as the pain of dealing with grief, the reality of making tough choices, and how saying goodbye to a loved one is the hardest thing to endure. Exploring love, mental health issues, and the trials that many face when it comes to accepting loss and change, *After Life* exemplifies how those who are gone from our physical realm are never forgotten.