



# J<sup>e</sup>-TAC

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## BUDDING ROMANCE

COUPLE FINDS  
LOVE AT TARLETON  
pg. 7



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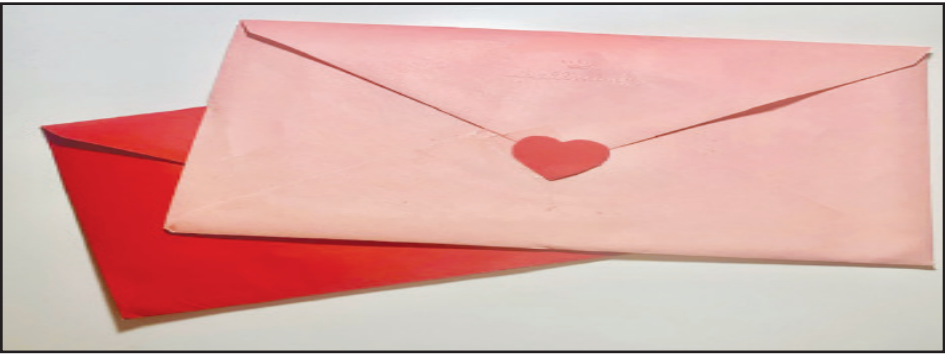


PHOTO BY: CAROLINE CRAIN

### Arrangement of love letter cards

# How to write a love letter

BY CAROLINE CRAIN

*News Editor*

As the season of love falls upon us, a thoughtful way to show your appreciation is by writing a letter to your special someone. After all, sometimes sincere words can mean more than material gifts.

Although most of our readers are part of the Tarleton State University community and, in theory, know how to write research papers and scholarly essays are typically a bit different in style from a message from the heart.

If you're wondering how to get started, here's a step-by-step guide to help you pen that perfect love letter.

### Step 1: The salutation

Every letter begins with a salutation.

For a love letter, it's pretty safe to start with "Dear (name)," or, if you prefer something more intimate, "Dear (pet name/term of endearment)." If you're writing to a spouse, partner or significant other, you might use "My love," "My dearest" or something playful that fits your relationship.

### Step 2: The introduction

Start your love letter by diving straight into your feelings. Since it's Valentine's season, you could open with something sweet like, "I've been thinking about you a lot lately..." or "Happy Valentine's Day – here's why you mean so much to me."

This sets the tone for a personal and emotional message right from the start. Let your partner know why you're writing and what they mean to you.

### Step 3: Express your feelings

The heart of the letter begins here. Go beyond general compliments and focus on specific things you love about the person. Consider including sentiments like a favorite memory, a

personal quality you admire, how they make you feel or your hopes for the future.

### Step 4: Add a personal touch

To make your letter more special, consider adding an inside joke that only the two of you understand, a short quote or song lyric that reminds you of them or a simple promise, such as "I'll always be here for you."

These small details can make your letter feel more unique and sincere.

### Step 5: The signoff

When you're ready to end your love letter, don't forget to sign off.

The classic "Love, (your name/pet name/ etc.," is simple but timeless. If you want to make it a bit more personal, try "Yours truly," "Forever yours" or even something creative that feels right for you. The possibilities are truly endless.

Now let's put it all together. Here is an example letter:

Dear Mom, (Step 1: The salutation)

Happy Valentine's Day! I've been thinking about how much you mean to me, and I wanted to take a moment to tell you. (Step 2: The introduction)

You've always been there for me, and I'm so grateful for your love and care. I still remember how you helped me study for every little quiz when I was younger. Now, with only a little bit of college left, I know I wouldn't be here without you. (Step 3: Express your feelings)

The little things you do, like calling to check in on me or sending pictures of everything that happens at home, mean the world. You're the kindest, strongest person I know, and I'm lucky to be your child. Thank you for everything you do. (Step 4: Add a personal touch)

With much love,

Caroline (Step 5: The signoff)

# Ways to spoil your pet this Valentine's Day

**BY BRENNA DEMPSEY**

*Executive Producer*

The day of love and affection is upon us, and who could be more loving and affectionate than our furry friends?

Do not miss out on the opportunity to show your pets how much they mean to you by doing something to make them feel important.

One great way to do this is by giving them a special treat. Pet stores have many different options for cat and dog treats, or you can even make them a little something if you are feeling creative.

A recipe found on the Smitten with Kittens rescue website lists some healthy and fun treats you can make for your cat. The “Baked Tuna Hearts” recipe is a cute and simple option to try.

Make sure the canned tuna you choose is packaged in water, not oil, and unsalted since too much salt is toxic for cats. Shape the tuna into hearts, bake it in the oven to warm it up then let it cool before serving.

You can even add a pinch of catnip to make it more appealing to your cat.

“Just remember that, as with anything, these treats should be given in limited quantities. Large amounts of fat, sugar or any food your

cat is not used to getting can lead to vomiting, diarrhea or indigestion,” the Smitten with Kittens website said.

When it comes to dogs, they unfortunately have to miss out on the tradition of Valentine's Day chocolate, but there just so happens to be a dog-safe cocoa alternative called carob powder.

Listed as non-toxic for dogs on the ASPCA information page, this can give your dog the experience of tasting chocolate with none of the stress.

The Gone to the Snow Dogs website has a recipe for “**Chocolate Cookies For Dogs DIY Valentines Day Dog Treats**” that might just make some tails wag.

## Ingredients:

- 1 cup Whole Wheat Flour
- 2 tbsp Carob Powder
- 1/4 cup Oat Flour
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 tbsp Peanut Butter
- 1 Egg
- 1/4 cup Coconut cooking oil

## Instructions:

- Preheat your oven to 400 Degrees
- In a large bowl or a mixer, add all the dry ingredients and whisk them together — 1 cup Whole Wheat Flour, 2 tbsp Carob Powder and

1/4 cup Oat Flour

- Make a well in the dry ingredients
- Add all the wet ingredients – 1/4 cup water, 2 tbsp Peanut Butter, 1 Egg and 1/4 cup Coconut cooking oil
- Mix until combined and forms a nice dough consistency
- Flour your surface and roll out your dough to 1/4 inch thick
- Cut into preferred shapes and place on your cookie sheet
- Bake for around 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how crunchy you want the treats
- Cool on a rack and then decorate if you choose, or feed them to your pets as is

Spoiling them with treats is not the only way to your pet's heart. Buying them some new toys can keep them entertained and happy.

Making a cute gift basket with an assortment of toys will be as fun for the pet parent as much as it is for the pet.

While this last option might not be a good fit for every pet, a little Valentine's Day dress-up is a surefire way to mark the memorable day.

Buying them a little shirt or hat to represent the holiday will make for some fun pictures to keep around.



PHOTO BY: BRENNA DEMPSEY

**Tilly showing off her Valentine's Day spirit with her little heart headband.**

## Love on a budget: Valentine's Day ideas that won't break the bank

**BY LESLIE POSADAS**

*Multimedia Journalist*

For many, Valentine's Day spending is limited, but the desire to celebrate love remains strong.

Below are several budget-friendly options that could be used this Feb. 14.

### Takeout and stargazing

Quality time doesn't have to be expensive. Sharing a quick meal with someone special is an alternative option for a fancy dinner.

Chick-fil-A offers its annual Valentine's Day heart-shaped trays, which can be enjoyed under the bright stars.

### Gift basket

Creating a basket full of goodies has become the biggest trend over the past few years, and Breanne Casey, a student at Tarleton State

University, has experienced this firsthand.

“One year, I made handwritten letters and separated them into three jars, decorated them according to my boyfriend's aesthetic, bought a gift basket, added tissue paper, and included socks, his favorite self-care items, candies and topped it off with a collared Ariat shirt, which I thrifted brand new for only \$15,” Casey said.

Sharing a similar experience, Naitlynn Garcia, also a student at Tarleton, believes being thoughtful and sentimental is worth more than a valuable item.

“A million words and actions are worth more than money,” Garcia said. “When my boyfriend made me a book full of things he loved about me, I felt more emotion and excitement than the necklace he got me because he took time out of his day, and it's special and one of a kind.”

### Cooking dinner at home

Crafting and enjoying a meal with someone special is both an activity and a gift.

Kambria Christman, an agricultural communications student at Tarleton, acknowledges the meaningful significance of cooking dinner at home with your significant other.

“My favorite date to do is making dinner together. It's a fun way to spend time together and enjoy being around each other in the comfort of a home,” Christman said.

“I am a big romantic, and my boyfriend knows that, so rather than spending a lot of money on a fancy dinner, I would rather my boyfriend get me flowers and make a pizza at home, which are both things that I really love,” Christman said.

H-E-B carries freshly made in-store 16-inch pizzas, which are priced at \$12.46 plus tax.

### Handwritten cards

Handwritten cards have been a Valentine's Day staple since kindergarten and still hold significant meaning.

“The most memorable gift my boyfriend has given me was a handwritten love note,” Christman said. “It's something that I can keep forever and cherish.”

Similarly, Casey encourages individuals to acknowledge their significant other and make do with what's at their disposal.

“Think about what's meaningful to the other person — this doesn't always mean spending money,” Casey said. “Anything from handwritten notes, watching their favorite movie with them, cooking their favorite dinner or making a picture collage slideshow with music for them to watch. There are a lot of heartfelt options that can be low-budget.”



# The gifts guys actually want for Valentine's Day

**BY ANDREW UTTERBACK**

*Multimedia Journalist*

Valentine's Day is here. You can find a nice card and box of chocolates just about anywhere, but if you're looking to give the special guy in your life something a bit extra but aren't sure what, I've got you covered.

The first foolproof gift idea is cologne. If your Valentine already has a favorite cologne, a fresh bottle will be much appreciated.

If you know he has a new bottle already or if you want to be a little more budget conscious, then a travel size bottle of his scent of choice is a great alternative.

And if he doesn't have a preferred cologne yet, take him to the mall and help him pick one. A trip to the fragrance counters at Nordstrom, Dillards or your department store of choice is an easy Valentines Day outing and a great excuse to shop.

The price point here can be as little as \$50 but can obviously go much higher depending on the scent he chooses.

Staying in the mall mindset, another excellent gift idea is jewelry. Guys already have jewelry at the front of their minds for Valentine's Day gifts, but most would love to receive some as well.

You can't go wrong with a nice watch as a gift and could even get the back of it engraved with initials or a message. Fossil

stores will engrave while you wait.

And, on the off chance that you think this gift might break your budget – no worries.

For \$150 to \$300, you can get a solid watch from a name brand like Fossil that he'll be sure to wear when he takes you out for Valentine's Day dinner. If your special guy is more into bracelets or chains, you can also get a great gift for the same price point.

What guy doesn't love a good pair of sunglasses?

We're still in the winter months, but spring break is just a handful of weeks away, meaning he'll be breaking out the sunglasses again pretty soon.

For \$200 or less, you can buy a nice pair of Ray-Bans for a classic look or Oakleys for the more active guy. Sunglasses in this price range almost always come with a nice carrying case and are sure to be the gift he appreciates year after year.

However, if he is the type to lose pair after pair of sunglasses, Goodr is a solid option with surprisingly high quality frames for around \$25.

I speak for myself and just about every guy I've ever met when I say you can't go wrong with a LEGO set. It really doesn't matter if it's the Millennium Falcon or a small car – if it says LEGO, you can check the gift off as a success.

The price point on this completely varies on which set you

select, and LEGO has offerings for just about any personality or interest. If you go for a bigger set, building it together can also be a fun date-night activity.

If your special guy is into cars, Etsy is full of custom car posters, keychains, pillows and just about anything you can print a car onto.

If he has a perfect dream car, then anything themed with that car is sure to be a hit. If he has his own car that he is always working on (or at least talking about), then there are plenty of custom options for a more personal touch.

If your significant guy doesn't already have a good pocket knife or he's looking to add to his collection, then there are more than enough options from which to choose.

If you're looking for quality on a budget, Buck Knives is a great pick.

In the mid range category, Civivi is a great choice and my personal everyday carry choice.

In the higher-end range, Spyderco knives tend to be a fan favorite.

All of these brands have options in a host of different colors and blade sizes, so you can shop until you find the perfect one. You can even get them engraved with their name or initials for an extra personal touch.

All of these are great gift ideas for that special guy in your life, but definitely not required. Any thoughtful gesture is more than enough to make for a great Valentine's Day.

## Speak her love language

**BY HELENA KNUTSON**

*Marketing Executive*

Sometimes it can be hard to show how deep appreciation and love is, especially when every girl is unique and expresses love differently.

Here are different gift ideas to get your special loved one for Valentine's that will coordinate perfectly with their love language.

### Gift Giving

Buying a gift for your loved ones can show just how well you know them. Some people feel the deepest love knowing someone is thinking about them, such as a gift.

Brilyn Fowler, a junior sports management major, thinks giving a gift to your special someone is a great way to show you care.

"Giving someone something meaningful can be a great gift... It doesn't have to be super big or expensive, it can be something small that relates to an inside joke or something you both like to do," said Fowler.

### Words of Affirmation

Words of affirmation are another love language and one of the most common.

Alexandria Gatewood, a freshman chemistry major, met her boyfriend at freshman orientation.

"Since we were both PSA majors, we were in the same group, so we sat by each other, and then we kinda hit off from there, I guess. I think we've been together six months now, almost seven," Gatewood said.

Gatewood accepts love through words of affirmation and thinks something simple and thought out would be a perfect Valentine's gift for the girl who just needs a little reminder of how much you care.

"A handwritten letter with flowers or something (is a nice gesture). Like, obviously not something super expensive because, you know, everyone thinks you have to go over the top for Valentine's Day when you just spent a bunch of money on Christmas," Gatewood said.

### Quality time

Quality time is another very popular love language and can be a simple yet meaningful act that shows just how much you care about your partner.

Bella Smith, a sophomore nursing major, thinks that the best way to show your love is by just being there for the person you love and building your connection through meaningful time.

"A surprise date or a gift that we could do together (is a way to show love and appreciation)... At the end of the day, we are spending time together... and I think that's way more important than like a purse or a perfume," Smith said.

Some ideas that would be perfect for quality time would be

a romantic dinner or partaking in an activity both parties find interesting.

### Acts of service

Acts of service is a love language dedicated to all the people who find love through helping others.

Brinley Parnell, a freshman pre-nursing major, thinks that someone taking charge and taking the stress of planning the perfect date would be a great gift in itself.

"I think planning on his own, going out to dinner, and having chocolate and flowers and being like 'Okay, at this time we're doing this and be dressed in this attire' (takes the stress off for me)," Parnell said.

Being able to plan something meaningful without help can be a great way to show your love to that special person. Planning a day revolving around shared interests and common hobbies is a great Valentine's gift that everyone can enjoy.

### Physical touch

Physical touch is another great way to show your loved one how much you mean to them. A single touch can show how much you care.

Rylan Thomas, a freshman elementary education major, thinks physical touch is a great gift to give someone for Valentine's Day. A couples massage or just cuddling on the couch can be a great way to show your love.

"I think couples massages or even going out dancing is a great gift to give your partner – something simple and easy and doesn't require a lot of money," Thomas said.

# The science behind love

**BY LINDSEY HUGHES**  
*Art Director*

Contrary to popular belief, love is not just a feeling or emotion that is sparked randomly when you find your significant other, meet your best friend or even have a baby. Falling in love is an intricate scientific process at its core.

Falling in love is an act that is strongly orchestrated by hormones and chemicals released in the human body.

The first phase of love is attraction. Attraction causes dopamine levels to increase, which produces what many writers have called a “natural high.” This is both because of the sense of euphoria dopamine gives and the fact that it has the same effects of many addictive substances.

Norepinephrine, also known as Noradrenaline, is another chemical that the body releases in the process of falling in love. This chemical, however, is connected to our natural fight-or-flight response.

This explains several physical reactions that you have most likely experienced in the context of love – sweaty palms, a racing heart or even extreme feelings of nervousness and excitement.

Have you ever experienced a feeling of pre-occupation with your significant other or crush, possibly to the verge of obsession?

This feeling is normal and is caused by serotonin levels decreasing during the early stages of falling in love.

Serotonin allows us to regulate and control our moods. This decrease is the explanation for the infatuation often felt during a budding relationship.

Oxytocin is what many psychologists call “the love hormone.” Oxytocin is released during physical touch, and is why we experience contentment and attachment after contact with a partner. Hugging, holding hands, kissing and intimacy all raise our oxytocin levels.

One very important hormone for those looking to be in long-term relationships is vasopressin.

Vasopressin is linked to monogamy and long-term relationships; it has been linked to both attachment and commitment. Increased levels of vasopressin cause increased protective and territorial behavior towards your partner.

Lastly, cortisol is an important hormone released during the initial stages of falling in love.

Harvard Medical School defines cortisol as the stress hormone. Levels of cortisol often significantly rise in the beginning of a relationship.

This is why many feelings may be heightened and intensified during the early stages of a partnership and why we may feel a gradual shift to comfort and stability.

“Cortisol and serotonin levels return to normal. Love, which began as a stressor (to our brains and bodies, at least), becomes a buffer against stress.” Scott Edwards said in a Harvard Medical School article called “Love and the Brain.”

Kynlie Bogle is a sophomore psychology major at Tarleton State University. She recently got engaged and has her own thoughts on the scientific side of love, while being in love.

“Studying psychology has changed my view on love,” Bogle said. “I feel like I have a deeper understanding of what it really takes to be in a relationship. Even though it is said all the time, communication truly is key. Love in psychology is defined as when the satisfaction, security and development of another person is as important to you as your own satisfaction, security and development. Relationships aren’t always 50/50, but there always must be work put in from both sides.”

Jacob Earl Holzschuh is a Tarleton Alumnus with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice and psychology. He is happily married and has a 1-year-old baby. His psychology background also gives a different insight into love.

“Studying psychology has made me view love and relationships less through an emotional lens and more through patterns of behavior, attachment styles and biological drivers,” Holzschuh said. “I recognize that attraction, commitment and intimacy are influenced by subconscious factors, not just feelings. Psychologically, love is a combination of attachment, intimacy and passion, influenced by neurotransmitters like oxytocin and dopamine. It’s less about fate and more about compatibility, reinforcement and shared experiences. From a human perspective, love is both a choice and a feeling – a deep commitment that requires sacrifice, trust and respect to grow.”

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# A single woman's guide to Valentine's Day

BY ANNABETH JOHNSON

*Multimedia Journalist*

From rose bouquets to heart-shaped boxes full of chocolates, Valentine's Day is the holiday known for celebrating love with that special someone.

There are some who have not met their person yet, but that does not mean they still cannot partake in the Valentine's Day festivities.

Here are some activities that a single woman can do to celebrate Valentine's Day.

## Take yourself out on a fancy date

Dressing up and taking yourself out to your favorite restaurant is a great way to treat yourself and enjoy the holiday of love with the food you love.

If money is too tight for a restaurant self-date, then going to get ice cream or coffee is a cheaper alternative that still emphasizes the same purpose.

## Cook yourself a nice dinner

If you have the experience and resources or simply would not like to go out to eat, you can always stay in and cook yourself a fancy dinner.

Turning on your favorite TV series or playlist while cooking your favorite meal is a great way to surround yourself with things you love this Valentine's Day.

Perhaps you are open to cooking a fancy dinner for yourself but are out of ideas.

Here are some meal ideas, which vary in experience needed, that can be found online:

- Spaghetti, green beans, and garlic bread
- Shredded chicken soft tacos, black beans, and spanish rice
- Steak, oven-roasted asparagus, and mashed potatoes
- Stuffed baked potatoes and caesar salad
- Smoked Salmon, white rice, and oven-roasted broccoli

If cooking is not your strong suit, ordering a meal and bringing it home is also always an option.

Whether it is homemade, take-out or chef-made, enjoying your favorite meal should be on your checklist of Valentine's Day activities.

## Treat yourself to some chocolates and a floral bouquet

When someone thinks about Valentine's



**Single women do not have to wait for someone else to buy them flowers or a box of chocolates.**

**PHOTO BY: ANNABETH JOHNSON**

Day, they think about that heart-shaped box of chocolates and a deep red rose bouquet.

This combination of items is the staple of this holiday but should not be limited to only couples.

This Valentine's Day, hop in your car, drive to your local floral shop and spend that money on a big bouquet for yourself.

Once the flowers are taken care of, swing by your local market and pick out a box of chocolates to indulge in.

## Get a workout in

For those who like to stay active, getting

some exercise this Valentine's Day can benefit your health and is a great way to start or end the day in a productive manner.

Besides, the gym may be emptier this holiday, and that just means easier access to all of the machines.

## Have a self-care movie night

Maybe you are looking to celebrate Valentine's Day in the comfort of your home.

Since you are spending the day celebrating all of the things you love, why not include some healthy past times such as the luxuries of self-care?

After getting all cozy for the evening, cuddle up in a blanket and turn on your favorite TV series to binge-watch while your face mask and freshly painted nails dry.

The activities listed above are only a few of the ways that an unaccompanied woman can be involved in the Valentine's Day celebrations.

Valentine's Day is special whether it is shared with someone or not. Therefore, the day should be filled with activities that make it special to you.

So treat yourself this Valentine's and always remember to celebrate that special someone – even if that means celebrating yourself.



# *Finding love across the hallway*

BY BETHANY KILPATRICK

*Multimedia Journalist*

Love is in the air at Tarleton State University this February, but for Paige Davis and Adam Stone, love has been in the air since day one in the halls of Traditions South.

Davis is studying mechanical engineering and is from Barlett, Kansas. Stone is studying computer science and is from Granbury, Texas. They are both juniors and have been in a committed relationship since their freshman year.

“I think proximity brought us together,” Davis said. “We lived across the hall from each other in Traditions South, because we were both in the Corps (Texan Corps of Cadets) at the time.”

While love at first sight is mythical to some, it is not to Stone.

“The first time I saw you (Davis),” Stone said. “You were in the hallway, and we didn’t speak to each other at the time, but I saw you, and I was like, ‘Wow, you were stunning, and I had a crush on you at that time.’”

Stone quickly caught Davis’ attention as well, but she had a slightly different response.

“The very first time that I looked at him or even interacted with him would have been at convocation,” Davis said. “My very first thought was, ‘Woah, I am going to marry this guy.’ My second thought was, ‘Holy cow, his legs are so hairy.’”

Davis’ observations made for a comical first interaction.

“I just told him he had Sasquatch legs,” Davis said. “I was like, ‘Well, if it is meant to be, that will go over well.’ And it did. Here we are.”

While their relationship began as simply friends, it did not stay that way too long.

“We met that August,” Davis said. “Then in September we just decided we were each others’ best friend, and we should be together, and there wasn’t really any reason we shouldn’t be.”

In the course of their relationship Davis and Stone have seen many sights together.

“After we first started dating,” Davis said. “We went to Florida together with my family. Then that next summer we did a road trip through Wyoming through the Badlands. We have also gone with his family. We went to Cozumel.”

To say this Tarleton couple enjoys the thrill



Davis and Stone take on the adventure of skydiving together in Florida.

COURTESY PHOTO

of an adventure is an understatement.

“We are both scuba divers,” Davis said. “So we have done a lot of scuba diving together. We have done firefighting together because we are both firefighters.”

Road tripping, exploring the ocean and firefighting is not all this couple does together.

“We went skydiving together,” Davis said. “I made him ride horses, also. He was not a horse person, but I am on the rodeo team, and he had to learn. He has been a trooper.”

Their latest adventure involves the adoption of their furry friend, Zane. After dog-sitting for Davis’ roommate, they decided they needed an addition to their relationship.

“We were playing with the dog,” Stone said. “It was a chocolate lab. While I was playing with the dog, I was like, ‘Man, I want a dog.’”

Davis shared the same feeling.

“After 10 minutes of hanging out with my roommate’s dog,” Davis said. “I asked Adam if I was crazy for looking for a dog.”

They decided they wanted to adopt a dog

from a rescue shelter, and after briefly researching shelters in Texas, Davis found a red merle Australian shepherd, Zane, that they wanted to be theirs.

“He was the best decision we have made,” Davis said. “He is a great addition to our lives, honestly.”

Olivia Ray is a junior at Tarleton and met Davis during her senior year of high school at Texan Orientation. They have been close friends since that point on.

“When they first got together,” Ray said. “I remember Paige being really secure and really sure about it. Even though I didn’t know much about him, I knew I trusted Paige.”

Ray admires the respectable qualities noticeably present between Davis and Stone.

“I would describe them as very compatible,” Ray said. “They know exactly what each other needs at a given time. They just know how to work very well together and adjust to each other’s schedules. I know they are both incredibly busy, but they always seem to find time for each

other, which I think is really important.”

Maintaining a loving relationship requires effort and communication according to Stone.

“Communicate,” Stone said. “I think that is the biggest issue for a lot of people who date. Also, I feel like it is important to make sure you are dating, actually going out on dates and not just becoming secondhand roommates to each other, because it is easy to fall into a routine.”

Davis agrees with her partner and encourages working through the hard times together as a couple.

“Not every relationship is perfect,” Davis said. “You have to have this objective that you love each other, and you are together for a reason. Your relationship didn’t just spawn out of nowhere. There is a reason that you are together, so if you are going through something or you are fighting, just remember you are there because you love each other, and you can work through it.”

# Love, according to media

BY ASHTYN HANSARD

*Digital Media Manager*

Valentine's Day is quickly approaching and many famous romcoms and romance novels are beginning to gain popularity again. However, I begin to question why we, the consumers, are so obsessed with love stories.

Do we try to use fictional relationships as a sort of guide for our own lives? Is love in the media portrayed accurately, or is it really just a far fetched dream that can only be achieved through fictional characters?

Think of the Disney movies you watched as a kid.

A normal but beautiful girl falls in love with a prince, and they live happily ever after.

Is it accurate to real life? No, but it's a nice story to tell a child because it's magical. As we get older, we start to see how ridiculous some of the characters acted and the magic of the movie starts to fade.

What about real love? Not the fairy tales and "love at first sight" stories, but the real, relatable stories that you could see happening in real life. Is there any story that can show a realistic depiction of love?

I believe that some media can accurately show what real love can look like, but it's not as easy as you'd think.

Love itself is hard to define in its entirety, mainly since it's such a complex emotion.

Some could argue that love doesn't exist while others could argue that love is seen everywhere. With such a broad range of description, you would think it would be easy to make a good representation.

However, I don't think a lot of love stories and romcoms today show a real depiction of the emotion.

If you know me, you know how much I love movies and books, but I find it really hard to get into the romance genre due to how ridiculous some of the stories are. I want to yell at the TV or throw my book because the characters just seem so two-dimensional and boring that I lose interest in the story.

As I've watched movies or shows and read books, I've noticed a certain aspect that really makes me believe that the love between the

characters is real: It isn't about the love story.

Some of the best love stories I've ever seen or read weren't focused on romantic relationships, but rather a larger and more relatable plot that allowed love to be found within itself. That larger plot usually tends to be grief.

One example is the series "Fleabag." The story follows a woman, who somehow remains unnamed throughout the series, who is dealing with plenty of personal problems while having a semi-complicated love life. However, the story is really about someone else that we never meet.

Throughout the story, the woman is trying to fully process the grief she's experiencing after her best friend and mother have died. She uses these failing relationships and the comfort of them to keep from having to deal with the reality of her emotions and the loss of the people she loves.

Emily Henry's novel "Beach Read" also uses grief as a main plotline. While it is a romance novel, the couple is not the sole focus, but more of an outcome of the two characters grieving a part of their lives. January, the main character, is having to navigate life after the sudden death of her father and the discovery of his secret second life comes to light.

One of the more famous love stories is "Me Before You." Louisa falls for Will, a quadriplegic, while being his caregiver. Even as they grow close and begin to have romantic feelings for one another, Will decides to end his life through medical assistance. This leaves Louisa in a grieving state, but there's also a bittersweet feeling of love left with it.

There's also the entire relationship between Katniss and Peeta in the "Hunger Games" trilogy. At the end of the third book, "Mockingjay," both characters have had their lives completely changed. Katniss' sister, Prim, has died when she was the whole reason Katniss even entered the games. Peeta has been mind controlled to the point where he still doesn't truly know who Katniss is.

While they're no longer the same people they were when they first competed, they come together in the end. Peeta helps Katniss work through her grief while Katniss helps Peeta work through his grief of losing himself, the



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCREEN RANT

## Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark in "Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2."

one thing he wanted to avoid.

"Wandavision," a popular Marvel show, has a line in their last episode that I feel correlates well with the point I'm trying to make. Vision, Wanda's late husband, says to her in a flashback, "What is grief, if not love persevering?"

While many romantic subplots use grief as an overall theme, it does not have to be limited to romance. There has been success with using it to show familial love and how grief can either bring a family closer together or drive them apart.

Take "The Haunting of Hill House" series as an example. The Crain siblings have to endure a traumatic experience of their mother dying due to suicide when they were kids. When they get older, their youngest sister, Nell, dies the same way in the same house.

The grief of losing them both starts to drive the siblings apart, but they recover in the end and grow their love for one another. Nell gives a speech in the last episode while appearing to them as a ghost, but it perfectly encapsulates the entire Crain sibling relationship.

"Forgiveness is warm. Like a tear on a cheek. Think of that and of me when you stand in the rain. I loved you completely. And you loved me the same. That's all. The rest is confetti," Nell said in his speech.

While the Crain siblings are a good example, some may think it's not very realistic due to the paranormal aspect.

The movie "Bridge to Terabithia" also depicts love in a very realistic yet quiet way.

Jess and Leslie become childhood best friends and live next door to each other. It's clear that they love each other, although we don't know for sure if it's romantic or platonic given they're just kids. When Leslie dies in an accident, Jess doesn't really know what to do and becomes angry with everything.

All these examples listed are just some of my ideas on how real love is portrayed in the media. We may not see these situations played out in real life often, but they're able to connect with us deeply and maybe inspire us to know that some of the greatest love stories can happen in the darkest times.



# Valentine's doesn't suck, but hating it for no reason does

BY COLTON BRADBERRY

*Opinion Editor*

Every February, stores flood with heart-shaped chocolates, stuffed animals holding “I Love You” signs and roses that mysteriously double in price overnight.

And every February, there are inevitable waves of complaints about Valentine's Day.

Some people claim it's nothing more than a cash grab for greeting card companies and florists. Others argue that couples shouldn't need a designated day to celebrate their love. And, of course, there's the classic argument from single people who insist the holiday is just a cruel reminder of what they don't have.

If you go by what advertisers and big corporations tell you, Valentine's Day is all about how much you spend and how extravagant your gestures are.

But that's not what love is about. And honestly, that's not what Valentine's Day is about, either.

At the same time, many people believe that if you're single, Valentine's Day is a day to dread, as if not being in a relationship somehow makes you less worthy of celebrating love. That's just as misguided as the idea that love is measured in grand, expensive gestures.

Valentine's Day has stopped being a celebration of love and started becoming an obligation. There's this unspoken pressure to prove how much you care about someone through gifts, expensive dates and social media-worthy displays.

Valentine's Day is what you make it.

Some see it as a commercialized holiday filled with overpriced gifts and social media pressure, while others embrace it as a time to celebrate love in their own way. The truth is, you get to decide how, if at all, you want to celebrate.

Instead of feeling pressured to spend money, Valentine's Day should be about genuine connection. That doesn't have to mean an expensive dinner; it could be cooking a meal together at home, taking a walk or simply having an uninterrupted conversation.

One of the most common complaints about Valentine's Day is that couples “shouldn't need

a holiday to celebrate their love.” The argument goes that if you're in a healthy relationship, you should treat every day like Valentine's Day – showing love, appreciation and romance all the time, not just on Feb. 14.

The reality is that special occasions exist to remind us to slow down and acknowledge things that matter. Life gets busy. People get caught up in routines, stress and obligations. Having a dedicated day to step back and say, “Hey, I appreciate you” isn't a sign that a relationship is lacking, it's a way to be intentional about something that can sometimes get lost in the shuffle.

Love, especially the kind that lasts through the ups and downs of life, is worth celebrating. We do it for anniversaries, weddings and engagements, so why not Valentine's Day?

For those who are single, it's easy to hate Valentine's Day. Social media doesn't help; everywhere you look, couples are posting their gifts, flowers and elaborate dates. But being single doesn't mean you're missing out.

It's easy to direct frustration toward Valentine's Day, especially when it feels like the whole world is telling you that love only counts if it comes with a relationship status. But hating the holiday doesn't change anything. It just reinforces the idea that being single is something to be upset about.

No one complains about people celebrating birthdays just because it's not their turn that day. Valentine's Day is no different. Just because it doesn't directly involve you this time around doesn't mean it's a bad thing. Let couples have their fun – it doesn't take anything away from you.

There's no need to perform your singleness on Valentine's Day. You don't have to tweet about how much you hate the holiday or post sarcastic memes about being alone. You don't have to dramatically declare it “just another day” as if acknowledging the holiday would somehow make you weaker.

Being single isn't something to prove or defend. It's just a relationship status, not a personality trait. Valentine's Day will come and go whether you acknowledge it or not, so there's no need to treat it like a personal attack.



PHOTO BY COLTON BRADBERRY

Valentine's Day chocolate display at H-E-B showcases a variety of sweet treats

**THE PURPLE POPCAST**

ON AIR

ANDREW UTTERBACK, HELENA KNUTSON  
AND LINDSEY HUGHES

# A movie to see with a ‘Companion’

BY HANNAH BROOKS

Multimedia Journalist

The season of love is here, and with that comes the release of the new movie “Companion.”

Released on Jan. 31 of this year, it’s already taken the main stage with a Rotten Tomatoes rating of 94% and an audience score of 91%.

“Companion” is a psychological thriller with hints of sci-fi, horror and comedy, all while moonlighting as a romance film.

The collective audience review is that it’s clever, witty and shocking.

It’s set in the present day with the dystopian aspect of android companions that are both subservient and completely human-like.

“Companion” starts off slow and lacking excitement, but in hindsight, this was

a complementary exposition to add extra shock to the twists that followed.

The film follows the relationship of Iris (played by Sophie Thatcher), an android companion to Josh (played by Jack Quaid).

Josh is a charming, psychopathic individual, and Iris finds herself being the pawn in his manipulative and murderous scheme. Iris discovers along this progression that she is not human and all her memories and emotions are programmed.

While the movie falls under the broad category of romance, viewers be warned that the story revolves around the toxic relationship between Iris and Josh, specifically as a nod to controlling relationships.

“Companion” does a great job of building tension with the classic trope of one of the main characters creating a

problem only to come up with solutions that exacerbate the problem.

However, the movie soon becomes an interesting commentary on the shift of emotional landscape over time in relationships—of course, to the extreme, because of murder—adding a sardonic essence.

Note to viewers: The film has a good amount of gore in it.

Whether you enjoy Valentine’s Day or not, people on both sides of the argument will find enjoyment in the stellar performances by the leading actors, as well as its wryly amusing plot.

By the end of the movie, you’ll likely find yourself rooting for Iris and, in reward, revel in a deliciously satisfying ending.



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# The violent history of Valentine's Day

BY BROOKLYN MCKINNEY

*Multimedia Journalist*

St. Valentine's Day was founded to honor the life of a Roman priest named Valentine, who defied direct orders from Roman emperor Claudius II and paid with his life.

Valentine kept marrying off men that Claudius II wanted to recruit into the army. Unfortunately for him, the Roman emperor didn't believe that married men would make good soldiers, so he had him arrested.

During his imprisonment, it is said that Valentine became close with his jailer's blind daughter. Before his execution in A.D. 269, he healed her blindness and wrote her a note, signing it "from your Valentine."

In A.D. 500, Pope Gelasius founded St. Valentine's Day, and many scholars believe that it actually took the place of Lupercalia, a pagan fertility festival that he banned in A.D. 494.

Lupercalia was celebrated annually on Feb. 15 under the supervision of priests called "Luperci."

As a fertility festival, it was held in honor of Roman fertility gods, like Faunus who looked like a half-human half-goat creature, and Lupercus, a protector of shepherds and their flocks.

The Romans would gather in this special cave where it was said that Romus and Romulus, the founders of Rome, were nursed by a she-wolf named "Lupus."

They would watch the Luperci sacrifice goats and a dog. They did all of this completely naked, slitting the animal's throats open with a sacrificial knife and then smearing the blood all over themselves.

While the blood would be wiped off with wool soaked in milk, the men would laugh.

After a sacrificial feast, the Luperci would then cut "thongs" or whips from goat skin and run around Palatine Hill, using them to strike any woman who came near them. Being hit with the goat whips was said to give them luck and fertility.

So how did St. Valentine's Day go from animal sacrifice and Christian martyrdom to the holiday of love?

Well, one of the first references of Valentine's Day as a sacred day for lovers actually came from Geoffrey Chaucer, who is mostly known for his book of short stories called "The

Canterbury Tales."

But he also wrote this poem in 1382 called the "Parliament of Fowles" about a flock of birds engaged in a debate while three male eagles try to seduce an aristocratic lady eagle.

The debate is full of insults, and the lady eagle ends up choosing no one. Just like there are no good fish in the sea, there were no good birds in the sky.

One of the eagles also has a high status, like his potential mate, but is more in love with the idea of love than her.

Eagle number two has a lower status than the lady eagle and is really bitter about it, while eagle number three is a clout chaser and only wants her to be his because every other bird does.

Chaucer wrote, "For this was on Seynt Valentynes day, When every foul cometh there to choose his mate."

This makes sense because, back then, English birds would pair off in February for mating season, and St. Valentine's Day is on Feb. 14.

So in the middle ages, the holiday started being associated with romance, and by the 18th century, it became a common practice for people to draw names for their "Valentine" the night before.

Drawing someone's name was seen as a good omen to become man and wife, so many women started performing these witchy rituals in churchyards or sleeping with bay leaves under their pillow to induce dreams of their betrothed.

Along with sending love letters or poems to express their affection, people also started normalizing hate mail with "Vinegar Valentine's" in the Victorian era.

These snarky poems were meant to leave a sour taste in the recipient's mouth and would often be packaged with an ugly caricature drawing of them.

Valentine's Day of course also became an excuse to send gifts such as flowers and chocolate.

Red roses became the traditional Valentine's Day flower because a Swedish King visited Persia one day and discovered that in Persian culture, red roses symbolize love.

While the discovery of chocolate goes way back to the Aztecs and their cacao beans, it soon became a delicacy that was mainly avail-



COURTESY PHOTO

Statue of cupid with his famous bow symbolizing the power of love

able to the wealthy in Spain and Europe.

One of these wealthy people was Giacomo Casanova, and he was renowned as the most famous lover of all time from publishing stories about his very scandalous life in the 1700s.

This guy did it all. He was a lawyer and a gambler who somehow found time to sleep with everyone and their mother.

In his autobiography called "Story of My Life," he wrote all about his sex life and an "elixir" of love that made him good in bed.

Spoiler alert: It was chocolate, so that's why rich Europeans started drinking hot chocolate.

The reason that stores currently sell chocolate in a heart-shaped box is because Robert Cadbury invented his heart-shaped box of chocolates in 1868. This version was far more

affordable to the masses, and the packaging was, of course, a huge hit because chocolate companies are still using it today.

Currently, Valentine's Day is mostly an over-commercialized excuse to buy each other roses and those heart-shaped boxes of chocolates. Oh, and don't forget to make expensive dinner reservations at least a month in advance just to sit in an overcrowded restaurant when the relationship barely lasted through traffic.

Should people just treat their partners like they love them every day and maybe bring back the hate mail?

Hopefully, this article inspired someone to draw an ugly picture of their mortal enemy and mail it to them. At least no one is sacrificing goats or dogs.



# Top 5 Book-Boyfriends

## *Someone to spend your day with if you don't have a Valentine*

**BY MACKENZIE JOHNSON**

*Managing Editor*

According to a report from the Pew Research Center, 50% of single people actually don't want a relationship, and surprisingly enough, more women are recorded to feel this way than men.

Within younger adults, 39% of women would prefer to stay single compared to the 33% of men.

I can't help but believe that if single women were instead polled on whether or not they'd be willing to date their favorite book character, that statistic would be drastically different.

The reason as to why many women prefer to stay single ranges from anything to valuing independence, lacking the time to commit, feeling insecure and scared at the prospect or, possibly most common, having too high of expectations for a relationship.

The media portrayal of relationships on TV screens plays a part into these seemingly high standards, but the portrayal of romance in the pages of our most beloved books is also to blame.

Men written by female writers are universally adored because they were written by women, for women. These fictional men are endearing, witty, thoughtful and always easy on the eyes.

As a result, it's easy to transfer those standards you'd look for in a book-boyfriend over to your actual love life.

If you yourself have fallen in love with a book-boyfriend and refuse to let go of those characteristics read in your favorite male lead, you're not the minority.

In fact, you're right on track – and although unrealistic, or at least difficult, expectations are probably not something to be proud of. For the duration of this article, we're instead going to choose to celebrate it.

We celebrate by checking your book-boyfriend list and making sure these five men haven't been left off of it.

### **5. Kai Azer**

I was hesitant about diving into the “Powerless” trilogy written by Lauren Roberts.

Prior to reading it, I had heard differing reviews of the book; one of the more negatively popular ones being that it too closely resembles the plot of Victoria Aveyard's “Red Queen” series.

As a die hard fan of “Red Queen,” I was very reluctant to crack open “Powerless” based on these reviews alone.

On one hand, I selfishly didn't mind peeking back into a realm similar to that of “Red Queen,” and on the other hand, if “Powerless” is nearly a replica of it, it would have felt wrong to betray the original series that introduced me into young adult fantasy.

In the end, talk of the unparalleled banter and male love interest “Powerless” had to offer tipped the scale, and I picked up the book out of sheer curiosity.

I was expecting to be offended by its supposed outright comparability to “Red Queen,” but was rather left pleasantly surprised.

Could I see some similarities between the two? Sure, probably.

Just about every fantasy book harbors the trope of having a guy with a high status and dark hair and actions fall for a fiercely independent female protagonist with self-preserving tendencies and a dreadful backstory – just not before the two both mildly hate each other.

“Powerless” is no different and neither is said love interest Kai Azer.

He's a lethally powerful and overconfident prince coded like nearly all fantasy book male leads, and yet, I wasn't once bored despite his character being a blueprint I've seen countless other times.

It could be from a place of comfortability, and yes, maybe some of the dialogue is a little repetitive, but I was hooked.

His character's outright fascination with female lead Paedyn Gray is addictive to read, as are the arrogant, yet commendable, measures he takes to get close to her despite their complex circumstances.

### **4. Peeta Mellark**

What kind of book girl would I be if I didn't put Peeta Mellark on this list?

Answer: Not a real one.

I first read “The Hunger Games” in middle school while on a trip to the beach in Florida.

I have always loved the beach, but I distinctly remember sitting out of the ocean waves in order to soak up more of the words Suzanne Collins fed to Peeta.

I had all three books of the series read before the four day vacation concluded.

“The Hunger Games” is truly a dystopian classic, and although the movies are spectacular, you're still missing out if you haven't read the books the movies were adapted from.

Book Peeta is a little more bold – so bold you have to sit the book down for a few minutes at a time to process the game this guy has. For the sake of time, the movie cuts much of that dialogue out.

The same goes for the gut-wrenchingly romantic dialogue Peeta drops. I am very easily pained by lovey-dovey lines, but book Peeta somehow makes it work in a way that doesn't inflict great suffering upon me.

Although Josh Hutcherson does a phenomenal job of bringing Peeta to our screens and showcasing those loyal qualities, not all of the best parts of Peeta in the book translate over to the movie.

The books give an even further look into not just the character of Peeta, but the premise of Peeta and Katniss' entire relationship.

Peeta is much more multifaceted than the movies credit him for, and that alone should be enough encouragement to want to see his character on paper.

### **3. Carden Greenbriar**

Carden is so interesting to me.

Born out of Holly Black's fantasy trilogy “Cruel Prince,” Carden is, you guessed it, a cruel prince.

He's described as cunning, entitled, manipulative and positively beautiful, which certainly helps the case of overlooking those initial qualities.

However, along with those questionable character makeup components, he's also severely vulnerable and mostly uses those traits to mask the internal struggles pumping through his royal blood.

And this royal blood absolutely boils for character Jude Duarte.

As a human outsider in a faerie world, Jude suspects Carden hates her for her mortality, but rather, Carden hates himself for not.

“Cruel Prince” is the ultimate slow burn and is loaded to the rim with betrayal, and this has a lot to do with the mixed opinions of the book.

The two truly do despise each other for much of the series, even if the underlying reasons as to why are to the contrary; therefore, the first book of the trilogy is more politically based and revolves around the realm's twisted court.

The final books of the series are where the focus is really dialed in on the thorny dynamic between Carden and Jude, and this is where the redemption arc of Carden also comes into full bloom.

Although not your traditional book-boyfriend, his convoluted character is not to be overlooked and will leave you saying, “I can fix him.”

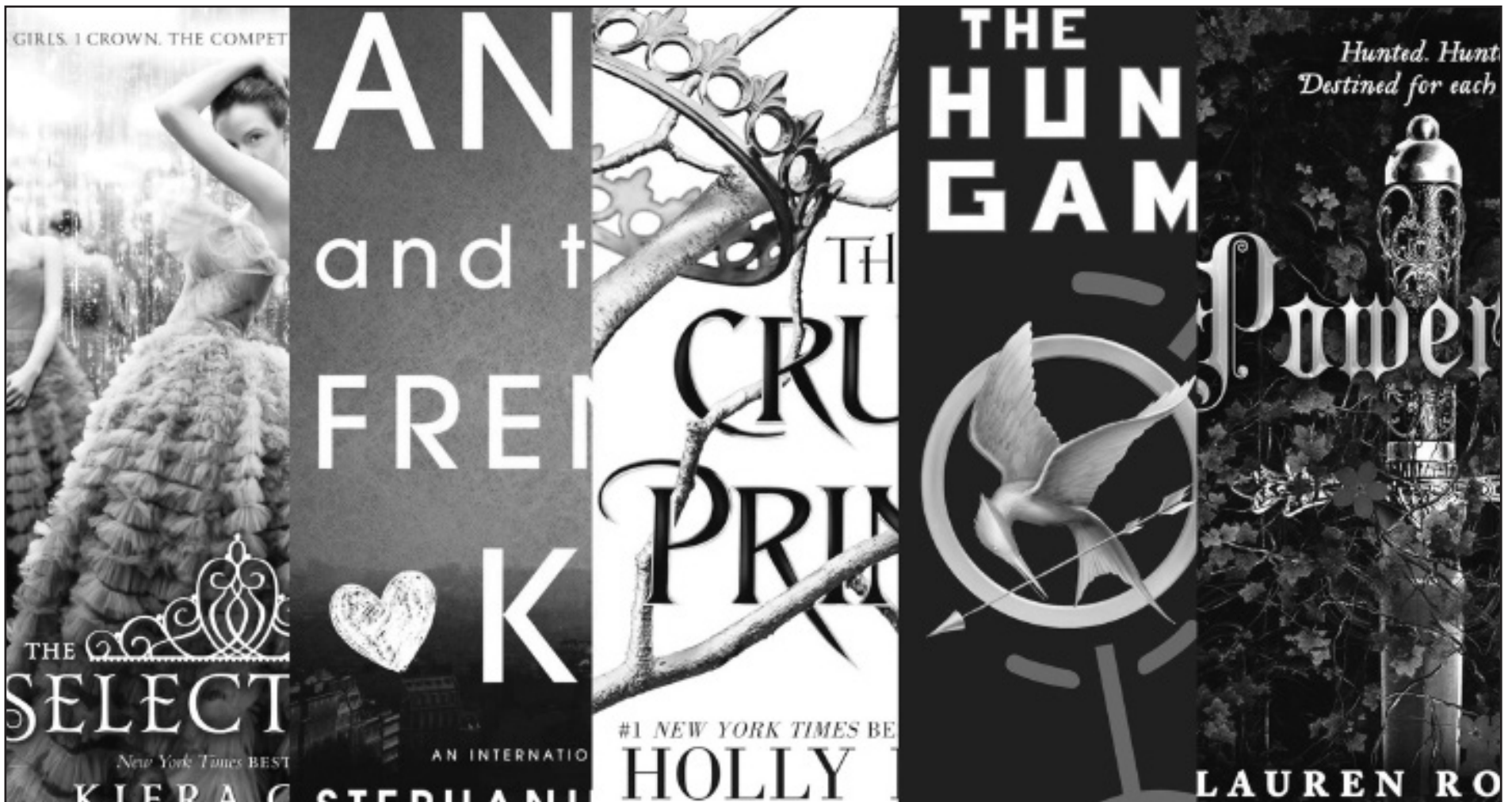
### **2. Étienne St. Clair**

If you're thinking, “This name sounds foreign,” then you're absolutely correct.

If you're also thinking, “The name alone of this character is probably much of why he's second on this list,” then you're also correct.

The name Étienne St. Clair is derived from French roots, but the actual character the name belongs to claims several nationalities.

Commonly referred to as simply St. Clair by everyone but one singular person, St. Clair is American, French and English.



COLLAGE BY MACKENZIE JOHNSON

**“The Selection,” “Anna and the French Kiss,” “Cruel Prince,” “The Hunger Games” and “Powerless” each feature five book-boyfriends you absolutely must meet this Valentine’s Day.**

Meaning, he’s bilingual and can speak American and French, all with a British accent.

What more could you possibly want in a book-boyfriend?

Written by Stephanie Perkins, the novel “Anna and the French Kiss” is one of my favorite novels to ever exist and the character St. Clair is mostly why.

This book is set in France at the School of American in Paris (SOAP) – a private high school of sorts for Americans in France.

The chemistry between St. Clair and main character Anna Oliphant, a Georgia native forced to attend SOAP by her distant father, are simply unmatched.

The banter is charming, the relationship buildup is authentic and the instant adoration the two characters have for each other is enough to make you want to jump into the book and drop kick both main characters for how outright unfair it is.

Not to mention, the setting the book takes place in is exquisite, all of the characters are ones you want to put in your pocket and keep forever and the dialogue is funny enough to be enjoyed by all young adults, but not so over the top to be classified as cheesy.

St. Clair himself is gorgeous, hilarious, charming and have I mentioned British?

His character is so captivating that you will find yourself overlooking one thing – his height.

Yes, he’s on the shorter side, but this just means it will be easier for him to reach the ground when it’s time to get down on one knee and ask for your hand in marriage.

I think we all know what my answer would be.

### 1. Maxon Schreave

The time has come where I have to muster up all of my strength and courage and selflessly give away the one I love the most – Maxon Schreave.

Maxon is all things every boyfriend should be: swoon-worthily handsome, heartbreakingly kind, undyingly devoted and naturally, in line for a throne.

If your real life boyfriend fits every single one of these criteria, then it’s not necessary to finish this article.

If you chose to be honest, then you’re still here and we can continue.

“The Selection” series by Kiera Cass where Maxon resides is the major pillar of all young adult novels.

Is the writing the best you’ve ever read?

Not particularly, no.

Is the female lead America Singer infuriating?

Absolutely, yes.

Does Maxon completely make up for these weighty downfalls?

100% percent, yes.

In fact, the frustrating decisions made by America in her and Maxon’s relationship is part of what makes him the best book-boyfriend.

I would have kicked America to the curb after decision one, but Maxon’s patience, benevolence and undeniable love for this difficult character always prevails.

Although the concept of “The Selection” trilogy is eccentric—think “The Bachelor” set in a castle—the writing is undoubtedly young adult and definitely nothing groundbreaking, but the character of Maxon is.

He is crafted perfectly, and his quotes will have you blushing, giggling and kicking your feet – to the point that I reread the series twice a year despite the fact that I was introduced to it in junior high.

Some books are simply timeless and impossible to outgrow, and Maxon adds just that effect to “The Selection” series.

Although fostering attachments to fictional characters may come with the ramifications of high expectations in real life relationships, it’s a price many are willing to pay.

Take a glimpse into any one of these five book-boyfriends, and you too may just find yourself paying that price – a price best paid by making a book-boyfriend list of your own.



# Sweet Treats for a Sweet Day

*Candies to keep you company during the season of love*

BY HAELEY CARPENTER

Editor-in-Chief

Whether you celebrate Valentine's Day or not, you can't miss the extra candy aisles in the grocery stores. Especially on Feb. 15 when they all go on sale.

If you are looking for an extra something to give that special person in your life, love a seasonal twist on traditional candies or just have a sweet tooth, Valentine's Day gives everyone an excuse to indulge themselves.

In no particular order, these are some of my favorite candies I will be buying this month.

## Stuffed chocolates

They're a classic.

From white to dark chocolate, sweet to nutty fillings and round to square shapes, each chocolate is unique.

There is no shortage of these heart-shaped boxes on shelves, and the best part about them are the sizes: You can get an extra large box for you and your honey to share or get a smaller box to keep to yourself.

Personally, I am looking forward to getting a medium sized box with the raspberry filled chocolates.

## Conversation hearts

This is another classic Valentine's candy – whether you like these or not depends on if you like dry, chalkier sweets. They remind me of Necco Wafers, which I know aren't everyone's first choice, but they are mine.

The colors and saying on the hearts will either make you feel lovey-dovey or make you gag with grossness surrounding the holiday.

## Dark Chocolate Raspberry Ghirardelli

Dark chocolate and raspberry is a combination in sweets that cannot be beat, and that is a hill I will die on.

The sharpness of the dark chocolate with the sweetness from the chunks of freeze dried raspberry is the perfect indulgent treat.

## Reese's Peanut Butter Heart

Disclaimer: I recently found out that I am allergic to peanuts (what a loser, trust me I know).

Although I can't enjoy the Reese's brand anymore, I do remember what they taste like, and even though I am not a milk chocolate girl, I find myself craving them every once and a

while.

Someone eat a heart shaped Reese's for me this week.

## Ferrero Rocher

Easily one of the best candies that have ever existed, and I will not take criticism on this one.

The only downside to these little rounded chocolates are that they disappear too quickly.

## Lindt Lindor Strawberries and Cream Truffles

Lindt chocolate rivals Ghirardelli and Ferrero Rocher, but I think they definitely have it covered when it comes to different flavors, especially seasonal ones.

The only flavor I like more than chocolate is strawberry, and I know what you're thinking: "Why aren't chocolate covered strawberries on the list?"

It's because chocolate covered strawberries are my special event/celebration treat and Valentine's Day isn't a big deal to me.

The white chocolate with the strawberries in these truffles will definitely take care of any sweet craving you have.

## Hostess Valentine's Ding Dongs

Who doesn't love Ding Dongs?

Other than the fact that they are bad for you—and they don't make you feel the best once you finish two or three—they are what I call soul food.

Food that feeds your mind and soul is soul food.

I can definitely tell you that Ding Dongs are a soul food.

## Heart Shaped Crabby Patties

Whether you eat the gummies all at once like a true burger or peel apart all the layers will tell me all I need to know about you as a person.

If you don't peel each layer apart and eat them individually, we cannot be friends.

The Valentine's twist to the classic Crabby Patty candy is just a different shape, but I like that the company did something to honor the season of love.

## M&M's Cupid's Blend

M&M's are the only milk chocolate that I really like.

Just because the only difference between a



COLLAGE BY HAELEY CARPENTER

A collage of some of the best candies to invest in on february 15 when it all goes on sale.

normal bag of M&M's and the Cupid's Blend is the color doesn't mean it doesn't taste any different.

In the Cupid's Blend you get the red, pink and white candies, and it's worth it.

## Molded chocolate

From men to frogs, the same chocolate companies that make bunnies for Easter outdo themselves for Valentine's Day.

Even though they are milk chocolate, the fun, creative shapes make it a great way to get in the loving spirit.

Candy is candy but seasonal twists like Valentine's Day is where creativity gets to shine in candy companies. Whether you have good or bad experiences with people on the candy aisle is always going to be there for you.



# A single guy's guide to Valentine's Day

BY GAVIN PATRICK

*Sports Editor*

“What does a single guy do on Valentine's Day?”

I'm glad you asked.

And no, we don't just sit around talking to ourselves, pondering our lives like I just did to open this piece.

Or... maybe we do a little bit.

I confess: As someone who's been single their whole life, it can be hard watching couples do their thing on Valentine's Day when you have nothing to show for.

I remember one year in high school, I was walking down the hallway the morning of Valentine's Day toward the band hall, the place I always went in the morning (yes, I was a “band kid,” and I was quite good at the snare drum, thank you very much), and I saw couples all along the walls and lockers exchanging chocolates, flowers, roses, hugs, kisses – you name it.

It just wasn't anything I was used to getting.

The only gifts I've ever received on Valentine's Day were from my mom. Sure, I've gotten baked goods from a girl friend (notice the space), who was also giving that same thing to all her other friends. I've also gotten those good ole' plastic goodie bags from teachers with all my least favorite candies.

Let's face it: Those are pity gifts.

In all seriousness, I do hope to one day be in a place where buying someone a romantic gift would be appropriate, but I'm in no hurry.

In fact, I've never even cared that much about Valentine's Day, except maybe when I knew my mom was making heart-shaped pancakes. Those were good days.

The best part about Valentine's Day, to me, is celebrating the ones you love. It's not about whether you have “a Valentine” or not – it's about showing endearment to those in your life who deserve it. And we all deserve something.

Especially our mothers.

Since we single guys don't have a girl to take out, how about, instead, we all call our moms on Valentine's Day?

That sound like a deal?

There's not many traditions for this day besides buying chocolates and roses (\*whisper\* and breaking up). But that's for the beaus. If there is one tradition single guys should have



Gavin and his mom Patricia Patrick on the Tarleton campus

PHOTO BY GAVIN PATRICK

on Valentine's Day, calling our moms should be the one.

We owe a lot to our moms, single guys. This is already the third time I've mentioned my mom – and for good reason.

Yours may not have made you and your siblings heart-shaped pancakes every year and left you a note on the table with a box of chocolates (sorry to brag here). But she at least fed you dinner. And cleaned the house. And did your laundry. And wiped your butt. And (oh, yeah) birthed you.

Think about the little things; that's what our mothers do. Except for the giving-birth part; that was pretty big.

As long as you're single—which, to my mom, means not married—your mom is the most significant woman in your life, guys. We should never take that for granted.

This may sound like I'm preaching Mother's Day right now, but I'm not. Your mom doesn't need a gift on Valentine's Day; that's

for Dad to worry about. All we need to do is give her a call, tell her about our day and tell her how much we love and appreciate her.

“But dude, that's so hard. Guys can't express their feelings.”

Yeah, I get that. But it's a lot easier to do than ask out that girl you've been eyeing for months.

Our moms miss us in college. Like, a lot.

Nod your head if your mom cried the day you left for your first semester... That's what I thought.

Even for the few who didn't nod their heads, you at least know she was going through some things that day and probably still is. That's because she loves you, and she misses you. She may even miss wiping your butt and putting you down for a nap.

But the biggest thing she misses is your voice.

I'll admit, I don't call my mom every day. I'm a busy guy, and the way I like to settle down

after a full-day's work is to not talk to anyone.

Some of you like to “settle down” at Twisted J after a no-day's work.

Whatever it is, we probably don't call our moms enough in college. And whoever does call their mom every day, I see you, and I salute you.

As busy as I am, I still make time, multiple times a week, to talk to my mom. It's important. And one of those days is Valentine's Day, and always will be – as long as I'm single, at least. Our moms deserve our time, guys. Perhaps the time it took you to read this story is all the time she needs in a day.

It's time to start a tradition, single guys: Call your mom on Valentine's Day, because Feb. 14 is a day of love, and that doesn't just have to apply to a partner.

In the meantime, though, I think you better ask out that girl.

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