



Notting Hill

Richard Curtis



About the author

This book is adapted from the 1999 film script by Richard Curtis. Born in New Zealand in 1956, Curtis moved to England when he was young and graduated from Oxford University. He began his career, writing for hit television shows such as *Blackadder* and *Mr Bean*, before starting in the film business. His first major film success came in 1994 with *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (also available in Penguin Readers). The film starred Hugh Grant, and made him famous overnight. Hugh Grant also plays William Thacker in *Notting Hill*. Anna Scott is played by Julia Roberts. As a huge star in her own right, she only had to play her public self for the role. *Notting Hill* was an immediate hit with audiences all around the world.

Summary

This popular romantic comedy tells the story of William Thacker, an unsuccessful London bookseller, and Anna Scott, the most popular actress in the world.

Chapter 1: Their story begins when Anna comes into William's bookshop, and the two exchange a few pleasant words as she buys a book.

Chapter 2: Only minutes later, William bumps into Anna again in the street, spilling his orange juice down her shirt. Anna is not pleased, but she accepts William's invitation to his flat to clean herself. Before leaving she gives William a friendly kiss.

Chapter 3: When Anna is back in London she calls William and leaves a message to Spike who informs his friend about the call three days later. William phones the Ritz Hotel and they decide to meet for tea.

Chapter 4: Rather than having tea with William, Anna receives reporters and photographers in her room. William pretends he is a reporter and invites her out that evening.

Chapter 5: That evening William takes Anna along to his sister's birthday party. There Anna meets William's friends, who welcome her into their circle despite the huge difference in their lifestyles. Anna enjoys the party a lot.

Chapter 6: Anna and William go out together again but quite unexpectedly Anna's film star boyfriend, Jeff, comes to London. William says goodbye to Anna. He is heartbroken.

Chapter 7: When Anna unexpectedly arrives at William's house several weeks later, the couple rediscover their affection for each other. But then hundreds of reporters and photographers find Anna at William's house and they both realize that the vast difference in their lifestyles is a barrier to a long-term relationship.

Chapter 8: William is sad and lonely without Anna, but decides he has to forget her.

Chapter 9: However, he can't resist going to watch her when she comes to London the next year to make her new film. He overhears a conversation where she says he is no one to her.

Chapter 10: Anna surprises William by arriving at his bookshop and declaring her love for him. In order to protect himself from pain, he tells her that it can never work between them. In an exciting ending to the story, William's friends persuade him to try and win Anna's love one more time, and they all dash across London and trick their way into Anna's press conference. In front of everyone, William asks for another chance and Anna accepts. A year later, we learn that Anna and William have settled into each other's very different worlds, and are happily living in Notting Hill and starting a family.

Background and themes

Notting Hill: Notting Hill is set in contemporary London, and the film made the London district of Notting Hill famous all over the world. The friendly village atmosphere of the area which Richard Curtis portrays, however, is fanciful and unrealistic. In fact, the film received a lot of criticism for not representing the large Caribbean community of the area.



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Love: The main theme of Notting Hill, of course, is romantic love – and particularly the power of love to unite people with different lifestyles and from opposite sides of the world. As well as the blossoming romance between Anna and William, other characters in the story are used to explore the theme of love: Max and Bella's love for each other enables them to retain a strong and loving marriage despite Bella's disability and their inability to have children. And Honey's decision to get married to Spike shows us that even less attractive and even strange people can find love which is as wonderful and important as anyone's.

Friendship: Friendship is another important theme in this story. William's group of interesting and amusing friends support him through his difficult relationship with Anna, and it is his friends who finally persuade him to ask Anna for another chance. The final scene, where the friends pull their resources together and frantically drive William through London in order to meet Anna before she disappears to America for ever, is typical of Richard Curtis's story-telling.

Fame: Through the character of Anna Scott, Richard Curtis explores both the positive and negative aspects of fame. When Anna is competing for the last slice of cake at Honey's birthday party, the group of friends (and so the reader) gets a rare glimpse of the loneliness and difficulty of stardom. Anna can only ever experience short moments of privacy, and she has to prevent herself from opening up and talking honestly with most people.

Humour: Some of the humour in the book is achieved through the amusing characters, such as Spike and Honey. William, too, has an amusing charm about him which Anna finds attractive. But the most successful humour in the story comes from the writer placing his characters in awkward and inappropriate situations and then inventing amusing ways for them to escape. William's attempts at impersonating a *Horse and Hound* reporter and a hotel worker are good examples.

Discussion activities

Introduction

- Research:** Get students to find information about Notting Hill in England and Beverly Hills in the United States.

- Discuss:** Ask students to read the Introduction and answer these: Will Anna and William find love together? Can a person who lives in Beverly Hills and one who lives in Notting Hill be happy together? Why or why not?
- Discuss:** Get students to look at the front of the book. It says 'Can the most famous film star in the world fall for the man in the street?' What do you think? Ask students to give reasons for their answers.

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

- Guess:** Ask students to read the titles of the first three chapters and speculate about what takes place in them.

While reading

- Discuss:** (p. 5) Anna likes William because he is amusing. Get students to find some sentences in this chapter which show this. Do you think William is funny? Why or why not?
- Discuss:** (p. 8) Ask students to imagine they are William Thacker. He has finished watching the video of Anna and now he is writing his diary. What happened to you today? How do you feel? Do you think you will see Anna again?
- Pair work:** Get students to work in pairs. Mr. Smith asks for books by John Grisham. What do you know about this writer? What kinds of books does he write? Why doesn't William have his books in his shop? Then pairs share their views with the rest of the class.
- Discuss:** At the end of Chapter 3 Anna says, 'I'm a little busy today.' Ask students the following questions: Why is she busy, do you think? What kinds of things does Anna have to do as part of her work?

After reading

- Group work:** Get students to work in small groups. Each group folds a piece of paper into four quarters and writes these places, one in each quarter: 'The bookshop', 'Notting Hill market', 'William's house' and 'The Ritz Hotel'. Give the students five or ten minutes to write down as many adjectives for each of these London places as possible. Finally, divide the board into quarters and ask the groups to read out their adjectives one at a time in turn. Make sure everyone understands the adjectives. Teach and add some adjectives of your own, too.
- Role play:** Get students to write and act out the following conversation:
Student A is Anna. She calls William's house to talk to him, but he is not there. She leaves a message with Spike.
Student B is Spike. He answers Anna's call. He takes a message from Anna to give to William.



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Chapters 4–6

Before reading

- 11 **Pair work:** Ask students to work in pairs and imagine what happens when William and Anna meet for tea.

While reading

- 12 **Write:** (p. 12) Get your students to imagine they are Tarquin from *Time Out*. Ask them to write some questions about the film for Anna, the male star and the child actress.
- 13 **Discuss:** (p. 20) Max says, 'I'm going to give the last piece of cake to the person with the saddest life.' Who has the saddest life do you think? Ask students to give reasons for their answer.
- 14 **Answer:** Get students to answer the following: What does Anna think, or how does she feel about: meat; her weight; going home with William; rules; love?
- 15 **Write:** When Anna asks William to come up to her room, William says 'There seem to be lots of reasons why I shouldn't.' What are the reasons? Ask students to write a list.

After reading

- 16 **Discuss:** Ask students to imagine that they are at Honey's birthday party. Like Bernie, Honey, Bella, William and Anna, each student must tell a sad story to try and win the last piece of cake. In groups, students should first invent a character for their group, and then make their stories as realistic as possible. Finally, choose some students to read out their group's story and ask the class to vote for the saddest story.
- 17 **Pair work:** Get students to work in pairs. Ask them to write three sentences about a famous actor or actress that everyone in the class will know. Each student or pair reads their sentences, one at a time, to the class. Can the other students guess who the person is? After one, two or three sentences?

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

- 18 **Guess:** Get students to speculate about William's life now that he knows Anna has got a boyfriend. Will he stop loving her? Will he ever forget her?

After reading

- 19 **Role play:** Ask students to prepare and act out this conversation:
Student A is a newspaper reporter and Student B is Spike's friend. Student B rings the newspaper to sell his story about Anna Scott. Student B only knows what Spike told him in the pub. Student A wants to get as much information as possible.
Encourage students to agree a fee for the story during the telephone conversation, too.
- 20 **Discuss:** Get students to answer the following:
Do you want to be famous? Why or why not?
What are the best things and the worst things about being famous?

Chapters 9–10

After reading

- 21 **Discuss:** Students work individually to tell the story of these last two chapters from Anna's point of view. How did she feel when William arrived at the film set in Hampstead? Did she expect him to say 'no' when she asked him to see more of her? Where did she go then, and what did she do? What did she feel when William and his friends arrived at the press conference? Students should write five or six short paragraphs either in class or as homework.
- 22 **Write:** Ask students to write a letter from Anna to her mother in America. Anna is married and lives in Notting Hill with William. She is expecting a baby soon. What news does she write to her family in America?

Extra activities

- 23 **Discuss:** Get students to prepare a short speech about their favourite actor or actress. Why do they like them? What are their best films? What makes them different from other actors or actresses? Students then read their speeches out loud in class.

Vocabulary activities

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