



Twist Those 5 Love Languages to Develop Characters and Build Tension

By Kelley J. P. Lindberg

What are the 5 love languages? (A series of books by Gary Chapman)

- How you express love to someone else and how you appreciate receiving love.
- Filling the “love tank” – helping the other person feel seen, appreciated, valued, loved.
- People generally have a primary love language but often have secondary love languages:
 - Words of Affirmation (compliments, encouragement, sharing feelings, etc.)
 - Quality Time (undivided attention, quality conversations, quality activities)
 - Receiving Gifts (tangible symbol of love, worth the investment)
 - Acts of Service (doing tasks/favors without expecting recognition or reward)
 - Physical Touch (loving touches; don’t confuse with sex, which is an urge, not necessarily a way to fill the love tank)

Why do love languages matter?

- Learning to speak each other’s love language, even if it doesn’t come naturally to you, is crucial in any relationship (romantic or non-romantic).
- If their love tank isn’t filled, people feel devalued, worthless. Conflicts escalate.
- If their love tank is filled regularly, they feel loved, valued. Conflicts can be resolved.
- It’s all about filling—or draining—that love tank.

In writing, use love languages to:

- Give characters depth, emotional needs, and emotional wounds.
- Make their personalities, actions, and reactions more consistent.
- Understand what’s going to hurt, confuse, frustrate, anger, or break them.
- Build meaningful internal motivations and obstacles for your characters.
- Build tension or pit characters against each other by making their love languages clash.
- Make relationships seem more realistic.
- Bring characters together (or back together).

When your characters don’t speak each other’s love language

- When love languages don’t align, THAT’S when things get interesting!
 - Build tension
 - Create misunderstandings that lead to wrong conclusions or red herrings (plot pivot-points, subplots)
 - Contribute to outright conflict, danger, breakups
 - Create humor

Passive vs. active use of love languages to build tension

- Passive: They simply don't use the other person's love language. They don't recognize it. They don't give or accept it.
- Active: They use the other person's love language in a negative or opposite way.

Twist those love languages!

- What can we accomplish with our new understanding of love languages?
 - Relationship on the rocks (not just romantic)
 - Resist love
 - Cruelty
 - Taunt
 - Bait
 - Reveal clues
 - Torture

Kelley's Table of Opposites

Build tension by having one character do the opposite of the other person's love language.

Love language	Used for good (awww):	Used for evil (mwahaha!):
Words of Affirmation	Express love, encouragement, confidence, ask forgiveness, make requests not demands, give credit	Insults, humiliation
Quality Time	One-on-one time, attentive and engaged, quality conversations, quality activities	Refuse to spend time together, make excuses, not attentive when together, invite outsiders in
Receiving Gifts	Gifts that show they understand the person's needs/wants/desires/interests, physical presence in crisis	Forget birthdays, buy generic vs thoughtful gifts, never send flowers, steal things from them
Acts of Service	Do unpleasant tasks the other hates, don't ask for acknowledgement or credit, do things as surprises, don't wait to be asked/begged. Make requests not demands	Avoid chores, demand the other does them, don't acknowledge their effort. Guilt, fear, coercion, complaints, threats
Physical Touch	Implicit (handholding, caresses) vs Explicit (massage, foreplay, sex) *Implicit touch is more likely to be a love language, while sex is more likely desire, not a true love language	Deliberate use of unpleasant touch, hit, withhold touch, rape, assault