

## Sample Definition Essays

### What is This Thing Called Love?

A wise man once said that love is a wonderful thing. Although this statement leaves sparse room for argument, it does little to define what love is beyond the vague realm of wonderful. It is my duty as a devout romantic to embark upon the seemingly difficult task of defining love by looking at the history, explaining what love is not, and examining the uses of love and the results of that usage.

#### (Origin and Causes)

The origin of the word is probably the most logical place to start. As with many words in the English language, love is a derivative of the Latin word "causemajoraprobemus" which means "You're miserable when you got it and miserable when you don't." The word was created to explain the biological phenomenon that existed when certain individuals came into contact with each other and either remained together or went about their lives separately. Regardless of the outcome, the relationship was usually characteristic of throat lumps, knotted stomachs, weak knees, temporary loss of language, sweaty palms, dizziness, sneezing, and occasional nausea. Belligerent insanity also resulted. History clearly illustrates this. Can we ever forget the face that launched a thousand ships? Federally expressing Van Gogh's ear? The construction of Le Tour Eiffel? All of these were results of love and love lost.

#### (Negation)

Star-crossed lovers have stated that love is not hand nor foot nor any part belonging to a man. Matrimonial ceremonies also claim that love is not jealous or boastful. Let it be stated here that love also is not a gourmet dish, a domesticated animal, or a latest trend. Love is not a strategic defense mechanism nor the best kept secret at the Pentagon. Love is not another seasoning to bottle and stick on the dust-lined shelves of the spice rack. Love is not to be confused with adhesive tape.

Instead, love is a great counterpart to late, evening thunder storms on hot July nights. Love goes well with cold pizza on picnic blankets. Love is cold, wet sand between bare toes. Love is a capitalistic sell-all for novels, Top-40 pop songs, summer movies, and greeting cards. In its simplest terms, love is a four-letter word. Much like other words of similar letter make up, when expressed it can evoke laughter, pleasure, pain, anger, and virtually any wave of reaction. Love also can be confused with feelings of indigestion and gas. Houses have been built, burned, and banished because of love.

## *Ishindenshin*

*Ishindenshin* is a common Japanese word. It describes a Japanese concept used to refer to communication without words or a “reading of the heart.” We Japanese do not always say exactly what we think or feel. People can guess and receive what is in a sender’s heart. People can understand each other without words. This is not a familiar concept in western cultures, where people are generally encouraged to state exactly what they mean. The phenomenon of *Ishindenshin* works well when Japanese are communicating in Japan, but it can present certain challenges when Japanese are communicating outside of their country.

*Ishindenshin* was born as a Buddhist word. The story goes that when Buddha preached to a lot of disciples about Buddhism, it was too hard to express the depth of the religion in words, so he showed them a lotus flower to communicate a point. Although most of his disciples could not understand what he meant, there was one who could understand. After that, Buddha preached his teachings only to the enlightened disciple instead of to many disciples.

There are many ways that Japanese demonstrate *Ishindenshin* in their daily lives. For example, when people ride on a bus, they stand up and give their seats to someone who is old or has a physical disability. *Ishindenshin* works especially well in situations like this where people do not know one another. It is like telepathy because people do not say anything. In Japanese culture, we seldom say negative words to other people because we are observant about hurting someone, but non-verbal communication will often get a negative point across. For example, my mother often has a sore shoulder. When she does, she shakes her head and takes a few deep breaths. At this point, all of us in the family know what she wants us to do, so she gets a massage.

*Ishindenshin* is a very useful concept. Understanding each other without explaining feelings is a convenient tool in communication. However, at the same time, it does sometimes cause misunderstandings. When I came to the United States the first time when I was 13, an American family welcomed me into their home as a family member. When I felt hungry and wanted to get something to eat, I expressed my feelings with the words, “I am beginning to get hungry,” but my host mother did not give me anything to eat. I felt so strange. Even though my English was not good, I knew that I had said the words clearly. I thought that she was so mean and did not want to give me any food, especially when my host sister got snacks for her and not for me. Then I thought about whether there was something wrong with my communication and decided to ask her directly for something to eat. I learned that there was no *ishindenshin* in American culture, so I had to say exactly what I wanted. I realized that outside of my own country, I had to adjust my communication style.

A Japanese overseas study coordinator that I know said that Japanese students may not be as good at English as many other international students because they are accustomed to the concept of *Ishindenshin*. He also said that it is very hard for Japanese From The Advanced Writing Handbook for ESOL by John Sparks. Used with permission. students to express every idea that they wish to communicate. There are many differences between the cultures of the U.S. and Japan; however, to know new things about other cultures is very interesting, so Japanese living in other countries need to get accustomed to talking in different ways.

*Ishindenshin* has mostly good effects but can also have a few bad ones for Japanese living outside of their country. Using this telepathy too much can have unfortunate consequences, but I believe it is important to use a moderate amount. We sometimes have to use our emotional intelligence and interpret feelings without words because there are situations in all people's lives when there are no words to express exactly how we feel.