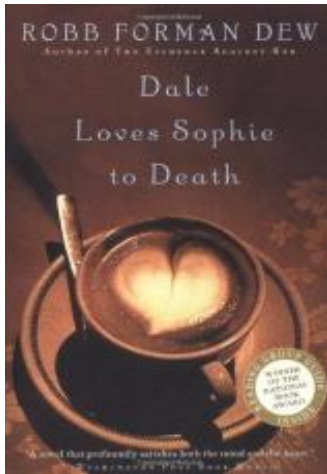


# Dale Loves Sophie to Death

by Robb Forman Dew

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## About the Book

Selected as the year's best work of fiction when it was published in 1982 and everywhere hailed for its narrative richness and emotional power, Robb Forman Dew's astonishing first novel illuminates the varieties of romantic love and the unexpected rewards of family life as it tells the story of a woman whose husband stays behind in New England while she and their three young children return to her midwestern hometown to spend a summer.

## Discussion Guide

1. Discuss *Dale Loves Sophie to Death* as a portrait of a marriage. Do you consider Dinah and Martin's marriage successful? How does it compare with other marriage portraits in the novel? for example, Lawrence and Pam's marriage? Dinah's parents' marriage?
2. Why did Dinah, as an adolescent, consider dancing to be "far sexier than sex" (page 185)? Do you agree with her perceptions about dancing?
3. Discuss Dinah's response to the birth of her first child (pages 174-175). Why was she both embarrassed and enraged?
4. Have you ever had a friend like Isobel? How does Dinah and Isobel's friendship change in the course of the novel?
5. Discuss Dinah's response to Toby's illness. Was she irresponsible in not seeking medical help sooner?
6. The novel offers some very sensual and highly detailed descriptions of food. Discuss the special role that food plays in the Howellses' domesticities.
7. Dinah realizes at a certain point that she has returned to Enfield every summer because she seeks an apology. "She

wanted an absolute, blanket apology from Buddy and from Isobel and from Polly and from her father" (page 138). Does Dinah receive such an apology in the course of *Dale Loves Sophie to Death*? Why?

8. Do you consider Dinah responsible for the death of her father's cat? Discuss the role animals play in the novel. Consider, for example, the lost dog that Dinah and her parents encounter on their walk through town. Consider also the kittens Dr. Briggs brings the Howells children at the end of the novel.

9. "The events that might astonish them now?the only things that could not be foreseen?were the unpleasant surprises" (page 187). Do you agree that Dinah's fate is sealed? That there can lie in store for her no happy surprises?

10. Why do you think Robb Forman Dew chose the title *Dale Loves Sophie to Death*, particularly in view of the fact that Dale and Sophie are not characters in the book? Do you consider the title appropriate for the novel?

## Author Bio

Robb Forman Dew is the author of the novels *DALE LOVES SOPHIE TO DEATH*, for which she received the National Book Award, *THE TIME OF HER LIFE* and *FORTUNATE LIVES*. She also penned the *Washburn Trilogy* (*THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HER*, *THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER* and *BEING POLITE TO HITLER*), which chronicles the evolution of American family life through the 20th century, as well as a memoir, *THE FAMILY HEART*. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband, who is professor of history at Williams College and the author of several books of Southern history.

## Critical Praise

"A precocious debut. . . Mrs. Dew can convey, with a skill matched by few writers today, the quick, peculiar shifts in feelings that we experience, moment to moment, day by day."

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### **Dale Loves Sophie to Death**

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