

# Agape, philia, and eros: greek love in "the fault in our stars"



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The English language is slightly limited when it comes to “love”. Love is the only word that the language offers to describe, well, love. Despite people loving certain people (or things) in different ways—the love a best friend receives is different from the love spouse receives—“love” covers it all. However, the Greek language provides more than just one word when it comes to love. There are many kinds of love displayed in John Green’s *The Fault In Our Stars*. The three that are the most apparent are those of agape, philia, and eros. Hazel Grace Lancaster, a sixteen-year-old living with cancer, receives agape, witnesses philia, and experiences eros.

Agape is a love that gives and gives and gives without expecting (or even wanting) anything. Hazel receives agape from her parents, in particular from her mother. Mrs. Lancaster literally makes herself available every second of the day for her daughter who, in reality, is dying. Mrs. Lancaster feels guilty whenever she is not doing anything for the direct betterment of Hazel.

Toward the end of the book, she reveals that she has been going to school in order to become a social worker. This is to prepare for when she can work again when Hazel no longer needs care. She kept the information from Hazel because she felt like Hazel would feel tossed aside. She did not want Hazel to feel like she had given up on her.

Additionally, Mrs. Lancaster displays agape is when Hazel’s favorite author, Peter Van Houten, invites her to visit him if she ever finds herself in Amsterdam. Hazel is obsessed with finding out the answers to unanswered questions in his book, *An Imperial Affliction*, which he refuses to disclose over email. Upon receiving an email from him, she yells for her mother. Mrs.

Lancaster bursts into her room seconds later, clutching a towel around

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herself, suds dripping from her hair. She had been taking a shower, but wanted to make sure Hazel was okay.

Hazel explains her predicament and asks if they can go to Amsterdam. Mrs. Lancaster comments on the lack of finances. At that moment, Hazel is struck by how she is the reason that her parents do not have a lot of money. Also at that instant, Mrs. Lancaster is filled with a desire to make it happen for Hazel, and expresses it to her daughter, saying she'll talk to Mr. Lancaster. Hazel, however, shoots the idea down, aware of how much her parents have already done for her.

This is an important scene because it really portrays Mrs. Lancaster's agape for her daughter. With their saving essentially drained, things are tight and the medical bills just keep coming. However, she intuitively feels that this might really be what's best for Hazel, who may not live much longer. When she realizes this, she can see no reason not to make it happen. She does not care about finances the trip will cost or time it will take. She continually pours herself out for Hazel, giving her everything that she possibly can. Mrs. Lancaster does this even when it will deprive herself of things.

Another kind of love is that of philia. Philia is often something that is shared between friends. It involves putting up with and appreciating the good parts of each other. In meeting Augustus Waters, Hazel also gets to know Isaac, the best friend of Augustus. The boys are there for each other no matter what, through thick and thin. Augustus means the world to Isaac. Similarly, Augustus will go to any lengths to be there for Isaac, such as shown when Isaac's girlfriend, Monica, breaks up with him.

The night that Isaac and Monica break up, Augustus does what he can to help his friend. In addition to being dumped, Isaac is also facing the prospect of a surgery to remove cancer. Unfortunately, the chances that this surgery will leave him blind are quite high. Augustus plays video games with him and ends up inviting Hazel over to help. When Isaac keeps trying to ventilate his anger on a seemingly indestructible pillow, Augustus allows him to destroy his basketball trophies. Thus, the night is christened “ The Night Of The Broken Trophies”. The evening bears witness to the fact that Augustus will go to any lengths to cure Isaac of his sadness.

Additionally, Augustus displays philia after Isaac goes blind. When Monica does not even visit or call to see how he is doing, Isaac gets increasingly frustrated. Augustus, along with Hazel, takes Isaac to Monica’s house. Augustus and Hazel proceed to help Isaac egg the house, not stopping even when Monica’s mother comes out.

Isaac shows his philia for Augustus when he gives a fake-eulogy before Augustus dies. In the eulogy, he gives testimony to how much Augustus means to him. He speaks of how, if he is ever given the ability to see the world again, he would not want to see it without his best friend.

The most “ romantic” kind of love is eros. This is a sensual, passionate love, shared between lovers. Augustus and Hazel experience this love. They are deeply attracted to and desire to be loved by each other. Hazel is originally afraid of this love, because she does not want to love Augustus only to hurt him by dying, as a former girlfriend had. However, she eventually gives in both to him and to her desires.

Augustus spends his "Wish" on Hazel, taking her to Amsterdam to meet Peter Van Houten. When Peter Van Houten fails to answer their questions satisfactorily, Hazel is extremely upset but Augustus comforts her. Later, during their trip, they let go of self-control and consummate their relationship, which is perhaps the ultimate example of eros, the most physical kind of love.

The Fault In Our Stars carries emotional weight, because it is pulsing with different types of love, the loves of agape, philia, and eros. Hazel's altruistic mother exhibits agape in the way she cares for her daughter without wanting or expecting anything in return. Best friends Augustus and Isaac show each other great philia in the way they strive to make each other feel better. Lastly, the eros that Augustus and Hazel share by their affection and selflessness for each other is incredibly deep. Rather than a narrative about death or about love, The Fault in Our Stars is primarily about love.