

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

Flowers for Algernon

Daniel Keyes

NOVEL UNITS[™]

NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING



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FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with your class.

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, inference,
sequencing, cause and effect

Writing

Dialogue, apology poem,
letter of recommendation,
prereading writing, narrative,
newspaper article, summary

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms

Thinking

Brainstorming, evaluating,
comparing and contrasting

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
role play

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot,
conflict, theme, mood

Section-by-Section

Pages 1-24

Vocabulary

Rorschach (3)
authority (18)

Thematic Apperception Test (4)
subconscious (21)

motivation (7)
conscious (21)

Vocabulary Activity

Word mapping is an activity that lends itself to any vocabulary list. For words that have clear antonyms, the following framework would be suitable:



Students might enjoy coming up with variations on this framework. For example, instead of listing antonyms, students could provide the drawings or symbols to illustrate the target word.

Cooperative Learning Activity

You may want to have all students examine example word maps for all target vocabulary words, even when the list is too lengthy to expect each student to map all the words. One way to circumvent the problem is to assign small groups responsibility for several words; each group selects a reporter who describes the group's word maps to the large group, using an overhead projector.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is writing the "progress reports"? Why? Why are the early reports somewhat hard to read? Why does he sometimes use asterisks (*)? (*Charlie Cordell, 32 years old, a retarded man who is about to undergo experimental brain surgery; grammar and punctuation are faulty; the asterisks replace words he doesn't understand/can't spell.*)
2. What can you tell about what Charlie is like? How can you tell that he is a better than average person? How can you tell that he is a "good reader of people," despite his retardation? (*He persists in writing these reports despite how hard writing must be for him; he has been nominated for the experiment by a teacher who praises his motivation; he seems kind and—considering his disability—curious, sensitive to people; for example, he notices that Professor Nemur seems "scared" when Charlie jumps up to shake his hand after finding that he has been chosen for the experiment.*)
3. What sorts of tests is Charlie given? Why? How does he respond to these tests? Have you ever taken any of these tests? (*personality and intelligence tests: maze, Rorschach, TAT; the experimenters want to be able to measure the intellectual and personality changes; He is puzzled by the tests and somewhat suspicious of them.*)

4. Who is Algernon? How does Charlie feel about him? (*Charlie is impressed by—and rather jealous of—Algernon, the mouse whose intelligence has already been enhanced by the surgical procedure.*)
5. Who is Miss Kinnian? Dr. Strauss? Professor Nemur? Burt? How does Charlie feel about each? Charlie obviously respects and adores Miss Kinnian (*his teacher*), and respects the men involved in the experiment—Dr. Strauss (*neurosurgeon and psychiatrist*), Professor Nemur (*academic*) and Burt (*graduate student*).
6. Why does Charlie want the operation? What are the risks? Has he been told about these risks? Do you think he understands the risks? Do you think the researchers are being ethical to go ahead with this experiment? What sorts of “scientific techniques” are the scientists using in their treatment of Charlie? (*He wants to “be smart” and is willing to risk the possibility of even a minor operation—although he probably doesn’t really understand the risks.*)
7. Where do you detect the first signs that the surgery has caused changes in Charlie? Is he aware of these changes? (*He starts remembering things—such as how to spell “progress.” He doesn’t seem to be aware of the subtle changes until later.*)
8. Why do you think the skinny nurse, Nemur, has changed? What was her opinion of the experiment? Do you agree with her? (*She told Charlie that the experiment was against God’s will.*)
9. How does Charlie feel about the people at work? What do you think of them? How do they feel about Charlie? Have they noticed any changes in him? (*He thinks they are all his friends; several of them actually laugh at him. They don’t seem to notice his improved speech and skills and are mistrustful.*)
10. What is Charlie supposed to do before he goes to bed? Do you know of research or scientific evidence to support this type of learning activity? (*listening to learning tapes, which continue to play as he falls asleep*)

Prediction

What do you think will happen as Charlie’s co-workers at the factory start to notice more and more changes in him? How do you think his relationship with them will change?

Writing Activity

You are Miss Kinnian. Write a letter of recommendation to Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss. Describe your impressions of Charlie and why he should be included in their study.

Activity: Attribute Webs

Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character’s traits. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about that particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the story or completed gradually as information unfolds—done individually, or finished as a group project. One type of character web uses these categories:

- How a character acts and feels (What do his/her statements reveal about feelings? What does his/her behavior show you about him/her?)
- How a character looks (What do clothing and physique tell you about this character?)
- Where a character lives (In what country, state, neighborhood does this character live? During what time period?)
- How others see about the character (What do other statements and actions show about their attitude toward the character?)

In class discussion about the student attribute webs for specific characters, the teacher can ask for supportive evidence from the story. Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They can also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.

Attribute webs are a kind of semantic mapping. Students can move on from attribute webs to other creative kinds of mapping. They can be encouraged to modify attribute webs, use sub-divisions, add or delete connections—in whatever ways are useful to them personally. It is important to emphasize that attribute webs are just a graphic way to record ideas. They provide students with a tool for helping them generate ideas and think about relationships among those ideas.

