

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Flowers for Algernon

by Daniel Keyes

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Flowers for Algernon

Note to the Teacher

This novel is a collection of progress reports, almost a diary, written by the main character, who is the subject of an experiment designed to increase human intelligence. The novel, an enlargement of a popular science fiction short story, also written by Daniel Keyes, critically evaluates the hypothesis that intelligent humans are better, happier people and lead better lives than their less-intelligent counterparts.

All references come from the Bantam Books edition of *Flowers for Algernon*, published 1975.

There are various references to sex and sexual behavior in *Flowers for Algernon*; they are dealt with sensitively and are an essential part of the story.

Flowers for Algernon

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student should be able to:

1. distinguish between first-person narrative and third-person narrative and comment on the advantages of each.
2. support that *Flowers for Algernon* is a loss-of-innocence novel by referring to incidents in the text.
3. trace how Charlie's style of writing changes as his intelligence both grows and decreases.
4. recognize the following literary devices and point out examples of each in the story:
 - allusion
 - foreshadowing
 - flashback
 - euphemism
 - symbol
5. find examples that lead to the conclusion that this is a science fiction novel.
6. define "symbol" and discuss how light and a knife are used as symbols in the story.
7. comment on the significance of the title and how the title applies to the theme that making a lasting contribution to the betterment of mankind may validate one's life.
8. discuss the issue of human experimentation as it applies to the main character.
9. list the qualities that Charlie believes make a human life valuable:
 - in the beginning of the story before the operation,
 - at the height of his intelligence,
 - when he accepts his ultimate fate.
10. point out examples of metaphors found in the novel.
11. discuss the following generalizations about intelligence:
 - It is better to have friends than to be intelligent.
 - The more intelligent people become, the more problems they will have.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Support the idea that this novel is a coming-of-age book even though the main character is thirty-two years old.
2. This story was originally published as a short story. What do you think may have been added to make it a novel?
3. Why does Charlie's doctor think it is important for him to remember childhood?
4. Why do you think this story is told in first-person narration, revealing to the reader the inner thoughts and motivations of only one character?
5. Do you think it is ethical for the doctors to experiment on Charlie? How do they justify their decision to operate? What does the mentally-advanced Charlie think about his role as a laboratory animal?
6. What emotions do you, as the reader, feel when Charlie's spelling begins to deteriorate and his diary entries get shorter? At what point in the story does the reader understand that he will not retain his increased intelligence?
7. Support or refute the following statement by supplying evidence from the novel: A knife symbolizes the power that someone close to Charlie has to hurt him.
8. What does the light in the cave represent to Charlie?
9. Find support in the book for this statement: After Charlie becomes aware that his intelligence will fade, he is more afraid of wasting his life than he is of dying.
10. Support or refute the idea that *Flowers for Algernon* suggests that the quality of a person's life is not determined by intellectual level but by personal connection to other humans.
11. What is the "scientific method"? Are the proposed scientific advancements in the novel believable and interesting?
12. Why does Charlie insist on burying Algernon and wanting flowers on the mouse's grave?
13. Relate the novel's title to a major theme in the book.

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progris riport 1 martch 3

1. In this first report, several characters in the story are identified. Briefly describe Charlie Gordon, Miss Kinnian, and Mr. Donner.

2. Why is Charlie writing the progress reports?

progris riport 2–martch 4

1. What information about Professor Nemur, Burt, and Dr. Strauss can be inferred by this report?

2. Why can Charlie not relax during the inkblot test?

3. How does Charlie react when he does not see anything in the inkblots, and it is clear he is going to fail the test?

6. List additional reasons Charlie wants to be smart.

PROGRESS REPORT 8

VOCABULARY

consciousness – a state of self-awareness
errand – a short trip for a necessary task

1. Describe the change in Charlie's attitude.

2. Why is Professor Nemur worried about publicity?

3. What secret is revealed about Algernon?

4. Why does Mr. Donner employ Charlie?

3. Why is Gimpy angry at Charlie after he solves the problem at the bakery without getting Gimpy fired?

4. Why will the professors at the college not discuss their areas of study with Charlie?

5. Explain the hallucination Charlie has in the park during the concert.

6. Why does Charlie want so desperately to stay at the bakery?

7. What is Fanny's opinion of Charlie's desire to keep his job.

8. Find an example of a metaphor and a simile in the May 25 progress report.

10. Explain the mistake Charlie finds in the statistical analysis of the waiting period.

11. Why must Charlie see his parents as soon as possible?

12. Support or refute the following statement:

Charlie lets Algernon out of his cage only as a distraction, so he can avoid speaking at the conference.

4. What is the one thing Alice has against Fay?

5. How does Alice know that Charlie is not emotionally involved with Fay?

6. What in the comparison in the following metaphor?

“A monkey sitting in the center of his cage, staring at me out of sleepy eyes, rubbing his cheeks with little old-man shriveled hands...and bouncing off the cage wire, up to the swing overhead where the other monkey sits....he swings and tries to grab the other monkey’s tail, but the one on the bar keeps swishing it away...”

7. Do you think Charlie expects to discover how to retain his increased intelligence?

8. Find a motif in the novel based on the following quotation:

“How many great problems have gone unsolved because men didn’t know enough, or have enough faith in the creative process and in themselves, to let go for the *whole* mind to work at it?”
