Biographical Sketch

Daniel Keyes was born in 1927 in Brooklyn, New York. After working as a merchant seaman, he attended Brooklyn College, where he earned both bachelor and master degrees. He went on to become a fiction editor at Marvel Science Fiction and also worked as a high school teacher for developmentally disabled adults. Having periodically published science-fiction stories since the early 1950s, Keyes drew on his experience in the classroom and his love for science fiction to compose a short story called “Flowers for Algernon” in 1950, which was published into a novel in 1966. In 1968, the novel was adapted for a feature film called Charly. The story has since been adapted many times in many media, notably in 1978 as a short-lived Broadway musical, Charlie and Algernon, and as a television drama in 2000 starring Matthew Modine.

Quotations from Flowers for Algernon

"Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eye are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other."
- The Republic, Preface

"I had betrayed them, and they hated me for it."

"They had pretended to be geniuses. But they were just ordinary men working blindly, pretending to be able to bring light into the darkness. Why is it that everyone lies? No one I know is what he appears to be."

"What did you expect? Did you think I’d remain a docile pup, wagging my tail and licking the foot that kicks me? I no longer have to take the kind of crap that people have been handing me all my life."
Locations within the novel
Comprehension Questions

When you’ve finished reading the associating chapters, answer each of these questions ON LOOSE-LEAF. Answer each in your OWN WORDS. Defend your answers with specific examples/details and/or quotations from the novel.

PAGES 1-24

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. Rorschach
2. Thematic Apperception Test
3. subconscious
4. conscious

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

5. What can you tell about what Charlie is like? (explain with specific examples)
6. What sorts of tests is Charlie given and how does he respond to these tests?
7. Who is Algernon and how does Charlie fee about him?
8. Why does Charlie want the operation? What are the risks?

PAGES 24-53

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. neurosurgeon
2. pessimist
3. ringo-levio
4. photostated

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

5. How would you describe the style and content of Charlie’s writing at the beginning of April?
6. By April, how has Charlie changed intellectually?
7. What does Charlie finally realize about the way most of his “friends” at the bakery have been treating him all along? How does he arrive at this insight?
8. Dr. Strauss tells Charlie that the more intelligent he becomes, the more problems he’ll have. Why?
9. How is Charlie’s improved memory painful?
10. How is Charlie’s reaction to the Rorschach cards different now? What does this show about him?
PAGES 54-92

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. scapegoat
2. alma mater
3. etymologies
4. platonic
5. hysterectomy
6. blasphemer

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

7. How does Alic Kinnian’s relationship with Charlie change in May?
8. a) Charlie begins to resent Professor Nemur. Why?
   b) Is his perception of the man accurate, do you think?
9. When pursued by the woman in the park, Charlie realizes that he wanted to be caught and beaten. Why do you think he wanted to be punished?
10. Charlie and Alice have grown apart. Do you think there is still “hope” for their relationship?

PAGES 92-115

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. pathology
2. prognosis
3. egotistic
4. paradoxical
5. vacuous

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

6. a) What do you think of Dr. Guarino? Do you condemn him?
   b) Why did he compare himself with Pasteur and Jennings?
7. What does Charlie finally realize about why he has always wanted to be smart?
8. Why won’t Nemur discuss the articles written in Hindu with Charlie? What “swipes” does the author seem to be taking at academics and, perhaps, the medical profession?
9. What plans does Charlie have now?
PAGES 115-149 *approach these chapters with caution and maturity. Be sure to address them with a Catholic mindset.

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. futile
2. naivete
3. polygamy
4. self-perpetuating
5. brusque

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

6. a) How does Charlie locate his father?
   b) Why doesn’t he ever tell his father who he is?
7. Why does Charlie refer to his mother so often as “two people”?
8. Charlie the adult says that Charlie the child is watching him. Explain what he means.
9. How is Algernon changing?

PAGES 150-193 *approach these chapters with caution and maturity. Be sure to address them with a Catholic mindset.

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. inexplicable
2. cortical
3. exigencies
4. dissociation
5. neurosis

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

6. How do the researchers react when Charlie returns? How has his role shifted?
7. How does Charlie find out what will happen to him if he becomes “retarded” again?
8. What is the Algernon-Gordon effect?
9. a) What is ironic about the condition in which Charlie finds his mother?
   b) What is ironic about the circumstances under which he leaves?
10. How has Norma changed?
PAGES 193-216 *approach these chapters with caution and maturity. Be sure to address them with a Catholic mindset.

Vocabulary – Define each of these words/names in full sentences on loose-leaf.

1. stolid
2. microcosm
3. labyrinth
4. pretense

Answer the following Comprehension Questions in full sentences on loose-leaf.

5. How does the first word of Progress Report 17 set the tone for the rest of the book?
6. Charlie thinks of committing suicide. Why doesn’t he do it?
7. What sort of hallucination/vision does Charlie have in Dr. Strauss’ office? What do you think it all means?
8. Charlie recalls the front window of the house in which he lived as a child. Why has the window become a recurring image for him?
9. How do the bakery workers treat Charlie when he returns? How have they changed?
10. What is Charlie’s final request to the experimenters?
11. How much time elapses between the surgery and Charlie’s return to Warren, at the end?

Essay Questions

Choose ONE essay question from the choices below. Write an essay that argues a point-of-view regarding the essay question, backed-up by at least ONE quotation from the novel. Be sure to provide enough description. FULL SENTENCES and PARAGRAPHS. Begin with a thesis statement and end with a concluding sentence. Should be approximately ONE page long.

1. Explain how Charlie’s personality changed throughout the novel.
2. Why does Charlie desire to be smart? (consider as a youth to an adult)
3. Describe deliberate acts of cruelty against the “retarded” Charlie.
4. Explain the meaning of “flowers” in the title.
5. Discuss the importance of autonomy in Charlie’s new life.