



Flowers for Algernon

by Daniel Keyes

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Two scientists, Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss, select Charlie Gordon, a 32-year-old retarded adult, to undergo experimental psychosurgery to increase his intelligence.

1st Report

To compose a complete and accurate record of the experiment, on March 3, Dr. Strauss asks Charlie to write progress reports on his thoughts and experiences, which reveal changing perceptions as he becomes more intelligent.

2nd Report

The next day, improved spelling, syntax, and vocabulary demonstrate Charlie's growth even before he realizes it. He has difficulty seeing figures in the Rorschach test.

3rd Report

Alice Kinnian, Charlie's teacher at the Beekman School for Retarded Adults in New York City, recommends Charlie for experimental surgery because of his friendly, cooperative attitude and his desire to learn. He has been parted from his family in Brooklyn for a long time.

4th Report

Charlie recalls that, 17 years before the story begins, his Uncle Herman died. Charlie went to work for Arthur Donner's Bakery as janitor. Burt Selden introduces Charlie to the psychology lab and to Algernon, a mouse that beats Charlie in navigating a maze.

5th Report

Charlie learns that his sister Norma, who lives with her mother in Brooklyn, gives permission for the operation. Nemur and Strauss' discussion of the first operation is beyond Charlie's comprehension. Nemur notes that the results are unpredictable.

6th Report

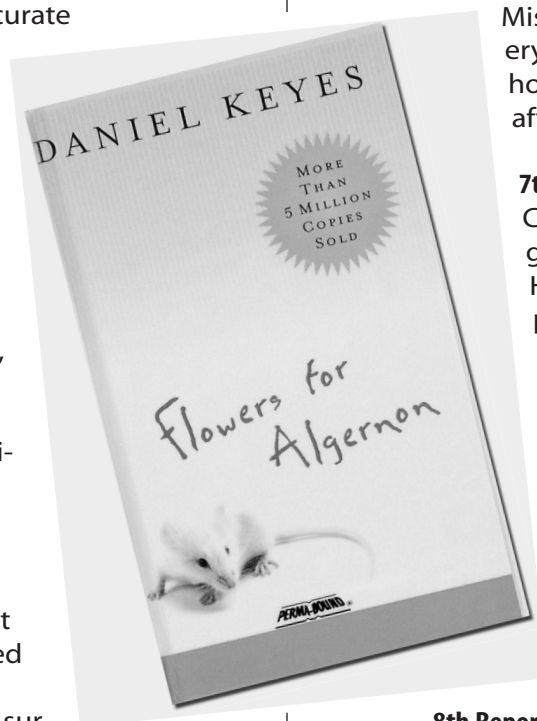
Charlie returns to a menial job at the bakery. He tells no one about the operation because the doctors have sworn Charlie to secrecy. Miss Kinnian brings flowers; the bakery sends a chocolate cake. Charlie hopes to find his mother and sister after he improves.

7th Report

Charlie recalls the details of the surgery and bandages over his eyes. He becomes more adept at writing progress reports. Because Nurse Hilda disapproves of psychosurgery, he wonders if the procedure will make God angry. The next day, Hilda is transferred to the nursery. Charlie asks Nurse Lucille about babies. Miss Kinnian encourages him to work at getting smarter. He believes that his family abandoned him because he was retarded.

8th Report

With intellectual horizons expanding, Charlie encounters problems and suffers headaches. He is angered that he continues to lose races around a maze against Algernon, a mouse whose intelligence has been artificially altered. It takes time to understand that the operation has altered only the potential to learn. Like a sponge, Charlie absorbs and assimilates knowledge with incredible speed. Miss Kinnian comes to the college testing center to tutor him.



Because Charlie's emotional growth lags behind, he develops frustrations and suffers unsettling dreams of childhood. He feels unhappy and dissatisfied. He questions authority. His fellow workers at the bakery regard him as a moron and put him on display at Halloran's Bar. He begins to understand and resent their cruelty. He beats Algernon in the maze on March 29. He is pleased, but suffers sleep irregularities that require medication. He begins reading *Robinson Crusoe*.

9th Report

On April 1, Gimpy and Frank Reilly trick Charlie by letting him run the dough mixer, an assignment that he accomplishes better and faster than Oliver, the current operator. Donner gives Charlie a five-dollar raise. Charlie recalls the birth of Norma and his mother's hostility toward him for holding the baby. Fellow workers are unable to understand the new Charlie. They give him alcohol and take him dancing with Ellen, who excites him sexually. During therapy with Dr. Strauss, Charlie recalls how Uncle Herman menaced cruel boys with a hammer.

Charlie begins reading novels and learning foreign languages. Fiction introduces him to human sexuality. Through free association, he relives his love for Harriet at age eleven. He recalls getting into trouble for the dirty words that Hymie writes on Charlie's valentine to Harriet. Her brothers, Oscar and Gus, beat Charlie. Tapes of Charlie's early test responses make him seem childish and ignorant.

10th Report

Charlie speeds up the bakery's production and earns a fifty-dollar bonus and a \$10-a-week raise. The bakery staff resents him. Because Dr. Nemur intends to present a paper on Charlie's operation at a convention in Chicago, Nemur and Strauss argue. Charlie makes friends with college boys at the Campus Bowl and discusses literature with them. He recalls how Rose knocked a metal spinner from his hand when he was six and refused to let Matt commit him to an institution. When she whipped her son for soiling his pants, Matt left their apartment.

11th Report

Charlie's changing attitude toward Alice further complicates the experiment. As a retarded adult, he respected and worshipped her. They attend a double feature—a war movie and a psychological

film. At the Forty-Fifth Street cafeteria, they discuss his development. She regrets agreeing to a date and reminds him that he has obligations to Nemur and Strauss. Charlie fears erections and recalls castration dreams and spying on his naked sister. The bakery workers resent him for condemning Gimpy's theft of money from the register.

Charlie meets Alice at the cafeteria to ask her advice. His emotions mature into love as he approaches, then surpasses her intelligence. He finds a new hangout at the university library and takes Alice to a concert at the Mall in Central Park. A voyeur enrages Charlie. All the workers except Fanny Birden circulate a petition against Charlie. He is shaken when Donner fires him from the bakery, which has been his refuge since age fifteen. He explains to Fanny how science can help the handicapped. He walks from Washington Square to Central Park to sleep and wonders what he searches for. He tries to love Alice, but experiences a buzzing sound, chill, nausea, and weeping.

12th Report

On June 5, one week before the convention, Dr. Nemur complains that Charlie has stopped filing reports, for which the Welberg Foundation pays him a salary. Charlie remembers how Norma refused to play with him and how Rose denied his limitations and drove him to learn more than he was capable of understanding. His obsession to be smart dates to his desire to please her. He recalls wanting a dog.

Charlie visits the Beekman Institute and observes his former classmates. When Alice accuses him of losing his old sweetness, he realizes the difficulty of her adjustment to him. When she rejects him at the door of her apartment, he walks Central Park and encounters a pregnant woman. Although she is willing to go to his place, he is revolted by the memory of his mother's pregnancy. The woman cries rape; Charlie runs from pursuers and exits the park at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street.

13th Report

On the flight to Chicago, Charlie rebels against fastening his seat belt. He remembers being about five during an appointment with Dr. Guarino, a quack who uses short-wave brain reconditioning twice a week to make Charlie smarter. In his memories, Rose and Matt quarrel about the waste of

money, which keeps Matt from owning his own barbershop. Rose feels guilty for Charlie's affliction.

At the convention of the International Psychological Association on June 12, Nemur and Strauss present their findings. Charlie discovers huge gaps in their scientific knowledge. He cites an article by a Hindu scientist. The audience studies photos of Charlie as though he is a lab creation. Burt pursues Charlie into the city and accuses him of being too judgmental of experimental science.

Charlie recalls observing Algernon's erratic behavior. He realizes that Nemur and Strauss may have made an error and that his intellectual growth is only temporary. Freeing Algernon from his cage, Charlie flees the convention to enjoy what little time he has left before regressing. The next day, Charlie takes the plane back to New York and rooms at the Camden Hotel on 41st Street near Times Square.

14th Report

The news of Charlie's remarkable attainment hits the media and informs Norma and Rose of his intellectual advances. He recalls Rose demanding that Charlie be institutionalized to keep Norma safe. While occupying a furnished apartment on Tenth Avenue and 43rd Street, Charlie tries to straighten out his emotional life before attacking the scientific problem of mental regression. On June 19, he meets Fay Lillman, an uninhibited young painter who develops a sexual relationship with him. The next day, he visits his father's barber shop on Wentworth Street in the Bronx, but Matt does not recognize him. While being shaved, Charlie recalls his parents taking him to Uncle Herman to live.

On June 21st, Fay brings Algernon a girl mouse named Minnie and shares a bottle of gin with Charlie. While caressing Fay, Charlie seems to see himself from a distance. When he sobers up, Fay describes his drunken actions that release the old Charlie. At a restaurant, he protests mistreatment of a retarded boy and considers becoming an advocate for the mentally handicapped. When he tries to romance Alice, the old Charlie gets in the way. He feels emotionally lost. On June 29th, he panics when he recognizes that his time as a normal man is slipping away. On July 9, Algernon bites Fay and gashes Minnie.

15th Report

Charlie returns to Nemur and Strauss. On viewing the incinerator, Charlie makes Burt promise to allow him to bury Algernon properly when the mouse dies. Charlie learns that he is to go to Warren State Home at the end of the experiment.

16th Report

Charlie visits the Warren State Home in Long Island. Winslow, the head psychologist, shows him around a dormitory and woodworking class. Winslow believes Charlie to be too advanced to understand the need for care for retardates. On July 16, Alice meets Fay and accuses Charlie of drinking too much. As he works out the experiment's flaws, Algernon continues to decline. On August 10, Charlie attends Bertha Nemur's cocktail party and rails at the professor for discounting his humanity. Drunk and out of control, Charlie goes to the bathroom and observes the other self in the mirror. He feels completely alone.

On August 26, Charlie sends a letter to Nemur explaining "The Algernon-Gordon Effect." He discloses an internal error and predicts an inevitable mental deterioration. As he declines into retardation in September, he grieves for Algernon, who dies on September 15. On September 24, Charlie visits Rose, who locks the door. He breaks in; Rose bandages a cut on his hand. Norma returns home and tells him about Rose's senility. Rose accuses him of trying to molest Norma. He leaves, crying like a child.

17th Report

In early October, Charlie grows irritable and fearful. On the sixth, he leaves Beekman laboratory for good. On the 11th, he enjoys a bittersweet ten-day affair with Alice, but drives her away when her love turns to pity. In spite of his efforts to retain knowledge, he rapidly regresses to moron level once more. Fay locks him out of her apartment. He retreats to television. The landlady, Mrs. Mooney, feeds him soup. By November 9, his headaches return. He refuses entry to Alice and Dr. Strauss. On November 18th, Charlie returns to the bakery. On November 21, he visits Miss Kinnian's class. In his last progress report, he says goodbye to everyone and asks that they put flowers on Algernon's grave.

Author Sketch

Daniel Keyes introduced humanity into speculative science fiction. A native of Brooklyn, New York, he was born August 9, 1927, to Betty Alicke and William Keyes.

Following a year at Brooklyn College, at age 17, he joined the Merchant Marine and worked as ship's purser in the post-World War II era on oil tankers bound for Europe and the Middle East. He married fashion designer and photographer Aurea Georginia Vazquez, mother of their daughters Hillary Ann and Leslie Joan. After graduating with a B. A. degree in psychology, he worked as editorial associate for Marvel Science Stories and Stadium Publishing Company.

With a partner, Keyes purchased Fenko and Keyes Photography Inc., which remained in business only one year. While working nights on a master's degree in American and English literature, he taught English in high school and began composing his fable about ill-advised psychosurgery that boosts intelligence. He drew material from observation of the treatment of retarded people. For the physician, Keyes used his own psychiatrist as a model. Before becoming a classic, *Flowers for Algernon* received a negative critique in *Kirkus Reviews*. Nonetheless, famous at age 32, Keyes lectured on college campuses, but devoted most of his time to teaching and writing. He joined the Wayne State University faculty in 1966. In 1972, he became a professor of composition and American literature at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. He retired from the classroom in 1992 to southern Florida to write psychological thrillers.

Critic's Corner

Flowers for Algernon has been adapted more ways and over a longer period of time than any other sci-fi work of modern times. Keyes' innovative science fiction novella developed from an original first-person short story. One critic described the action as "one of the most perfect and perfectly-controlled narrative arcs in the entire history of the short story." Through five rejections in a year, he remained adamant that he would not alter the ending. He kept faith in the dismal history of



Charlie Gordon and returned an advance to Doubleday, which demanded that the author strip the story of emotional and sexual themes. The published version has never gone out of print and continues to engage readers in reprints and new translations in 30 countries, especially in Japan, where Keyes is a hero among sci-fi fans.

Critical response is overwhelming. In a preface, Isaac Asimov extolled the novel for its perfection. Reviewer Barbara Phillips accounted for the story's longevity: "It is a tale that, for all its surface simplicity, goes far deeper than most in exploring questions of self-awareness and the loss of innocence; of humans' capacity for cruelty and for kindness; of medical ethics, the meaning of informed consent, and its occasional sacrifice on the altar of ambition." In the U. S., *Flowers for Algernon* won the Hugo and Nebula awards. U. S. Steel presented a 1961 television adaptation of *Flowers for Algernon* as *The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon*, starring Cliff Robertson. In 1968, Claire Bloom and Robertson performed in the film adaptation, *Charly*, which won Robertson an Oscar. He remarked, "This was a movie made on a lot of handshakes—and everyone honored every one of them. That's a rarity in Hollywood, then and now."

The following year, David Rogers adapted the story into a two-act play. In the 1970s, a stage musical of *Flowers for Algernon* toured Canada and England and debuted at the Kennedy Center in Washington D. C. as *Charlie and Algernon*. At a high point in the action, Charlie exclaims, "Knowledge and intellect that haven't been tempered with feeling ain't worth a damn!" The musical drama flourished in London's West End and on Broadway. Irish radio broadcast the drama in Dublin in 1983, which preceded performances in Australia, Poland, and Japan.

In addition to Keyes' success with *Flowers for Algernon*, he lectures at universities in the United States and Japan. *The Minds of Billy Milligan* won him a Mystery Writers of America award and a Kurd Lasswitz Award for best book by a foreign author; *Unveiling Claudia* received an Edgar Allan Poe Award nomination. In 1988, Keyes accepted a distinguished alumnus medal of honor from Brooklyn College. He also earned a fellowship from the Ohio Arts Council and the Baker Fund Award from Ohio University, where his papers are stored. In 2000, CBS-TV reprised *Flowers for Algernon*, starring Matthew

Modine and Kelli Williams as Charlie and Alice. In 2006, in defiance of a request for book banning, the Warren County School Board in Bowling Green, Kentucky, validated four decades of classroom use of *Flowers for Algernon* and boosted the novel to the 47th of the American Library Association's 100 most challenged works in the final decades of the 20th century.

Keyes' Published Works

"Precedent," *Marvel Science Stories*, 1952
 "Robot—Unwanted," *Other Worlds*, 1952
 "Something Borrowed," *Fantastic Story*, 1952
 "The Trouble with Elmo," *Galaxy*, 1958
 "Flowers for Algernon," *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 1959
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 "A Jury of Its Peers," *Worlds of Tomorrow*, 1963
 "The Quality of Mercy," *Frozen Planet*, 1966
 "Spellbinder," *North American Review*, 1967
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 "How Much Does a Character Cost?," *Those Who Can*, 1973
The Fifth Sally, 1980
The Minds of Billy Milligan, 1981
Unveiling Claudia, 1986
Daniel Keyes Collected Stories, 1993
The Milligan Wars, 1994
The Daniel Keyes Reader, 1994
Until Death Do Us Part: The Sleeping Princess, 1998
Algernon, Charlie and I: A Writer's Journey, 2000

Media Versions of Keyes' Work

Audiocassette (abridged)

Flowers for Algernon, Walberg Publishing, 1995

Audiocassette (unabridged)

Flowers for Algernon, Parrot Audio Books, 1995

Autobiography

Algernon, Charlie and I, Challenge Pres, 2000

Large Print Book

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Play

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Spanish Translation

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Video

Charly

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Gates, Anita. "Getting Smarter Isn't Necessarily Getting Happier," *New York Times* (18 February 2000): E1.

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"Review: *Algernon, Charlie and I*," *School Library Journal* 46, no. 9 (September 2000): 261.

Rose, Steve, "No Flowers for Algernon," *Educational Leadership* (May 1998): 84-85.

Salij, Marta. "*Algernon, Charlie and I*," *Detroit Free Press* (23 February 2000).

West, Mark. *Trust Your Children*. New York: Reading, English, and Communication, 1997.

White, Brian. "School Board Votes against Banning Book," *Bowling Green (Ky.) Daily News* (15 August 2006).

Timeline of the Story

age 5 Rose and Matt Gordon take Charlie to Dr. Guarino.

age 6 Charlie is next door when Rose gives birth to Norma.

age 11 Charlie loves Harriet and gives her a locket on Valentine's Day.

age 14-15 Charlie asks for a dog.

age 15 Uncle Herman entrusts Charlie to Mr. Donner.

age 17 Uncle Herman dies. Mr. Donner retrieves Charlie from Warren State Home and makes him janitor of the bakery. Alice Kinnian recommends Charlie for Nemur and Strauss' experimentation. Norma gives permission for the operation.

March 3 Dr. Strauss asks Charlie to write progress reports.

March 8 Charlie undergoes psychosurgery.

March 15 He leaves the hospital.

March 20 He returns to work at the bakery.

March 27 He begins therapy sessions with Dr. Strauss.

March 29 Charlie beats Algernon around the maze.

March 30 Charlie begins reading *Robinson Crusoe*.

April 1 Gimpy and Frank Reilly trick Charlie by letting him run the dough mixer.

April 21 Bakery workers fear Charlie.

April 24 Nemur plans to present his paper in Chicago in six weeks.

May 1 Charlie falls in love with Alice.

May 8 He sees Gimpy stealing from the cash register.

May 10 Alice urges Charlie to think for himself.

May 11 He confronts Gimpy.

May 20 Donner fires Charlie.

June 5 Nemur complains that Charlie has stopped filing reports.

June 6 Charlie quarrels with Alice.

June 8 A woman screams rape; Charlie flees through Central Park.

June 11 Nemur is annoyed at the attention Charlie receives in Chicago.

June 12 At the convention of the International Psychological Association, Charlie discovers huge gaps in Nemur and Strauss' scientific knowledge.

June 13 Charlie steals Algernon and takes the plane back to New York.

June 14 The media report Charlie's rise from moron to genius.

June 19 He meets Fay Lillman.

June 20 He visits Matt, who does not recognize him.

June 21 Fay brings Algernon a girl mouse named Minnie.

June 29 Charlie panics when he feels his time as a normal man slipping away.

July 9 Algernon bites Fay and gashes Minnie.

July 12 Charlie returns to the psychology office to begin an independent study.

July 14 He visits the Warren State Home.

July 16 Alice accuses Charlie of drinking too much.

August 10 He gets out of control at Bertha Nemur's cocktail party.

August 11 At 4:30 A. M., he discovers the error in the experiment.

August 26 He sends a letter to Nemur on "The Algernon-Gordon Effect," which predicts mental deterioration.

September 1 Alice weeps when Charlie explains the error.

September 15 Algernon dies.

September 24 Charlie cries after visiting Rose and Norma.

October 3 He grows irritable, fearful, and suicidal.

October 5 He leaves Beekman laboratory for good.

October 11-21 He enjoys a bittersweet ten-day affair with Alice.

October 25 He gives up typing.

November 9 His headaches resume.

November 18 He returns to the bakery.

November 21 He visits Miss Kinnian's class before entering Warren State Home.

General Objectives

1. To discuss sibling rivalry
2. To describe the physical, mental, and emotional effects of coping alone in a hostile environment
3. To characterize the value of reason and objectivity in solving scientific questions
4. To acknowledge the importance of maturity to sexual curiosity
5. To discuss the nature of loss and regret
6. To characterize persistence
7. To discuss human foibles
8. To account for the dissolution of family
9. To differentiate between love and pity
10. To enumerate examples of manipulation and menace

Specific Objectives

1. To outline the interconnected lives of the people who know Charlie
2. To recount how Charlie discloses Dr. Nemur's failure
3. To explain how Alice alters in her relationship with Charlie
4. To account for the importance of the maze

5. To evaluate changes in Charlie's self-concept
6. To define the roles of Fay, Matt, Rose, Bertha Nemur, Hilda, and Norma
7. To analyze Charlie's encounter with scientists in Chicago
8. To justify the theft of the mouse
9. To contrast the apartment and lab as settings
10. To account for Charlie's despair
11. To explain the role of gathering places such as the cafeteria, movie theaters, and Central Park
12. To define Burt's place as guardian
13. To study the implications of Charlie's outburst at the cocktail party
14. To characterize Charlie's decline
15. To contrast Charlie before and after his rise to genius

Related Reading

Ray Bradbury, "The Electric Grandmother" and
Something Wicked This Way Comes

Karel Capek, *R. U. R.*

Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*

Robert Cormier, *I Am the Cheese*

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*

Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi*

Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisbee and the Rats of NIMH*

Scott O'Dell, *Sarah Bishop*

Alby O'Shea, *The Mensa Think Smart Book*

J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Armstrong Sperry, *Call It Courage*

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and
"Markheim"

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Daniel Keyes' writing, present the following terms and applications:

Climax: the height of an action, a crisis or turning point from which all behaviors or attitudes are permanently altered and nothing can ever be what it once was. The alteration in Algernon's behavior at the lab before the convention concerns Charlie enough to make him flee the Chicago hotel and return by plane to New York. His acceptance of deterioration in Algernon forces him to turn to Fay for love and solace. Her gift of Minnie implies her solution to human difficulties. Charlie, however, relies heavily on alcohol, solitude, and brooding as he looks into his future and sees time running out for a solution to the Algernon-Gordon Effect. At this point, there is no turning back as Charlie accepts the evil fate that will return him to his birth handicap.

Motif: a pattern or predictable arrangement of elements to express an abstract theme in a story, as found in the reports that Charlie writes of his experiences. In retrospect, he is glad that he wrote only objective data rather than on subjective reactions to his love for Alice. As he hangs on to intellectual achievement, he introduces into subsequent reports his decline in mental powers, depth of thought, rhetorical sophistication, and mind and body control. Gradually, he gives up punctuation and correct grammar. By his final report, he has obviously returned to his former state and is no longer suited for living alone or caring for himself.

Novella: a short work of prose fiction that is carefully controlled and features a varied cast of characters, clearly defined setting, an historical or social milieu, sustained action, and a plot. The elements in the definition of novella suit *Flowers for Algernon*. Although the work began as a short story, development into an intricate narrative adds more plot complication, such as the cocktail party, the report on the Algernon-Gordon effect, the face in the mirror, drinking episodes, peculiarities in Algernon's behavior, and the attack on Minnie. By having Charlie live a separate life with Fay, then return to Alice for a brief love affair, Keyes enhances the poignance of Charlie's loss to himself and Alice as he surpasses her in intelligence and perception, then rapidly declines to a childlike state.

The Importance of Setting

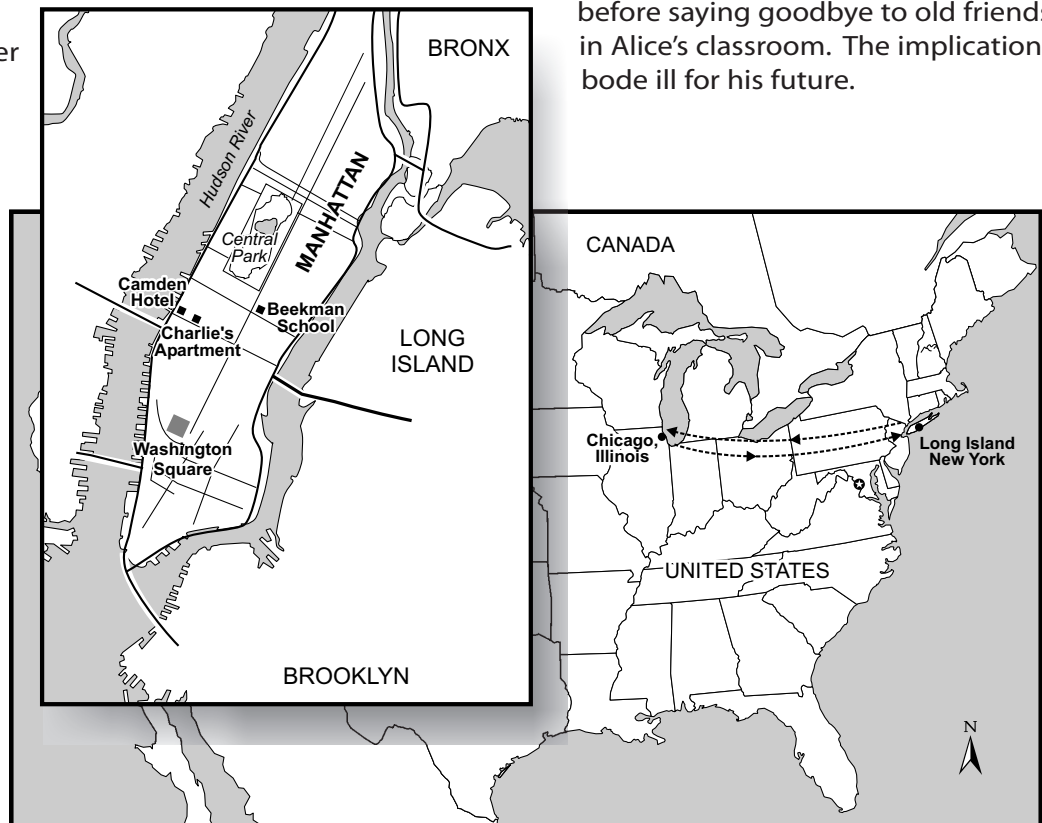
The settings in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* are both nondescript and particularized. In the beginning, Charlie could be in any research hospital, studying at any class for the mentally retarded, and working in any bakery. As he develops intelligence the spring of his 33rd year, he notices the cafeteria where he meets Alice and enjoys the ambience of Fay's departure out the window to the fire escape to access her apartment. Deep thinking sessions near Times Square, in a movie theater, across Washington Square, in a subway, and at an outdoor concert in Central Park tie the story to New York City, where Charlie wanders the landscape and determines the best way to face a losing situation.

The cataclysm occurs between Charlie and Algernon, his animal friend and fellow surgical experiment. As the mouse grows more erratic in behavior in cage and in the maze, Charlie mulls over the possibility of a flaw in the original hypothesis. Dr. Nemur's rush to share the paper with the scientific community places Charlie on his first plane from New York to Chicago, where he controls fear of being belted down as he was in boyhood at Dr. Guarino's office. The mix-up in hotel rooms presages the mix-up in the surgical outcome. As important scientists confer to share information, Charlie at first performs brilliantly, drawing Nemur's jealousy at the attention Charlie receives. Ultimately, the bitter truth of failure forces Charlie to flee the convention and the watchfulness of Burt Selden. By kidnapping Algernon, Charlie carries his fate in his jacket pocket.

Once more in New York, Charlie experiments in living alone in his first adult apartment at 43rd and 10th Street. By poring over Algernon and working

at the theory behind psychosurgery to reverse mental retardation, Charlie grows more morose as hope seems doomed. The intervention of Fay comes literally through the window as she makes herself at home in his flat and moves easily between apartment, displaying her body, teaching him to dance, and nudging him toward a sexual relationship. The two dance and drink in clubs until the wee hours. Charlie's double life keeps Fay and Alice apart until they inadvertently meet and become friends.

A visit to Burt suggests Charlie's grief at seeing the incinerator and his dread at Algernon's demise. Charlie's hesitant communion with family at Rose's home in Brooklyn and at Matt's barbershop in the Bronx ends disastrously. His one-day visit to the Warren State Home prepares him for the colorless incarceration of the remaining days of his life. The author recedes from Charlie's brief affair with Alice, then, in the falling action, returns Charlie to his original milieu of a simple room with a landlady and a menial job in Arthur Donner's bakery. After ending his relationship with Alice when her love gives place to pity, Charlie turns back to the television and peeping at women out the window for entertainment. He receives nourishment from Mrs. Mooney and makes daily visits to Algernon's grave before saying goodbye to old friends in Alice's classroom. The implications bode ill for his future.



Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Daniel Keyes, psychosurgery, the film version of the novel, scientific ethics, book banning, dualism, and other subjects and issues deriving from the text, consult these sources:

Articles

Glannon, Walter. "Neuroethics," *Bioethics* 20, no. 1 (February 2006): 37-51.

Mashour, George, A., et al. "Psychosurgery Past, Present, and Future," *Brain Research Reviews* 48, no. 3 (June 2005): 409-419.

Audiocassette

Tales of Terror and Mystery, Blackstone Audiobooks
The Time Machine, Tantor

Books

Ender's Game, Orson Scott Card
Pudd'nhead Wilson, Mark Twain

CD-ROM

Poe's Tales of Terror, Teacher's Discovery

e-Book

The Invisible Man, H. G. Wells

Internet

"Banned Books Weeks,"

<http://www.ala.org/bbooks/>

"Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion,"

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Novellas

Animal Farm, George Orwell

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson

Plays

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson

Flowers for Algernon, Bert Coules and Daniel Keyes

R. U. R., Karel Capek

Reference

Principles of Biomedical Ethics, Oxford Press

Working with Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman

Short Stories

"The Dybbuk," Isaac Bashevis Singer

"Sredni Vashtar," Saki

Videos/DVDs

Charly

Children of a Lesser God

The Electric Grandmother

Good Will Hunting

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Something Wicked This Way Comes

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* should include these aspects:

Themes

- retardation
- research
- experimentation
- friendship
- dilemma
- conflict
- compromise
- loyalty
- reunion
- family
- failure
- loss

Motifs

- manipulation of a large set of variables
- asserting self-control
- saying farewell to self
- grasping at love
- turning to alcohol for escape
- preparing for institutionalization

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Report and page numbers are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes 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 light, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. (epigraph, preceding p. 1)

(The central theme is that the retarded are human beings with human needs. They should not suffer ridicule because they lack the capacity to understand the world. Plato's quotation, taken from Book VII of The Republic, applies to the theme by explaining the differences among people in the capacity to think clearly and to perceive truth. Charlie moves from darkness to the blinding light. Unable to prevent the loss of light, he stumbles away from it once more in the last segment of a pathetic circuit.)

2. "The more intelligent you become the more problems you'll have, Charlie." (9th Report, p. 47)
(Although Charlie does not think he has problems at this stage of his development, Dr. Strauss predicts that growing more intelligent will create many problems. Charlie is starting to remember his past. When he has the intelligence to begin understanding the unhappy childhood that shaped his life, he will grasp more and more the complexities of the world around him. Life as a moron is simple; life as a genius will confront him with unforeseen and painful problems.)
3. "Even in the world of make-believe there have to be rules." (11th Report, p. 77)
(Charlie reveals an emerging critical awareness by taking offense at a movie that concludes too simply. If he willingly suspends disbelief, then the writer must make the story as credible and consistent as possible with reality and viewer expectation. The statement appears to express Keyes' duty as a fiction writer. The concept on which he bases the novel is incredible, yet Keyes presents the story realistically through a series of progress reports. The characters are well-rounded, motivated, and consistent. Thus, he appears to agree with Charlie's demands.)
4. "It was evil when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge." (11th Report, p. 107)
(Keyes alludes to Genesis and the injunction from God to abstain from one tree in the garden of Eden. Against the warning, the first couple ate forbidden fruit, lost their innocence, and suffered banishment from an earthly paradise. Charlie's dismissal from the bakery is a parallel situation. He too has acquired knowledge, lost his childish simplicity, and been forced from the refuge that has been an anchor for over half his lifetime.)

5. I'm like an animal who's been locked out of his nice, safe cage. (11th Report, p. 111)
(The cage image accounts for Charlie's panic. His intellect has grown so fast that he is emotionally confused. He is discovering conflicts he never knew and realizes people are not as good and kind as he once believed. The world is so complicated that his former feeble-minded state seems peaceful by comparison. The cage, like Charlie's imprisoned intellect, denies freedom, but it also provides security. Charlie, now free of mental constrictions, suffers growing pains, which fulfill Dr. Strauss' prophecy.)

6. Now I can see where I got the unusual motivation for becoming smart that so amazed everyone at first. (13th Report, p. 144)
(Charlie is highly motivated to be smart. As he ponders his mother, he recalls, "I guess I never stopped wanting to be the smart boy she wanted me to be, so that she would love me." A high degree of inner prompting encourages him to learn and make up for the years when he lacked a capacity for knowledge. The link to Rose explains the painfully boyish "Maa" that he bleats when he finally returns to his mother to display the success she always wanted for him.)

7. As Burt would put it, mocking the euphemisms of educational jargon, I'm exceptional—a democratic term used to avoid the damning labels of gifted and deprived (which used to mean bright and retarded) and as soon as exceptional begins to mean anything to anyone they'll change it. (13th Report, p. 153)
(Charlie uses exceptional as a term from educational psychology to label those who depart significantly from the norm of human intelligence, whether remarkably slow or remarkably adept. Thus, the label fits Charlie whether he is a moron or a genius.)

8. I see now that when Norma flowered in our garden, I became a weed. (14th Report, p. 168)
(Charlie's memories are complete enough to piece together his mother's rejection. When he was her only child, she refused to admit that he was mentally retarded. To do so would imply that she was a defective mother. With the birth of a normal daughter, Rose rejected Charlie, denying him essential love and acceptance. Since she had produced Norma, the flower, she no longer wanted Charlie, the weed. To protect her flower from contamination, she threatened to kill Charlie if Matt did not send him to an institution.)

9. I wished I could say that like the House of Atreus or Cadmus we were suffering for the

sins of our forefathers, or fulfilling an ancient Greek oracle. (16th Report, p. 273)
(Keyes refers to two extended families from Greek mythology. The great Greek tragedies deal with the fate of various members of these doomed families, whom the gods punished hideously over extended generations for the sins of their ancestors.)

10. P. S. please if you get a chance put some flowers on Algernon's grave in the back yard. (17th Report, p. 311)
(In the last lines of the novel, when Charlie can no longer understand the significance of his actions, he makes this final pathetic request. Algernon is the experimental mouse whose intelligence is increased by the same operation that later makes Charlie a genius. Early in the novel Algernon is one of the sources of Charlie's frustrations because at first the mouse can run a maze better than he can.)

When Charlie learns that Algernon has had the same operation, he begins to identify with the mouse. This alliance of man and rodent emerges after the International Psychological Convention in Chicago, where Charlie learns that the mouse's behavior has become erratic. At a climactic moment, Charlie realizes the experiment has failed. The mental deterioration of Algernon now foreshadows Charlie's. When the mouse dies, Charlie cannot bear to see him thrown into the incinerator, the usual means of disposal for laboratory specimens. He buries the mouse in his backyard and puts flowers on the grave. Charlie Gordon is symbolically mourning the death of himself.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

Style

1. What narrative device enables Keyes to tell the story through Charlie's point of view?
(Daniel Keyes tells the story of Charlie Gordon's intellectual rise and fall through a series of seventeen progress reports written by Charlie himself. At first, the writing describes anticipation of surgery and Charlie's response to a week in the hospital and his treatment for headaches. His rhetorical style is simple, naive, and filled with grammatical and spelling errors, such as "jean-asses" for geniuses, faulty verb forms, and the absence of apostrophes in "I'm" and other contractions. When Charlie regresses, his writing once more declines from highly literate to subnormal, then to the scrawl of a retarded adult.)

Purpose

2. What is the intent of the experiment conducted on Charlie and Algernon?
(The purpose of the experiment that Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss conduct on the mouse and retarded adult is an artificial increase in intelligence through chemical and surgical intervention. Nemur explains to a young clinician from Falmouth College the result of radiation or virus in causing a "defective gene which produces a, shall we say, 'maverick enzyme' that creates defective biochemical reactions." Nemur accounts for the reversal of damage by "injections of chemicals which combine with the defective enzymes, changing the molecular shape of the interfering key, as it were." The procedure calls for the removal of "the damaged portions of the brain and [permits] the implanted brain tissue which has been chemically revitalized to produce brain proteins at a supernormal rate.")

Conflict

3. Describe deliberate acts of cruelty against the retarded.
(Several incidents illustrate cruelty to Charlie when he is unable to fend for himself. Most frequent are the thoughtless tricks played by the employees of Donner's Bakery. One example occurs at Halloran's Bar, where, for the amusement of girls, men have Charlie demonstrate his technique of cleaning out toilets. Then they send him to check on weather conditions around the corner and leave before he can return. On another occasion, they force him to dance with a girl, then trip him repeatedly for laughs.)

One of the cruelest episodes illustrating the thoughtlessness of children occurs in Charlie's childhood. Out of his instinctive search for love, he wants to give Harriet a Valentine because she treats him with kindness. He asks his classmate Hymie to write the message for him since Charlie has not mastered writing. The sentiment Charlie dictates is simple-minded, yet beautiful. Obviously, Hymie writes an obscenity because the girl rejects Charlie and her brothers, Gus and Oscar, beat Charlie unmercifully as a degenerate capable of endangering Harriet.)

Character Interaction

4. How do bakery employees change toward Charlie as he grows intelligent?
(Although frequently playing tricks on the retarded Charlie, the workers at Donner's Bakery usually treat him with a gruff kindness and acceptance. As he changes, he begins to see that one of the reasons they like having him around is the sense of superiority they have over him. They are inadequate, unambitious workers in dead-end jobs. When Charlie outdistances their intelligence and learns Oliver's job of dough mixing in a few minutes, they reject Charlie as a fellow worker. Because they can no longer value him only as a moron, a butt of jokes and pranks, he

has no place among them. Being inferior to a former moron is more than they can endure, so they sign a petition to have him fired. Only Fanny Birden refuses to promote Charlie's expulsion.)

Coming to Knowledge

5. When does Charlie realize that Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss have made an error?
(At the Chicago convention, Charlie realizes that his saviors have not waited long enough to prove that the operation makes a permanent change in intelligence. Nemur's conclusion that Charlie will not regress is premature. Charlie contacts the Welberg Foundation that funded the experiment to request financing for his own independent study of the problem. The grant enables him to plunge into intensive short-term scientific investigation to determine whether his intelligence is permanent or temporary. He proves that he will rapidly return to a feeble-minded state. Ironically, he succeeds where the scientists fail, but discloses a personal tragedy that will soon envelop him.)

Motivation

6. How does the relationship between Charlie and Alice alter?
(While a retarded adult student at the Beekman Institute, Charlie worships his teacher, Alice Kinnian. Becoming more intelligent, he begins falling in love with her, but the sexual repression imposed by his mother years before prevents him from developing a close relationship. He discovers that he is outgrowing Alice and realizes "now that my feeling for Alice had been moving backward against the current of my learning, from worship, to love, to fondness, to a feeling of gratitude and responsibility." Later, he discloses his mistake: "I thought my intelligence created the barrier—my pompous, foolish pride, the feeling we had nothing in common because I had gone beyond you. You put that idea into my head. But that's not it. It's Charlie, the little boy who's afraid of women because of things his mother did to him.")

While Charlie regresses, Alice and he find a beautiful and intimate love suited to the relative nearness of their intelligence. Their story is all the more poignant because of its brevity and fragility as Charlie's IQ continues to plunge. When Charlie returns to the adult center thinking he is still in Miss Kinnian's class for retarded adults, he has come full circle. Once more, he is less than fully human and she is his idol.)

Theme

7. Why is ambition central to the plot?
(As Charlie Gordon pieces together his past, he reveals an intense motivation. His mother could not accept his retardation. She drove him unmercifully. Like any child yearning for a mother's love and acceptance, he struggled to achieve things far

beyond his mental capacity. In the throes of repeated failure, his loss of bowel and bladder control demeaned him further in his parent's eyes, leading to guilt, shame, punishment, and alienation from the family.

When he was retarded, Charlie believed that becoming smart would bring new friends. In reality, he becomes smart and loses friends at the bakery primarily because of increased intelligence. Another problem for his rising IQ is that emotionally, he is unable to keep up with his intellectual development. The anxieties and repressions of the feeble-minded Charlie are still active. Several times, he experiences a Jekyll-and-Hyde Shift in perception. Dr. Strauss describes the alteration: "A peculiar dissociation has taken place in the last month or so. He's had several experiences perceiving himself as he was before the experiment—as a separate and distinct individual still functioning in his consciousness—as if the old Charlie were struggling for control of the body."

Frustration is unavoidable for Charlie. He learns that brilliance and the pursuit of knowledge may hinder the more important quest for love: "Intelligence and education that hasn't been tempered by human affection isn't worth a damn. . . . All too often a search for knowledge drives out the search for love." Thus, he experiences a bifurcation of intent—from wanting to be smart to wanting to be accepted and valued for himself.)

Atmosphere

8. What does Charlie learn from his study of the retarded?
(Keyes deepens his theme of compassion for the retarded through his protagonist's experiences. Charlie has mixed motives for visiting the Warren State Home and Training School on Long Island. He knows that his mother wanted him committed and that Norma has made provisions to send him to Warren if the experiment fails. The surface reason for the visit is to investigate the facilities and treatment for the handicapped. Perhaps his deeper purpose is to see his own future.

On the dismal campus, the overall impression of Warren is of a colorless existence: "The feeling of cold grayness was everywhere around me—a sense of resignation. There had been no talk of rehabilitation, of cure, of some day sending these people out into the world again. No one had spoken of hope. The feeling was of living death—or worse, of never having been fully alive and knowing. Souls withered from the beginning, and doomed to stare into the time and space of everyday." Charlie learns that the retardates are classified tidy and untidy. The untidy are those too retarded to control bladder and bowel function. Charlie wonders which classification he will be. The prospect of being reduced to an animal-like existence crushes Charlie at a vulnerable point in his metamorphosis.)

Action

9. Why does Charlie return to his family home? *(Before sinking into the oblivion of feeble-mindedness, Charlie has to understand himself and his past. He interacts with Matt as client to barber without impressing on his father that the old Charlie has been replaced by an intelligent adult. He returns to Rose, finds her senile, and breaks a glass to reach into her protective shell, allowing her to tend his injured hand. He gives her a copy of a scientific report to prove that he has achieved the success she wanted for him.)*

Sibling relationship alters at the Gordon home. Norma's view of Charlie after so many years also washes away her rejection and cruelty toward him as a child. She has become warm and sensitive as the result of her own suffering. The sadness of the meeting is heightened by Charlie's knowledge that his departure from retardation is short-term. He cannot bear to relate to his family that his intelligence will soon decline into the former state.)

Tone

10. What is the author's purpose in revealing Dr. Nemur's belief that "Charlie Gordon did not exist before the experiment"? *(Contributing to the author's tone are scientific folk like Nemur, who are incapable of accepting Charlie's humanity before the experiment. Charlie's frustration at their blindness and callousness return frequently to the narrative. He insists, "I'm a person. I was somebody before I went under the surgeon's knife. And I have to love someone." Later, he insists, "But I'm not an inanimate object. I'm a person." At the crux of the experiment, he reminds Nemur, "But what you did for me—wonderful as it is—doesn't give you the right to treat me like an experimental animal. I'm an individual now, and so was Charlie before he ever walked into that lab.")*

In a model of dual self-awareness, Charlie experiences the unique transformation to genius while remembering what it was like as a moron. His increased intellect enables him to interpret the feeble-minded Charlie's unappreciated human drives and emotions. This peculiar double vision allows the new Charlie to understand a moron's inarticulate yearning for love and acceptance. The recurring references to the retarded Charlie's human needs point up the basic definition of humanity. Beyond his own suffering, he identifies with the simple-witted dishwasher in the Greenwich Village diner who misperceives the catcalls and derision. Charlie's anger at inhumanity toward mental handicap is Keyes' focus—to express the moron's position among normal people as a real, feeling, and needy human spirit.)

How Language Works

Daniel Keyes reveals the upward and downward progression of Charlie's intelligence through personal observations;

1. At the beginning of the experiment, Charlie is dubious about its success: "I told him I dint think I was goin to get smart anyway."
2. Abstract thought terrifies him: "For the first time I began to think about what God means."
3. Developing intelligence distances him from Alice, forcing him to admit, "My feeling for Alice had been moving backward against the current of my learning, from worship to love, to fondness, to a feeling of gratitude and responsibility."
4. Loss of intelligence sends Charlie on a downtown odyssey of movie theaters: "I wanted to be with the people around me in the darkness."
5. Terror of retardation stalks him: "I'm sick with myself because there is so little time left for me to read and write and think."
6. Returned to self-ridicule, he states cheerfully, "I reely pulled a Charlie Gordon that time."

Across the Curriculum

Logic and Mathematics

1. Characterize the growth of reason as Charlie develops from simple word problems to asking why. Explain how he becomes aware of abstract thought about mortality, love, sex, and God.
2. Highlight examples of convergent and divergent thinking as Charlie solves educational puzzles and the moral dilemma of Gimpy's theft from the cash register.
3. Compose a character interaction analysis emphasizing the positive results of psychosurgery. How does Charlie's improvement

in IQ uplift Nemur, Strauss, Burt, Alice, the bakery workers, boys at the Campus Bowl, and the Gordon family? What might Uncle Herman have said about agreeing to experimental surgery or making a vast change in Charlie's intelligence?

4. Make a time line of events in the story. Highlight moments of emotional and physical stress or excitement, for example, Charlie's first love, losing bowel control, winning a race against Algernon, watching the dissection of Algernon's brain, dancing with Fay, debating with attendees at the convention, talking with Winslow about institutionalization, running from police in Central Park, getting a haircut, greeting Norma, and talking with Dr. Guarino.

Religion

1. Explain in a theme why Daniel Keyes chooses the age of Jesus for Charlie Gordon. In what way is Charlie crucified? How does he transcend earthly exploitation?

Composition

1. Make an oral report on the theme of jealousy and grudges. Comment on Nemur's jealousy of Charlie's success among conventioners. Discuss Charlie's intent to conduct an independent study of the error in Nemur and Strauss' initial hypothesis.
2. Describe in an oral presentation Charlie's alienation before and after surgery. What qualities does he lack as he rapidly turns into a genius? Why do Burt and Alice encourage him to mature in emotion as well as mind? Why does Charlie continue to feel alone?
3. Explain in a theme how the author characterizes the need to achieve. Discuss elements of Charlie's retardation, particularly toilet training, curiosity about a baby sister, and introduction to sexuality. Comment on his attempts to please his parents, doctors, sister, friends, Harriet, and teachers.
4. Compose a first person account of the effects of psychosurgery from the point of view of Burt, Algernon, Alice, Dr. Nemur, Nurse Hilda, or Nurse Lucille. Predict how Charlie will accommodate a vast upgrade in intelligence.

5. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, especially Burt, the retarded dishwasher at the bar, Winslow, Charlie's landlady, Harriet, Oliver, Bertha Nemur, Dr. Guarino, Mrs. Mooney, the principle at the Warren State Home, Fay's new boyfriend, the pregnant woman in the park, and Minnie. How do these characters illuminate facets of the major characters, for example Algernon's attack on Minnie, Charlie's defense of the retarded boy, Charlie's withdrawal into his apartment, Burt's agreement to allow the burial of Algernon, Charlie's confrontation of Gimpy over stealing from the cash register, and Charlie's relief at seeing Fay with someone new?

Speech

1. Have classmates participate in a panel discussion from the point of view of Nemur, Strauss, Arthur Donner, Alice, Charlie, Matt, Rose, Norma, Burt, Uncle Herman, or Fay. Conclude what is best for Charlie. Consider these options: making no change, performing experimental surgery, returning him to his family, letting him live independent of control, supplying tutors and attendants, or committing him to an institution.
2. Describe in a short speech the difference between the story as short fiction and as a novella. Comment on the additional information that Keyes adds to the original version to make it longer and more detailed.
3. Describe in a short speech the effects of loneliness, insecurity, disillusion with family, danger, pain, terror, greed, manipulation, handicap, and prestige on characters in the story. How do characters compensate for failure? Why does Charlie's affair with Fay lessen dramatic tension?

Art

1. Draw a book jacket or poster emphasizing the role of science in subjecting Charlie Gordon to an inhumane experiment in psychosurgery. Contrast his behavior with that of Algernon.
2. Using desktop publishing or other media, design a page from a psychology text explaining the causes of retardation or the

use of psychosurgery, a sign welcoming visitors to the Warren State Home woodworking class or to the convention in Chicago, a menu in a New York cafeteria or on a jet to Chicago, a logo naming products to aid the retarded or of Dr. Guarino's method of making Charlie smart, a monument honoring Karl Jung or Sigmund Freud, multiple views of a Rorschach or Thematic Apperception Test, a business card for Burt or Alice, visiting hours at the hospital surgery ward or at the Warren State Home, a news headline about Charlie's phenomenal recovery from retardation or about Algernon's escape, an illustrated entry on educational games for retarded children or classes preparing them for work in a bakery or restaurant, a diagram explaining neurological damage or enzyme treatment of the brain, a chart depicting Charlie's phenomenal rise or fall in IQ, and a schematic drawing of a dough mixer or teaching machine.

3. Create a bulletin board illustrating settings at the Warren State Home, for example, a swimming pool, woodworking shop, dormitory, dining hall, television room, laundry, tennis court, examination rooms, grounds, or visitors' lounge.
4. Suggest a New York City memorial and/or plaque to Charlie Gordon to honor his research into the Algernon-Gordon Effect.

Journalism

1. Compose the text of a television documentary on experiments that can save people from being born retarded or that can alter their state after they are born. Choose experts to testify on camera to the need for human volunteers for psychosurgery.

Music

1. Give an oral report on the background of Claude Debussy's "Le Mer." Explain what emotional challenges Charlie isolates in the music.
2. Suggest titles by Igor Stravinsky that Charlie may prefer, such as *The Firebird Suite*, *Petrushka*, or *The Rite of Spring*.

Anatomy and Health

1. Using a model of the cranium, spine, and nervous system, explain to a small group why Dr. Guarino's machine makes no change in Charlie's intelligence. Why does fear cause Charlie to lose control of his bowels.
2. Contrast female characters in terms of action, control, reason, and compassion, particularly in terms of Charlie's sexual curiosity. Include Rose Gordon, Norma Gordon, Fay, Alice Kinnian, Thelma, Bertha Nemur, Harriet, Lucille, Mrs. Mooney, Hilda, Fanny Birden, and Minnie.

Psychology

1. Discuss Charlie's loss of motor control as his intelligence declines. Name tasks he can no longer perform, particularly typing.
2. Introduce to the class the use of lobotomy to prevent mental patients from becoming uncontrollable. Comment on the decline in lobotomies as mental institutions became more compassionate and scientific.
3. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma in Charlie during the rise and fall of his intelligence. List causes, symptoms, and diagnosis of anger, frustration, fear, arrogance, sexual confusion, impaired socialization, disappointment, violence, alcohol abuse, and disillusion.
4. Outline a bulletin board or web site on these events in the history of psychology: 1793, Philippe Pinel's humanization of treatment; 1800, training for the mentally handicapped at the Academy of Sciences in Paris; 1886, Victor A. H. Horsley pioneers brain surgery in London; 1895, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer publish *Studies in Hysteria*; 1909, Wilhelm Ludwig Johannsen isolates factors that determine heredity; 1911, Edward Lee Thorndike describes measurement of mental behavior in animals in a T-maze; 1914, Arthur S. Otis develops an IQ test for the U. S. Army; 1920, Hermann Rorschach devises a projective test; 1925, James Broadus Watson launches behaviorism; 1926, Sigmund Freud's *The Problem of Anxiety* explains how regression relieves stress; 1935, C. D. Morgan and H. A. Murray create the Thematic Apperception Test; 1950, Frank

Baxter popularizes teaching machines; and 1960, scientists outline a diet to prevent retardation.

5. Compose an extended definition of friend. What qualities make Fay, Mrs. Mooney, Alice, Gimpy, Arthur Donner, Fanny Birden, Uncle Herman, and Burt trustworthy friends? Under what circumstances does Charlie turn to them for support and advice?

Education

1. Suggest humane methods of toilet training retarded children like Charlie.
2. Compose an informal essay on parenting a retarded child. Focus on the mistakes Rose and Matt make in socializing Charlie, explaining sexual stirrings, and introducing him to his baby sister Norma. Justify Charlie's longing for a dog.
3. Divide the class into small groups to study the background elements of the story, particularly methods by which Charlie catches up on learning and life. Determine if he might have had an easier time if he had lived with his family, taken drugs to control his emotions, gone to church, or regularly attended Miss Kinnian's class.

Law

1. Design an Internet web site revealing your response toward experimental surgeries on the helpless, including retarded people and animals. Propose a law sparing them pain and long-term emotional suffering.
2. In a small group, study the legal elements of the story, particularly the experimenters' disregard for Charlie's feelings, Rose's ambivalence toward Charlie after Norma's birth, threats to Charlie with a butcher knife, and Uncle Herman's love of his nephew. Determine the best placement of Charlie after his uncle's death, for example, in a group home or halfway house.

Social Studies

1. Explain briefly the nature of scientific consortia and the types of information they share. Suggest areas of expertise that reside in one part of the world academic community, such as astrophysics in the United States, facial transplant and identification of the AIDS virus in French laboratories, and advanced genetic engineering and pharmaceuticals in Switzerland, Japan, and Russia.

Geography

1. Create a bulletin board contrasting terrain and movement in these settings: Times Square, a double feature, an outdoor concert in Central Park, meetings with Alice at a cafeteria, a barbershop in the Bronx, a cocktail party at the Nemur home, the Warren State Home on Long Island, classes at Beekman University, a convention in Chicago, surgery in a New York hospital, a visit to Marks Street in Brooklyn, renting a furnished apartment, flight from Burt down State Street, comforting by Nurse Hilda and Nurse Lucille, and races against Algernon in a laboratory maze.

Literature

1. List and discuss literary works and authors that Charlie finds stimulating, particularly Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the novels of Dostoevski, Flaubert, Dickens, Hemingway, and Faulkner. Add your own choices to the list, including female and nonwhite authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, Ursula Le Guin, Isabel Allende, Kazuo Ishiguro, Charlotte Brontë, Amy Tan, N. Scott Momaday, and Willa Cather.
2. Compose a short speech in which you describe emerging maturity in Cynthia Rylant's *Missing May*, Scott O'Dell's *Sarah Bishop*, Bette Greene's *Summer of My German Soldier*, Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Kettie Frings' play *Look Homeward, Angel*, Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, William Armstrong's *Souder*, and Scott Card's *Ender's Game*. Compare their personal problems with Charlie's assessment of his emotional immaturity.
3. Discuss with a group the theme of challenge. How does the author express Charlie's horror at finding faults in the two men he trusts?

Why does Burt Selden blame Charlie for being too hard on Nemur and Strauss?

Language

1. With a group, list and explain these terms, which express important concepts: psychosurgery, analysis, maze, regression, moron, scientific method, erratic, neural retardation, pathology, prognosis, ramified scores, psychosubstantiation tests, strato-jet, spinner, thematic apperception, psychopathology, genius, maverick enzyme, encephalo-reconditioning, labyrinth, and platonic.

Economics

1. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness between the bakery workers, Arthur Donner, and Charlie. Create auxiliary lines to connect Charlie with tricksters, customers, and the bakers' union.
2. Propose an equitable scale of paying retarded workers for menial jobs in bakeries and restaurants. Suggest ways that the wood-working shop can sell the lamp bases and other projects the students complete.

Drama

1. Write several conversations that are only implied, such as Norma Gordon's agreement with Nemur and Strauss on where Charlie will spend the rest of his life, Alice's selection of Charlie for the experiment, Matt's longing for a barbershop of his own, Nurse Lucille's refusal to discuss conception with Charlie, Bertha Nemur's arguments with her husband about Charlie's advancements, Dr. Strauss' explanation of free association, Uncle Herman's protection of his nephew, Fay's alliance with a new boyfriend, and Norma's decision not to place Rose in an institution for the aged.
2. Role-play the part of lab technologist, nurse, barbershop customer, fellow inmate at the Warren State Home, bakery worker, college student, or conventioneer. Explain how the book would change if the main character had been Alice.
3. Compose a short pantomime on the melodramatic atmosphere of these scenes: Charlie

protecting a retarded dishwasher in a bar, Fay installing a new lock, Rose bandaging Charlie's hand, Charlie trying to introduce himself to Matt, convention attendees viewing Charlie as an experiment, or Alice and Nemur pounding on Charlie's door as he regresses toward retardation in private.

4. Apply a Freytag diagram to the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Why does this clear delineation of action lend itself well to radio, audio cassette, spectacle, or the stage? What problems would a producer have in staging *Flowers for Algernon* as an opera, TV miniseries, puppet play, or outdoor musical drama?

Cinema

1. Draw settings for a storyboard version of *Flowers for Algernon*. Show the placement of actors, music, costumes, props, sound effects, and lighting. Include Algernon's death and burial, Charlie's apartment on 43rd and 10th, the airplane ride from New York to Chicago, slipping in the fire escape window, introducing Minnie to Algernon, learning to read in Alice's class, getting a raise at the bakery, recovering from psychosurgery, facing the old Charlie in the mirror, fleeing the screaming pregnant woman in Central Park, defending a retarded dishwasher in a bar, spilling water on Alice, or chasing the pervert who stared at Alice.
2. View various films about difficult moments for adolescents, for example, *Member of the Wedding*, *Little Women*, *Life with Father*, *True Grit*, *I Remember Mama*, *This Boy's Life*, *Good Will Hunting*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Finding Forrester*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and *Daughters of the Dust*. Discuss why filmmakers focus on problems with coming of age, especially under unusual circumstances, such as hiding from Nazis in *The Diary of Anne Frank* or choosing a religious life in *The Sound of Music* or *The Song of Bernadette*.
3. View films depicting mad scientist themes, such as *Frankenstein*, *Andromeda Strain*, *Beethoven*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Godzilla*, *The Terminal Man*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Coma*, and *Wit*. Compare the movies' settings, motifs, and dialogue to those of *Flowers for Algernon*. Comment on the interplay of

people with family, animals, patients, and victims of unethical treatment. Determine whether Charlie has ample reason to blame the Welberg Foundation for exploiting him in a laboratory experiment.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of teamwork, fear, insecurity, intimidation, loyalty, victory, fairness, poor judgment, conjecture, and reward in the combined effort to end Charlie Gordon's retardation.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate why vast changes in a human life may cause more harm than good to the individual and to friends, co-workers, colleagues, and family.
3. Compose a scene in which Charlie is enjoying the woodworking shop at the Warren State Home.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Winslow's hasty judgment, Rose's irrationality, Matt's inability to aid his son, Norma's hatred, Nemur's faulty logic, Mrs. Nemur's curiosity, Alice's pity, Fay's erratic behavior, Nurse Hilda's fundamentalism, Burt's complicity with exploiters, Gimpy's cruelty, Dr. Guarino's venality, and Charlie's arrogance.
5. Account for the popularity of a book about a failed scientific experiment.

Teacher's Notes

Vocabulary

Fill in the letter of an appropriate synonym from the list below for each underlined word. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Fill in the letter of an appropriate synonym from the list below for each underlined word. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| A. rebellion | M. inconsistent |
| B. irresistible impulse | N. stupidity |
| C. doubtful | O. concrete |
| D. assumption | P. trite expression |
| E. backward motion | Q. admission |
| F. distrustful | R. spiritual |
| G. mentally deteriorated | S. blind alley |
| H. soundness | T. maze |
| I. self-satisfied | U. submissive |
| J. empty | V. self-importance |
| K. contradictory | W. lack of sophistication |
| L. proven theory | X. prediction |

- _____ 1. If we claim too much now, our whole hypothesis will come under fire.
- _____ 2. The best of people have been smug and patronizing.
- _____ 3. You're not getting senile and dull-witted.
- _____ 4. How can he refute Rahajamati's attack on this method, and Tanida's challenge to the validity of this kind of control?
- _____ 5. It is paradoxical that an ordinary man like Nemur presumes to devote himself to making other people geniuses.
- _____ 6. At that point the compulsion overwhelmed me.
- _____ 7. I felt sick inside as I looked at his dull, vacuous smile.
- _____ 8. I could see by his face that he was skeptical.
- _____ 9. What eludes me is the reason for Algernon's regression.
- _____ 10. You've become cynical.
- _____ 11. My relationship with Alice Kinnian remains platonic.
- _____ 12. Did you think I'd remain a docile pup, wagging my tail and licking the foot that kicks me?
- _____ 13. There will be enough time later to talk of prognosis.
- _____ 14. I've seen enough of men like Nemur to know that mixed in with that pompousness is a good measure of uncertainty and fear.
- _____ 15. It is also possible that this erratic behavior is unique to Algernon.
- _____ 16. "I surrender" is too much of a cliché.
- _____ 17. I have often reread my early progress reports and seen the illiteracy and the childish naiveté.
- _____ 18. Algernon started, paused, doubled back, turned around and then forward again, until finally he was in the cul-de-sac.
- _____ 19. We need to show the world that there is some tangible good coming out of our research.
- _____ 20. I am back in the cave where everything is quiet and dark and I swim the wet labyrinth searching for one to receive me.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Selecting Settings (20 points)

Underline the correct setting to complete each statement. On the line that follows, explain the circumstances of each episode.

1. At **(the auditorium, Charlie's apartment, the Chalmers Hotel, the Beekman Institute)**, Algernon gashes Minnie's chest.

2. In the **(hospital, laboratory, classroom, bar)**, Charlie is curious about where babies come from.

3. Rose bandages a cut on Charlie's hand at **(her apartment, Dr. Guarino's office, the bakery, Uncle Herman's house)**.

4. Charlie grows drunk and obnoxious at **(the convention, the cafeteria, outdoor concert, the cocktail party)**.

5. Charlie discusses literature at **(Alice's class, Burt's lab, the Campus Bowl, Dr. Strauss' analysis session)**.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- ___ 1. Before his operation, Charlie's intelligence is so low that he fails the Thematic Apperception Test and the Rorschach Test.
- ___ 2. As a retarded adult, Charlie does not resent people laughing at him.
- ___ 3. The workers at the bakery are intentionally cruel to Charlie.
- ___ 4. As his intelligence grows, Charlie becomes more suspicious of people.
- ___ 5. Even though he has promised Charlie's uncle a lifetime job, Mr. Donner fires Charlie from the bakery.
- ___ 6. One of Charlie's major problems is that he lacks experience in solving normal human quandaries.
- ___ 7. Charlie is unable to establish a normal relationship with Alice until he overcomes sexual repression.
- ___ 8. When Charlie learns that his superior intellect is temporary, he wishes that he had never agreed to the operation.
- ___ 9. For a time, Charlie believes he loves Fay.
- ___ 10. The landlady wants to stop Charlie from peeping at neighbor women undressing.

Part III: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Charlie is grieved at the mistreatment of a retarded worker.
2. Describe the daily life of a retarded bakery worker.
3. Discuss why Alice selects Charlie for the experiment.
4. Link Charlie's interest in the Algernon-Gordon Effect with Nemur's original attempt to overcome retardation.
5. Account for the existence of two Charlies in one.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part IV: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Complete each of the following statements with the correct response. Place the letter of your answer in the blank at left.

- _____ 1. Charlie is eager to undergo the operation so he can become smart and
- marry Alice.
 - get a better job.
 - have lots of friends.
 - help other morons.
- _____ 2. Algernon becomes an important symbol to Charlie because
- the mouse is unusually smart.
 - he associates Algernon's destiny with his own.
 - he is unable to beat Algernon at the maze.
 - Burt hates to see them both undergo surgery.
- _____ 3. Charlie is angry when he learns that
- Professor Nemur and Dr. Struass have lied to Norma.
 - Alice does not respect him.
 - people have been ridiculing him all his life.
 - Rose is responsible for his emotional problems.
- _____ 4. When Charlie's increased IQ becomes evident, other employees
- fear him.
 - congratulate him.
 - seem unaware of the change.
 - help him get a raise and bonus.
- _____ 5. Matt
- blames Rose for Charlie's retardation.
 - insists that Charlie is a danger to his baby sister.
 - becomes angry that Charlie is not toilet trained.
 - accepts Charlie's retardation.
- _____ 6. When Charlie tries to make love to Alice, he
- realizes that he drinks too much.
 - sees the ghost of his former self.
 - decides that platonic love is better for them both.
 - is angry that she meets Fay on the fire escape.
- _____ 7. The relationship between Nemur and Charlie is strained because
- Nemur is jealous of Charlie's popularity at the convention.
 - Charlie resents being a lab experiment.
 - Nemur denounces Charlie's love of Alice.
 - Charlie objects to Nemur's premature publication of the experiment.
- _____ 8. Charlie's original motivation to be smart is his
- desire to impress Alice.
 - will to obey Uncle Herman.
 - wish to win Gimpy as a friend.
 - intent to please Rose.
- _____ 9. Burt tries to convince Charlie to respect Dr. Nemur because Nemur is
- responsible for making Charlie a genius.
 - the only one who can correct the faulty surgery.
 - the greatest authority in the field of psychosurgery.
 - an ordinary man doing a great man's work.
- _____ 10. When her daughter appears normal, Rose
- rejects Charlie.
 - forgives Charlie for watching a spinner.
 - threatens Charlie with a knife.
 - continues taking Charlie to Dr. Guarino in search of a cure.
- _____ 11. Fay is the person
- whom Charlie learns to love.
 - who helps Charlie overcome sexual repression.
 - who dismays Charlie by yelling "rape" in the park.
 - who encourages Charlie to dance and drink excessively.
- _____ 12. Before his decline, Charlie visits the Warren State Home and Training School and finds the atmosphere
- happy and cheerful.
 - brutalizing.
 - gray and hopeless.
 - purposeful and nourishing.
- _____ 13. When Charlie proves his deterioration is unavoidable, he considers suicide, but rejects it because
- the retarded Charlie has a right to live.
 - Rose disapproves of suicide.
 - he wants to enjoy normality as long as possible.
 - he must verify the Algernon-Gordon Effect.
- _____ 14. As he regresses, his loss of memory follows the classic pattern of forgetting
- the oldest memories first.
 - the most detailed mathematics and foreign language.
 - the most trivial details.
 - the most recent data first.
- _____ 15. Charlie drives Alice away because
- she reminds him of his retarded friends at the Beekman Institute.
 - he has lost interest in platonic love.
 - she is disgusted that he wallows in self-pity.
 - he cannot bear having her watch him deteriorate.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each question below.

- _____ 1. What is Fay's gift to Charlie and Algernon?
- _____ 2. Whom does Charlie see stealing from the cash register?
- _____ 3. Whom does Charlie protect from a gaping boy with his trousers open?
- _____ 4. What punctuation first fascinates Charlie?
- _____ 5. Which worker does not sign the petition?
- _____ 6. Where does Charlie encounter a pregnant woman?
- _____ 7. Whom does Norma keep out of an institution?
- _____ 8. What is Oliver's job?
- _____ 9. Who accuses Charlie of being too advanced to care for retarded children?
- _____ 10. When does Algernon die?

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. The operation triples Charlie's intelligence.
- _____ 2. Charlie knows immediately that the operation has changed him.
- _____ 3. Alice likes and respects Charlie throughout the experiment.
- _____ 4. College students humor Charlie at the Campus Bowl.
- _____ 5. After Herman's death, Charlie no longer cares about having a job.
- _____ 6. Matt is unaware of the identity of his customer.
- _____ 7. Charlie realizes he was not really a person before the operation.
- _____ 8. At the height of his intellectual powers, Charlie knows that his retarded self is no longer lurking.
- _____ 9. Bertha Nemur is aware of Charlie's past history.
- _____ 10. Harriet loves Charlie out of pity.

Part III: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the meaning of "flowers" in the title.
2. Discuss the importance of autonomy in Charlie's new life.
3. Describe the value of a well-rounded education and interests to Charlie.
4. Propose other ways of helping retardates live useful lives.
5. Determine at what point psychosurgery is safe to apply to humans.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part IV: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Complete each of the following statements with the correct response. Place the letter of your answer in the blank at left.

- _____ 1. Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss choose Charlie because
- he is cooperative and highly motivated.
 - raising the IQ of a moron will aid the scientific community.
 - the operation is too dangerous to perform on a normal person.
 - no relatives interfere.
- _____ 2. Dr. Strauss tells Charlie that the more intelligent he becomes,
- the more content he will be with hurtful memories.
 - the sooner he can forget how painful it was to be a moron.
 - the sooner he can love a woman normally.
 - the more problems he will have.
- _____ 3. As his intelligence grows, Charlie reacts to the world with
- suspicious and anger.
 - eagerness to please.
 - disillusionment and apathy.
 - emotional withdrawal and abuse of alcohol.
- _____ 4. Before Norma is born, Rose
- spends Matt's savings for a barbershop on quack doctors.
 - insists that Charlie is normal.
 - wants to send Charlie to the Warren State Home.
 - recognizes Charlie's need for short-wave brain reconditioning.
- _____ 5. As Charlie assimilates knowledge, he learns that
- most educated people are competent in a narrow field.
 - the university staff regards him as a freak.
 - Nemur and Strauss have lied to the scientific community.
 - Matt could have saved him pain by giving him to Uncle Herman.
- _____ 6. When bakery workers pass a petition, Charlie knows they hate him because he
- threatens their security.
 - interferes with stealing from Mr. Donner.
 - makes them feel inferior to a moron.
 - discovers their former cruelty to him.
- _____ 7. As Charlie outpaces Alice intellectually, she
- hates him for making her feel stupid.
 - expects gratitude because she recommended him for surgery.
 - accuses him of arrogance.
 - wants to spend her life with him.

- _____ 8. Dr. Guarino
- always gives Charlie candy.
 - sincerely tries to toilet train the boy.
 - treats Charlie as a human being.
 - convinces Rose to accept the boy's fascination with the baby.
- _____ 9. At the convention, Charlie is shocked that
- Nemur and Strauss have always known the experiment is temporary.
 - Nemur and Strauss are ignorant of much of their own fields.
 - Algernon's regression has been scientifically verified.
 - Algernon dies.
- _____ 10. The studies that anger Charlie are those that
- search for flaws by other scientists.
 - squander research on short-term cures.
 - use human beings as experimental specimens.
 - dispose of animals in the incinerator.
- _____ 11. Charlie realizes that Fay is
- free and independent.
 - fascinated by stories about him in the newspapers.
 - eventually going to meet Alice.
 - leaving him for another man.
- _____ 12. Dr. Strauss notes that Charlie eventually sees himself as
- a totally new personal unrelated to the old Charlie.
 - two distinct personalities.
 - Rose and Matt's pathetic moron son.
 - an arrogant, short-tempered genius.
- _____ 13. As Charlie declines, he
- flees Chicago and returns to the lab to steal Algernon.
 - hates Nemur and Strauss.
 - is grateful for short-term brilliance.
 - insists on solving the faulty operation to save other morons.
- _____ 14. Charlie has a brief affair with Alice because
- he knows how little time he has.
 - love is worth any price.
 - she is compassionate toward his loss of Fay to another man.
 - he thinks she will save him from the Warren State Home.
- _____ 15. In detailing Charlie's rise in IQ, Keyes displays
- the development of a brilliant mind.
 - the importance of motherhood to the handicapped.
 - Norma's part in causing shame in Charlie.
 - Burt's correct evaluation of the new Charlie.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. B | 11. R | 16. P |
| 2. I | 7. J | 12. U | 17. W |
| 3. G | 8. C | 13. X | 18. S |
| 4. H | 9. E | 14. V | 19. O |
| 5. K | 10. F | 15. M | 20. T |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Selecting Settings (20 points)

1. Charlie's apartment
2. hospital
3. her apartment
4. the cocktail party
5. the Campus Bowl

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part III: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. B | 11. B |
| 2. B | 7. B | 12. C |
| 3. C | 8. D | 13. A |
| 4. A | 9. D | 14. D |
| 5. D | 10. A | 15. D |

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Minnie | 6. Central Park |
| 2. Gimpy | 7. Rose |
| 3. Alice | 8. dough mixer |
| 4. comma | 9. Winslow |
| 5. Fanny Birden | 10. September 15 |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

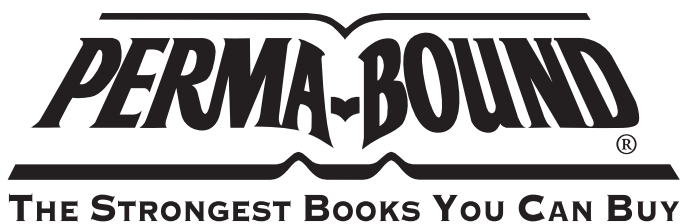
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part III: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. C | 11. A |
| 2. D | 7. C | 12. B |
| 3. A | 8. C | 13. C |
| 4. B | 9. B | 14. B |
| 5. A | 10. B | 15. A |



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