

“Flowers for Algernon” Theme

When people take an I.Q. test, it measures much more than just intelligence. It can measure creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. The short fictional story, “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes shows the struggles of Charlie Gordon, a 37-year old man with a complicated learning disability. In the story, Charlie Gordon is chosen out of many by Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur to be tested on. The two scientists wanted to make dumb people more intelligent by performing operations. Charlie Gordon has an I.Q. of 68 which is very low. Charlie is so determined to become smart that he decides to take a risky operation that could go wrong at any time. Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur decided the operation was a bit more secure once they tested it out on a mouse that they name Algernon. Charlie takes this operation, and a little while after, he becomes a genius that absorbs information very rapidly. Charlie didn’t know that his intelligence was only temporary and that it would all soon leave him. Throughout the entire story Charlie Gordon undergoes a lot of changes with himself. Charlie’s attitude changes throughout the story, his intelligence changes, and his feelings toward certain characters change.

First of all, Charlie’s personality goes through a lot of change. In “Flowers for Algernon” Charlie has a conversation with Dr. Strauss and it said, “ Mr. Strauss says I shud rite down what I think and evrey thing that happens to me from now on. I dont know why but he says its importint so they will see if they will use me. I hope they use me.” (285) At this part of the story Charlie is really tolerant and doesn’t really care that he has to write the progress reports.

Charlie doesn't mind writing the reports if it means he gets to be the one that they will use for the operation. Further along in the story this all changes. After the operation Charlie later claims that Dr. Strauss is very angry at him for not writing any progress reports for several weeks. Charlie later replied Dr. Strauss by explaining that he got too busy thinking and reading that he forgot to write them down and that writing was such a slow process. Charlie doesn't have the same emotions as before. He has changed and now thinks that writing progress reports are just irritating and a waste of his precious time. Charlie's attitude change got noticed very quickly because he got known to be someone so polite that suddenly became arrogant.

Secondly, Charlie's attitude wasn't the only thing that changed, there were times when it became obvious that Charlie's intelligence was changing. Charlie became joyful when he finally beat the mouse that was smarter than him. Every time he went against the mouse, he would lose. In page 290 of "Flowers for Algernon" Charlie exclaims "I beat Algernon! I didn't even know I beat him until Burt the tester told me" Charlie's intelligence had just changed and it showed that he was becoming more and more intelligent. Now that Charlie beat Algernon, it was evident that the operation had worked on Charlie and they were expecting great things out of Charlie. Sadly, an unforeseen effect from the operation finally shows up and takes away Charlie's intelligence. He does not want to be the person he was before the operation so he tries to resist what is going to happen to him. Charlie himself states that he doesn't want to be dumb again when he anxiously says, "It's so cruelly logical. I learned so much so fast. Now my mind is deteriorating rapidly. I won't let it happen. I'll fight it. I can't help thinking of the boy in the restaurant, the blank expression, the silly smile, the people laughing at him. No- please-not that again..." Charlie would never want to become like he was before but it was an unstoppable process. The

last letter of the phrase says “again”. This means that Charlie’s intelligence was going to change again and he didn’t want it to happen. Charlie Gordon’s intelligence changed in good directions and in bad directions throughout the entire story.

In addition, Charlie’s view on other people’s personalities changed a lot during the story. It was most noticeable with Miss Kinnian. Charlie describes her in page 286 when he declares, “I like Miss Kinnian because shes a very smart teacher.” Charlie likes Miss Kinnian because she is respectful and polite. He only see’s her as a very nice teacher who wants the best for him and wants to help him achieve his dream. Later in the story his feelings toward Miss Kinnian start to change. On page 295 of “Flowers for Algernon” he states, “ I don’t understand why I never noticed how beautiful Miss Kinnian really is. She has brown eyes and feathery brown hair that comes to the top of her neck. She’s only thirty-four! I think from the beginning I had the feeling that she was an unreachable genius- and very,very old. Now every time I see her she grows younger and more lovely.” Charlie describes her with passion and it is obvious he loves her this time. Charlie got feelings for Miss Kinnian and is barely starting to notice them. He never realized how beautiful she was but now that his intelligence and personality changed he sees Miss Kinnian as a young beautiful woman. There are many more examples of change in the story. For example how Joe Carp and Frank Reilly were very selfish and always mocked Charlie. In the end they defended him and stood up for him but Miss Kinnian was his teacher and was more closer to Charlie than to Joe and Frank.

In conclusion, Charlie undergoes multiple changes in his life. His attitude changes, his intelligence changes, and so does his view of other people. This is important because it shows how much a person can change in only a few months. It is important to find themes in literary

works because in doing so you can get a deeper meaning and understanding of the story. Change is such a universal theme because anything and anybody can change in a good or bad way.

Charlie's life was never an easy one, he had many obstacles that were both internal and external.

This shows that many things can change just because of someone else's life. Charlie always wanted to become smart and he did but only temporarily. Everyone who does have intelligence should be appreciative of what they have because when it goes away, they will want it back.