

Flowers for Algernon

Short Story by Daniel Keyes

from **Charly**

Screenplay by Stirling Silliphant

When is it better not to **KNOW?**

COMMON CORE

RL 3 Analyze how lines of dialogue and incidents in a story reveal aspects of a character.

RL 5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

RL 6 Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader create effects.

As young children, we want to know everything: why the sky is blue, how computers work, why people can talk but dogs can't. Humans have a natural thirst for knowledge. But as we grow up, we sometimes find there are things it's not necessary, or even desirable, to know. In the short story you are about to read, a man learns that knowledge can bring with it some unpleasant truths.

DISCUSS If it were possible, would you want to see what the future holds for you in ten years, even if you couldn't change it? Discuss this question with a small group. Consider the benefits of knowing what your life will be like, as well as the potential negatives.

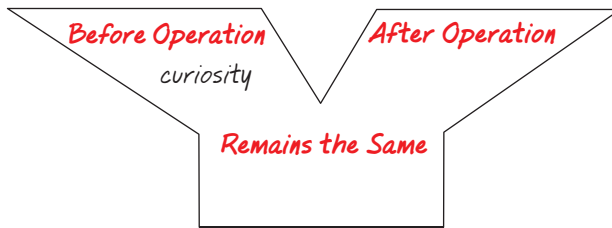


Meet the Authors

● TEXT ANALYSIS: CHARACTER TRAITS

Like real people, literary characters have distinct personal qualities known as **character traits**. A reader must often infer these traits based on the characters' words, actions, and appearances. Character traits can lead to conflict in a story and influence how the conflict is resolved.

In "Flowers for Algernon," the main character undergoes a dramatic transformation. As you read, use a Y-chart to note which of his character traits change and which stay the same.



Review: **Point of View**

● READING SKILL: EXAMINE STRUCTURE

The **structure** of a text is the way the paragraphs and events are arranged. The text of "Flowers for Algernon" takes the form of letters and journal entries. These help the author to

- reveal the thoughts and feelings of the main character
- remind readers that this character is changing daily
- make the story seem as if it is a true account

As you read, notice the dates, lengths, and language of the letters and journal entries and consider how these affect your understanding of the story.

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Try to figure out what each boldfaced word means in the context of its sentence.

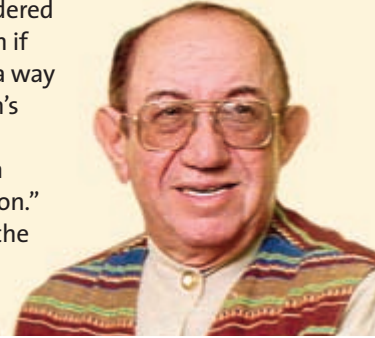
1. The doctor had a **specialization** in brain development.
2. The research findings created a **sensation** at the conference.
3. Will you **refute** the results, or do you believe them, too?
4. His understanding is **proportional** to his intelligence.
5. His long work hours could **impair** his social life.
6. They laughed at his **absurd** moves when dancing.

Daniel Keyes

born 1927

Wondering, What If?

Daniel Keyes started his career as an English teacher. A struggling student once approached him and said, "I want to be smart." Keyes wondered what would happen if science discovered a way to increase a person's intelligence, and he explored the idea in "Flowers for Algernon." He later expanded the story into a novel, published in 1966.

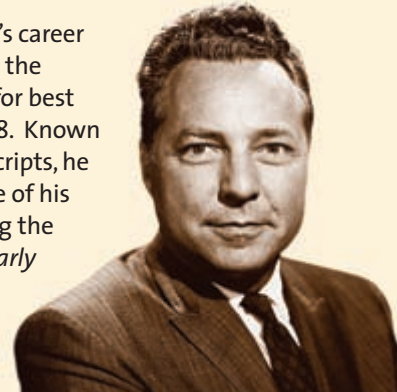


Stirling Silliphant

1918-1996

Screenwriter

Stirling Silliphant's career included winning the Academy Award for best screenplay in 1968. Known for action-filled scripts, he showed the range of his abilities by writing the screenplay for *Charly* (1969), based on the novel *Flowers for Algernon*.



BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

IQ In "Flowers for Algernon," the main character takes tests to measure his IQ, or intelligence quotient. IQ is a number that is thought to provide a measurement of a person's intelligence. IQ tests involve memory, reasoning, and numerical ability. Intelligence tests were once considered to be a reliable measure, but today, questions remain about the accuracy of such tests.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Authors Online

Go to [thinkcentral.com](https://www.thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML8-197



Flowers *for* Algernon

Daniel Keyes

Analyze Visuals ▶

What is the **mood** of this illustration? Tell how the colors and brush strokes help create that mood.

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A CHARACTER TRAITS

What can you **infer** about Charlie's abilities and personality?



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VISUAL VOCABULARY



Rorschach (rôr'shāk')
test *n.* the name of a personality test that uses inkblot designs

B EXAMINE STRUCTURE

In what ways are Charlie's journal entries unique?

C CHARACTER TRAITS

What do lines 41–46 tell you about Charlie's desire to change?

Language Coach

Informal Language

Notice that Charlie misspells many words in lines 55–60. To understand these misspelled words, try reading them aloud. Also, look for clues to their meaning in the surrounding words.

1. **Thematic Apperception** (thĭ-măt'ĭk äp'ər-sĕp'shən) **Test:** test for analyzing personality on the basis of stories people make up about a series of pictures.

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D POINT OF VIEW

Because this story is told in the **first-person point of view**, you learn about Charlie's thought process directly from him. What do you learn about his mental capacity?

E CHARACTER TRAITS

What have you learned about Charlie through the comments of Miss Kinnian and the doctors?

-
2. **amazed:** Charlie's way of writing *a maze*.
 3. **motor-vation:** Charlie's way of writing *motivation*.
 4. **eye-q:** Charlie's way of writing *IQ* (abbreviation for *intelligence quotient*).

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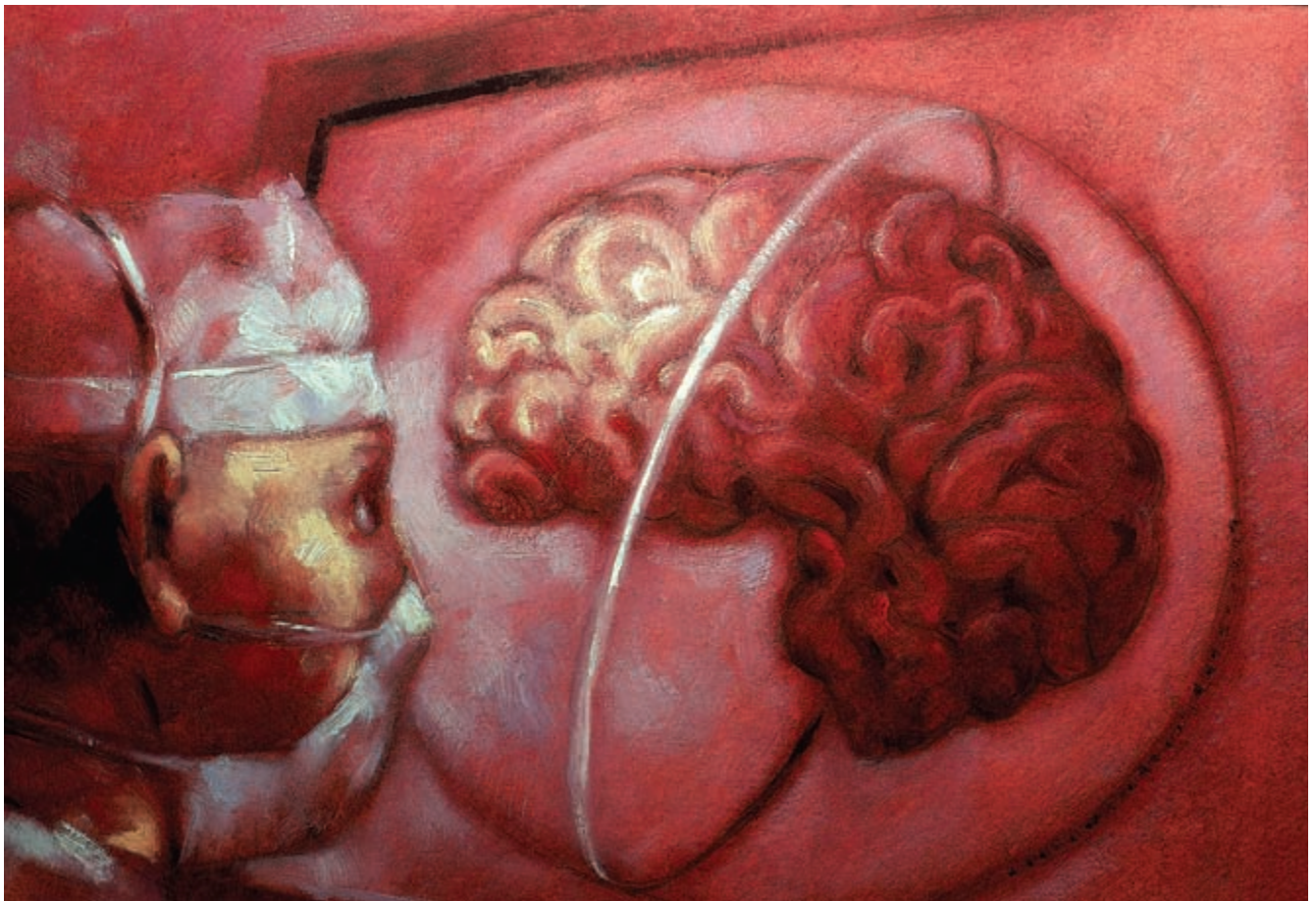
F CHARACTER TRAITS

Which of Charlie's traits convince Dr. Strauss to use him in the experiment?

G CHARACTER TRAITS

What hopes does Charlie have for the operation?

5. **einstines therey of**vity:** Charlie's way of writing *Einstein's theory of relativity*, the theory of space and time developed by Albert Einstein.



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▲ Analyze Visuals

What is the **connection** between this illustration and what happens to Charlie?

H EXAMINE STRUCTURE

In what ways is the March 19 progress report different from the other reports so far? Think about its length and language.

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1 CHARACTER TRAITS

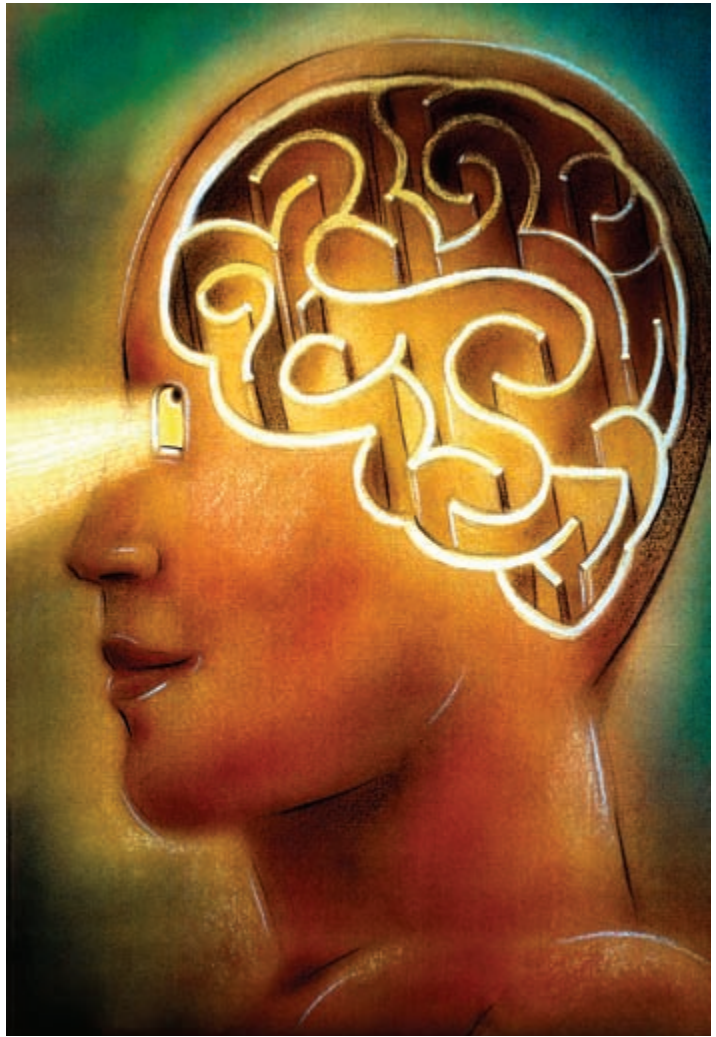
Why does Charlie think these men are his friends? Note whether he is a good judge of character at this point.

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- 1 POINT OF VIEW**
How does hearing about the party from Charlie's **point of view** affect your reaction to his coworkers?

6. **the subconscious** (süb-kön'shəs) **and the conscious** (kön'shəs): psychological terms. *Subconscious* refers to mental activity a person is not aware of; *conscious* refers to mental activity of which a person is aware.
7. **Charlie is a card when he's potted**: Charlie is funny when he's drunk.

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K **EXAMINE
STRUCTURE**

Note the date on this journal entry. What significant changes have happened in the story since the first entries one month ago?

L **CHARACTER TRAITS**

In lines 249–266, what does Charlie’s treatment of Algernon reveal about his character?

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M CHARACTER TRAITS
What can you **infer** about Miss Kinnian from her conversation with Charlie?

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N CHARACTER TRAITS

Why is Charlie ashamed now? Why wasn't he ashamed a couple of weeks ago?

O POINT OF VIEW

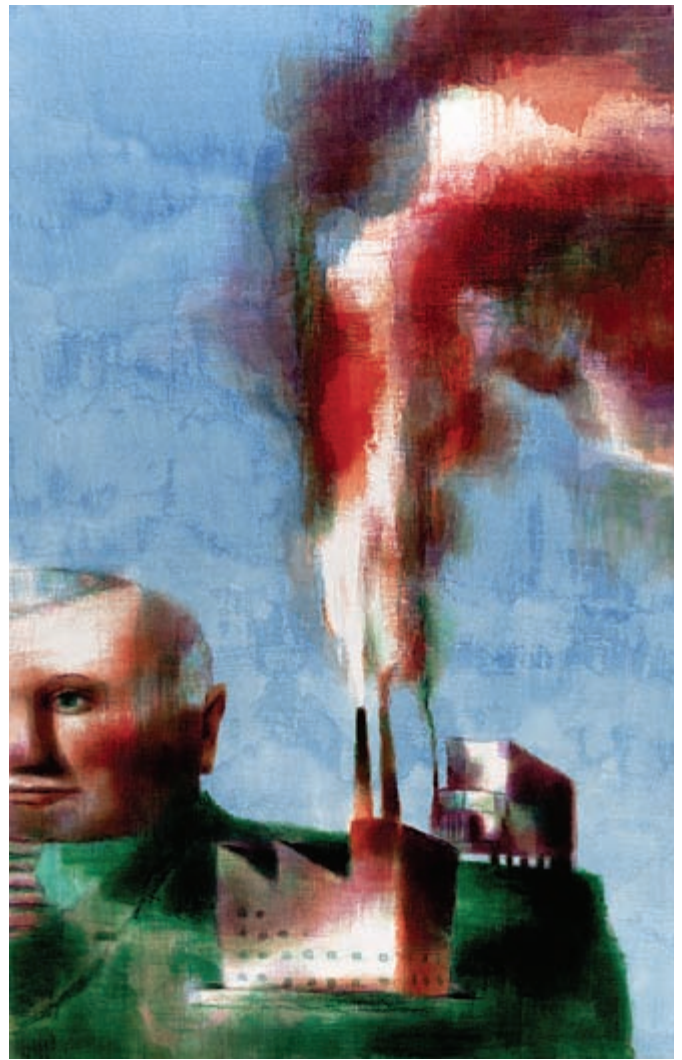
How might your understanding of Charlie's progress be different if you knew what others were thinking?

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P CHARACTER TRAITS

How is Charlie's second experience with the Rorschach test different from his first experience?

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◆ **GRAMMAR IN
CONTEXT**

Reread lines 477–478.
Notice that Charlie uses the **comparative form** (“younger” and “more lovely”) to compare his current impression of Miss Kinnian with his earlier impression of her.

8. **neurosurgeons** (nōōr'ō-sūr'jənz): doctors who perform surgery on the brain and nervous system.
9. **Chair of Psychology at Princeton**: head of the psychology department at Princeton University.

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Q CHARACTER TRAITS

What new aspects of Charlie's personality are revealed in this scene with Miss Kinnian?

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▼ **Analyze
Visuals**

What might the flask in this illustration symbolize?



10. **It was evil . . . die:** a reference to the biblical story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2–3).

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sensation (sĕn-sā'shən)
n. a state of great
interest and excitement

specialization
(spĕsh'ə-lĭ-za'shən) *n.*
a focus on a particular
area of study

absurd (əb-sûrd')
adj. ridiculously
unreasonable

refute (rĭ-fyŭōt') *v.*
to prove as false

**R EXAMINE
STRUCTURE**

What do the length and language of the May 15 progress report reveal about Charlie's intelligence? Think about how this report differs from those in March and April.

11. **calculus** (kăł'kyə-ləs) **of variations:** a branch of higher mathematics.
12. **inferiority complex:** feelings of worthlessness.
13. **Hindustani** (hĭn'dŏō-stă'nĕ): a group of languages used in India.

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S CHARACTER TRAITS

How has Charlie's attitude toward socializing changed?

T CHARACTER TRAITS

Why does Charlie defend the dishwasher? Tell what you can **infer** about his personality based on his behavior.

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COMMON CORE RL.3

U INTERNAL CONFLICT

An **internal conflict** is a struggle that occurs within a character.

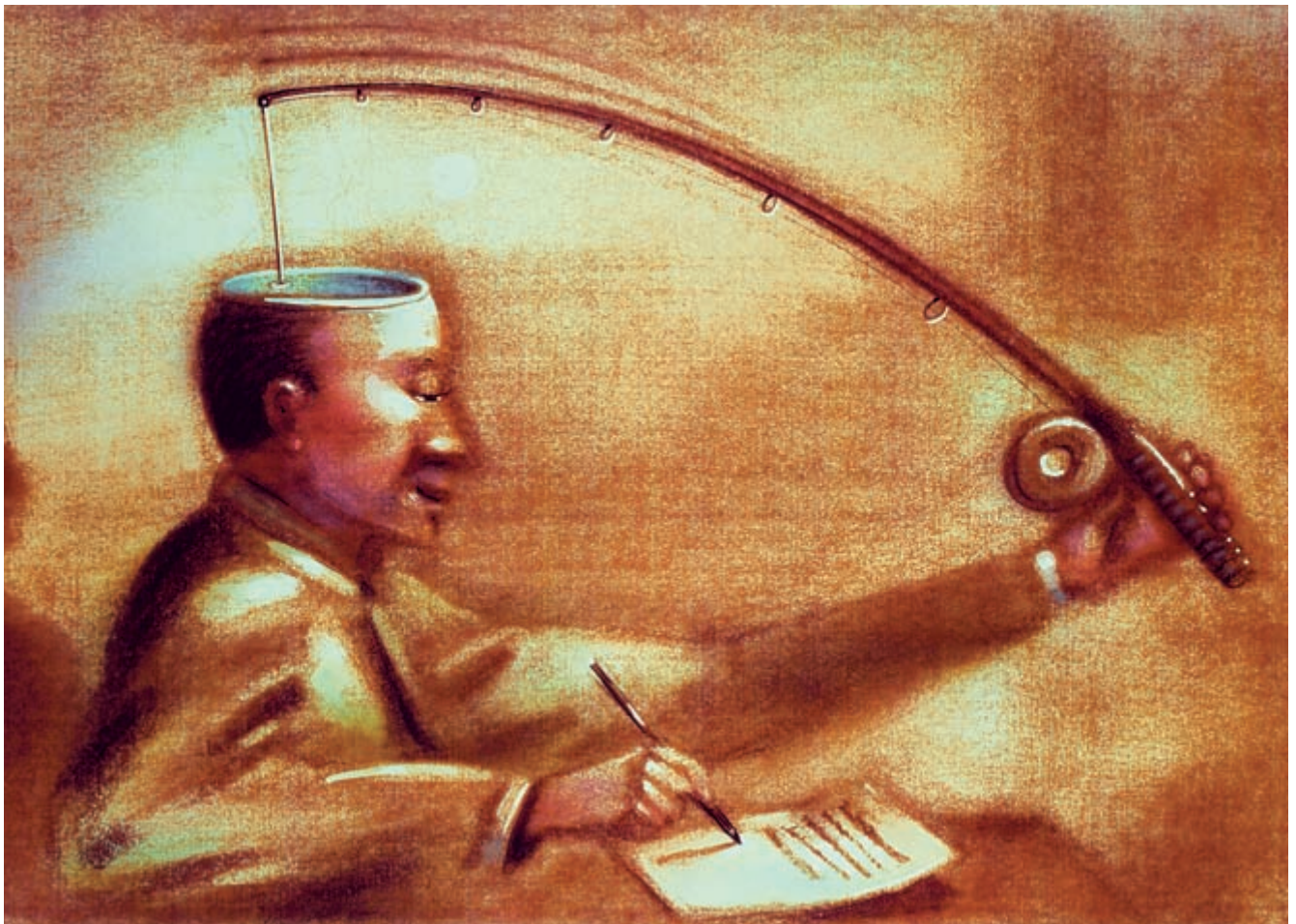
Reread lines 641–668.

As Charlie thinks about his past behavior, he feels angry at the people who used to make fun of him, and he also feels ashamed of the way he played along with them. What new character trait or traits are revealed in this passage? How do they help Charlie resolve conflicted feelings about his past?

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▼ Analyze Visuals

In what way does this illustration **represent** the actions Charlie describes in his May 29 entry?



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**v EXAMINE
STRUCTURE**

What is different about the June 4 entry? Tell what you learn about Charlie and his future from this section.

impair (ĩm-pâr') v.
to weaken; damage

-
14. **motor activity:** movement produced by use of the muscles.
 15. **progressive amnesia** (prə-grĕs'iv ăm-nĕ'zhə): a steadily worsening loss of memory.

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proportional
(prə-pôr'shə-nəl) *adj.*
having a constant
relation in degree or
number

**W EXAMINE
STRUCTURE**

What does Charlie's language in the June 10 entry tell you about what is happening to his intelligence? Think about how this might affect Charlie's attitude toward Algernon's death.

16. **cerebral convolutions** (sĕr'ə-brəl kŏn'-və-lōō'shən) . . . **brain fissures** (fīsh'ərz): cerebral convolutions are ridges or folds on the brain's surface; fissures are grooves that divide the brain into sections.

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x POINT OF VIEW

What effect does learning about Charlie's feelings through his own words have on you?

Language Coach

Similes A simile is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. Notice the simile in lines 797–798. What does Charlie's writing have in common with sand slipping through someone's fingers?

17. **fugues** (fyooogz): psychological states where people seem to act consciously but later have no memory of the action.

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▲ Analyze Visuals

What can you
infer about what is
happening to the man
in the picture?

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**Y EXAMINE
STRUCTURE**

Compare the July 25 progress report to those from previous months. How does it help you understand what has happened to Charlie?

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- 2 CHARACTER TRAITS**
What does Charlie's attitude toward his experience suggest about the kind of person he is?

CHARLY¹

STIRLING SILLIPHANT

CHARACTERS

Charlie

Dr. Strauss

Dr. Nemur

Alice Kinnian

Charlie. Boy!

(He straightens, looks at Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss who stand at one end of the cage. Alice Kinnian is just to one side of Charlie in a laboratory around which cages containing mice, rats, and monkeys are arranged. Here and there in the background lab assistants are at work. Dr. Strauss reaches in a piece of cheese, rewards the mouse.)

10 **Dr. Strauss.** Well, Charlie, what do you think of Algernon?

Charlie (*grinning*). Pretty fancy name for a mouse!

Dr. Strauss. Algernon's a pretty special mouse.

(Charlie turns back to the cage, rubs the tip of his fingers along the mesh and baby-talks to the mouse. Algernon twitches its nose and waggles its whiskers.)

(favoring Dr. Nemur)

20 **Dr. Nemur** (*to Alice*). How much does Charlie understand about the operation?

Alice Kinnian. Charlie?

(Charlie looks up.)

Charlie. Yeh?

Alice Kinnian. What do you remember about the operation we discussed? The reason I brought you here?

1. **Charly:** The screenwriter might have chosen to misspell Charlie's name as "Charly" to convey the main character's struggle with spelling.

Movie still from the 1969 film *Charly*



(Charlie straightens, looks the two doctors straight in the eye—this is his big moment—and the words come now, tumbling.)

30 **Charlie.** All my life I wantid to be smart not dumb. It's very hard to be smart. It's—kind of—slow. I mean, I *try*—but it's—slow. Even when I learn something in Miss Kinnian's class at the Training Center where I try the hardest it's slow—and I ferget. I used to think maybe it's because I talk to myself a lot—you know, I say, hey, Charlie—and stuff like that—but that don't slow me down—because I don't

40 listen to myself.

(*He stops, out of breath, discovers that Alice—and the two doctors—still seem to expect more from him.*)

Charlie. Oh—the operashun! The operashun will make me smart. (*a beat—then to Alice*) Is that what you told me?

Alice Kinnian (*softly*). We *hope* it will, Charlie. But nobody knows for sure. Anyway . . . (*looking at the doctors*) . . . the doctors have to

50 talk to a lot of other people too—before they decide who'll be the first to have this operation. (*favoring Dr. Strauss*)

Dr. Strauss. Charlie . . . how would you like to race Algernon?

Charlie (*grinning*). Sure, but . . . (*He looks down at the cage.*)

Charlie. I can't fit in there.

(*Dr. Strauss hands Charlie a long metal rod.*)

Dr. Strauss. We call this an electric stylus.

60 (*She guides Charlie's hand holding the stylus into the open space between the walls of a maze which sits next to Algernon's cage on the long bench before which they stand.*)

Dr. Strauss. When I say START—move the pencil along this line until you come to . . . that place there—the FINISH. If you move the wrong way, you'll get a shock.

(*She causes Charlie's hand to touch the wall of a cul-de-sac. Charlie reacts.*)

70 **Dr. Strauss.** Did that hurt?

Charlie. Naw.

Dr. Strauss. That shock is a signal . . . it tells you to back up the stylus and go down another row.

Alice Kinnian. You understand, Charlie?

(*Charlie nods reassuringly, smiles broadly. This is FUN. Dr. Nemur moves Algernon from the finish box to the start box.*)

Dr. Strauss. Ready?

80 (*Charlie, eager to begin, nods. He holds up his left hand, exhibiting the rabbit's foot. Alice smiles at him reassuringly.*)

Dr. Strauss. Start.

(*Dr. Strauss waits until she sees that Charlie has already begun to guide the stylus, then she lifts the hatch and releases Algernon. Camera shots alternate between Charlie and Algernon as each "runs" his race. Charlie's race is hardly run—it is actually one shock after another, one bafflement piled on top another, one dead end after another—then all too quickly Algernon's telltale victory squeak is heard. Charlie looks over at Algernon in the finish box. Dr. Strauss is feeding him a small piece of cheese. Close-up on Charlie as he considers what has just happened. He looks up at Alice, who is smiling reassuringly. Dr. Nemur's face is without expression. Charlie brings the stylus out of the maze. He shrugs.*)

90

100 **Charlie.** Anybody so stoopid even a little mouse can beat him you sure don't want to give *him* no operashun. I don't blame you!

(*He puts down the stylus, leans closer to the cage, and smiles in wonder at Algernon.*)

Charlie. I dint know mice was so smart.

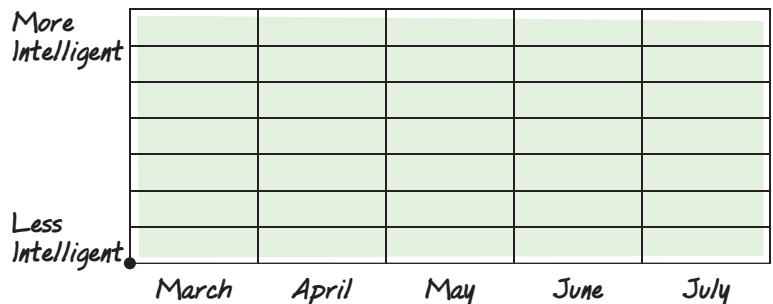
Comprehension

- Recall** What type of operation does Charlie undergo?
- Clarify** Why does Charlie decide to leave New York at the end of the story?
- Clarify** In *Charly*, what is the purpose of the electric stylus?

Text Analysis

- 4. Identify Character Traits** If you haven't done this yet, fill in the bottom of your Y-chart with traits that Charlie showed throughout the story. Use notes on your chart to support your answer.
- 5. Understand Plot Elements** The technique of hinting about something that will occur later in a story is called **foreshadowing**. Explain how Algernon's death is an example of this technique.

- 6. Examine Structure** This story covers a period of five months. Analyze the progress reports from each of these months to determine the change in Charlie's abilities. Track your results on a graph like the one shown. How quickly did Charlie Gordon's intelligence rise and fall?



- 7. Analyze Parallel Episodes** A **parallel episode** is a repeated element in a story's plot. For example, Charlie races Algernon both before he has the operation and after. Identify at least three other parallel episodes in this story. What is the purpose of repeating these elements? In your opinion, are these parallel episodes good additions to the structure of the story? Give reasons for your answer.
- 8. Compare Texts** Think about the ways that the short story and the screenplay present the scene in which Charlie meets Algernon. What are the similarities and differences? Consider the amount of detail each selection provides.

Extension and Challenge

- 9. Text Criticism** A literary critic wrote that "Flowers for Algernon" has "one of the most perfect and perfectly controlled narrative arcs in the entire history of the short story . . ." A **narrative arc** is the shape a story's plot takes as it slowly rises, reaches a high point, and then falls to reach a resolution. What do you think the critic meant by this comment?

When is it better not to KNOW?

Would Charlie have been better off if he had never gained the knowledge he did? Consider how he feels at different points in the story.

COMMON CORE

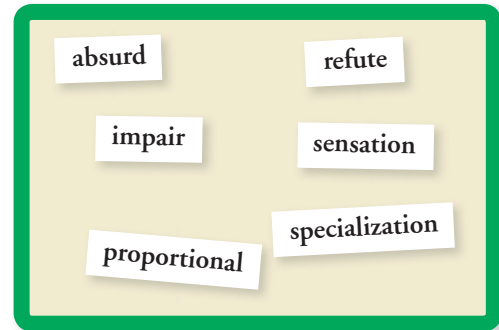
RL 3 Analyze how lines of dialogue and incidents in a story reveal aspects of a character. **RL 5** Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style. **RL 6** Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader create effects. **RL 7** Analyze the extent to which a filmed production of a story stays faithful to or departs from the text.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Show that you understand the boldfaced words. Decide if each statement is true or false.

1. Something that causes a **sensation** is not of much interest.
2. A **specialization** means a little knowledge about a lot of things.
3. If something is **absurd**, it's unusual or ridiculous.
4. To **refute** something is to agree with it wholeheartedly.
5. Lack of sleep can **impair** your ability to stay alert.
6. When two things are **proportional**, they are not at all related to each other.



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- appropriate
- assess
- intelligence
- motive
- role

Were the doctors right to try such a risky experiment to improve Charlie's **intelligence**? Write a paragraph that states and supports your opinion. Use at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: SPECIALIZED VOCABULARY

Many of the words used in this selection are specialized terms that relate to the study of psychology. Knowing the meanings of these words can help you understand more about this field of study. When you come across a word that you do not know, try to use context clues to help you figure out its meaning. Use a dictionary or a specialized dictionary for that field of study to find the exact meaning.

PRACTICE Match the word in the first column with its definition in the second column. Use a dictionary if you need help.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. hypothesis | a. symptoms that characterize a disease or disorder |
| 2. syndrome | b. a return to a less developed condition |
| 3. regression | c. an assumption used as the basis for research |
| 4. introspective | d. examining one's own thoughts, feelings, and sensations |

COMMON CORE

L 4a Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word. **L 4c** Consult general and specialized reference materials to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning. **L 6** Acquire and use domain-specific words.



Language

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Compare Correctly

Review the **Grammar in Context** note on page 211. The **comparative form** of a modifier is used to compare only two people or things. For most one-syllable modifiers, add *-er* (brighter, closer) to form the comparative. For most modifiers with two or more syllables, use the word *more* (more important, more easily).

The **superlative form** is used to compare three or more people or things. For most one-syllable modifiers, add *-est* (brightest, closest). For most modifiers with two or more syllables, use the word *most* (most important, most easily).

Example: Dr. Strauss is **closer** to being a genius than Dr. Nemur.
(*Two things are being compared, and close has one syllable.*)

Example: Even the **most intelligent** person in the world must be unhappy sometimes. (*More than two things are being compared, and intelligent has more than one syllable.*)

PRACTICE Choose the correct form to complete each sentence.

1. Charlie Gordon becomes (smarter, more smart) than he was before.
2. Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur might be the (brightest, most bright) doctors in their field, but they do not always make good decisions.
3. At first, Charlie is (more content, contenter) at his job than at the lab.
4. Miss Kinnian is the person (more, most) worried about Charlie's well-being.

For more help with comparative and superlative forms, see page R58 in the *Grammar Handbook*.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Explore the issues raised in “Flowers for Algernon” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Extended Constructed Response: Reflection

After reading this story, do you think having knowledge makes a person happier, kinder, or generally better? Write a **two- or three-paragraph response**, citing as evidence two or more characters.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Have you used any comparative or superlative modifiers? If not, revise your writing.



W1b Write arguments to support claims with logical reasoning and relevant evidence. **L1** Demonstrate command of standard English grammar and usage when writing.

Interactive Revision **THINK** central
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KEYWORD: HML8-229