Flowers for Algernon

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DANIEL KEYES

Daniel Keyes grew up in Brooklyn, and studied psychology at Brooklyn College. He took an interest in writing during his time in school, and after graduating he began working as the editor of the pulp science fiction magazine *Marvel Science Stories*, the precursor to Marvel Comics. It was during his time working for Marvel that Keyes developed the idea for the short story "Flowers for Algernon," his most famous work. He published the story in 1959, and was honored for his work with a Hugo Award, the most prestigious honor given to American science fiction authors. Encouraged by his success, Keyes set to work converting his short story into a full-length novel. When he published the novel in 1966, it won the Nebula Award—the *other* most prestigious award given for American science fiction. After 1966, Keyes continued to write stories and novels, though none were remotely as successful as *Flowers for Algernon*. He taught creative writing at Wayne State University in Michigan until his death from pneumonia in 2014. He's survived by two daughters.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Flowers for Algernon doesn't allude to many specific historical events, but its portrayal of sex and love is unmistakably a product of the 1960s. At this time, American culture was becoming more open to sexuality and frank discussions of sex. The so-called "Sexual Revolution" saw increased sexual education in school, further research into human sexuality (pioneered by Dr. Alfred Kinsey), the wide availability of birth control, and the decriminalization of extramarital sex. In this way, Charlie Gordon's discovery of his own sexuality could be said to symbolize the way the U.S. was "discovering" its own sexuality at the same time.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Flowers for Algernon alludes to many literary works, including the Bible and Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*. Several times, the characters mention the Adam and Eve story, in which the first human beings eat the forbidden fruit, essentially trading eternal life and happiness for knowledge. Charlie Gordon thinks of himself in Adam's place, sacrificing his own blissful ignorance for a chance at genius. Charlie also mentions reading *Robinson Crusoe*, which is about a man who lives alone on a desert island. Charlie sees a lot of himself in Crusoe: he's a lonely man, forced to confront his own problems on the "desert island" of his isolation.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Flowers for Algernon
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** March 1966
- **Literary Period:** 1960s science fiction
- **Genre:** Science fiction / *Bildungsroman*
- **Setting:** New York City / Chicago, the 1960s
- **Climax:** Charlie Gordon reunites with his mother and his sister
- **Antagonist:** Charlie's hubris and arrogance
- **Point of View:** The novel is written in the "epistolary" style, consisting of a series of journal entries and letters, written by Charlie Gordon in the first person

EXTRA CREDIT

Tearjerker: *Flowers for Algernon* was popular when it was published in 1966, and within 2 years it had been made into the film *Charly*, starring Cliff Robertson. The film was a commercial and critical success, and wound up winning Robertson the Academy Award for Best Actor. It's still regarded as one of the most effective Hollywood tearjerkers.

Never trust your editor: When Daniel Keyes sent in the original short story version of "Flowers for Algernon," his editor almost forced him to change the ending. Apparently, the editor felt that Keyes' ending was too depressing, and thought that an ending in which Charlie gets to keep his intelligence would be more popular. Good thing Keyes didn't listen.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel is made up of a series of progress reports written by a man named Charlie Gordon. As the novel begins, Charlie Gordon is mentally disabled, with an IQ of 68. He works at a bakery and attends classes at night to learn how to read and write. Because of Charlie's motivation, his teacher, Alice Kinnian, recommends him for a cutting-edge experimental surgery designed by Professor Harold Nemur and Doctor Strauss. Strauss and Nemur believe that they can greatly increase intelligence through this operation. They've already performed their surgery on a mouse named Algernon, who has become super-intelligent. Charlie competes with Algernon in **mazes** and other intelligence tests, and loses every time.

Charlie undergoes the surgery, and is told that soon he'll have an IQ of 185. At first, Charlie doesn't feel intelligent at all. He continues working at the bakery, where his coworkers tease

him and bully him for his clumsiness. In the evenings, Charlie continues meeting with Alice, who tells him to remain patient. Charlie begins to have vague flashbacks to his childhood—a period of time that he barely remembers.

At work, Charlie slowly shows signs of increased intelligence. He becomes adept at mixing dough, and gets a raise for his efforts. He has wet dreams, which Dr. Strauss—who acts as his therapist—explains to him. Charlie also beats Algernon in intelligence tests. At the same time, he begins to have more frequent flashbacks: he remembers that his mother, Rose Gordon, would spank him for being bad, and that she vehemently denied that he was mentally challenged. He also had a sister named Norma Gordon, who hated Charlie for getting too much attention from their parents.

Alice teaches Charlie grammar and encourages him to read, and Charlie quickly becomes more and more intelligent. He begins to alienate his coworkers, who resent him for being smarter than they are. Charlie also notices that Alice is very pretty, and he tries to pluck up the courage to ask her out.

Charlie confronts an ethical dilemma when he discovers that his coworker Gimpy, who's always been gruff but kind to him, is stealing from the bakery. Charlie asks Professor Nemur for advice, but Nemur says that it's an unimportant issue. Alice urges Charlie to resolve the dilemma by exploring his own values and beliefs, and Charlie is able to convince Gimpy to stop stealing anymore.

Encouraged by his discussions with Alice, Charlie asks Alice on a date. The date goes well, and Charlie decides that he's in love. Alice tells Charlie that he's being too hasty, however: although he's very intelligent now, he still has the *emotional* intelligence of a child. Alice and Charlie go on other dates, and Charlie slowly realizes that he's vastly more intelligent than Alice.

Charlie is fired from his job at the bakery—his coworkers, furious with his new intelligence, sign a petition asking for his immediate dismissal. Charlie is hurt. The only coworker who doesn't sign the petition, Fanny Birden, says goodbye to Charlie, and warns him that it was a sin for **Adam and Eve** to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Angry and upset, Charlie goes to Alice's apartment, where he tries and fails to be physically intimate with her.

Charlie continues to work closely with Professor Nemur. He flies out to Chicago for a medical conference, where Nemur's discovery is supposed to be one of the highlights. At the conference, Charlie begins to resent Nemur's condescending attitude—although Charlie is now far more intelligent than Nemur, Nemur continues to regard him as a "guinea pig." Charlie embarrasses Nemur in front of his colleagues, and frees Algernon from his cage. Together, Charlie and Algernon leave Chicago, with Charlie resolving to live life on his own terms from now on.

Back in New York, Charlie finds an apartment for himself. He meets women late at night and attempts to have sex with them, but he frightens them away. His fortunes improve after he meets his apartment neighbor, a strong, energetic woman named Fay Lillman. Fay is uninhibited, and tells Charlie that she'd like to have sex with him. Meanwhile, Charlie remembers an episode from his childhood in which his sister Norma became furious with him. Norma wanted to have a dog, but their father, Matt Gordon, refused to give her one unless she let Charlie play with it. Charlie has another vivid flashback of his mother spanking him after he accidentally embarrassed a girl at his school. Charlie visits his father, who now works in a barbershop in the Bronx. Matt doesn't recognize Charlie, and Charlie is unable to force himself to reveal his identity.

Charlie decides to devote himself to studying neuroscience—in this way, he believes, he can help other mentally disabled people. At the same time, he launches a turbulent relationship with Fay. At first, Charlie can't have sex with Fay without experiencing traumatizing hallucinations in which he sees a younger version of himself—the "**old Charlie**." Over time, however, Charlie learns to be confortable around Fay.

Charlie is then horrified to discover that Algernon's intelligence is vanishing—suggesting that the same might happen to him soon. Charlie reunites with Professor Nemur and begs for funding to research the issue. Nemur arranges for Charlie to pursue this research. In the meantime, Charlie visits the Warren State Home for the mentally ill—the home where Charlie might have to live if his hypothesis is proven correct and he loses his intelligence. Warren State is surprisingly pleasant, although Charlie is still terrified at returning to a state of mental disability.

Charlie gets drunk and confronts Nemur and Strauss. Charlie tells them they're condescending and conceited, but comes to realize that he's become just as bad. Shortly after this confrontation, Charlie makes a breakthrough in his research: he concludes that Nemur's brain surgery will always be impermanent. In the long run, Charlie's own intelligence will disappear, and he'll become mentally disabled again. Algernon dies and Charlie buries his body and decorates the grave with flowers.

Charlie tries to tie up loose ends before his loses his intelligence. He goes to visit his sister Norma, who still cares for their mother. Charlie's mother now suffers from dementia—while she recognizes Charlie, she seems to forget who he is from time to time. Norma, on the other hand, is a kind, bright woman, who's happy to reunite with Charlie. She tells Charlie that she's hated herself for years because of the way she treated him. Charlie is so moved by his conversation with Norma that he has to leave. He decides to forgive his mother for her cruelty—there's simply no point in hating her.

Charlie's intelligence fades quickly. He becomes irritable, and Fay breaks off all ties with him. Alice continues to visit Charlie, although she's upset by his moodiness. One night, Charlie and

Alice have sex, and Charlie feels that he's experiencing "something different"—a love few people find in a whole lifetime.

Charlie loses all his intelligence and enters a state of mental disability once again. He returns to the bakery, and succeeds in getting his old job back. His coworkers, who formerly bullied him, now treat him with more respect. Nevertheless, Charlie decides that he can no longer be around his coworkers or Alice—he can't stand to talk to people who remember a time when he was a genius. He decides to go to the Warren State Home. In his final progress report, Charlie says goodbye to Alice, Professor Nemur, Doctor Strauss, and everyone else he's met since the experiment. In a postscript, he asks "someone" to put more flowers on Algernon's grave.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Charlie Gordon – The protagonist and narrator of *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie Gordon starts out as a kindhearted, mentally challenged man in his early 30s, who is then given an incredible chance to become a genius when he's selected for experimental brain surgery. After his IQ triples, Charlie must come to terms with his new life. He quickly discovers that his coworkers, who he thought were his friends, actually look down on him—a decision that shakes his faith in people. Charlie also strikes up a romance with his former teacher, Alice Kinnian—a romance that lasts most of the book, though it's disrupted at times by Charlie's traumatic childhood, which has made it difficult for him to experience sexual pleasure of any kind. As Charlie becomes internationally recognized for his brilliance, he shows his arrogance—arguably the very quality that led him to be selected for surgery in the first place. In spite of his pride, Charlie slowly learns emotional maturity, coming to terms with his family and with Alice. Tragically, Charlie loses his genius at the novels end and declines into intellectual disability once again. Yet he doesn't regret the time he spent as a genius—he's used his time to solve major scientific puzzles and perform research that he hopes will help millions of people one day.

Alice Kinnian – A young, beautiful woman who works as a teacher for mentally challenged adults, and is instrumental in choosing Charlie Gordon as the subject of Professor Nemur's brain surgery. Alice is intelligent but also kind—a rare combination in the novel. She's devoted her adult life to helping other people, and takes care of Charlie, even after he loses his genius and lapses into intellectual disability once again. Although Alice finds herself feeling attracted to Charlie once he becomes a genius, she's frustrated by his arrogance, and worries that they're moving too fast—she recognizes that Charlie has childhood issues that he needs to settle before he can pursue a mature relationship with anyone. Charlie and Alice enjoy a few moments of pure, mature love, but ultimately they're forced to end their love affair when Charlie loses his intelligence.

Algernon – Algernon is a mouse that becomes extremely intelligent after Professor Nemur performs experimental brain surgery on it. Algernon is the first animal to have its IQ artificially increased, just as Charlie is the first human being to have his IQ artificially increased. As such, Algernon is a symbol for Charlie's own mental growth and decline. Algernon's mastery of Nemur's puzzles, his frustration with the academic world, his desire for freedom, and his inevitable loss of intelligence anticipate Charlie's own experience. In the end, Algernon dies, a reminder of the incompleteness of all attempts to control one's own life and abilities.

Professor Harold Nemur – A talented but decidedly non-brilliant scientist, who pioneers an experimental brain surgery technique that allows patients to experience huge increases in IQ. Nemur is arrogant, egocentric, and jealous—the very embodiment of the limits of intelligence in terms of morality and wisdom. In spite of his academic training, Nemur is clueless about the most basic moral problems, and—confirming his emotional immaturity—often treats Charlie Gordon with condescension or (after Charlie's intelligence eclipses his own) outright resentment. Nevertheless, Keyes makes it clear that Nemur isn't a monster—his wife, Bertha Nemur, has put him under a lot of pressure, and he clearly has some sympathy for Charlie, even if it's limited by his own arrogance.

Doctor Strauss – A surgeon and therapist who works closely with Charlie Gordon during his transformation from mental disability to genius. In many ways, Strauss is a slightly friendlier version of Nemur: like Nemur, he's ambitious, conceited, and jealous, but he seems to have more self-awareness and humility than Nemur. Strauss conducts therapy sessions with Charlie Gordon, during which he helps Charlie identify the subconscious sources of his anxiety and insecurity.

Rose Gordon (Charlie's mother) – Charlie Gordon's mother, and one of the most important influences on his life. Rose is a domineering, cruel mother who's obsessed with outward appearances. She spends years denying that Charlie is mentally disabled, despite all evidence to the contrary, and later, when she can't deny it any more, she sends Charlie to live with his uncle. Rose continues to wield great power over Charlie even after Charlie becomes a genius. Because Rose used to beat him as a child for showing any interest in women, Charlie later finds it difficult to form intimate relationships with Alice Kinnian. In general, it's suggested that Charlie's ambition and need for validation are partly the result of his mother's abusive and controlling attitude.

Fay Lillman – A young, attractive woman who lives in Charlie's apartment building. Fay represents the exact opposite of the scientific establishment that "creates" Charlie: she's casual, anti-intellectual, and intuitive. Although Charlie never feels

love for Fay, he's highly attracted to her, not least because she's a welcome alternative to his academic pursuits. Fay recedes from view toward the end of the novel—when Charlie begins to lose his intelligence, she shuns him.

Norma Gordon – Charlie Gordon's younger sister. Norma, it's implied, is an intelligent, hardworking woman, who always resented Charlie for getting more attention and love than she did. In spite of her rocky relationship with Charlie, Norma seems eager to reunite with Charlie when he visits her—newly brilliant—in Brooklyn. In spite of her resentment, she always loved Charlie.

Fanny Birden – A worker at the bakery alongside Charlie Gordon—the only worker who doesn't sign the petition to have Charlie fired. While Fanny doesn't dislike or resent Charlie, she's suspicious of Charlie's operation, and cites the Biblical story of **Adam and Eve** as proof that humans are not meant to pursue knowledge.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Burt Seldon – A young, friendly graduate student who conducts tests on Charlie Gordon and helps him through the moral and ethical dilemmas of his changing intelligence.

Uncle Herman – Charlie Gordon's uncle, who takes care of Charlie after his parents decide that Charlie is a danger to his sister.

Mr. Donner – The kindly owner of the bakery where Charlie Gordon works. Long ago, Mr. Donner swore to his good friend, Charlie's Uncle Herman, that Charlie would always have a job at his bakery. Nevertheless, Donner dismisses Charlie when Charlie's coworkers sign a petition against Charlie.

Joe Carp – An initially smug, bullying coworker of Charlie's, who teases Charlie for his stupidity. Later in the novel, though, Joe becomes Charlie's protector.

Frank Reilly – A bullying coworker of Charlie's, who teases and plays tricks on Charlie.

Ellen – A woman with whom Charlie dances following his surgery, prompting some of his first wet dreams.

Hymie Roth – A boy with whom Charlie Gordon goes to school, Hymie Roth tricks Charlie into giving Harriet a dirty note, leading Charlie to be kicked out of school.

Harriet – A beautiful girl with whom Charlie Gordon goes to school.

Gus – Harriet's older brother.

Matt Gordon – Charlie Gordon's father, a calm, careful man who frequently takes Charlie's side against Rose Gordon, his wife. As an adult, Charlie feels a strong affinity for his father, whom he regards as his protector.

Dr. Guarino – A quack doctor who cons Charlie Gordon's parents into paying him to "cure" Charlie's disability.

Bertha Nemur – The ambitious, jealous wife of Professor Harold Nemur.

Leroy – A young dancer with whom Fay Lillman has a sexual relationship.

Minnie – A female mouse that Fay Lillman offers as a companion to Algernon.

Mr. Winslow – The head of the Warren State Home for the mentally disabled.

Mr. Raynor – One of the wealthy sponsors of the Foundation that funds Charlie Gordon's brain surgery.

Mrs. Raynor – One of the wealthy sponsors of the Foundation that funds Charlie Gordon's brain surgery.

Mrs. Mooney – The landlady of the apartment building where Charlie Gordon lives in the second half of the novel.

Klaus – An obnoxious man who bullies Charlie Gordon after Charlie returns to his job at the bakery.

Hilda – A nurse who takes care of Charlie Gordon after his surgery.

Lucille – A nurse who takes care of Charlie Gordon after his surgery.

Gimpy – A gruff man who works at the bakery with Charlie Gordon, and—much to Charlie's horror—steals money from Mr. Donner. Charlie talks with Gimpy rather than reveal the theft, and convinces Gimpy to stop stealing. Later, after Charlie's intelligence deteriorates, Gimpy protects Charlie.

Lester Braun – A mentally disabled student in Alice Kinnian's class.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IGNORANCE, INTELLIGENCE, AND HAPPINESS

After Charlie Gordon has his surgery and begins to progress from mental disability to brilliance, he has an argument with one of his coworkers, Fanny Birden. Fanny tells Charlie that it was a sin for **Adam and Eve** to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, because in doing so, they traded eternal happiness for knowledge. The apparent tradeoff between happiness and intelligence is one of the most important themes in *Flowers for Algernon*. As he becomes more and more intelligent, Charlie discovers problems he didn't even know he had, while also finding some new outlets for pleasure.

At first, it seems that there really is a strict tradeoff between happiness and intelligence. As a mentally disabled employee of Mr. Donner's bakery, Charlie Gordon is extremely happy, and confident that he has many good friends. From the reader's perspective, however, it's apparent that Charlie's coworkers treat him horribly: they make fun of his stupidity, trip him, and force him to dance for their own cruel amusement. Blissfully unaware of the truth, Charlie (at least in the beginning) is by far the happiest character in the book, but paradoxically, no reader would trade places with him. Ignorance is bliss. And yet Charlie's bliss seems less "real" and less desirable than that of an intelligent person, since it's based on the delusion that Charlie's coworkers respect him. Keyes reinforces his point after Charlie becomes intelligent, and realizes, with a shock, that his coworkers, far from liking him, have always looked down on him. Charlie's newfound intelligence brings truth, but it doesn't bring him any joy—on the contrary, it reminds him how small and lonely his life really, whether he's a genius or not.

Keyes complicates the idea that ignorance is bliss in two important ways. First, he shows that intelligence can *also* be bliss, if only from time to time. When Charlie becomes a genius, he throws himself into his research—there's enormous pleasure to be had in discovering things for himself. At the same time, Charlie's research doesn't bring him total happiness; as he admits, his desire to learn is like a torturous, unquenchable thirst. Despite the fact that Charlie's intellectual endeavors never bring him total happiness, he continues with them. This leads Keyes to his second important point: even if intelligence isn't always blissful, it's the "smart man's burden" to continue with one's studies, for the benefit of other people. Charlie senses that his research will never make him happy, but he also knows that he can help millions by pursuing his research—and this is a far stronger mandate than mere personal bliss can ever be.

In the end, Keyes doesn't really refute the idea that ignorance is bliss: indeed, he shows that Charlie is at his happiest when he's mentally disabled, and at his most miserable when he's a genius. However, he questions whether bliss should be the only goal of the human race. As Charlie gets more and more intelligent, he becomes less happy—but this certainly doesn't mean that his life is a failure. Charlie makes the choice to use his intelligence to help other people. This choice is grounded in his sense of responsibility to his fellow humans. Moreover, Charlie's sense of responsibility would be utterly foreign to his blissfully ignorant self. This reminds us why Charlie is the hero of the novel, and also reiterates that there are good reasons to "leave the Garden of Eden."

INTELLIGENCE VS. WISDOM AND MORALITY

In *Flowers for Algernon*, Keyes establishes a tradeoff between intelligence and happiness, and at the same time makes a different point about the relationship between intelligence and wisdom. By the novel's midpoint Charlie Gordon is a genius: his brain holds a staggering amount of information about the world. And yet in spite of Charlie's vast knowledge and voracious reading, he finds himself incapable of handling the most basic "real-world" situations. The distinction between intelligence and wisdom is most apparent when Charlie confronts moral challenges. His knowledge of history and philosophy makes him successful and famous, but it doesn't teach him right from wrong—and it also doesn't help him take action to actually *do* the right thing. In general, then, Keyes uses Charlie's experiences to make a distinction between intelligence and wisdom, i.e., the ability to deal with real-world problems, especially moral problems.

Keyes suggests that there need not be a direct relationship between intelligence and wisdom or morality. The characters with average or below-average intelligence often exemplify wisdom—an intuition about how things work, or about how to treat other people with respect. When he's mentally handicapped, Charlie instinctively sympathizes with other people, such as his coworkers, his sister Norma, and his friend Burt. Charlie even feels compassion for Algernon the mouse, who everyone else ignores—only Charlie can see the injustice of imprisoning Algernon and forcing him to solve endless mazes. Charlie—while he's mentally disabled—can also see very plainly that his mentor, Professor Nemur, is unhappy because he takes himself too seriously. Because he's never been able to gasp very much knowledge, Charlie listens to his instincts when dealing with other people. Ironically, his childlike wisdom allows him to grasp moral truths that more intelligent people cannot see.

On the other hand, the novel's most intelligent characters are often clueless or indifferent when it comes to dealing with other people. When Charlie becomes a genius, he begins to look down on the mentally disabled, and smugly criticizes his colleagues for their narrow-mindedness. He also finds himself unable to handle the simplest moral dilemmas. When he discovers that his coworker, Gimpy, is stealing money from the bakery where they both work, Charlie realizes that—intellectually speaking—there's no "correct" answer to the problem: if Charlie reports Gimpy, he'll be putting a father out of work, and if he remains silent, he'll be enabling a thief. Even Charlie's mentor, Professor Nemur, doesn't have a good answer for Charlie—he dismisses the problem altogether. Intelligent people, Keyes suggests, are so used to relying on knowledge and science for the answers that they often forget about respect, humility, and morality—in short, wisdom and goodness.

Does this mean that it's impossible to be both intelligent and wise/morally good? Keyes believes that it *is* possible to "marry" intelligence to wisdom and morality—it just requires a lot of trial and error. Although Charlie's intelligence initially makes

him arrogant and oblivious to other people's feelings, he gradually acquires wisdom of his own. In the novel's climactic scene, he reunites with his mother, Rose Gordon, and his sister, Norma Gordon—the sources of most of his anger and insecurity. Charlie learns to do the right thing: love and forgive his family members in spite of the harm they've done him. In doing so, he gains wisdom through experience and grows in a way that he never could through knowledge or study alone.

Although *Flowers for Algernon* seems to be about a mentally challenged man's struggle to gain and then keep his intelligence, it's really about his struggle to find wisdom. Keyes makes it clear that intelligent people are by no means always wise or good—on the contrary, they're often *less* so than their intellectual inferiors. After he becomes a genius, Charlie gains wisdom, but not because of his intelligence so much as his dedication, hard work, and willingness to try again.

PRIDE, HUBRIS, AND THE TRAGIC HERO

From the very beginning, the readers of *Flowers for Algernon* are meant to identify with Charlie Gordon in one important respect: his pride and ambition. Charlie's pride—his desire for respect, intelligence, and prestige—is at the center of his character: without pride Professor Nemur would never have chosen him to undergo the operation that makes him a genius. And yet Charlie's pride is his greatest weakness as well as his greatest strength. Through pride, Charlie takes on the qualities of a tragic hero: a strong, ambitious man who tries to be great, and is punished by the universe for doing so.

As with any tragic hero, Charlie rises to greatness through a combination of ambition, hard work, and incredible luck. He's chosen to have a miraculous operation because of his desire to "be smart," and after he has the operation, he throws himself into learning as much about the world as possible. Quickly, Charlie begins to "rise" in the world: he gets a better job, masters dozens of languages, writes concertos, and starts working on his own scholarly research. Even if this is a work of science fiction, Charlie's ambitions to better himself are instantly recognizable to the reader: Charlie wants to gain the admiration of the people around him (his coworkers and, later, his academic colleagues) and learn as much about life as possible.

While Charlie is rising to greatness, his pride in himself is inspiring and heroic; when he achieves greatness, however, his pride becomes insufferable. Confident that his intelligence outstrips that of even the greatest scientists and professors on the planet, Charlie sneers at his colleagues and ungratefully ridicules Professor Nemur, the same man who made him a genius in the first place. Charlie's great flaw, we see, is his "hubris"—his extreme, selfish pride; i.e., the very thing that motivated him to become a genius in the first place.

Because this is a tragedy, Charlie can't be allowed to stay on top. In the end, the laws of science punish him for his ascent to genius—not only pulling him back to his original state, but making him even *less* intelligent that he was initially. And yet surprisingly, *Flowers for Algernon* isn't just a cautionary tale about the dangers of being too arrogant. Even though we recognize Charlie's hubris as a personal flaw, we can't reject his pride and ambition altogether. Charlie's burden is that he achieves so much, and inspires us to do the same with our own lives, even though he's ultimately punished. Hubris may be a flaw, but it's also a quintessential human emotion—the desire for greater knowledge and respect—and for this reason, we respect Charlie as the tragic hero he is.

CRUELTY AND BULLYING

Flowers for Algernon studies the relationship between intelligent and unintelligent people, or more generally, between the powerful and the weak. Because Charlie Gordon travels between these two worlds—moving from mental disability to brilliance, and then back to mental disability again—he comes to see the ways in which people mock and bully their intellectual inferiors, partly out of cruelty, and partly out of insecurity.

People of average intelligence bully the mentally disabled, Keyes suggests, because they want to remind themselves of their place in the "pecking order." At the bakery where Charlie works, Charlie's coworkers subject him to a series of cruel pranks and jokes that reinforce Charlie's stupidity, clumsiness, and gullibility. It's significant that Charlie's coworkers never, ever get tired of playing pranks on him (you'd think that after more than a decade, the joke would have gotten old). By teasing Charlie for his stupidity, Charlie's coworkers are effectively congratulating themselves for being smarter than Charlie—none of them are particularly intelligent, but at least they're not at the bottom of the barrel. This becomes clearer after Charlie becomes a genius. His former coworkers admit that they're ignoring him because they don't want a reminder of their own mental inferiority: they don't want to be around someone who makes *them* feel stupid.

Much the same is true of Charlie's mentors, Professor Nemur and Doctor Strauss. Indeed, as Keyes portrays it, the entire academic community suffers from the same inferiority complex as Charlie's coworkers. When Nemur shows footage of Charlie before his operation, Nemur's colleagues laugh at Charlie's clumsiness. Then, when they meet Charlie as a genius, they shun him, one by one, because he's smarter than they are. Even Charlie himself starts to look down on his intellectual inferiors once he becomes intelligent—first his coworkers, and then his teacher and lover, Alice Kinnian. Disturbingly, Keyes suggests that human beings have a tendency to bully people who are weaker than they are, and fear those who are stronger.

Thankfully, Keyes doesn't end his novel on such a pessimistic note. Even if humans have a natural tendency to be cruel to their inferiors, it's possible to replace this tendency with kindness and understanding. When Charlie returns to his job at the bakery, mentally disabled once again, his coworkers prove that they're less sadistic than they initially seemed. Not only do they accept Charlie once again, but they also refrain from teasing him anymore. It's possible to read Keyes's novel as a moral fable about the dangers of bullying. There's simply no sense in being cruel to those below us in the pecking order, because nobody's place in the pecking order is completely secure.

LOVE AND SEXUALITY

Arguably the biggest change that Charlie Gordon undergoes in *Flowers for Algernon*—even bigger than his rise from mental disability to genius—is the change in his romantic life. At the beginning of the novel, Charlie is completely ignorant of the opposite sex (he's assumed to be straight). He's never even kissed a girl, and from an early age his mother, Rose Gordon, has impressed upon him that he mustn't touch women. As he ages mentally, Charlie contemplates sex, his relationship with the opposite sex, and his relationship with his mother, maturing to the point where he can feel sincere, emotional love for another woman. In describing Charlie's sexual maturation, Keyes incorporates elements of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and allusions to the "free love" movement of the 1960s.

Perhaps Keyes's most important point about love and sexuality is Freudian in nature: human sexuality begins with childhood experience. Even after Charlie Gordon becomes a genius, he's dominated by **hallucinations of his childhood self**—an internalized version of his sexual insecurities. As a child, Charlie's mother would spank and beat him for showing any interest in women. Keyes implies that Charlie's childhood experiences give him a permanent Oedipus complex: an aversion to having sex with women, caused by a fixation on a strong, domineering mother figure. Because he's still afraid of his mother's punishments, Charlie can't perform sexually with the women he meets after becoming a genius. In typical Freudian form, Charlie conquers his aversion to sex by first identifying the source of the problem—his mother's cruelty—and then reconnecting with his aging mother, who's suffering from dementia. It's only after Charlie visits his mother, symbolically "burying" her and closing the door on his Oedipus complex, that he succeeds in having a stable, mature relationship with Alice Kinnian, the love of his life.

Although Freudian psychoanalysis has a clear influence on the novel's view of human sexuality, Keyes is equally influenced by the free love movement of the 1960s, which was in full force at the time when *Flowers for Algernon* was published (in the film version, released in 1968, Charlie actually joins the counterculture movement, smoking marijuana and riding motorbikes). Charlie experiments with a number of sexual partners during his sexual maturation, including women he meets in Central Park, and one bohemian woman—Fay Lillman—whom he knows to have other sexual partners. There's no expectation that Charlie remain loyal to any one of these sexual partners (indeed, at one point, Charlie argues for the value of polygamy)—on the contrary, Charlie moves from one encounter to the next, conquering his aversion to sex little by little. Keyes's view of sexuality was considered radically open at the time: a reflection of the new Sixties ethos that sexuality should be de-stigmatized and celebrated as a critical part of love and maturity. Indeed, Charlie learns how to love and respect women—that is, to have mature emotional relationships—partly *because* he has sex with women. During his first sexual encounters, Charlie is confused and even violent, reflecting his fear and ignorance of love. Gradually, however, Charlie progresses from physical love to emotional love, using each sexual encounter to fight his lifelong aversion to women.

Flowers for Algernon provides a surprisingly frank look at love and sexuality. Although it's dated in some ways (Freud's influence on psychology has waned, and Keyes's descriptions of Charlie's earliest sexual encounters are guilty of the same problem as the sexual revolution itself: they trivialize and objectify women), Keyes's work continues to teach relevant lessons: first, that human sexuality begins in childhood, not adulthood; and second, that sexuality is an ongoing process, one which takes a great deal of practice and experimentation. Moreover, Keyes suggests that sex, far from being an incidental part of mature romantic love, is a key part of building a stable relationship with another person.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ALGERNON'S MAZE

It's no secret that Algernon the mouse's experiences symbolize Charlie Gordon's own struggles with genius. Algernon becomes irritated with having to solve endless mazes designed to measure his intelligence, and thus Algernon's mazes symbolize Charlie's own exasperation with the medical establishment. Professor Nemur—the man who designed Charlie's brain surgery—parades Charlie around at a medical conference, forcing him to show off his new intellect. Just as Algernon becomes bored and frustrated, Charlie begins to resent Nemur for treating him like an animal or a sideshow attraction. Thus, Charlie and Algernon "escape" from the medical conference at

the same time, turning their backs on the "mazes" of academic bureaucracy.

CHARLIE'S HALLUCINATIONS (YOUNGER CHARLIE)

Especially in the second half of the novel, Charlie Gordon experiences vivid hallucinations of his younger self, often peering out from behind a window. Charlie's visions prove that he hasn't entirely overcome his own troubled past: not only is there a part of his mind that continues to suffer from mental disability, but he's also still traumatized by his childhood experiences. As a child, Charlie's mother, Rose Gordon, beat him for misbehaving or touching women, even in the most innocent ways. As a result, Charlie—even as a brilliant adult—can't be intimate with women without hallucinating a younger version of his self. The symbolism is clear: the child is "father to the man"—that is, Charlie's internalized sense of fear and inferiority from childhood lives on in his own head as an adult.

ADAM AND EVE

At several points in the book, Keyes references the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. In the book of Genesis, we're told that Adam and Eve gave up a life of eternal happiness in the Garden of Eden when they chose to eat from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Although they gained intelligence and knowledge from the tree, their lives also became sadder and more painful because they were expelled from Eden for their disobedience. It's clear enough that (in the novel) the Adam and Eve story is meant to symbolize Charlie Gordon's own brain surgery. Just like Adam and Eve, Charlie gains enormous knowledge when his IQ triples. And yet his new intelligence doesn't bring him happiness—on the contrary, it makes him realize that he was miserable all along, and just didn't know it. There appears to be a tradeoff between happiness and intellect in *Flowers for Algernon*, and the Adam and Eve story is the best symbol of this.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harcourt edition of *Flowers for Algernon* published in 1994.

3d progris riport Quotes

He said Miss Kinnian tolld him I was her bestist pupil in the Beekman School for retarted adults and I tryed the hardist becaus I reely wantd to lern I wantid it more even then pepul who are smarter even then me.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Alice Kinnian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In the early chapters of the novel, Charlie Gordon's IQ is very low--he can barely read or write. But as this quotation makes clear, he's also incredibly ambitious and determined to improve his mind. Charlie attends night classes taught by Miss Kinnian--the woman who ultimately recommends Charlie for the controversial brain surgery that makes him into a genius.

Charlie's ambition, one could say, is his greatest strength and (as we will see shortly) his greatest weakness. It's also the quality that first makes him the novel's "hero." Even if we can't really understand Charlie's way of looking at the world, we can identify with his ambition to improve himself and become more successful and talented. Charlie is a tragic hero, who rises and falls over the course of the novel due to his appetite for glory.

Progris riport 5 Quotes

Dr Strauss said I had something that was very good. He said I had a good motor-vation. I never even knowed I had that. I felt good when he said not everbody with an eye-Q of 68 had that thing like I had it. I dont know what it is or where I got it but he said Algernon had it too.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Doctor Strauss, Algernon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie talks to Dr. Strauss, one of the scientists who will mastermind Charlie's brain surgery--a procedure that will soon make him a genius. Dr. Strauss explains that the procedure will increase Charlie's IQ rapidly. He also adds that he's chosen Charlie for the procedure because of Charlie's drive and motivation to succeed.

Charlie's motivation to succeed is--as we've already seen--his defining quality. But it's also important to note that Charlie feels "good" when Strauss praises his motivation. Charlie alreadyfeels pride in his abilities. Indeed, it's Charlie's pride, as much as his motivation, that pushes him

to attend night classes, learn to read, and (eventually), get brain surgery. He doesn't just want to learn how to read: he wants other people to recognize that he's learned how to read and praise him for it. Charlie's desire for recognition is rooted in a conflicted relationship with his own parents--a relationship we won't fully understand until the novel is over.

Progress Report 7 Quotes

If your smart you can have lots of fiends to talk to and you never get lonley by yourself all the time.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charlie explains why he wants to become smart: he wants to have more friends. Charlie is confident that intelligence is a path to a better social life: brain power will help him talk to the people around him and make them more likely to talk to him and like him.

There are two ways to interpret Charlie's quotation, one positive, one rather tragic. On one hand, Charlie's desire for human contact seems innocent and highly poignant. Charlie is bullied and ignored at his job (although he doesn't yet know it), and he doesn't have a family that loves him (his family abandoned him years ago). In all, he craves friends to fill the void in his social life. But on the other hand, this quote expresses the tragically naive view that with greater intelligence comes greater happiness and love. This isn't always the case, as Charlie finds out--indeed, he's arguably at his most "blissful" when he's most "ignorant."

Well I tolld her that made me kind of feel bad because I thot I was going to be smart rite away and I coud go back to show the guys at the bakery how smart I am and talk with them about things and mabye even get to be an assistint baker. Then I was gone to try and find my mom and dad. They woud be serprised to see how smart I got because my mom always wanted me too be smart to. Mabey they woudnt send me away no more if they see how smart I am.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Alice Kinnian, Rose Gordon (Charlie's mother), Matt Gordon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie has just been told that his brain surgery will make him smart, but not overnight. On the contrary, he'll have to work exceptionally hard after his surgery to ensure that his mind absorbs new information and grows to its full potential. Charlie is disappointed by the news, because he wants to become more intelligent, more popular, and more loved as soon as possible.

The passage is important because it spells out, in the plainest terms, the link between Charlie's tragic childhood and his desire for success and popularity. Charlie was an unloved child--because of his mother's behavior, he was made to feel ashamed of his low IQ and clumsy behavior. As a result, Charlie has been conditioned to feel a constant desire to please other people--a desire that's led him to learn to read and write at night class. Like many a tragic literary hero, Charlie seeks approval and prestige because he never enjoyed the love of his parents and siblings.

Progress Report 8 Quotes

We had a lot of fun at the bakery today. Joe Carp said hey look where Charlie had his operashun what did they do Charlie put some brains in. I was going to tell him about me getting smart but I remembered Prof Nemur said no. Then Frank Reilly said what did you do Charlie open a door the hard way. That made me laff. Their my frends and they really like me.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Joe Carp, Professor Harold Nemur, Frank Reilly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation is a good example of dramatic irony--a situation in which a character is ignorant to some important information, but the reader is well aware of it. Here, Charlie--bearing a big scar from his brain surgery, but still with his low IQ for the time being--doesn't realize that the people at the bakery are making fun of him in the cruelest way; as far as he's concerned, they're his best friends.

One important question that the passage might lead us to ask is, does Charlie realize on any level that his coworkers

don't really like him? His statement, "Their my friends," would suggest that Charlie is completely ignorant of his coworkers' meanness. And yet Charlie also seems to feel, on some level, that his friendships with his coworkers are threadbare because of his low IQ. Even if he doesn't know exactly why Joe Carp is laughing at him in this scene, perhaps Charlie senses that he's distanced from the people around him by his intelligence--and this is precisely why he wants brain surgery in the first place.

Frank laffed and said dont go getting so eddicated that you wont talk to your old frends. I said dont worry I will always keep my old frends even if I can read and rite. He was laffing and Joe Carp was laffing but Gimpy came in and told them to get back to making rolls. They are all good frends to me.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Gimpy, Frank Reilly, Joe Carp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Charlie (who's just had his brain surgery, but isn't a genius yet) interacts with his "friends" at the bakery. One coworker, Frank, is clearly mocking Charlie--he doesn't believe that Charlie will ever become a genius, since Charlie has always been a slow, clumsy employee.

On a narrative level, this quote is important because it sets us up for a later scene, in which Frank is punished and humiliated for ever doubting Charlie's potential for intelligence. But the passage is also interesting in that it marks some of the differences between Charlie's coworkers; in other words, the passage makes it clear that not all of Charlie's "friends" bully him. Gimpy, if no one else, seems to genuinely like Charlie and look after him, even if Gimpy would never be openly affectionate or sentimental with him.

Progress Report 9 Quotes

Now I know what they mean when they say "to pull a Charlie Gordon." I'm ashamed. And another thing. I dreamed about that girl Ellen dancing and rubbing up against me and when I woke up the sheets were wet and messy.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Ellen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie--who's had brain surgery, and is slowly becoming more intelligent--realizes that his coworkers laugh at him for his stupidity. Charlie is immediately embarrassed. It's interesting to note that Charlie's first reaction to the news that he's a punching bag for his coworkers isn't anger--his shame outweighs his anger. As we've already seen, Charlie has been dealing with embarrassment his entire life. He's so used to apologizing for his low intelligence that it doesn't yet occur to him that his coworkers at the bakery are really at fault, not him.

The other notable part of this passage is the information that Charlie has had a "wet dream" after seeing an attractive woman. As Charlie gains intellectual maturity, he's also thrust into the world of emotional and sexual maturity. (It's also worth noting that the passage echoes the Biblical book of Genesis: just as Adam and Eve become ashamed of their nakedness at the same instant that they gain knowledge, so Charlie simultaneously becomes embarrassed and sexually aware with his new intelligence.)

I told him one of the things that bothers me is about women. Like dancing with that girl Ellen got me all excited. So we talked about it and I got a funny feeling while I was talking, cold and sweaty, and a buzzing inside my head and I thought I was going to throw up. Maybe because I always thought it was dirty and bad to talk about that. But Dr Strauss said what happened to me after the party was a wet dream, and it's a natural thing that happens to boys. So even if I'm getting intelligent and learning a lot of new things, he thinks I'm still a boy about women. It's confusing, but I'm going to find out all about my life.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Ellen, Doctor Strauss

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie tries to come to terms with a new side of his personality--his sexuality. For the first chapters of the novel, Charlie has essentially been a child--a slow, clumsy boy

trapped in a man's body. Now, thanks to his brain surgery, Charlie is becoming a genius, but he's also transforming from an immature young boy to a mature man in a matter of weeks. Charlie has danced with a beautiful woman, and then had a wet dream about her. Dr. Strauss's job is to counsel Charlie through his experiences with the brain surgery--here, for example, he explains a few things about sex to Charlie.

It's important to bear in mind that Charlie's story isn't just one of intellectual discovery; it's also one of emotional development. While Keyes will give us plenty of information about Charlie's scientific and musical pursuits, the heart of his story is Charlie's search for love--a stable, adult relationship with another woman. In this quotation, Charlie takes the first, cautious steps toward such a relationship.

"You mean there are no pictures hidden in those inkblots?" Burt frowned and took off his glasses. "What?"
"Pictures! Hidden in the inkblots! Last time you told me that everyone could see them and you wanted me to find them too."

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Burt Seldon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie, now a man of average intelligence, has a conversation with Burt Seldon, a technician and graduate student who's been tasked with overseeing Charlie's transformation to genius. Previously, Charlie has taken a series of inkblot tests (Rorschach tests) with Burt. Charlie misinterpreted Burt's explanation of the test to mean that there were literal pictures in the inkblot; i.e., that the test had a correct answer. Now that Charlie is intelligent enough to realize that the inkblots have no actual pictures in them, he accuses Burt of lying about the tests.

Charlie's reaction demonstrates his frustration; not only with Burt but with himself. Although he's taking out his anger on Burt, Charlie is really furious at himself for having been foolish enough to believe that there was a correct answer to an inkblot test. In this way, the scene shows how Charlie is beginning to hate himself and hate intellectually disabled people in general. Already, Charlie is rejecting the naivete and simplicity that used to characterize his worldview--he's looking ahead to a bright future of intellectual achievement, but forgetting where he came from.

Progress Report 10 Quotes

I spend most of my free time at the library now, reading and soaking up what I can from books. I'm not concentrating on anything in particular, just reading a lot of fiction now—Dostoevski, Flaubert, Dickens, Hemingway, Faulkner—everything I can get my hands on feeding a hunger that can't be satisfied.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie becomes more intelligent, he develops a deep love for world literature, and devours several book a day. He spends a lot of time in libraries, reading as much as he can (and attracting a lot of attention for doing so).

It's interesting to note that Charlie describes his desire for intellectual stimulation as a hunger that cannot be satisfied. In general, Charlie's description of the intellectual life suggests the tragic proportions of his story. An ambitious, driven man, Charlie strives for greatness and prestige, only to realize that his drive will never, ever disappear. His endless need to learn is at once disturbing and deeply relatable for readers: we've all felt that gnawing sense of curiosity, and then been disappointed when it doesn't go away. One could say that Charlie represents humanity's ambition to be great, and simultaneously its utter failure to be so.

Progress Report 11 Quotes

"Charlie, you amaze me. In some ways you're so advanced, and yet when it comes to making a decision, you're still a child. I can't decide for you, Charlie. The answer can't be found in books—or be solved by bringing it to other people. Not unless you want to remain a child all your life. You've got to find the answer inside you—*feel* the right thing to do. Charlie, you've got to learn to trust yourself."

Related Characters: Alice Kinnian (speaker), Charlie Gordon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie becomes increasingly intelligent, he also becomes aware of the astonishing gaps in his knowledge. Charlie has witnessed his only friend and protector at the bakery, Gimpy, stealing money from the store. Charlie's unsure how to go about "solving" this problem, and he's concerned that there's no branch of human knowledge that can tell him how to proceed.Here, Charlie's mentor, Alice Kinnian (the same woman who once taught Charlie to read and write, and who recommended Charlie for brain surgery), tells Charlie the truth: he doesn't know anything about morality, in spite of his "book learning." Furthermore, Charlie will have to trust his own moral instincts when dealing with Gimpy.

The passage is important because it suggests some of the strengths and limitations of Charlie's brain surgery. A higher IQ means that Charlie can discover new knowledge and savor the pleasure of finding things out. And yet Charlie's new intelligence also causes him some new problems: he feels the sting of guilt, regret, and here, moral uncertainty. He's now forced to make the moral decisions that all adults must make--in other words, he's becoming not only more intelligent but more *mature*. The "tradeoff" of intelligence, one could say, is that Charlie sacrifices his blissful ignorance, and yet gets the opportunity to become sensitive, mature, and wise.

❝ She stared down at the bride and groom on the wedding cake she was decorating and I could see her lips barely move as she whispered: "It was evil when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge. It was evil when they saw they was naked, and learned about lust and shame. And they was driven out of Paradise and the gates was closed to them. If not for that none of us would have to grow old and be sick and die." There was nothing more to say, to her or to the rest of them. None of them would look into my eyes. I can still feel the hostility. Before, they had laughed at me, despising me for my ignorance and dullness; now, they hated me for my knowledge and understanding. Why? What in God's name did they want of me?

Related Characters: Fanny Birden, Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107-108

Explanation and Analysis

One of Charlie's coworkers at the bakery, a woman named Fanny Birden, tells Charlie about the "danger" of his brain surgery. By gaining intelligence, Fanny suggests, Charlie is sacrificing his innocence and childlike goodness. Fanny makes this claim by citing the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which the first human beings lost their innocence and innate goodness by eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

We've already had ample evidence for the point Fanny is making. Charlie, newly intelligent, is indeed becoming a little arrogant, a little pompous, and a little dismissive of those who are intellectually inferior to him (i.e., almost everybody). Previously, Charlie was a cheerful, carefree man, blissfully unaware that his coworkers were making fun of him. By becoming intelligent, Charlie has 1) become a ruder, less "moral" person and 2) become more miserable, as he realizes that he has even fewer friends than he'd thought. There really does seem to be a tradeoff between intelligence and morality--and, even more to the point, between intelligence and happiness.

Ultimately, though, it's not clear if Keyes really agrees with Fanny. It's true that the newly intelligent Charlie is rude, arrogant, and even cruel. And yet Charlie also has the opportunity to be good and moral, in a way that was utterly beyond him before his surgery. A mentally disabled Charlie Gordon can't solve complex moral problems in a way that benefits everyone, or publish scientific articles that will save thousands of lives. One could say that Charlie's new intelligence (and, for that matter, Adam and Eve's newfound sinfulness) is a challenge: he can either be more sinful than he ever was before, or he can use his brain to climb to new heights of glory and goodness.

Progress Report 13 Quotes

❝ A funny thing about Guarino. I should resent him for what he did to me, and for taking advantage of Rose and Matt, but somehow I can't. After that first day, he was always pleasant to me. There was always the pat on the shoulder, the smile, the encouraging word that came my way so rarely.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Dr. Guarino, Matt Gordon, Rose Gordon (Charlie's mother)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie remembers an episode from his childhood that he'd

previously repressed. His parents, desperate to make him intelligent by any means necessary, hired a quack doctor, Guarino, to "put some brains" in Charlie. Guarino was, of course, a con artist, who stole Charlie's parents' money and did nothing at all to make Charlie more intelligent. Strangely, though, Charlie doesn't resent Guarino. On the contrary, he remembers Guarido fondly for treating him as an equal, or at least a human being. As the passage suggests, Charlie is still desperate for the validation and approval of his peers. He's been treated as a outcast or a freak for so long that any semblance of politeness or normality thrown his way is a blessing. Now a genius, Charlie overcompensates for the decades during which he was mocked and bullied by seeking the validation of millions.

"Take it easy, Charlie. The old man is on edge. This convention means a lot to him. His reputation is at stake."
"I didn't know you were so close to him," I taunted, recalling all the times Burt had complained about the professor's narrowness and pushing.
"I'm not close to him." He looked at me defiantly. "But he's put his whole life into this. He's no Freud or Jung or Pavlov or Watson, but he's doing something important and I respect his dedication—maybe even more cause he's just an ordinary man trying to do a great man's work, while the great men are all busy making bombs."

Related Characters: Burt Seldon, Charlie Gordon (speaker), Professor Harold Nemur

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Charlie and Professor Nemur have traveled to Chicago for a major medical conference. Nemur, the doctor who masterminded Charlie's brain surgery, is looking forward to presenting on his new procedure. Charlie has come to resent Nemur for treating him as a pawn, rather than a human being—Charlie believes (and with good reason) that Nemur is just using him to gain acclaim in the scientific community. Charlie's friend and mentor, Burt, defends Nemur by praising his drive and determination.

It's interesting to note that Burt highlights the same qualities that first brought Charlie to Nemur's attention. Just as Charlie has striven to be smarter and more successful, so too has Nemur—who's well aware of the fact that he's not a genius—tried to become the best he can be. Furthermore, Burt's comment that Nemur is doing good work while great men build bombs reminds us of an important distinction between intelligence and morality. Being smart is no guarantee of a happy, productive life—one could spend one's life building machines of war. It's only when one combines intelligence with a strong sense of right and wrong that it's possible to be a "good" human being. Charlie, already a genius, will have to educate himself in ethics and morality to become good.

After the chairman announced the presentation from Beekman University, we took our seats on the platform behind the long table—Algernon in his cage between Burt and me. We were the main attraction of the evening, and when we were settled, the chairman began his introduction. I half expected to bear him boom out: Laideezzz and gentulmennnnnn. Step right this way and see the side show! An act never before seen in the scientific world! A mouse and a moron turned into geniuses before your very eyes!

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Burt Seldon, Professor Harold Nemur, Algernon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

At a major medical conference, Charlie and Professor Nemur appear to answer questions about Charlie's brain surgery. As Charlie prepares for the presentation, he has the distinct sense that he's been exhibited at a circus. In other words, Charlie still thinks of himself as a sideshow freak, not even a human being. It's hard to deny that Charlie has a point: the doctors who've attended the medical conference think of Charlie as a pawn, a convenient "example" of Nemur's ideas. Charlie first volunteered for brain surgery because he thought intelligence would help him gain new friends who respected him as a human being. But here, it becomes clear that the opposite is true: Charlie is more of a "freak" than he ever was before—the doctors who admire his intelligence have no intention of engaging with him on a personal level.

Progress Report 14 Quotes

Somehow, getting drunk had momentarily broken down the conscious barriers that kept the old Charlie Gordon hidden deep in my mind. As I suspected all along, he was not really gone. Nothing in our minds is ever really gone. The operation had covered him over with a veneer of education and culture, but emotionally he was there—watching and waiting.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie comes to realize that in spite of his new intelligence, in his subconscious he's still a mentally disabled, emotionally underdeveloped man--and he can access this side of his personality whenever he gets drunk. Moreover, Charlie discovers that he's been repressing memories of his childhood. As a mentally challenged man, he was incapable of remembering much about his parents, his experiences in school, etc. (There's even some suggestion that his mind unconsciously repressed these memories because they were so painful.) But now, Charlie remembers many details about his past; these details were "waiting" in his mind all along. As he says here, "Nothing in our minds is ever really gone."

Charlie's realization foreshadows the novel's pessimistic conclusion. Charlie, working with Professor Nemur, tries to escape his tragic past--he tries to become intelligent and forget that there was ever a time when he couldn't add, read, or write. But in the end, Charlie is unable to escape his past--no amount of surgery can change who he is.

There is so much that can be done with this technique, if it is perfected. If I could be made into a genius, what about the more than five million mentally retarded in the United States? What about the countless millions all over the world, and those yet unborn destined to be retarded? What fantastic levels might be achieved by using this technique on normal people. On geniuses?

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie, now a talented medical doctor himself, fantasizes about what Professor Nemur's procedure could do to help the people of the world. He imagines using his newfound medical expertise to treat other mentally challenged people, giving them the same gift of intelligence that he was given.

This passage walks a fine line between arrogance and humility. On one hand, it shows Charlie striving to use his intelligence for the good of other people, rather than using it to show off and belittle his companions. Charlie isn't yet at the point where he's forgotten his years of mental disability--he continues to sympathize with those who've been born with a low IQ. And yet the passage *also* shows Charlie as his most arrogant and ambitious. In the same sense that Professor Nemur has arrogantly treated Charlie as his "creation," Charlie wants to operate on millions of other mentally disabled patients, attaining fame and prestige for himself in the process.

Then, with a violent effort of the will, I was back on the couch with her, aware of her body and my own urgency and potency, and I saw the face against the window, hungrily watching. And I thought to myself, go ahead, you poor bastard—watch. I don't give a damn any more. And his eyes went wide as he watched.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Fay Lillman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie becomes more intelligent and self-aware, he begins to hallucinate a young boy--the childhood version of Charlie himself. This young version of Charlie "watches" Charlie almost constantly, but especially when Charlie is engaging in behavior that he couldn't have managed when he was mentally disabled. In this scene, Charlie is about to have sexual intercourse with Fay Lillman, his neighbor. Although Charlie feels "young Charlie" watching him, he decides that he doesn't care--he continues having sex, daring his young self to do anything about it.

The presence of "young Charlie" in Charlie's mind suggests that he's still haunted by his past--the years during which he was humiliated and teased for his disability. As Charlie becomes more mature and experienced, he comes to resent young Charlie--he hates that there was ever a time in his life when he had a low IQ and feared his own sexuality. Here, Charlie seems to make peace with his troubled past (he no longer cares), and yet he also clearly hates his former self.

> If I can find that out, and if it adds even one jot of information to whatever else has been discovered about mental retardation and the possibility of helping others like myself, I will be satisfied. Whatever happens to me, I will have lived a thousand normal lives by what I might add to others not yet born.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie becomes suspicious that his brain surgery will wear off over time--although he's become a genius, eventually he'll regress to mental disability once again. In the time he has left as a genius, Charlie decides to research his own surgical procedure. As he makes clear in the quotation, he wants to leave a lasting scientific legacy, which will go on to benefit thousands of patients around the world.

The fact that Charlie, blessed with intelligence, can conduct research that could help other human beings reminds us that--contrary to what Fanny Birden claimed--intelligence and morality aren't mutually exclusive. It's possible to be smart and good; indeed, a smart person is capable of some acts of goodness far beyond what a mentally disabled person could imagine. Of course, it's also true that the quote shows Charlie at his greediest and most ambitious: he wants to be remembered forever, and thinks that he can gain a kind of immorality by leaving a legacy behind.

> I was seeing myself as I really had become: Nemur had said it. I was an arrogant, self-centered bastard. Unlike Charlie, I was incapable of making friends or thinking about other people and their problems. I was interested in myself, and myself only. For one long moment in that mirror I had seen myself through Charlie's eyes—looked down at myself and saw what I had really become. And I was ashamed.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Professor Harold Nemur

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252-253

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie spends more time as an intelligent person, he becomes increasingly self-aware. Here, he stares in the mirror and realizes that he's become a pompous, arrogant man. Charlie also decides that as a mentally disabled man, he was happier, more moral, and friendlier than he is now.

Although Charlie himself seems to believe that his intelligence has been a horrible burden--making him a meaner, less friendly person--Keyes wouldn't necessarily agree. Charlie has become more arrogant on account of his genius, but he's also completed acts of goodness on a scale that he couldn't have imagined before his surgery: he's conducted important medical research that will help other people live longer, healthier lives. And while he may have become less friendly, he's gained the gift of self-awareness: the ability to *realize* his own shortcomings and try to improve them. Previously, Charlie had tried to transform himself to gain the approval of his peers. But here, he seems to be acting out of a desire to please himself. Thanks to his brain surgery, Charlie has become more mature and emotionally intelligent: he's acting to make himself, not other people, happy.

Progress Report 17 Quotes

> The only bad thing about having Alice here with me is that now I feel I should fight this thing. I want to stop time, freeze myself at this level and never let go of her.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Alice Kinnian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 295

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Charlie--having realized that he's going to lose his intelligence and become mentally disabled once again--expresses a desire to "freeze time" and spend the rest of his life with Alice, the woman he's come to love.

Charlie's desires contrast markedly with his earlier ambitions to learn, make important scientific discoveries,

and generallybecome a great man. Put another way, Charlie sacrifices some of his arrogance and hubris because of the emotional connection he feels for Alice. Although books have taught Charlie to seek fame and glory, Alice has taught Charlie emotional maturity: instead of the elusive pleasures of prestige or sex, Charlie has discovered the more profound pleasure of love.

You're right. I never said I could understand the things that were happening to you. Not when you became too intelligent for me, and not now. But I'll tell you one thing. Before you had the operation, you weren't like this. You didn't wallow in your own filth and self-pity, you didn't pollute your own mind by sitting in front of the TV set all day and night, you didn't snarl and snap at people. There was something about you that made us respect you—yes, even as you were. You had something I had never seen in a retarded person before.

Related Characters: Alice Kinnian (speaker), Charlie Gordon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie begins to lose his intelligence, he becomes angry and frustrated. In particular, he fights with Alice Kinnian, the woman he loves. Alice tells Charlie that he shouldn't guard his intelligence so jealously--when he was mentally disabled, she insists, he was a kinder, more likable person. Now that he's a genius, Charlie is a frustrated, self-pitying man--not particularly likable at all.

Alice's claims support the idea that Charlie's brain surgery may have come at the cost of happiness and goodness. By gaining a high IQ, Charlie has become more self-absorbed, and in losing it he has become more bitter and irritable--to the point where he doesn't care about hurting other people's feelings, even Alice's.

I saw her through my kitchen window last week. I dont know her name, or even what her top part looks like but every night about eleven oclock she goes into her bathroom to take a bath. She never pulls her shade down and thru my window when I put out my lights I can see her from the neck down when she comes out of the bath to dry herself. It makes me excited, but when the lady turns out the light I feel let down and lonely.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie loses his intelligence more and more rapidly, he again becomes childlike in his sexuality and emotional maturity. Here, for instance, he spies on a woman who lives in the building opposite his own. Charlie is still capable of sexual desire, but he shows no signs of being capable of romantic love for another woman--he acts like an immature 12-year-old, peeping on his unfortunate neighbors. In other words, Charlie isn't just losing his mental capabilities--he's also losing his emotional intelligence. It remains to be seen whether all the experiences and wisdom he gained as a genius will stick with him even as his IQ drops.

If you ever reed this Miss Kinnian dont be sorry for me. Im glad I got a second chanse in life like you said to be smart because I lerned alot of things that I never even new were in this werld and Im grateful I saw it all even for a littel bit. And Im glad I found out all about my family and me. It was like I never had a family til I remembird about them and saw them and now I know I had a family and I was a person just like evryone.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Alice Kinnian

Related Themes:

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Charlie sums up his experiences as a genius. Although one could say that Charlie's time with a high IQ has been futile (since he's losing his IQ in the end), Charlie himself disagrees. As he points out here, Charlie has gotten the chance to experience the pleasure of finding things out--a pleasure he'd always wanted to experience, even as a mentally disabled man. Moreover, Charlie has satisfied an even deeper desire--the desire to know that he has a family. During his time as a genius, Charlie tracked down his parents, and fell in love with a woman (Miss Kinnian herself). More simply and poignantly, Charlie now feels that he is "a person just like evryone"—he has gained an emotional maturity and self-confidence that cannot be taken from him.

P.S. please tel prof Nemur not to be such a grouch when pepul laff at him and he woud have more frends. Its easy to have fiends if you let pepul laff at you. Im going to have lots of fiends where I go.
P.S. please if you get a chanse put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard.

Related Characters: Charlie Gordon (speaker), Professor Harold Nemur, Algernon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

As Charlie regresses to mental disability once again, he embodies a childlike goodness. He tells Nemur to be nicer, and even asks someone to put flowers on the grave of Algernon, the mouse whose mental growth and decline paralleled his own.

As a genius, Charlie's relationship with right and wrong was uncertain--there were times when he did good, and there were times when he proved himself to be capable of acts of arrogance and cruelty. As a mentally disabled man, however, Charlie proves that he instinctively knows right from wrong: he feels compassion for things that more intelligent people would ignore, such as Algernon the mouse. He also shows himself to be insightful, "sizing up" Professor Nemur quickly (and surprisingly accurately!). In general, then, Charlie's final diary entry suggests the tradeoff between intelligence and wisdom. As a genius, Charlie has a hard time knowing the right thing to do, and has big moral lapses. As a mentally disabled man, Charlie doesn't have much knowledge, but he seems to be a good, honest person who always knows the right thing to do. So as depressing as the novel's end might be, there's a silver lining: Charlie loses his IQ, but gains some wisdom, and retains all his human dignity.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROGRIS RIPORT 1

Martch 3. A man named Charlie Gordon writes in clumsy, badly spelled English. He says that two men named Doctor Strauss and Professor Nemur have told him to write down as much as possible about an upcoming operation that will make him "smart." Charlie introduces himself: he works for a man named Mr. Donner at a bakery, where he makes a small wage. Charlie also attends night classes for mentally disabled adults. A teacher at these classes, named Miss Kinnian, has recommended him to Nemur and Strauss.

As the novel begins, we're not sure exactly what's going on, because we're seeing through the eyes of a mentally disabled man. Even so, it's important to note that from the start, Charlie Gordon has a clear, desire to become smarter. Charlie's drive and ambition make him a sympathetic, relatable character for readers—and these qualities also lead him to become a tragic hero with the "fatal flaw" of hubris: too much *pride and ambition, and of the kind that leads to one's ultimate downfall.*

PROGRIS RIPORT 2

Martch 4. Charlie undergoes a series of psychological tests with Professor Nemur and Doctor Strauss. An assistant, whose first name is Burt (Charlie isn't good at remembering last names), gives Charlie inkblot tests—or "raw shok" tests, as Charlie calls them—and asks him to say what the inkblots remind him of. Charlie is so simpleminded that he doesn't know how to answer these questions—he says the inkblots remind him of ink. Charlie tries hard to "see" something in the inkblots, and Burt gets more and more frustrated. Charlie concludes, "I don't think I passd the raw shok test."

An inkblot (or Rorschach) test is a basic psychological examination, but Charlie clearly doesn't know what it is (and even confuses "Rorschach" with "raw shok"). For most of the first half of the book, we get a lot of "dramatic irony" of this kind, in which we the readers are meant to understand something that the character does not. Charlie's mistake is to think that there's literally something "hidden" in the inkblot—he can't understand that he's supposed to project his own subconscious mind onto abstract shapes. This could point to the fact that Charlie simply doesn't have the deep-seated guilt and fear that inkblot tests were designed to measure—he's unintelligent, but also innocent.

3D PROGRIS RIPORT

Martch 5. Charlie goes in for more tests with Doctor Strauss and Professor Nemur. Strauss is interested in using Charlie as a subject, since Charlie has shown surprising enthusiasm and motivation: Miss Kinnian says Charlie is by far the hardest-working student in her classes.

The two things we learn about Charlie in these opening chapters are that 1) he's mentally disabled; 2) he's extremely ambitious. In spite of his limitations, Charlie's ambition makes him a fitting "tragic hero" for the novel.

Professor Nemur tells Charlie that he would be undergoing a procedure that they've tried on animals—it's not clear if the procedure would work on human beings, too. Nemur needs permission from someone in Charlie's family. Charlie mentions his younger sister, Norma, and his parents, whom he hasn't seen for a long time.

As the plot goes along, we begin to understand the science fiction conceit of the story: there's a miraculous surgery that can make people smarter. In a way, Charlie is the perfect person to explain this procedure to the reader: he doesn't understand how it works, but of course neither do we, since it's fictional. Keyes doesn't get into the "scientific" aspect of his plot too much, but rather deals with the philosophical ramifications of someone going from intellectual disability to genius.

Charlie notes that because of writing progress reports and going in to see Strauss and Nemur, he's very tired at work. He drops a tray of rolls, and his boss, Gimpy, yells at him. Charlie wants to be smart so that Gimpy will be surprised.

We already know that Charlie is ambitious, and here, we begin to see why. Charlie doesn't just want intelligence for its own sake—he wants to surprise and impress his peers.

PROGRIS RIPORT 4

March 5. Charlie goes in for more tests with Nemur and Strauss. He looks at pictures, and tries to explain what's happening in the pictures. Charlie remembers his Uncle Herman, the man who raised him. It was Herman who got Charlie the job at the bakery before he died. Charlie finds it hard to work through the pictorial tests, and the nurse who shows him the pictures becomes irritated.

Charlie has some memories of the past, but not many. He can barely remember his mother and sister, much less his uncle. Charlie essentially lives in a state of blissful ignorance—he has no guilt or fear of his family, because he doesn't remember anything about his family.

Charlie meets with Burt Selden again (this time, Charlie remembers his last name), and performs other tests. He has to compete against a mouse named Algernon. Amazingly, Algernon is better than Charlie at solving **mazes**. Charlie didn't realize a mouse could be so smart.

Keyes immediately associates Charlie with Algernon. Algernon may just be a mouse with no personality or voice (at least in the novel) of his own, but he and Charlie are both on the same level: test subjects for Nemur's experiments. In this sense, Algernon's life symbolizes and in some ways anticipates Charlie's own experiences.

PROGRIS RIPORT 5

March 6. Strauss and Nemur track down Charlie's sister, Norma, who lived with Charlie's mother in Brooklyn. Norma gives the doctors permission to operate on Charlie, meaning that Charlie will undergo the operation soon. Charlie is very excited.

Charlie is essentially a child in these early chapters—he can't make his own decisions, and so his family members have to make decisions for him.

Nemur, Strauss, and Burt Selden meet with Charlie to talk about his upcoming experiment. They say that Miss Kinnian has recommended Charlie because he's hard-working and highly motivated. They explain that Charlie will soon become extremely intelligent—he'll be a new "superman," despite the fact that at the present time he has an IQ of only 68.

Like any tragic hero, Charlie begins with a sense of ambition and desire. For the time being, Charlie's desire for greatness (genius) is inspiring. In line with the psychological ideas of his time, Keyes gives a lot of weight to IQ: a test that has since been shown to be more biased and limited than it was originally thought.

Professor Nemur expresses some doubts about using Charlie for the experiment, since there could be complications from the required surgery. Although Charlie doesn't understand everything Nemur is saying, Nemur tells Charlie that there's a possibility that the surgery won't work on him. Or it's possible that the surgery will work for a short time, and then Charlie will have an even lower mental age than he has right now.

Here, Keyes throws some foreshadowing our way. There's really only one reason why we'd be hearing that the surgery might fail: because the surgery will *fail in the end. As with most great tragic stories, we can sense that Charlie's ambition is destined to be thwarted: he's going to aim incredibly high, but in the end he's going to punished for it.*

PROGRIS RIPORT 6

March 8. Charlie is going to begin his surgery tomorrow, and he's very nervous. Nemur has instructed him to tell his coworkers that he's sick—they send him a chocolate cake and tell him to feel better soon. Miss Kinnian visits Charlie and gives him some magazines to read. Burt brings Charlie flowers from the people in the psychology laboratory that's running Charlie's experiment.

The first information we get about Charlie's coworkers is that they seem to care about him—they send him a cake to wish him well.

Charlie imagines becoming smart and pleasing Miss Kinnian. He thinks about going to visit his family, and finally being smart, just like his sister. Professor Nemur tells Charlie that if the experiment is a success, Charlie will be world-famous. Scientists will give other people Charlie's operation, and everyone in the world will be brilliant.

Charlie is made aware of the global implications of his surgery: he understands very well that his intelligence will make him famous and popular. This seems to be one of the key reasons why *Charlie wants the surgery: he wants the respect of his peers, and wants more "friends."*

PROGRESS REPORT 7

March 11. Charlie has had his operation, and he reports that it didn't hurt. Afterwards, Charlie wears bandages on his face for the next three days. Burt comes to visit Charlie every day to measure his blood pressure and temperature. Burt explains that Charlie has been writing progress reports so that other people will be able to understand his transformation.

One important question is whether or not Charlie understands what these progress reports are for. As we see here, Charlie is vaguely aware that other people are going to be reading his words. It's also telling that this report is the first one with its title spelled correctly—a sign that the operation is already affecting Charlie's brain.

Charlie wonders when he'll start to be smart. He imagines that being smart is wonderful: smart people have lots of friends, and never get lonely.

Charlie's naïve idea about greater intelligence bringing greater happiness is another example of dramatic irony, as he will learn soon enough.

March 12. Charlie stays in the hospital, tended by a nurse named Hilda. Hilda tells Charlie that he's been very brave for letting Professor Nemur study him. Hilda adds that she has her doubts about Charlie's operation, since God would have made him smart if it was "God's will." She mentions the story of **Adam and Eve**, and implies that Strauss and Nemur are "tampering with things." This makes Charlie frightened, since he doesn't want to anger God.

Hilda is the first person to question whether the surgery was the right thing to do, and here she establishes one of the novel's most important themes: the tradeoff between intelligence and happiness. This is essentially what happened in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve—they ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and so gained knowledge but lost their innocence and were expelled from Paradise. Hilda's warning also highlights Charlie as a tragic hero punished for his ambition, and essentially frames the story as a vague retelling of Frankenstein—man tries to "play God" and is punished for his hubris. At the same time, Hilda's criticism seems logically biased, as we would assume she wouldn't object to taking medicine for a sickness instead of just leaving it up to "God's will."

March 13. Charlie gets a new nurse, named Lucille. Lucille is friendly, and shows Charlie how to spell. She mentions that Hilda has been sent to the maternity of the hospital, where it doesn't matter if she "talks too much." Charlie asks Lucille how babies are made, and Lucille blushes.

Charlie's newfound intelligence is immediately linked to an exploration of his sexuality, as Keyes portrays these two things as closely intertwined. It's suggested that Hilda has been punished for criticizing Nemur and the surgery—and that Charlie is indirectly responsible, as he wrote down her words in his progress report.

Miss Kinnian visits Charlie, and Charlie tells her that he's disappointed that he's not smart yet. Kinnian tells Charlie that he'll have to work very hard to become intelligent. Charlie admits that he'd dreamed about returning to the bakery and impressing his coworkers with his intelligence. He also wanted to become smart so that he could make his mother happy: his mother always wanted him to be cleverer when he was a child.

Charlie wants to become a genius as quickly as possible, because he wants to impress his coworkers as soon as he can. He's also motivated by a sense of inadequacy with regards to his mother. This establishes a strong Freudian theme (related to Freud's idea of the "Oedipal complex," in which male children first experience romantic love for their mothers), to which Keyes will return later on.

PROGRESS REPORT 8

March 15. Charlie has left the hospital, though he hasn't gone back to work yet. Professor Nemur gives Charlie puzzles to work on—**mazes** and logic games. Charlie gets headaches when he thinks. Miss Kinnian visits him and tells him that he has to be patient—he'll be smart soon.

Charlie's headaches are a sign of his brain's growth, but they're also a subtle reminder that intelligence is no guarantee of happiness: it's painful—literally in this case—to get smarter. Through the mazes, Charlie is once again explicitly linked to Algernon.

March 16. Charlie goes to the college where Burt works. He listens to college students talk about art, politics, and religion. Charlie doesn't know anything about these subjects, except that religion is good—his mother raised him to believe that God is great.

Charlie isn't yet intelligent enough to participate in academic conversations, but he's ambitious enough to aspire to be a part of them.

Burt explains that Charlie's experiment is being kept a secret, for fear that Nemur will get bad publicity if the experiment fails. He adds that "no scientist is a great man to his colleagues." Charlie learns that Burt is a graduate student who works with Nemur.

We begin to see that Nemur isn't a saint or a genius by any means—he's just another work-driven academic trying to achieve some success for himself in the medical community.

March 17. Every day, Charlie wakes up and imagines that he's going to be smart. He wonders if the experiment has failed. He tells Miss Kinnian that he doesn't want to write progress reports anymore, and that he gets headaches all the time. Miss Kinnian insists that Charlie remain patient.

Charlie begins to have doubts about his goals of genius. He knows what he wants, but he isn't getting immediate results, so he starts to question whether the surgery was worthwhile to begin with.

March 20. Charlie goes back to work at the bakery, although he has instructions from Strauss not to tell anyone about his operation. Charlie has missed the bakery: he likes his friends and "all the fun we have."

So far, we haven't seen Charlie interact with his coworkers at the bakery. As far as Charlie's concerned, he and his coworkers are friends. And yet we've also gotten hints that they look down on him, as he wants to "show them up" by becoming smart.

Doctor Strauss tells Charlie that he should continue making notes about his experiences. He adds that it's going to take some time, but eventually, Charlie will become three times as intelligent as he was—just like Algernon, the mouse.

Here Charlie is explicitly paired with Algernon in the sense that Algernon's experiences foreshadow Charlie's—and that they are both "lab rats."

March 21. At the bakery, Joe Carp, another employee, teases Charlie. Although Joe doesn't know about Charlie's surgery, he notices the scar on Charlie's head and teases him for "getting some brains." Charlie laughs, since he thinks Joe is his friend.

It's heartbreaking to see Charlie's coworkers—the people he regards as friends—making fun of him. But this brings up an interesting question: if Charlie believes *that his coworkers are his friends, is the situation really tragic for him? We recognize the cruelty that Charlie faces, but Charlie himself remains blissfully ignorant.*

Mr. Donner, the owner of the bakery, tells Charlie that Charlie been working there for 17 years (he's 32 now). Charlie's Uncle Herman was Mr. Donner's best friend—as a result, Charlie will always have a job at the bakery. If Charlie hadn't had this job, Donner explains, he would have been sent to the Warren home for mentally disabled people.

Charlie has spent his entire adult life living on other people's kindness and generosity. Despite his age (32), he's a child—he doesn't make his own decisions, and he depends on adults' supervision at all times. This is an important point, because it reminds us that this is a "coming of age" novel: Charlie basically grows from a child to an adult, albeit in only a few months.

At work, "pulling a Charlie Gordon" is a common expression, meaning that someone has made an embarrassing mistake. Charlie doesn't understand what the expression means. That day, Charlie tells Mr. Donner that he could learn to be an apprentice baker. Mr. Donner looks surprised, since Charlie usually doesn't talk so much. Charlie thinks to himself that he's ready to become smart.

We get a small sign that Charlie is getting smarter—he takes some initiative, proving that he's been thinking about an issue on his own time. This is just the first glimmer of Charlie's future genius. There is also more dramatic irony here, as we understand tragic realities that Charlie does not.

March 24. Charlie is supposed to come to the science lab with Strauss and Nemur to conduct more experiments with Algernon the mouse. Charlie misses a few appointments with Algernon, and Strauss and Nemur come to visit him in his home. Strauss, recognizing that Charlie is frustrated, tells Charlie that he's learning constantly, even if he can't feel it yet.

This is an important scene, because it reminds us what motivates Charlie. Charlie wants to be smart—not just because being smart is good in and of itself, but because intelligence (he thinks) is a way to impress his coworkers and become more popular. Thus, when Charlie fails to impress his coworkers right away, he begins to doubt the efficacy of his surgery.

Professor Nemur gives Charlie a small device that looks like a TV—he explains that Charlie should listen to it when he falls asleep, since it'll help him learn more information. The machine is also designed to make Charlie have dreams about his childhood. Charlie finds this frightening, but he agrees to use the machine.

This is one of the more obvious Freudian touches in the novel, as Keyes suggests that Charlie is learning "subliminally"—i.e., Charlie's subconscious mind will learn lessons from the device when he is asleep. (There's a similar subplot in Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, another Freudian science fiction classic.)

Charlie adds one last thing—he's going to go back to his classes with Miss Kinnian. He notes that Miss Kinnian "is nice."

Here we see the first vague hint that Charlie is becoming attracted to Miss Kinnian, as once again his intellectual growth is linked to a discovery of sexuality.

March 25. Charlie uses Professor Nemur's machine, and finds it impossible to sleep while he's listening to it. When Charlie visits Burt at the university, Burt tells Charlie that the machine is helping him learn. Soon, Miss Kinnian will conduct tests on Charlie, and teach him "lessons." Charlie is confused—if his TV device is supposed to make him smart, he wonders, then why don't people get smart by watching the late show before they go to bed?

Charlie's question is another sign that he's getting smarter and is able to think more critically than before. He is starting to question his world and complicate his own assumptions about other people.

March 26. Charlie continues to listen to his TV device before going to sleep, and finds it difficult to sleep well. The device helps him remember something from "a long time ago." He remembers asking Joe Carp to help him learn how to read. Joe laughed and told Charlie that he was wasting his time. As Joe laughs, Fanny Birden, another bakery employee, scolds Joe and tells Charlie that she admires him for wanting to learn how to read. She tells him about an adult learning center at Beekman College. Joe continues laughing, and Charlie concludes, "They are all good friends to me."

With each chapter, we learn more about Charlie's past. This reflects the fact that Charlie's mind is getting stronger: he has an easier time recalling memories. But Charlie's memories aren't particularly happy, and the more we learn, the more we realize that Charlie's life is sad and lonely. His "friends" at work are nothing of the kind—they treat Charlie like a clown. In this case, Charlie losing his ignorance also means losing his bliss.

After work that day, Charlie follows Fanny's directions to the adult learning center, where he finds a group of adult students, led by Miss Kinnian. She tells Charlie to register for classes. Charlie concludes, "Thinking and remembering is hard."

Charlie depends on the kindness of people like Fanny and Miss Kinnian to better himself.

March 27. Following his experiences with the TV device, Charlie goes to therapy sessions with Doctor Strauss. Charlie sits on a couch and talks about "anything that comes into my head." On his first day, Charlie tells Strauss about his day at the bakery. He's so tired from staying up late with the TV device that he falls asleep in the middle of his session with Strauss.

Charlie's therapy sessions with Doctor Strauss aren't particularly informative for either one of them. Charlie doesn't seem racked by guilt or insecurity, at least not yet—it's implied that these things will only come when his intelligence increases.

March 28. Charlie gets headaches. He sleeps better, since Doctor Strauss has showed him how to turn down the volume on the TV device. Charlie isn't sure what the TV device is teaching him. Strauss explains that there's an unconscious and a conscious mind—Charlie is learning information unconsciously. Strauss gives Charlie a dictionary, and Charlie spends time looking up new words, including "conscious."

While most of the psychology in this novel has been debunked in recent decades (Freudian psychoanalysis is now considered limited and mostly false) it was all the rage at the time when Keyes was writing.

Later on, Charlie goes to a party with his "friends" from work. At the party, Joe Carp and Frank Reilly (another employee) give Charlie whiskey to drink and make Charlie dance with a lampshade on his head. Joe mocks Charlie for being a janitor, and when Charlie mentions Miss Kinnian, he suggests that Charlie and Miss Kinnian are "making out," though Charlie doesn't know what this means. Later on, Charlie's "friends" ditch him, and he gets lost trying to wander home. He feels ashamed for getting lost, since Algernon could probably find his way home easily.

It's significant (and very Freudian, as well as Biblical) that Charlie's maturation coincides with the growing feeling of shame. In the Bible, Adam and Eve become fully "human" in the very instant that they feel shame at their own nakedness. Similarly, Freud looks on shame as a critical part of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Shame is the earliest form of true self-awareness, and thus the beginning of adulthood.

That night, Charlie dreams about his parents. In the dream, Charlie cries while his parents lead him through a department store. He gets lost, and a man gives him a lollipop. When Charlie wakes up, he has a headache, and decides not to drink whiskey anymore.

In Charlie's dreams, he's still a child. This points to the fact that 1) Charlie still has a lot of growing to do, and 2) Charlie is getting in touch with his own unconscious mind. His childhood self is still very present in his subconscious.

March 29. Charlie beats Algernon in a **maze** competition. He realizes that he's getting smarter, even if he doesn't feel smarter. Burt, who runs Charlie's tests, tells Charlie that Algernon is a very intelligent mouse. Algernon has to solve a logic puzzle every time he's hungry. Charlie finds this "mean," and asks Burt, "how would you like to have to pass a test every time you want to eat?"

Charlie measures his intellectual progress by comparing himself with Algernon. It's interesting that he finds a moral flaw in the experiment with Algernon—although he's not particularly bright yet, Charlie is naturally good at putting himself in others' shoes, even when the "others" aren't human. This suggests that morality and goodness aren't by any means proportional to intellect.

Charlie takes pills to sleep more soundly. He remembers his Uncle Herman, a house painter. He also remembers his parents slapping his sister Norma for calling him "the artist of the family." Charlie (still unaware that Norma was being sarcastic back then) he plans to go visit Norma as soon as he's intelligent.

Charlie still has a lot of growing to do, as he doesn't understand sarcasm yet. But at least he's having an easier time remembering his childhood and his family.

March 30. Charlie begins lessons with Miss Kinnian. He thinks that Miss Kinnian looks younger than he remembered her being. Kinnian tells Charlie that she has confidence in him. Together, they begin reading a book, *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Dafoe. The book is very difficult for Charlie, but he responds to the story of Robinson Crusoe being marooned on an island, all alone.

Keyes likes to slip in allusions to books whose plots and themes mirror those of his own. Here, Robinson Crusoe's fate—being marooned on an island—ironically parallels Charlie's. Although Charlie believes intelligence will make him popular, the exact opposite is true: intelligence alienates him from his peers.

March 31. Miss Kinnian helps Charlie learn grammar and spelling. He's frustrated with the rules of spelling—for example, that "through" and "threw" sound the same, but mean different things. Miss Kinnian tells Charlie that spelling isn't supposed to make sense.

Charlie gains a greater understanding of the rules of language. In most psychological models of human development, language mastery is a crucial part—even the *crucial part—of maturation.*

PROGRESS REPORT 9

April 1. Charlie begins a new job at the bakery—dough-mixer. He's taking over for Oliver, who quit his job recently. Charlie gets the job because Joe Carp suggests that he take it—much to everyone's amusement. Charlie is unsure of himself, since Gimpy, the head baker, isn't around, and usually he isn't allowed to touch the mixer. Fanny Birden tries to argue with Joe Carp, but Joe tells Fanny, "it's April Fool's Day."

Charlie's coworkers are obviously trying to get him to break the mixer. They treat him as a tool or toy, to be pushed and manipulated for their amusement. It's telling that even though Charlie has been working at the bakery for years, the "joke" never seems to get old for his coworkers—they always like asserting their own superiority by proving they can trick Charlie.

Charlie proceeds to work the dough-mixer, much to everyone's surprise. Fanny Birden finds this very exciting, since it took Oliver two full years to learn how to use the dough-mixer. When Gimpy returns to the bakery, he's surprised and impressed to see Charlie working so well. He shows Mr. Donner that Charlie is mixing the dough well, and Mr. Donner gives Charlie a 5 dollar raise: from now on, he's a dough-mixer. Charlie realizes that Joe wanted him to break the machine—now, Joe's mad. Charlie wonders if this means he's getting smarter.

This is one of the first scenes in which Charlie "shows up" his peers. After reading about Charlie being teased and bullied, it's very satisfying to see Charlie get the last laugh. It's especially funny that Charlie doesn't quite realize what he's doing—he's still so innocent that he seems to take little pleasure in wiping the smile off of Joe's face.

April 3. Charlie finishes reading *Robinson Crusoe* and wants to know what happens next.

Charlie craves new information; as we'll see, knowledge gives him "a hunger that can't be satisfied."

April 4. Miss Kinnian reads through Charlie's progress reports, and, according to Charlie, "looks kind of funny." She tells Charlie that some of Charlie's friends aren't really his friends. Charlie insists that his friends are smart and good—at this point, Kinnian "gets something in her eye."

Charlie still thinks his coworkers are his friends, but he's almost at the point where he's going to learn the truth about them. It's suggested that Miss Kinnian is moved to tears by the tragedy of Charlie's situation with his coworkers.

Charlie remembers his mother and his sister, Norma. When Norma was a baby, Charlie tried to comfort her, but his mother was so angry with him for trying to do so that she slapped him. Charlie realizes that his mother was afraid that he would hurt the baby due to his stupidity. This makes Charlie sad, since he would never hurt a baby. He decides to tell Doctor Strauss about his memories of Norma.

Evidently Charlie is now having an easier time remembering his past, but the more he learns, the more devastating his memories become—intelligence is no guarantee of happiness.

April 6. Charlie learns punctuation marks. He plays around with writing sentences, concluding, "Everybody, uses commas, so I'll, use them, too."

Charlie treats knowledge as a toy to be played with. He's genuinely excited by the information he's learning.

April 17. Charlie learns that he's using commas incorrectly—there are rules about correct usage. He also realizes that he needs to learn spelling. Miss Kinnian is a genius, he decides.

As Charlie's mental age increases, he begins to respect the rules. In essence, Charlie is going through the agony of learning how to write and spell in only a few days (instead of the usual number of years).

April 8. Charlie reads a book about grammar, recommended to him by Miss Kinnian. He also spends a night with the TV device, and when he wakes up, he finds that "the whole thing straightened out in my mind." Miss Kinnian explains that Charlie has "reached a plateau."

The "plateau" Kinnian refers to means that Charlie's brain capacity is at a new maximum, and will (presumably) stop increasing so dramatically now. He still has a lot of information to learn, but he now has the ability to absorb it all.

Charlie reads over his old progress reports, and is embarrassed to find that they're full of grammatical errors. Miss Kinnian points out that this means Charlie is making fast progress.

It's a mark of Charlie's maturation that he's looking back on his old work. Charlie no longer lives in a perpetual present: he can remember the past and look forward to the future.

April 10. Charlie says that he feels "sick." He explains that Joe Carp and Frank Reilly invited him to a party the night before. At the party, they gave him a "plain coke" that "tasted funny." Afterwards, Joe made Charlie dance with a woman named Ellen, and then tripped him. Charlie's coworkers laughed. Someone gave Charlie a wax apple, which Charlie bit as if it were real fruit.

Charlie still doesn't understand that his coworkers are being mean to him—while he's intelligent, he's so inexperienced with cruelty and bullying that he doesn't yet know how to recognize it.

As this happened to Charlie, he remembered a day from his childhood, when the other children played "hide-and-go-seek" with him. Charlie was "it," but when he opened his eyes, he was surprised to find that the other children had left him. At the party, Charlie begins to blush, and realizes that Frank and Joe like to make fun of him. When he goes home, Charlie dreams about Ellen, and when he wakes up, his bed sheets are "wet and messy." He chooses not to go to work at the bakery.

Charlie's wet dream (those wet, messy sheets) is another clear sign that he's entering a state of adulthood. He's learning lots of information, but—almost as importantly—he's getting in touch with his own sexuality. In the past, Charlie didn't have any sexual feelings for women whatsoever—now, he can't stop thinking about them.

April 13. Charlie takes another day of work off. He's been thinking about how his coworkers laugh at him, and decides that it's a good thing that he knows the truth now. He spends his day learning new words and reading books. Miss Kinnian continues to give him lessons in the evening, and notes that he's reading very quickly.

Charlie now recognizes that he has lost his "friends" by gaining greater knowledge of them, but he immediately decides that the tradeoff was worth it—it's better to know the harsh truth than to live in a state of blissful ignorance.

Charlie continues to have vivid flashbacks of the past. He recalls a day long ago, when he arrived at the bakery. Outside the bakery a group of older boys laughed at Charlie, but inside, Gimpy greeted him. Then, Charlie felt someone kicking his legs out from under him. Charlie isn't sure what this memory means, and plans to ask Doctor Strauss about it.

The more Charlie remembers, the more sinister his past seems to become. In this memory, Charlie is helpless and at the mercy of others. Though he's gained intelligence since then, not much has changed yet—he's still Nemur's guinea pig.

April 14. Charlie visits with Doctor Strauss, who encourages him to continue writing down his memories. Charlie also learns that Strauss is a psychiatrist and a neurosurgeon. Strauss explains that Charlie's intellectual growth will outstrip his emotional growth. As a result, it's very important for Charlie to tell Strauss about his emotions. Charlie tells Strauss about the wet sheets he found the night after he danced with Ellen. Strauss explains that Charlie had a wet dream—he's slowly maturing with regards to women.

It's helpful to think of this novel as a "coming of age" story, told over the course of a couple of months instead of several years. Charlie is thus entering the stage in his life where he starts to discover his sexuality and learn about different people's careers.

April 15. Charlie continues with his education. He starts teaching himself multiple foreign languages, and Doctor Strauss gives him tapes to listen to while he sleeps. He also reads voraciously: *The Great Gatsby*, *An American Tragedy*, and *Look Homeward, Angel*, among others. These books teach Charlie about how men and women behave around each other.

Charlie throws himself into his reading lists. Like so many precocious teenagers, he learns about sexuality from books long before he has any actual sexual encounters of his own.

April 16. Charlie is feeling more secure, though he's still angry with his coworkers for laughing at him over the course of so many years. He believes that people will begin to like him better when his IQ is much higher.

Charlie still clings to the (rather childish) belief that intelligence is going to make him happier and more popular. Little does he know the truth: intelligence can also alienate *people from others.*

Charlie learns about the concept of IQ from Doctor Strauss and Professor Nemur. Nemur and Strauss bicker about the true meaning of IQ—whether it's a measure of innate intelligence or potential intelligence. Later, Burt Selden tells Charlie that IQ isn't a very good measure of intelligence at all. Nevertheless, Charlie's current IQ is about 100, and soon it will be well over 150. Professor Nemur tells Charlie that he's going to take a Rorschach test soon—Charlie doesn't know what this is.

So far, Keyes hasn't really questioned his characters' assumptions about intelligence, but now he suggests that intelligence can't always be measured by tests or experiments (and IQ in particular has been shown in recent years to be very flawed). This will be an important theme in the second half of the novel, when it becomes clear that there's more than one kind of intelligence—emotional, social, academic, etc. It's also important to note that Charlie hasn't heard of the Rorschach test, even though he took one at the start of the book.

April 17. Charlie has a nightmare about Miss Kinnian. In the nightmare, Charlie sits down to write, but finds that he's forgotten how. Suddenly, he remembers—but when he shows his progress reports to Miss Kinnian, she's furious, because he's written "dirty words."

Charlie sees his new intelligence as a precious possession, and he is now paranoid about losing it again. This dream also brings up his subconscious and sexuality again, and relates these things to Miss Kinnian.

After he wakes up from his nightmare, Charlie tries to use a strategy Doctor Strauss has taught him: "free association." He writes about his nightmare, trying to think of anything that the dream reminds him of. Charlie ends up writing about being an eleven-year-old child. In his free association essay, he goes to public school, accompanied by Miss Kinnian, who takes the form of an eleven-year-old girl named Harriet.

This is one of the more heavily Freudian parts of the book. Keyes thesis here is that free association can tell us important information about the subconscious mind. Charlie thinks of Miss Kinnian as a very specific young girl—a conceit whose Freudian dimensions Keyes is about to unpack.

Charlie remembers that Harriet was a real person—she was beautiful and popular. For Valentines Day, Charlie bought Harriet a beautiful golden locket. He asked a "friend," Hymie Roth, to write Harriet a message about how much Charlie liked her. When Charlie presented Harriet with the present and message, Harriet is terrified. Harriet's older brother, Gus, beats up Charlie for writing a "dirty note."

Charlie has been a victim of bullies for almost his entire life. It's especially telling that Charlie subconsciously associates Harriet with Miss Kinnian, as his feelings for Miss Kinnian grow more obvious by the day.

Thinking about his memory, Charlie realizes that he shouldn't have asked Hymie to write Harriet the letter. He's grateful he can write for himself now.

As Charlie sees it, writing (and knowledge in general) is a source of power. He's finally controlling his own words now, and thus his own destiny

April 18. Charlie takes a Rorschach test with Burt Selden, and he realizes that a Rorschach test is the same "inkblot test" he took before. When Charlie looks at his inkblot test, he accuses Burt of lying about the inkblots. He claims that Burt once told him there were pictures "hidden" in the inkblots. He yells that Burt has been mocking him.

This is one of the first cracks in Charlie's confidence. Here he remembers his previous inkblot test and rashly concludes that Burt was teasing him. This is a clear mark of Charlie's sense of insecurity: now that he realizes that he's surrounded by bullies, he assumes that everyone *is bullying him.*

Burt plays Charlie a recording of their first inkblot testing session, and Charlie is embarrassed to hear that Burt was telling the truth—he never said there were pictures hidden in the inkblots. Afterwards, Charlie wonders about his progress reports, and thinks that he should keep some of them to himself.

This is a key chapter in the novel because it shows Charlie developing a more complex "inner life"— getting in touch with his own consciousness, keeping secrets from other people and exploring the depths of his own memory. These are all critical parts of the process of coming of age.

PROGRESS REPORT 10

April 21. At work, Charlie figures out a more efficient mixing process, saving the bakery a lot of money. Mr. Donner rewards Charlie with a large bonus, but when Charlie offers to take Joe Carp and Frank Reilly out to celebrate, they say they're busy. Charlie realizes that everyone is frightened of him now.

Charlie alienates his coworkers, both because he's so intelligent and because his coworkers are now jealous and resentful of his success. Before, they only liked hanging around him to make themselves feel smarter.

Charlie returns to the memory he's been trying to reconstruct. In the memory, Frank Reilly pulls Charlie's legs out from under him, and Gimpy yells at Frank for picking on Charlie. Gimpy tries to teach Charlie how to make rolls, offering him a shiny brass disk as a reward. Charlie is frightened of failing at this task, but he tries his best to follow Gimpy's instructions. Although he makes a few rolls, he forgets his instructions almost immediately. Gimpy sighs with disappointment—he hasn't taught Charlie anything. Afterwards, Charlie sits in a corner, reading a comic book, and Gimpy gives Charlie the brass disc, even though Charlie hasn't learned anything.

In his memories, Charlie confronts a series of big, imposing, and often very cruel parental figures. Here, Gimpy is one. Charlie is evidently afraid of displeasing him, but he also recognizes Gimpy as his benefactor and caretaker. This reflects the way Charlie has lived most of his adult life: he's been frightened of the outside world, and yet also completely dependent on others.

April 22. At the bakery, Charlie notices people ignoring and resenting him. He's disappointed that his coworkers aren't prouder of him. He also plans to ask Miss Kinnian to go to a movie with him—though he's nervous about doing so.

Charlie goes through the agony of asking a girl out on a date. It's a little amusing to see a grown man so nervous about this, but it also points to the fact that Charlie's still a teenager in his mind.

April 24. Charlie convinces Professor Nemur—with Doctor Strauss's help—that he shouldn't have to send in everything he writes, since some of it will be too personal.

Charlie stands up for himself and wins an important victory: he's "carved out space" for his own feelings and secrets. Of course, we, the readers, continue to get access to Charlie's inner life, even if Nemur doesn't.

Charlie thinks back on his visit with Nemur and Strauss—it was "very upsetting," he reports. He walks in on an argument between Strauss and Nemur. Nemur wants to present a paper on his findings in Chicago, but Strauss insists that it's too soon: Charlie is still changing, and they need to run more tests before they reach any conclusion. Strauss raises the possibility of "regression," but Nemur insists that this isn't going to happen. Nemur implies that Strauss is a cynical opportunist, riding his coattails, and Strauss shoots back that the same is true of Nemur. Charlie realizes that millions of people are depending on the results of Strauss and Nemur's research. He decides to wait before asking Miss Kinnian out to the movie.

This is an important scene, because it shows Charlie becoming conscious of the "bigness" and the "smallness" of the project. On one hand, he sees, as if for the first time, that his brain surgery could be used to help millions of people around the world. And yet he also *realizes that the people who developed this surgery aren't gods—they're petty, small-minded men, hunting for prestige and recognition from their peers (not unlike Charlie, desperately seeking his coworker's admiration.)*

April 26. Charlie educates himself in the university library. He's fascinated by poetry and science, and buries himself in books.

Charlie continues to read and educate himself—he's experiencing the "pleasure of finding things out" for the first time.

April 27. Charlie makes friends with some college students. Some of the college students raise the possibility that there is no God. This frightens Charlie, since he's always assumed there is a God. He realizes that one of the great things about education is that it makes you question the things you've believed your whole life.

It's worth noting that Keyes wrote this novel at the height of the "existentialism craze" in the United States. College students, of the kind Keyes describes here, debated the "death of God," arguing that in the absence of a divine presence, human beings have to work things out for themselves. This isn't a bad way to think of Charlie's coming of age: he's always depended on "Gods" (his parents, Mr. Donner, etc.), but now, he's newly free—and such freedom can be terrifying.

Charlie educates himself by reading in the library. He reads mostly fiction, "feeding a hunger that can't be satisfied."

We begin to get a sense for the tragic futility of Charlie's struggle for intelligence. He wants to learn, but and he'll never be able to know enough to be satisfied.

April 28. Charlie has a dream in which his parents argue with a schoolteacher about his future. Charlie's mother insists that Charlie will go to college and be "normal" one day, but the schoolteacher curtly disagrees, saying that Charlie will need to go to a special school. Charlie's mother begins to cry.

Thanks to his mother, Charlie has always had a very keen notion of what is and isn't "normal." This helps explain why Charlie was so interested in learning how to read and write in the first place—he's always sought his mother's approval—and through it, her love.

The next morning, Charlie remembers his dream. He also remembers being six years old, before his sister, Norma, was born. Charlie's mother, whose name is Rose, insists that Charlie was normal, though Charlie's father, whose name is Matt, says otherwise. Rose yells at Charlie to play with his alphabet blocks. She weeps that she just wants her son to be like everyone else.

In Freudian terms, Rose is the embodiment of the superego—the part of the mind that deals with ethics and "public morality." Rose is concerned—indeed, only concerned—with what other people say and think. It's not hard to see that Charlie has inherited his own desire for public recognition from Rose: like his mother, he wants other people to like him and respect him.

In the memory, Charlie tells his mother that he needs help going to the bathroom, and his mother angrily says that he's old enough to go by himself. Then she spanks Charlie for being bad. In the present day, Charlie thinks sadly that he can't remember what his family members look like.

This is a very specific Freudian nod on Keyes's part—in Freudian psychology, Charlie is stuck in the "anal stage" of development in this memory—he's not progressing healthily to adolescence. This may seem pretty silly by contemporary standards, but Freudian formulations of this kind were all the rage in the 60s, especially for sci-fi writers like Keyes.

PROGRESS REPORT 11

May 1. Charlie has noticed that Miss Kinnian—whose first name is Alice—is extremely beautiful. He takes her to dinner and a movie, and fantasizes about putting his arm around her, though he doesn't dare.

Charlie feels a strong sense of both attraction and repulsion for other women, and he'll spend the rest of the novel making sense of his feelings.

After the film, Charlie criticizes the film's poor storyline and cheap ending, and Alice is impressed by Charlie's new intelligence. They walk through Times Square (we realize that Charlie lives in New York City) and talk about Charlie's future. Alice warns Charlie to be patient—he's going to be a genius soon.

Although Charlie's IQ might be growing, Alice is still the "voice of wisdom" in these chapters. Charlie can only think of becoming smarter as soon as possible, while Alice, on the other hand, encourages Charlie to practice patience, moderation, and humility.

Charlie is moved by Alice's support, and tells her that he could never have done this without her. Alice touches Charlie's hand, and Charlie blushes and spills water on his shirt. They take a cab out of Times Square, and Charlie is frustrated. He tells Alice that he likes her, and Alice replies that she feels the same way about him. Charlie says that he doesn't know how to put his feelings into words, since they're so new to him. Alice responds by saying that they can't make their friendship "personal," because too much is at stake: Charlie needs to take more time for himself, since millions of people are going to follow his example one day soon.

In moral terms, Charlie is stuck in a state of selfishness, while Alice is thinking in broader, less personal terms. Charlie is concerned with himself and his own coming of age, while Alice wants to set a good example for the millions of people who might one day benefit from Charlie's example. This is clearly good advice, not least because Charlie isn't quite ready to pursue a sexual relationship with Alice: he has too many traumatic memories to deal with first.

At the end of the night, Charlie contemplates kissing Alice, but she gets out of the cab before he can. She thinks him for a "lovely time." Charlie plans to kiss Alice on their next night out.

Charlie goes through more "adolescent" pangs of love and lust.

May 3. Charlie has more nightmares, and doesn't know whether they're real or imagined. In one nightmare, he sees a red-haired girl with a bloody knife in her hand. He tries free association, and discovers a memory he didn't know he had. In the memory, Charlie finds Norma's underwear stained with blood, and his parents spank him for "being bad." In the present, Charlie concludes that he's always been told to keep away from women. But now that he's intelligent, he feels that he must explore his romantic needs.

The Freudian image of a woman with a knife (a phallic power symbol) suggests that Charlie has been trained to fear women and female contact, probably due to his mother's cruelty. Charlie, in touch with his subconscious mind for the first time in his life, wants to purge himself of these destructive memories.

May 8. While he's working at the store, Charlie notices that Gimpy is stealing money. Gimpy undercharges a friend for his purchases, allowing Gimpy to pocket the extra money. Charlie finds this shocking: Gimpy has worked with Mr. Donner for more than 15 years, during which Donner has given Gimpy money for his wife's hospital bills. Horrified, Charlie watches as Gimpy undercharges other customers.

This is a major turning point in the novel: Charlie confronts a moral dilemma for the first time in his life. He has grown very "book-smart" by now, but only experience can teach him wisdom and moral strength.

May 8. Charlie tries to decide what to do. He could report Gimpy to Mr. Donner, but Gimpy would simply deny it. There seems to be no right thing to do.

Keyes's point is that there's no "correct answer" to a moral dilemma; i.e., there' s no book that can teach Charlie what to do. Charlie is coming to terms with the limits of his "book learning."

May 9. Charlie continues worrying about Gimpy's thefts. He realizes that by refusing to report Gimpy, he's as guilty as Gimpy himself. And yet if Gimpy—a father of three—were fired, he probably couldn't get another job, especially not with his clubfoot. Charlie notes that his intelligence isn't helping him solve the problem.

Charlie doesn't know what to do, but at least he recognizes the limits of his own knowledge. Rather than trying to apply philosophy or history to Gimpy's situation, he accepts that there's a clear distinction between knowing things and knowing what to do—in other words, a distinction between intelligence and wisdom.

May 10. Charlie asks Professor Nemur about Gimpy, and Nemur insists that Charlie shouldn't mention the incident to Mr. Donner. Charlie points out that Gimpy has used him to deliver undervalued packages to customers for years, meaning that Charlie effectively has been helping Gimpy steal. Nemur dismisses this reasoning, pointing out that Charlie was only an "object" before his operation. Charlie finds this incredibly insulting, and leaves Nemur's office.

It comes as a nasty surprise that Professor Nemur isn't interested in Charlie's moral conundrum. For all his intelligence, Nemur isn't a particularly good or wise man—he's so interested in his own success and medical prestige that he has no time to think about matters of right and wrong. Charlie also begins to see that Nemur doesn't think of Charlie as a person at all—he's just a guinea pig, a tool to aid Nemur in his struggle for fame.

Charlie goes to talk about Gimpy with Alice. Alice listens patiently to Charlie's story, and then tells Charlie that there's no intellectual way to solve this problem; he will have to learn to trust himself. Charlie realizes that Alice is right.

Alice is an important influence on Charlie. Although Professor Nemur gave Charlie his intelligence, Alice is the one who'll give Charlie his wisdom.

Charlie goes on to tell Alice that she has "made me see." Alice blushes, and Charlie, encouraged, tells her he loves her. Alice tells Charlie to be careful—it's "not time." She tells him to continue with his studies and see other women before he decides that he's in love. Charlie suggests that Alice is writing him off because he's still "emotionally mentally disabled."

Ever since his brain surgery, Charlie is used to moving fast: for example, he goes from barely knowing how to read to reading Shakespeare in mere weeks. And yet Charlie can't move through his interpersonal relationships with the same speed: he has to "take it slow."

Charlie begs Alice to let him see her again, "away from the lab." Alice is reluctant, but eventually agrees to go to a concert with Charlie. She kisses Charlie on the cheek and wishes him goodnight. As she leaves, Charlie decides that he's in love.

Charlie believes that he's in love—the ultimate example of something that can't be taught in a book. Charlie's emotional development is itself an important part of his education. He's learning a lot about science and history, but now, he'll have to learn about his own feelings.

May 11. Charlie resolves to follow his intuition: he'll go back to the bakery and talk to Gimpy about his theft. At the end of the day, Charlie tells Gimpy that he has a "friend who 'has a problem.'" Charlie proceeds to tell Gimpy about "his friend," who's discovered that his coworker is stealing. He tells Gimpy that his friend will forget about the whole incident, as long as the stealing stops. Gimpy mutters that Charlie's "friend" should mind his own business, but adds that the coworker will stop stealing. Gimpy tells Charlie, "you'll be sorry you stuck your nose in." He points out that he's always stood up for Charlie. Charlie feels that he's handled the incident the right way, though he wonders, "How many people are there like Gimpy who use other people that way?"

Keyes conveys the challenge of being intelligent enough to understand the complexity of life. Although Charlie successfully follows Alice's advice, using intuition and morality to solve the problem, his success in resolving the issue brings him no real pleasure. In the same way that Charlie feels an unquenchable thirst to learn more, he feels a sense of perpetual dissatisfaction when resolving his disagreement with Gimpy—hence his rhetorical question. Charlie is still fairly ignorant of the "real world," and his question foreshadows some of his upcoming experiences with coworkers and his professors.

May 15. Charlie keeps studying at the university library. He reads very quickly, and digests information about hundreds of different subjects. When he hears students in the cafeteria discussing politics or religion, he finds their conversations childish. At times, Charlie raises conversations with university professors, but they become angry when it becomes clear that Charlie's knowledge of the material vastly exceeds their own. Charlie notices that the professors at the university all have very narrow specializations: only Charlie can discuss literature *and* economics; religion *and* history. Charlie is disillusioned with his peers. He notes that tomorrow he's going to a concert with Alice, and tells himself that she's a woman, not a goddess.

This is an important turning point in the novel. Charlie is getting smarter at such a rapid speed that he leaves his peers behind. The same professors who once impressed him now seem petty and trivial. One important consequence of this process is that Charlie becomes highly arrogant: he knows how smart he is, and believes this gives him the right to look down on other people. The best (and most heartbreaking) illustration of this idea is that Charlie now looks down even on Alice.

May 17. Charlie has had a date with Alice. They go to a concert in Central Park. During the concert—Debussy's *La Mer*—Alice tells Charlie to stop trying to "understand" the music and give in to his emotions. Charlie feels Alice lean on his shoulder, and wonders what she's thinking.

Although Charlie recognizes that he's now "smarter" than Alice, he still has plenty to learn from her. Alice offers Charlie an emotional and even spiritual awareness of the world, offsetting Charlie's purely academic education.

Suddenly, Charlie notices a teenager with his pants open, watching him sitting with Alice. Charlie runs off after the teenager, despite Alice's insistence that it doesn't matter. He's unable to find the teenager. Later, Alice invites Charlie back to her place for coffee, but Charlie refuses, saying that he has work to do that night. Charlie senses that Alice is waiting for Charlie to kiss her, but he doesn't.

Charlie seems unable to "consummate" his relationship with Alice, as he finds it almost impossible to touch or her kiss her. This reminds us that Charlie has deep-seeded psychological issues that he needs to resolve—issues that stem from his traumatic childhood and his bullying mother.

In the present, Charlie hypothesizes that he hallucinated the teenager. He's so new to the world of sexuality that he has to stave off anxiety and even delusion. He realizes that he's simply not ready to be in a relationship with Alice, at least not yet.

The irony is that while Charlie is "seeing the world more clearly," he's also "seeing things" that literally aren't there at all. Based on the hallucinations that appear later in the novel, we can assume that the "teenager" Charlie sees is actually a vision of his younger self.

May 20. Charlie is fired from his job at the bakery. Mr. Donner is apologetic as he fires Charlie, remembering that he swore to Charlie's Uncle Herman that Charlie would always have a place at the bakery. He explains that Charlie's coworkers have come to visit him in secret—they've signed a petition asking for Charlie's dismissal. Charlie is devastated by this news, since the bakery has practically been his home for years. He asks Donner where he could go.

In one of the saddest and nastiest sections in the book, we see the extent of Charlie's coworkers' resentment for him. They've only kept Charlie around for so long because they want to feel superior, and now that Charlie is cleverer than they are, they don't have a convenient "benchmark" for their own intelligence—if anything, Charlie's presence now makes them feel stupid.

Charlie begs Donner for a chance to convince his coworkers to let him stay, and Mr. Donner reluctantly agrees. Charlie confronts Frank Reilly, Gimpy, and Joe Carp, and they tell him that he's become a "big shot," "always with a book." Charlie talks to the other employees, and they give him the same answer. Charlie realizes that by maturing so quickly, he's reminded his coworkers of their own intellectual limitations.

It's true that Charlie has become arrogant and self-absorbed (we saw this when Charlie went to the university and ridiculed professors), but it's also true that Charlie's coworkers are mean and insecure about their own brains. If anything, then, both Charlie and *his coworkers are guilty of the same sense of superiority: before, Charlie's coworkers enjoyed feeling superior to him, and now, Charlie relishes the feeling of being superior to his coworkers.*

Charlie finds Fanny Birden, the one woman who refused to sign the petition. Fanny explains that she finds Charlie very strange, even if she doesn't think he should leave. She points out that Charlie "used to be a good, dependable man." She cites the Bible, saying that it was a sin for **Adam and Eve** to gain knowledge, and she expresses her hopes that Charlie go back to being a good, simple man. Charlie insists that he can never go back: soon, millions of people will follow his example, going from stupidity to brilliance.

This is a crucial passage in the novel: the moment when Keyes spells out, in unambiguous terms, the tradeoff between knowledge and happiness. Charlie is smarter than he's ever been, but he's also newly afraid, insecure, and even unhappy. Keyes sees something both deeply admirable and deeply repellent about Charlie's brain surgery: on one hand, Charlie becomes conceited and loses his innocence; on the other, he takes control of his own life, gaining a new sense of freedom and curiosity.

May 20. Upset about his dismissal from the bakery, Charlie goes to Alice's apartment. Alice invites him inside and serves him coffee. Charlie has a quick look around Alice's apartment: it's full of *New York* and *Reader's Digest* magazines, and decorated with a reproduction of a Picasso painting, as well as a kitschy painting of a knight. All in all, Charlie concludes, "nothing fits."

Alice's apartment reflects her "in between" state of mind (in terms of the kinds of people Charlie is familiar with): she's neither a stuffy academic nor a gruff bakery worker: she likes both kitsch and *"high art." This reflects the fact that Alice is the "golden mean" between genius and humility, and she helps Charlie pursue his self-education without sacrificing modesty or wisdom.*

Charlie confesses to Alice that he's frightened. Alice tells Charlie that Strauss and Nemur have been pushing him too quickly: although he's a genius, he also has the soul of a little boy, unfamiliar with the most basic parts of the adult experience.

Alice makes clear what Keyes has been implying for the last 50 pages: Charlie is a genius, but in terms of emotional wisdom and experience, he's still ignorant and childish.

As Alice talks to him, Charlie remembers a day when he fainted in the middle of a bakery delivery—the woman to whom he was delivering the cake exposed herself to him. Then, Charlie remembers being a small child, and being beaten by Rose whenever he got an erection. Rose threatens to kill Charlie if he ever touches a girl.

Charlie's sexual anxieties can be traced back to his childhood, where his mother conditioned him to fear women's bodies. This is a perfect example of Alice's point: Charlie can't "rush into" sexual relationships. On the contrary, he needs time and caution in order to de-condition himself and work through his issues.

In the present, Charlie tells Alice, "hold me," and Alice begins to kiss him. Charlie kisses her back, but suddenly he freezes up and feels a sense of nausea. Charlie begins to cry, and Alice comforts him.

As if to reiterate Alice's point, Keyes shows us what happens when Charlie tries to be physical with Alice: he regresses to a childish state.

PROGRESS REPORT 12

June 5. Two weeks have passed since Charlie has written a report for Professor Nemur. Nemur is furious—a major psychological conference in Chicago is only weeks away, and he wants to present his preliminary report there. Charlie and Nemur resent each other: Charlie doesn't like that Nemur treats him as a lab rat, and Nemur doesn't like that Charlie isn't obeying his instructions to write progress reports. Strauss convinces Charlie to write his reports and to write them in plain, simple English.

It's true that Nemur is arrogant and condescending to Charlie, and treats Charlie like an object to be manipulated. And yet it's also true that Charlie is becoming arrogant and condescending himself. Nemur's "Frankenstein's monster" has moved beyond his control—the student has become the master.

Charlie sees Alice occasionally, but their relationship has been platonic ever since Alice kissed Charlie.

Charlie is heeding Alice's advice, "taking it slow" while he tries to resolve his psychological issues.

Charlie continues to have vivid flashbacks to his childhood. In one, he sees his sister Norma returning from school, happy at having gotten an "A" on her paper. Rose and Matt tell Norma to go play with Charlie, but Norma refuses. She shouts that Charlie never gets good grades in school. She also demands a dog, claiming that she's old enough to take care of it. Matt insists that Norma can have the dog, but only if she shares it with Charlie. Norma refuses, and so Matt tells her that she'll never have a dog. Norma is furious, and yells at Charlie.

Charlie seems to be nursing repressed feelings of guilt. While he loves his sister, Charlie recognizes that his own mental disability made life harder for her. This helps explain why Charlie wanted to become a genius in the first place: he may not have remembered this specific incident, but he was trained from childhood to feel guilty about his disability and to see it as something that hurt others.

Charlie remembers something else: once, Norma told her friends that Charlie wasn't really her brother at all, but just "a boy we took in because we felt sorry for him." Charlie is humiliated by this memory, and wishes he could find Norma and apologize to her for depriving her of the dog.

Charlie experienced bullying and cruelty from all sides growing up, and was always made to feel "less then."

June 6. Charlie and Alice have a fight. Charlie has gone to visit Alice in the adult learning center. Inside, Charlie notices Lester Braun—a mentally disabled student whom Alice always claimed was the smartest in the class. Lester was smarter than Charlie, but he didn't show up for class very often. Charlie realizes that if Lester had been more punctual, the scientists would have used Lester instead of Charlie.

This is an important reminder Charlie's most basic characteristic is his drive; i.e., his desire for prestige. There are smarter people in Charlie's class, but none who work as hard as he does.

In Alice's classroom, Charlie is moved to see his old classmates, all of whom are mentally disabled. One student, Francine, calls Charlie a "big shot" and giggles. Alice calls the class to an end, and when her students have left, she tells Charlie that something's on her mind. Charlie has been changing lately, she claims: he's become arrogant and cold. Charlie protests that he refuses to be a "docile pup" any longer.

Charlie is shocked to find that he can't muster much sympathy for his old friends. This helps him realize that he's become arrogant and self-absorbed, in a way that would have been astounding to him before his surgery. While it's true that Charlie's professors have been condescending to him, it's also true that Charlie has become condescending to others. This is partly Keyes's commentary on how humans naturally scorn those they deem "inferior" to themselves, but it's also Charlie asserting his own independence and freedom—he wants to break free from the people controlling his life.

Charlie begs Alice to go home with him—he needs somebody to talk to. Alice replies that she can't talk to Charlie anymore—his talk is too sophisticated for her. Alice claims that she feels inferior whenever she's around Charlie. Charlie tries to protest, but Alice insists that he should go with Nemur to the conference in Chicago—he'll be among intellectual equals there.

Here, we see another version of Charlie's "unquenchable thirst." Charlie doesn't just want emotional contact—he wants to be in contact with people who challenge him intellectually. Finding that Alice doesn't fit the bill, Charlie goes off to Chicago in the hopes that he'll find an intellectual equal there.

Charlie leaves Alice's apartment. He realizes that he's just as far from Alice now—with an IQ of 185—as he was when he had an IQ of 70.

The tables have turned: where before Alice was the intelligent one, supervising Charlie, Charlie has become the genius, looking down on Alice as if she were a mere child. The difference, of course, is that Alice never condescended to Charlie, while Charlie can't help but treat Alice with disdain.

June 8. Charlie spends his nights walking through the city. Once, he meets a woman in Central Park, and she tells him that she's from Virginia. She married a sailor, but the sailor took advantage of her by having rough sex with her. Since then, she's refused to have sex with him. Nevertheless, the woman claims, she's "been around the block" many times with other men.

Charlie knows that he's sexually inexperienced. He tries to "educate" himself in sexuality the only way he knows how—by "breezing through" the material. Thus, he tries to meet "experienced women."

Charlie touches the woman's hand, and tells her that he's thinking about her. The woman asks Charlie to take her to his home, and Charlie promises that he will. Before they leave, the woman removes her clothing, revealing that she's pregnant. Charlie is furious—he yells, "You ought to be ashamed for yourself."

For a contemporary reader, it's a little hard to understand this scene; it's tough to distinguish between Keyes' own disdain for the pregnant woman (partly a product of the era) and Charlie's. While the idea of a pregnant woman having sex with a stranger would have been disturbing to many of Keyes' 60s readers, it's also true that Charlie finds the woman especially disturbing because he regards himself *as a child, still the slave of his own mother. In short, Charlie has been trying to escape his mother's influence, and instead, he comes upon a sexualized mother figure.*

Charlie has a strange, dissociative experience, in which he grabs the woman's shoulder and tries to kiss her. Suddenly, he realizes that the woman is screaming. Charlie runs away, frightened, as the woman cries for help. He hears a group shouting that "a degenerate" has tried to rape the woman.

Charlie finds that sexual education doesn't work like scientific or literary education: he can't treat women like objects.

Charlie tries to understand what he's just done. He realizes that he was subconsciously *trying* to be caught and punished for his actions. Even now, he fantasizes about himself being "torn apart" by an angry mob.

Charlie's feelings of guilt are so profound that he wants *to be caught. Because of his mother's treatment of him, he now associates desire with punishment.*

PROGRESS REPORT 13

June 10. Charlie flies in a private jet to Chicago for Nemur's conference. He's going to meet hundreds of people, all of whom will be fascinated to talk to him and measure his intellectual progress. As he flies, Charlie thinks about the possibility of crashing (he's never been on a plane before).

Anxiety and worry often circumvent logical thinking altogether, so Charlie's intelligence doesn't help him at all when he's frightened of flying.

During the flight, Charlie remembers being five years old and going with Rose and Matt to Dr. Guarino—a man who claims to be able to make Charlie smart. Guarino claims that he's stumbled upon an invention that can cure mental problems of any kind. He straps Charlie into a large machine with flashing lights, and tells Charlie that the machine has made him "a bit smarter." Charlie is so terrified of the machine that he pees his pants.

Part of Charlie's bewilderment with his new intelligence stems from the fact that quack doctors have been trying to make him smart for years now—he can scarcely believe that a doctor has finally succeeded.

After the "procedure," Dr. Guarino tells Rose and Matt to continue bringing Charlie in and paying him more money. As time goes on, Matt and Rose realize that they're losing all their money to quack doctors promising to make Charlie smart.

As Charlie thinks back to his childhood, he realizes that his mental disability has impoverished his parents—they wasted all their money on bogus treatments. This exacerbates Charlie's guilt.

Charlie realizes a strange thing: even though Dr. Guarino was a con-artist who stole money from Charlie's parents, Charlie doesn't resent him at all. On the contrary, Dr. Guarino treated Charlie like a normal person—just another patient to be rushed through Guarino's procedure.

Charlie is so accustomed to being treated like an animal that it's refreshing when anyone treats him like a normal person—even if it's a con artist.

June 11. Charlie and Nemur stay in the Independence Hotel in Chicago, along with most of the young psychologists in town for Nemur's conference. At the hotel, the night before the conference, a young clinician from Falmouth College asks Nemur to explain his new procedure. Nemur launches into a long lecture on his process. In the middle of the lecture, Charlie interrupts Nemur and cites a report by an Indian scientist, which hasn't been translated into English yet. Nemur is embarrassed by Charlie's interruption, especially when Charlie insists that Nemur is neglecting important medical information.

The key thing to note about this scene is that it's pleasurable *for Charlie: he genuinely enjoys correcting Nemur's medical knowledge. Charlie has been feeling inferior to Professor Nemur for some time now, and even if he recognizes that Nemur is no genius, he hasn't had a chance to put Nemur in his place until now. For his part, Nemur has been so confident in his own ability—and so sure that Charlie will play the part of a docile patient—that he can barely speak after Charlie corrects him.*

Later on that night, Charlie talks with Strauss, who noticed the way Charlie interrupted Nemur. Strauss explains that Nemur is embarrassed, and doesn't like to have to admit that he hasn't heard of a medical article. Charlie criticizes Nemur—and then Strauss—for not understanding Hindi, Japanese, and many other languages. As he talks to Strauss, Charlie realizes that his own knowledge of science, history, languages, and other subjects now vastly exceeds Strauss's—it isn't even close.

Charlie's greatest source of pleasure is no longer the process of finding things out for its own sake. Instead, Charlie gets pleasure from reminding *other people of his knowledge and intellectual superiority. In a way, this is what Charlie always wanted, even when he was mentally disabled: he wanted to "surprise" his peers with his intelligence.*

Later on, Burt Selden, who's also attending the conference, tells Charlie that Charlie is damaging Nemur's reputation in front of Nemur's colleagues. Burt admits that Nemur is arrogant and not particularly brilliant, and yet he respects Nemur for his lofty ambitions. Burt adds that Nemur's under a lot of pressure from his wife, Bertha Nemur—it was she who pressured him into presenting his findings early.

In a novel that's largely about intelligence, it's important to point out the characters who embody wisdom. *Burt Seldon, much like Alice Kinnian, is a mildly intelligent (certainly not brilliant) man who nonetheless exemplifies a decency and respectfulness from which Charlie (and Nemur) could benefit.*

Charlie realizes that Burt is right: he shouldn't be so impatient with Nemur. Nemur is a sad, middle-aged man, too old to start over again, and he's invested everything in his intelligence research. Nevertheless, Charlie is angry with Nemur and Strauss—he thinks they're frauds, passing themselves off as geniuses to Charlie, when in reality they're nothing special in the world of academia.

Charlie, to his credit, recognizes that there are limits to his intelligence—in other words, he realizes that there's more to life than being correct. At the same time, Charlie isn't ready to relinquish his sense of superiority: it's such a novelty for him to be intelligent that he can't help but celebrate.

Charlie begins to describe the academic conference itself. He's impressed by some of the researchers' findings, but finds some of the other projects rather trivial. This gives Charlie new respect for Strauss and Nemur: they've devoted their careers to something important and uncertain, rather than something "insignificant and safe."

It's important to note that Charlie admires Nemur and Strauss for "aiming high." From the very beginning, Charlie has been someone who aims high: he wants to be smart, even if it alienates him from his peers and ruins his life. It's this reckless ambition that makes Charlie such a fascinating (and surprisingly relatable) hero.

Nemur begins to present his findings to his colleagues, and Charlie feels a strong sense of resentment: he imagines Nemur as a carnival announcer, leading his friends to see Charlie, the "main attraction." Nemur calls Burt to go over Algernon's intellectual progress, and Charlie is surprised to see Burt explain that Algernon's behavior has become increasingly erratic and unpredictable—there are days when Algernon refuses to participate in the **mazes** and problems he's been assigned. Charlie is even more upset when Burt shows the other scientists videos of Charlie—back when he was still mentally disabled—trying and failing to solve mental challenges. The scientists laugh at Charlie's failures.

In this disturbing scene, we can't help but agree that Charlie has a point. The professors at the conference in Chicago are no better than Charlie's coworkers at the bakery: they're intellectual bullies, celebrating their own intelligence and sophistication by laughing at their mental inferiors. But although Charlie can recognize this in others, he himself continues to feel a comparable sense of conceit when dealing with other people—including the professors themselves.

Furious with the scientists at the meeting, Charlie imagines letting Algernon out of his cage. He listens to Nemur reading embarrassing excerpts from Charlie's progress reports. At one point, Nemur calls Charlie one of "nature's mistakes," and congratulates himself for "correcting" the mistake. As he listens, Charlie realizes how premature Nemur's presentation really is: there's no way to know whether the intellectual changes in Algernon and Charlie will last forever, or if they're only temporary.

Nemur's speech is incredibly rude and condescending to Charlie and to all people with intellectual disabilities: he regards Charlie's mental disability as a hideous disease to be wiped out with brain surgery. This is dehumanizing at the most basic level, as Nemur essentially connects intelligence with human dignity and value—something everyone should have, no matter their IQ.

Suddenly, Charlie lets Algernon out of his tiny cage. Algernon runs through the conference, and Nemur shrieks for the scientists to catch him. Charlie is amused by the sight of hundreds of middle-aged scientists chasing after an animal. Charlie then finds Algernon hiding in a bathroom, and instead of returning Algernon to his cage, he slips the mouse into his pocket and tells the scientists that Algernon slipped into a ventilator.

In this critical scene, Charlie refuses to sit for Nemur's condescension any longer. He's aiming to embarrass Nemur in the most public, irreversible way: by humiliating Nemur in front of hundreds of colleagues. Once again Algernon acts aas living symbol for Charlie, as the two both escape from their "masters" at the same time.

Charlie leaves the scientists' conference. He plans to return to New York and start a new life for himself. He also decides that he should track down his parents.

We're about to enter the "third act" of the book. Charlie has fled academia, and embarked on a more personal journey: to track down his family.

PROGRESS REPORT 14

June 15. News of Charlie and Algernon's "escape" hits the newspapers. In one news story, Charlie is surprised to find an interview with his own mother and sister. Since the news story includes their address, Charlie now has a way to contact his family. The article also mentions that his father works at a barbershop in the Bronx. Charlie stares at the photograph of his mother that's included in the newspaper article. He feels a flash of fear, as well as some love.

It's a little too convenient that Charlie finds information about his family in the newspaper the day after his escape (nor is it remotely believable that a newspaper would include a family's home address!), but Keyes can be forgiven for these plot holes: he's moving the story toward a big confrontation between Charlie and his mother, during which Charlie will have to face his past and his conflicted feelings for his family.

Charlie has a flashback in which he overhears his parents arguing about sending him to the Warren State Home for the mentally disabled. Rose wants to send Charlie away, since she believes that Charlie's presence is having a bad effect on Norma's development. Matt accuses Rose of trying to "cut her losses" with Charlie, now that she has a good relationship with Norma—a suggestion that Rose angrily dismisses. As Charlie remembers all of this, he realizes that he should wait before he goes to meet his family.

Charlie seems to be learning the value of caution and discretion. Before, he wanted to dive into a relationship with Alice; here, he recognizes that interpersonal relationships take time to develop. As a result, he decides to wait before going to meet his family. His "emotional intelligence" is finally starting to catch up with his "book learning."

Charlie takes his money out of his bank account and uses it to check into a hotel room near Times Square. He's weary of his responsibilities and memories, and hopes that he can make a fresh start soon.

The "fresh start" is an important theme in the second half of the book: Charlie has been born again, thanks to his brain surgery, but he's not sure what kind of life he wants for himself. The only way for Charlie to decide is by trial and error.

June 16. Charlie settles into a new routine. He stays in an apartment near Times Square, spends his days reading and studying, and sometimes watches TV with Algernon. He builds Algernon complicated, three-dimensional **mazes** to ensure that he keeps in shape, and tries to motivate him with food.

It's interesting that Charlie builds mazes for Algernon, when previously he'd criticized Burt for doing the same thing. But here it's suggested that Charlie knows what Algernon needs, because it's what he himself needs—intellectual stimulation, and companionship with an "equal."

June 19. Charlie meets his neighbor, a woman named Fay Lillman, when he accidentally locks himself out of his apartment. Fay lets Charlie into her apartment, which, much to Charlie's shock, is filthy and crowded with knick-knacks. She offers Charlie a beer, and he accepts. As he drinks, he notices that Fay is a painter: her apartment's walls are decorated with her works, many of which are nudes of herself.

Fay is clearly an open, uninhibited woman: she's comfortable with her sexuality, and doesn't mind sharing it with other people. She's also not particularly intellectual (there are no books in her apartment, it would seem). In a word, Fay is everything Charlie isn't.

Fay lets Charlie into his apartment via the fire escape. Charlie lets Fay into his place, and Fay is impressed with Charlie's piano playing (he's taught himself recently), and with the elaborate **mazes** he's built for Algernon. Suddenly, Fay says she has to go—she has a date with someone she met at an art gallery. Charlie is impressed by Fay's liveliness and vitality.

Charlie is trying out his "fresh start" with Fay. Charlie has spent his entire life being treated with suspicion (first for being disabled, then for being a genius), so it's refreshing for him to find a woman who regards him as ordinary. He also starts learning to value other aspects of a person besides their IQ.

June 20. Charlie goes to visit his father, Matt, at the barbershop where he works in the Bronx. Charlie chooses to do this before he sees his mother and sister, since he's always felt that he's closer with his father. In most of his memories, it was Matt who protected him from Rose.

Charlie is being careful with his emotions, so he starts with the easiest reunion—his father, the man who acted as his protector. Interestingly, Matt doesn't seem to exert remotely the same influence over Charlie's adult behavior that Rose does—cruelty is more memorable than decency.

When Charlie finds Matt at the barbershop, Matt doesn't recognize him. Charlie sits in the barber's chair as his own father cuts his hair. As he sits there, Charlie remembers an argument between Matt and Rose from years ago. Rose shouts that Charlie has "got to go" to the Warren State Home. Rose waves a knife around and claims that Charlie is "better off dead." Matt insists that Rose calm down—he argues that they can send Charlie to live with Charlie's uncle, Herman.

It's no wonder than Charlie has repressed this memory for so long: he can't stand to think that his own mother wanted him out of her life, and even dead. Charlie has always had a feeling of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with himself, and it was this that first led him to receive brain surgery. Now Charlie is identifying the source of his feeling, and hopefully eliminating it in the process.

Back in the present, Charlie turns to Matt and asks, "Do you recognize me?" Matt replies that he has no idea what Charlie means. Charlie realizes that he has no idea what to say to his father, and this is because he's simply not his father's son anymore. Charlie pays his father for the haircut and leaves the barbershop without saying another word.

Charlie's first reunion with a family member ends on a rather disappointing note. There's no tearful embrace; indeed, Matt doesn't even know that there's been *a reunion. But even if Charlie doesn't have the courage to reveal himself to his father, he's made an important breakthrough today: he's identified the source of his feelings of inadequacy, and recognized that he is fundamentally a different person now after the surgery.*

June 21. Charlie continues to spend time teaching Algernon how to navigate through **mazes**. Algernon solves every maze he's given. One evening, Fay comes to Charlie's apartment with a female mouse named Minnie—a companion for Algernon. Charlie finds that he can't force himself to be upset with Fay. He's also glad that Algernon is no longer alone.

Here, the link between Algernon and Charlie becomes even more obvious: Charlie is becoming more social and exploring his sexuality, just as Algernon is gaining another mouse for a companion.

June 23. Late one night, Charlie hears a knock on his door—it's Fay, accompanied by a dancer named Leroy. Fay invites Charlie over for a drink, but neither Charlie nor Leroy like this idea. Charlie has to fight the temptation to call Alice. He finds that he can't picture Alice's face—all he can think of is Fay.

Charlie comes to an ambiguous stage in his sexual maturity. He's clearly capable of love and affection, but his feelings seem curiously separate from actual people, and he hasn't overcome his sexual impotence yet.

Later that night, Fay stops by Charlie's apartment again, saying that she's sent Leroy home after he tried to make a pass at her. She adds that if it were Charlie who'd tried, she wouldn't have refused him. Fay offers Charlie alcohol, and together, they get drunk.

It's tempting to think of Fay as an early example of a "manic pixie dream girl"—a bubbly, impossibly adventurous woman whose sole purpose is to awaken feelings of vitality and liveliness in a male protagonist.

The next morning, Charlie wakes up lying next to Fay, who says that he acted odd last night—they didn't have sex, but he said that he wanted to learn to read and write like everyone else. Charlie realizes that the "**old Charlie**" is still with him, even after his operation.

Charlie confirms there's still a part of him that's a child, and now this "old Charlie" even seems to become its own separate entity. Charlie has yet to resolve his psychological issues—he'll have to meet his mother first.

June 24. Charlie goes on an "anti-intellectual binge." He goes to trashy movies, amusement parks, and restaurants. At a restaurant, Charlie witnesses a mentally challenged teenager—who works as a waiter—drop a tray of dishes. The customers laugh and jeer at the teenager, and at first Charlie is amused, too. Then, he realizes that he might as well be laughing at himself.

Charlie indulges in feelings of sensuality: instead of trying to think, he celebrates the fact that he can feel. But this leads Charlie to an uneasy conclusion: he's become a "normal" person who laughs at his intellectual inferiors, just as his coworkers used to laugh at him.

Charlie realizes that he needs to stop worrying about himself and devote his mental energy to helping other people. He could become a talented neuroscientist, devoting the rest of his life to replicating his own surgery in the brains of mentally disabled patients. He resolves to call Alice and tell her about his plans.

Charlie makes a big leap forward in his emotional and moral development: instead of indulging in sensuality or chasing his own happiness and fulfillment (essentially, asking whether ignorance is bliss or not), he now sees that his great talents also give him a responsibility for his fellow humans. The real test is whether or not he can follow through with these plans.

June 25. Charlie calls Alice and asks to see her. She's very eager to see him—she hasn't heard from him at all since he left for Chicago. Charlie meets Alice at her apartment, where he confesses that he's still "**the old Charlie Gordon**" sometimes—the frightened child who fears his mother.

The first step toward solving a problem is admitting you have one—thus, it's important that Charlie understands what's wrong with him. By identifying the "old Charlie" inside him, Charlie begins to figure out how to rid himself of his mental affliction.

Alice takes Charlie to her bedroom and tries to make love to him. This is difficult for Charlie—he continues to have vivid flashbacks to his childhood—but eventually, he finds a way to perform with Alice. He turns off the lights and imagines that Alice is Fay, the one woman who doesn't provoke feelings of anxiety. Charlie imagines himself kissing Fay's body, even as he says Alice's name. Suddenly, he looks into Alice's eyes, and finds himself pushing her away.

Charlie still has a hard time relating to women. Even when he's attracted to a woman, he has to channel these feelings through *another person—thus, he can't feel attracted to for Alice without thinking of Fay. Keyes devotes a lot of the plot here to Charlie's "sexual awakening," something consistent with the Free Love movement of the 1960s. It's also these scenes that have led the book to be banned in many places.*

Terrified of his own sexual anxiety, Charlie leaves Alice's apartment. He staggers through Times Square, where he buys a bottle of gin, and then goes back to his apartment. He knocks on Fay's door, but finds that she isn't there.

Charlie is trying to "run away from himself"—he's so concerned about his sexual inadequacy that he tries to regress mentally; i.e., he gets himself drunk, hoping to forget all the anxiety and shame of his super-intelligent self.

A short while later, Fay returns to her apartment, and Charlie comes to see her. He immediately wraps himself around her. Fay is uncomfortable at first—while she's attracted to Charlie, she knows that Charlie gets anxiety around women—but Charlie insists that everything will be "fine this time." Charlie makes passionate love to Fay. As he does, he imagines the "**old Charlie**" watching, and finds that he doesn't care anymore.

This is a major breakthrough for Charlie, even if it isn't truly a "solution" to his problem. Charlie is slowly growing accustomed to his childhood traumas—accepting them instead of fighting them. In short, Charlie is making peace with his inner child instead of trying to fight it. This is also a major milestone in Charlie's story as a more traditional "coming of age" tale.

June 29. Charlie realizes that he has limited time. He's been busy calling various professors and researchers around the world, pointing out the flaws and errors in their experiments and research. Without saying what he means, he wonders how much time he has left: "A month? A year?"

As we enter the final part of Keyes' novel, we come back to where we started. Charlie has now forced himself to admit the truth: there's a strong possibility that he's going to lose his IQ (as he suggested to Professor Nemur at the Chicago conference) and regress to his former self. Charlie has been living a life in "fast-forward" for the past few months, so it's only appropriate that now, Charlie tries to cram in as many experiences as possible before he experiences an "intellectual death."

June 30. Charlie gives Fay the keys to his place. He enjoys spending time with her, and makes love to her frequently. He's not in love with Fay, but he finds that he can use her to cure his sexual anxieties.

There's something both inspiring and disturbing about this section: Charlie is curing his sexual neuroses, but in doing so he's treating a woman as a mere object.

July 5. Charlie finishes a piano concerto he's been working on, and dedicates it to Fay. While Charlie doesn't think much of Fay's aesthetic tastes, he's impressed by Fay's openness and generosity. At one point, Fay took in a homeless girl, who ran off with Fay's savings. Fay didn't report the incident, saying that she couldn't punish a starving girl for trying to survive.

Fay, like Alice, is an important moral teacher for Charlie. Charlie can teach himself about math or science, but only by spending time with people like Fay does he learn the value of generosity, openness, and human connection.

July 8. Charlie starts neglecting his research to go club-hopping instead. Even though he's not living up to his potential, he still completes impressive research in a wide variety of topics.

Charlie is at the top of the intellectual pack, and he's bored. Instead of devoting himself totally to his work, he indulges in sensual pleasure.

One night, Charlie has too much to drink, and in his drunkenness he behaves like the "**old Charlie**." Fay is confused by Charlie's behavior, but finds it funny. Charlie also notes that Algernon's behavior is becoming erratic again, and Minnie seems afraid of him.

Fay is such an open, accepting woman that she doesn't shun Charlie for his bizarre behavior, or even question him for it. It's notable that so many of the women in this novel are selfless and rather one-dimensional: they exist to help Charlie.

July 9. Algernon bites Fay while Fay is trying to play with him. Shortly afterwards, Charlie finds that Algernon has attacked Minnie. Charlie finds this distressing—it could mean any number of different things. He decides to call Professor Nemur the next day.

Because Algernon and Charlie are so closely linked both mentally and symbolically, this feels like ominous foreshadowing for Charlie himself.

PROGRESS REPORT 15

July 12. Charlie goes in to visit with Nemur, Strauss, and Burt, since Charlie has told them about Algernon's deteriorating condition. Nemur and his academic Foundation have agreed to let Charlie pursue his own independent research into Algernon's mental health. Charlie is grateful, though he can tell that Nemur is opposed to giving Charlie, his former patient, so much freedom.

It would seem that Charlie and Professor Nemur have come to a grudging respect for each other. Nemur recognizes that Charlie is smarter than he is, and allows him to conduct research; similarly, Charlie recognizes that Nemur is well-connected in the academic world, and relies upon him to pursue his research.

Burt and Charlie examine Algernon, and Burt sadly tells Charlie that Algernon is losing some of his old intelligence. Frustrated, Charlie confronts Nemur, asking what'll happen if he (Charlie) also loses his new intelligence. Reluctantly, Nemur tells Charlie that there's a possibility that Charlie will be even less intelligent than he was before the operation. He probably won't be able to return to his old job at the bakery, since the situation will be too odd and disturbing for his coworkers. Instead, Nemur's Foundation has arranged to send Charlie to the Warren State Home and Training School. Charlie is extremely upset by this news—he's been kept out of the State Home for his entire adult life, thanks to Mr. Donner's kindness.

In this terrifying scene, Charlie confronts his destiny: to lose his intelligence and be sent away to a home for mentally disabled patients. Previously, Charlie was motivated by a desire to rise to the top of the heap. Now that he's at the top, Charlie's principle motivation is his fear of falling back to his former position—indeed, falling back to below *his former position. Unfortunately, Since becoming a genius, Charlie has burned many bridges. He's been so arrogantly confident in his ability to take care of himself that he hasn't arranged a "backup plan" in case he loses his newfound intelligence.*

Charlie devotes all his attention to studying Algernon's mental deterioration. He doesn't contact Fay for fear that Fay would run into Alice. He also plans to visit the Warren State Home—the place where he might be spending the rest of his life.

Charlie's struggle to maintain his brilliance takes on epic proportions in this passage: he devotes every ounce of his genius to saving himself from intellectual death. And yet a part of Charlie seems to know that all his efforts will be in vain—he's preparing himself to be sent to the Warren State Home.

PROGRESS REPORT 16

July 14. Charlie goes out to visit the Warren State Home for the mentally ill. He meets with Mr. Winslow, the director of the Home, saying that he's a professor at the university. Winslow, a calm, sensible man, tells Charlie that the Home makes no effort to imprison its patients—they're free to wander away if they like.

This visit is tragically ironic, as genius-Charlie surveys the place that will probably become his home once he regresses. The home at least seems like a nice, nurturing place—unlike many "asylums" for the mentally ill or disabled.

Winslow escorts Charlie through the facilities. Charlie sees mentally disabled patients taking care of each other in very tender ways. He also sees teachers working with deaf and intellectually disabled students. The principal of these students explains that most of the students in her program have IQs of well below 60—someone with an IQ of 70 would be intelligent compared to these students.

Keyes again brings up the idea that there might be a negative correlation between intelligence and kindness. The intelligent characters in the novel seem overworked, miserable, and selfish, while the mentally challenged patients respect and take care of each other.

Charlie leaves Warren, thinking about the people who work there—people who've chosen to devote their adult lives to helping those who are less fortunate. Nevertheless, he worries that he wasn't shown the most horrific parts of life at Warren—parts that he may be intimately acquainted with in the near future.

Charlie now recognizes the virtue of devoting oneself to other people, and seems to realize that intelligence has nothing to do with moral goodness or strength.

July 15. Charlie continues to work on his research with Algernon, partly because it's very important but partly because he's been putting off a visit to see his mother. Algernon is erratic and frustrating to work with. To relax himself, Charlie drinks and goes dancing with Fay. He becomes irritated with Fay for showing no interest in his research. Fay is only interested in three things, he decides—painting, dancing, and having sex.

Charlie used to accept and even admire Fay's sensuality and anti-intellectualism as her greatest asset, but now he ridicules her. Charlie is working hard on research that will potentially benefit other people, but in his personal relationships he seems to be growing arrogant and withdrawn again.

July 16. Alice goes to visit Charlie in his apartment—Burt has told her about Algernon's mental deterioration. While Alice is at Charlie's apartment, Fay comes by, carrying a bottle of alcohol. To Charlie's surprise, Fay and Alice get along well with each other. They chat about art and laugh about Fay's suggestion that everyone should join a nudist colony.

Charlie has been so egocentric that he's been unable to imagine any interactions between *his female friends—as far as he's concerned, Fay and Alice are real only insofar as they interact with* him. *Seeing Fay and Alice interact with each other reminds Charlie that he's not the center of the universe.*

Later, Charlie goes downstairs with Alice to hail a cab for her. Alice tells Charlie that she likes Fay. Charlie insists that he doesn't love Fay—Alice is the only woman he's ever loved. Charlie tells Alice that he hasn't told Fay about his mental disability, and he notices that Alice relaxes as he says this. Later that night Charlie has sex with Fay, but thinks about Alice and no one else.

Charlie seems more perceptive than usual: he's always been good at reading other people, but even so, his attentiveness to Alice's jealousy seems like a sign of his increased emotional intelligence. The question, then, is whether or not he'll lose the wisdom he's gained when he loses his intellect.

July 27. Charlie works hard studying mental deterioration. His only reality is the laboratory where he studies Algernon. Although it's the summer, and everyone outside is bright and energetic, Charlie is dirty, morose, and tired.

The paradox of Charlie's intelligence (and, one might say, of power in general) is that he can't enjoy it, because he spends too much time trying to preserve it. It's also ironic that Charlie seems to be mentally deteriorating even as he studies mental deterioration.

July 28. Charlie learns that Fay has a new boyfriend, but he isn't hurt—in fact, he's relieved. He continues working hard to study Algernon. Sometimes, he notices Algernon confidently navigating his way through a **maze**, only to forget where he's going, or indeed, what he's doing. Charlie knows that even if he doesn't save Algernon from mental deterioration, his research will be valuable to doctors of mental disability in years to come—he's indirectly helping other people, even if he can't help Algernon or himself.

Charlie has moved past his sensual phase: instead of hanging out with Fay, he throws himself into his research. While it's possible to read this decision as a moral regression (i.e., Charlie's cutting himself off from other people), it's actually the case that Charlie is becoming closer to his "fellow men." As he says here, he's conducting research in order to help other people as much as himself.

July 31. Charlie senses that he's on the edge of a major breakthrough with Algernon. At the same time, he can feel that he's at the peak of his intelligence. He prays that his research will turn out to be correct, but even if it isn't, he must try to be grateful for "clearing the way" for future researchers in this subject. Charlie also mentions that Fay's new boyfriend works as a dance instructor.

Charlie has made a great deal of moral progress, even in the time since his last progress report. The fact that Fay has essentially left Charlie for a dancer has larger significance, suggesting that there is a world of physicality and interpersonal connection that is just as important or powerful as intellectual genius like Charlie's.

August 11. Charlie has reached a dead-end with his research. He knows that Algernon is regressing mentally, but he can't imagine why or how. Against his instincts, Charlie decides to take a break. He goes to a cocktail party organized by Bertha Nemur, Professor Nemur's wife. At the party, Charlie meets Mr. Raynor and Mrs. Raynor, two of the most important people on the board of the Foundation that's sponsoring his research. Mrs. Nemur greets Charlie warmly, but sneeringly implies that his research is secondary to that done by her husband, Professor Nemur.

In this chapter Keyes gives us a sense for the ins and outs of academic research (Keyes spent most of his adulthood working at various colleges and universities, so he knows what he's talking about). Keyes is unflinching in his critique of the pettiness and small-mindedness of scientists. While Charlie seems at least partly motivated by an abstract desire to help the human race, his colleagues at the Foundation seem entirely motivated by their selfish desire for fame.

Charlie drinks more and more, despite the warnings of Doctor Strauss. He tells Strauss, loudly enough for all to hear, that the Raynors are fools who don't understand the research they're sponsoring. Suddenly, Charlie finds himself face-to-face with Professor Nemur, who attacks Charlie for his rudeness and lack of gratitude. Charlie shoots back that Nemur is embarrassed that his "lab rat" turned out to be smarter than Nemur himself.

Here, the two sides of the argument come head-to-head. Nemur is an arrogant narcissist, but so is Charlie. Charlie is right to call out his former mentor, but he's also wrong to take such great pleasure in doing so. All this also continues Keyes' commentary on intellect vs. morality. At the home for the disabled everyone was kind and caring to each other, but this gathering of intellectuals is full of jealousy and spite.

Charlie goes on to chastise Nemur for his condescending attitude and egocentrism. He explains that intelligence—so often celebrated at universities and research institutions—isn't worth much unless it's tempered by love and human affection. As he talks, Charlie's speech begins to shift so that he is speaking like his former, mentally disabled self. Alarmed, Strauss drags Charlie out of the room.

Charlie reveals the extent of his progress as a moral agent. Previously, he'd measured success in the narrowest, most personal terms. Now, he's talking in terms of human dignity and human happiness—terms that seem more or less foreign to someone like Professor Nemur.

Charlie staggers to the men's bathroom, and looks at his face in the mirror. He asks himself, "What do you want?" and then shrugs. Charlie, addressing his mentally disabled self, says, "I'm your enemy," and vows to defend his intelligence with every ounce of strength he has. He walks out of the bathroom, past Doctor Strauss, and out of the building. It occurs to him that he's gone from a kind, likable, mentally disabled man to an arrogant, insufferable genius.

In a way, Charlie has been "looking in the mirror" ever since he became a genius. He's examined his own psyche—his traumatic childhood, and his feelings of ambition and insecurity. Here, Charlie finally states the plain truth: he hates his inner child and resents the fact that he had such a tragic childhood. This is also an important step forward, as Charlie admits to himself that he's a narcissist. As we've already seen, the first step to finding a solution is admitting there's a problem.

Charlie goes to his apartment. He considers knocking on Fay's door, but he hears a man's laugh, and decides that he's too late. At 4:30 AM, he realizes "the flaw in the experiment" he's been conducting on Algernon. He resolves to finish his work as soon as possible.

It's now clear that Charlie has become cut off from Fay's world of sensual innocence. Instead, he devotes himself to intellectual endeavors, motivated not by his own arrogance (as he was before) so much as an abstract sense of right and wrong.

August 26 – Letter to Professor Nemur. The chapter consists of a letter from Charlie Gordon to Professor Nemur. Charlie explains that he's completed research on the "Algernon-Gordon Effect," the process by which Nemur's surgery deteriorates over time. The greater the increase in artificially-induced intelligence, he realizes, the quicker the rate of deterioration. This means that Charlie's own intelligence will deteriorate very quickly, soon after it reaches its peak.

This is the only passage in the book that's not presented as an entry from Charlie's progress report,—signaling that this is a particularly important chapter in the novel. Charlie has now officially discovered and confronted his fate: he's doomed to lose his intelligence and quickly regress.

Charlie ends his letter by thanking Professor Nemur for his patience, and apologizing for the fact that his own academic career in psychology must "rest upon the ashes of the work of this staff, and especially those who have done so much for me."

Although Charlie has learned his fate, it's not clear if he's accepted it. At any rate, Charlie seems genuinely apologetic to Nemur. Perhaps the nearness of his own "mortality" is making Charlie more grateful and forgiving..

September 1. Charlie has discovered that he's going to lose his intelligence very soon. He tries not to panic. Recently, Professor Nemur presented Charlie's research to colleagues at the university, and they verified the "Algernon-Gordon Effect." Charlie tells Alice that he'll lose his intelligence soon, and Alice cries when she hears this.

As Charlie faces the tragic truth that he's going to lose his intelligence, he turns to Alice for love and comfort. Alice has been an important influence on Charlie's moral and intellectual development from the very beginning, so, it makes sense that he would turn to Alice now.

September 2. Charlie is eerily calm. He's powerless to do anything to prevent his mental deterioration. And yet he doesn't blame anyone—not even Doctor Strauss or Professor Nemur. His only question is: "How much can I hang on to?"

Charlie's mental state is both selfish (he wants to hold on to his brains) and magnanimous. It would be easy to imagine Charlie blaming Strauss and Nemur for his suffering, and yet Charlie refrains from blaming anyone. He's taken the mature path of accepting that things are the way they are, and all he can do is try his best with what he has.

September 15. Professor Nemur informs Charlie that his findings have been professionally confirmed—something Charlie has already predicted will happen. Charlie tells Nemur that the other scientists should devote their time to researching enzyme imbalances, so that perhaps one day, it *will* be possible to increase intelligence permanently.

Even after he give up all hope of preserving his intelligence, Charlie doesn't stop his research. This proves that Charlie really is motivated by a desire to help other people: even if he can't save his own mind, he can still improve the minds of others.

September 17. Charlie notices that he's becoming absent-minded. He's also upset because of the recent death of Algernon. Charlie dissects Algernon's body and finds that his theory was correct: just as he predicted, Algernon's brain had become smooth and pale, a sign of deterioration.

Algernon's death prefigures the "intellectual death" that awaits Charlie, and adds more tragic foreshadowing to the novel.

Charlie has developed an unusual friendship with Algernon, and he's sorry to see Algernon die, not least because it reiterates that Charlie's own mind is going to deteriorate soon. Charlie buries Algernon in his backyard, and puts some flowers on his grave. He can't help but cry.

Charlie is weeping for his own impending fate as well as for Algernon, but it's also clear that he genuinely loved and empathized with Algernon, and so his tears are far from purely selfish.

September 21. Charlie plans to visit his mother tomorrow. He's very nervous, and keeps telling himself not to hate her.

Whether he's ready for the psychological strain or not, Charlie is running out of time to visit his mother and reconcile himself with his past.

September 27. It's been three days since Charlie saw his mother. He describes the visit.

This is the climactic chapter of the book: the moment in which Charlie confronts the cause of his sadness and sexual anxiety, and the source of his feelings of ambition and inadequacy.

Charlie drove to Marks Street, to the house where he grew up. He's amazed to see his mother sitting on the stoop outside, washing the windows. This reminds Charlie that Rose was always interested in what other people thought of her and her family. Rose sees Charlie staring at her, and irritably asks him if he wants something. Charlie is unable to speak. After a moment, he says, "Maaa." Rose gasps: she recognizes that it's Charlie, her son.

The reunion starts on an uncertain note. Merely being around his mother is enough to make Charlie regress from a genius to a child—he can barely speak. It's telling that Rose (unlike Matt) recognizes Charlie right away: even if she was cruel to her son, she spent more time thinking about him than anyone else, and, it would seem, continues to think about him decades later.

Rose looks at Charlie with panic and fear. As Charlie moves toward her, Rose tries to run away. She slams the door in Charlie's face, and Charlie bangs on the door window until it breaks and he cuts his hand on the glass. He manages to reach through the window and unlock the door, and then walks down the hall to his mother's room.

Charlie is so desperate to see his mother—so desperate for a moment of catharsis—that he's willing to break into her house. This scene also has some symbolic resonance: one could say that Charlie is "smashing the mirror," i.e., rejecting the narcissism and rigorous self-contemplation he's been engaged in for so many pages.

Charlie calls to Rose and begs her to talk to him. He explains that he's changed—he's no longer mentally disabled—and he just wants to see his family. Hesitantly, Rose opens the door. She takes Charlie to wash his bloody hand, sighing, "Charlie, Charlie, always getting yourself in a mess," as if Charlie were still a little boy. Suddenly, she says "Oh my God," and walks away from Charlie.

In this important scene, Rose's obsession with taking care of Charlie comes across as stubborn and oddly childish—even after Charlie tells her that he's become a genius, she refuses to treat him any differently. We realize that Rose's obsession with taking care of Charlie was as much a mark of her own neuroses and insecurities as it was a mark of Charlie's mental disability.

Charlie listens as Rose babbles about her son—a brilliant boy with a high IQ. Then, she claims that her sister is coming for dinner with a young guest—she has to clean their house. Charlie realizes that Rose doesn't really understand who he is. Suddenly, he hears her ask, "How could it be?" Charlie explains that he's had an operation that has made him brilliant and famous—"Thank God," Rose responds. She claims she's going to tell everyone about her son's new intelligence, including Uncle Herman (who's dead).

Slowly, we realize what's going on. Ironically, Rose, not Charlie, is now the one with a mental disability: she has dementia, and doesn't really understand what's going on (even though she's read about Charlie's operation at some point). Strangely, the fact that Rose has dementia clarifies the kind of person she is. Even after she loses her mind, she maintains her strong desire to be perceived as "normal." Rose is the embodiment of the Freudian "superego": her first question to herself is always, "What will other people think?" Previously, Charlie was afraid of his mother, but now, her obsession with public appearances comes across as pathetic and rather sad.

Charlie decides that he should go. Before he leaves, he gives Rose a copy of his report on the Algernon-Gordon Effect—proof that her son turned out to be someone important. Then, the front door opens—it's Norma, Charlie's sister.

It's a sign of Charlie's perceptiveness—and his pride—that he presents his study as proof that he turned out to be important. Charlie knows that Rose cares about other people's opinions, and now he's giving her concrete proof that he turned out to be successful.

Norma recognizes Charlie right away. She explains that Professor Nemur told her about Charlie's operation, and that she's been wanting to see Charlie for some time now. Rose had always told her that Charlie died in Warren, and she believed this until Nemur's visit. Norma offers to make Charlie some food. Together, they sit down and talk.

In Charlie's memories, Norma came across as a mean, self-absorbed girl. But it's now clear that this was mostly the result of a young girl growing up in a difficult environment, and she seems to have changed in her maturity.

Charlie notices that Norma owns a dog now, and this reminds him of the fight they had years ago. Norma apologizes to Charlie for being so unfriendly for so long. She explains that she always resented Charlie because their parents never punished him. In school, everyone laughed at Norma for being Charlie's brother. But she hates herself for resenting Charlie, and apologizes to him again and again. She admits that she's been feeling guilty for years—if it hadn't been for her, Rose wouldn't have sent Charlie away from home.

Even if Charlie can't quite confront his mother, he gets some much-needed closure with his sister. By confessing her feelings of resentment for Charlie, Norma proves that she wants a good relationship with her brother. One mark of Norma and Charlie's kinship is that they both suffer from a strong sense of guilt and shame: Charlie because of his mother's cruelty and the belief that his disability hurt his family, and Norma because of her own cruelty.

Norma insists that Charlie should stay with her family. Charlie shakes his head—he needs to travel, make some speeches, etc. But he promises to come back soon. He urges Norma to take good care of Rose. Norma is appalled that Charlie is leaving her so soon. She touches Charlie's hand. Abruptly, Rose shouts, "Don't touch her! Dirty mind!" and waves a knife at Charlie and Norma. Norma manages to take the knife out of Rose's hand. She tells Charlie that the sight of her mother with a knife reminds her of a dream she had years ago. Charlie doesn't tell her that this dream was probably real; i.e., that it's the same memory he still thinks about.

It's a mark of Charlie's progress in this scene that when Rose shouts, "Dirty mind!" he isn't the least bit frightened. By confronting the source of his problem—his domineering mother—Charlie gains more control over his own emotions. In Freudian terms, this is essentially Charlie resolving his "Oedipal complex," and moving past his sexual neuroses regarding his mother so that he can be in a healthy relationship with another woman. Another sign of Charlie's new maturity is that he chooses not to tell Norma about his memory of Rose waving the knife. It's subtle and ironic that Charlie recognizes that—sometimes, anyway—ignorance is bliss.

Charlie thinks about Rose's anger and hatred, and realizes that there's no point in hating her. He forgives his mother for threatening him and hating him for all these years. Calmly, he tells Norma that he'll see her soon, and leaves the house. As he walks away, he turns back, and thinks he sees a **little boy** staring at him from the window.

It's hard to gauge Charlie's behavior in this chapter. He clearly wants a resolution with his family, and yet he doesn't seem to want a real relationship with them. Perhaps the reason that he chooses to leave Norma so quickly is that he doesn't want to hurt her further down the line: but it could also be that he's essentially using them as "objects" (like he did with Fay) to cure his psychological problems. Even though Charlie has confronted the source of his trauma, he continues to hallucinate himself as a little boy: a sign of his impending regression to a childlike state.

PROGRESS REPORT 17

October 3. Charlie continues to lose his intelligence. He contemplates killing himself, but realizes that this would be foolish: he was happy enough when he was mentally disabled, and he will soon be mentally disabled again.

This logically makes sense, but it's also unclear how happy Charlie will be as intellectually disabled now that he has known life as a genius. "Disability" isn't really a disability unless one has known the "ability" and then lost it (like Charlie now has)—otherwise it's just whatever state the "disabled" person is used to and has always known.

Late at night, Charlie listens to records, irritating his neighbors. He's stopped playing the piano, and realizes that he doesn't enjoy the same kinds of music anymore. Furious, he smashes every record in his place.

Immediately after his surgery, Charlie couldn't stand his slow climb from disability to brilliance. Now that he's losing his mind, Charlie can't stand the agonizingly slow deterioration of his genius.

October 4. Charlie goes to a therapy session with Doctor Strauss. As he sits on the couch, he realizes that Strauss reminds him of his father Matt. Feeling bitter, he compares Strauss to a barber, "trimming" his patients' egos and ids (terms from Freudian psychology).

Charlie has many father figures in this book: Strauss, Burt, Nemur, etc., but Charlie is also his own *father figure—especially since he exists as "child-Charlie" as much as he does as "genius-Charlie." Here, Keyes implies as much by having Charlie ridicule Strauss.*

As Charlie sits on the couch, he tells Strauss about his hallucinations—he's been seeing a version of his **childhood self**. As Charlie talks, he has another hallucination, so vivid that he forgets Strauss is there. He imagines his "expanding spirit" moving through time and space. Then, unexpectedly, he feels himself shrinking back into a small, dark cave. Charlie struggles to escape the cave, but he can't.

Charlie's vision of the dark cave symbolizes the slow loss of intelligence he faces. Although he's depended on his mind to explore the mysteries of the universe, he now faces the agony of returning to his former state of ignorance. And yet it's also unclear whether or not this will be "agony" once he's actually ignorant again.

Charlie realizes that Doctor Strauss is standing over him, worried. Strauss tells Charlie that he's been hallucinating for some time now. He suggests that Charlie leave now—they can continue tomorrow. As he walks out, Charlie remembers the words of Plato: "The men of the cave would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes."

Charlie's dream parallels a famous passage from Plato's Republic, *about a wise man who escapes from a cave and sees "truth" in the form of bright sunlight. As Charlie interprets it, Plato's story is about the arbitrary nature of truth and enlightenment. Although Charlie has acquired a great deal of intelligence and wisdom, his former, mentally disabled self would regard most of this information as nonsensical.*

October 5. Charlie visits Professor Nemur and Burt to conduct more tests. He tries to solve **mazes**, and finds that he can't. As Charlie gets more frustrated, Burt apologizes for lashing out at Charlie at the party, and Charlie accepts his apology. Burt gives Charlie a Rorschach test. With great frustration, Charlie realizes that he doesn't remember how the test works anymore. Abruptly, Charlie gets up and tells Burt that he's leaving. He asks Burt to say "goodbye to everyone." Before Burt can reply, Charlie is gone.

Charlie becomes increasingly moody and testy as he loses his intelligence. Although he acquired new wisdom and patience after visiting his family, he now seems to be regressing in that as well (or else aggression is a side effect of his mental deterioration, as it was for Algernon). This suggests an important question: will Charlie be able to preserve any of his wisdom, even after he loses all his intelligence?

October 7. Charlie spends all his time alone in his room. He tries to read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but finds that he can't remember anything about it. He remembers his childhood, when his mother angrily tried to teach him how to read. Charlie begs to God, "Don't take it all away."

Milton's epic poem is about Adam and Eve's decision to eat from the tree of knowledge; an apt reminder of the supposed "tradeoff" between happiness and intelligence that Charlie has faced throughout the book. Charlie hasn't always been happy as a genius, but he's used his genius to help other people and reach a state of emotional enlightenment.

October 10. Charlie goes for walks late at night. One night, he can't remember where he lives, and a policeman has to take him home. He also meets a pimp, who offers him "a girl." Charlie gives the man ten dollars, and the man leaves, but never comes back. Charlie is humiliated.

Charlie is regressing, both intellectually and sexually. The strongest sign of his former, super-intelligent self is his strong sense of shame.

October 11. Charlie finds Alice asleep on his couch. Alice wakes up and explains that she wants to see as much of Charlie as possible. She points out that Charlie probably has the same IQ at her.

Charlie and Alice don't regard each other with condescension or disdain anymore—on the contrary, they can finally love one another as equals.

October 14. Charlie's mental state deteriorates quickly. He spends time with Alice, but gets angry easily. He listens to Stravinsky music and finds it slow and dull, despite the fact that he used to love Stravinsky. He wishes he could freeze time and live with Alice forever.

Charlie isn't as arrogant or self-absorbed as he used to be: even though he cares about keeping his intelligence, his sadness is rooted in love for Alice, not just love for himself.

October 17. Charlie begins to have hallucinations of his **childhood self**, looking out through a window. He fears being sent back to the Warren State Home.

Charlie's childhood self is like an "angel of death," reminding Charlie of his inescapable fate.

October 18. Charlie rereads his own paper on the Algernon-Gordon Effect and finds that he can't understand any of it. He's irritable all day long, even when Alice is kind to him. He imagines that Alice is humoring him—deliberately ignoring his mental deterioration. This infuriates Charlie. He wishes he could enjoy his time with Alice, but can't.

Charlie descends into paranoia and fear. He loves Alice, but finds himself unable to express his love. Again Charlie's irritation and anger remind us of Algernon's aggression late in his life.

October 19. Charlie loses some of his motor control, and he trips and drops things constantly. His only pleasure is television. Alice tries to cheer him up, but this only makes Charlie angrier. He realizes that he can longer read any language but English.

Charlie continues to lose his IQ as well as his emotional intelligence: he can't interact with other people, or understand complex writing.

October 21. Alice and Charlie have a fight. Alice claims that she can't live with Charlie when he lives in such a messy place. She reminds Charlie that before he had his operation, he never wallowed in self-pity, nor did he lash out at people for no reason. Charlie has lost something that he had before the operation: something that made everyone respect him, even when he was mentally disabled.

Alice again shows her wisdom and emotional maturity here, and seems to deliver Keyes' verdict on the matter—there is a crucial part of humanity that is based in decency, kindness, and dignity, and this has nothing to do with one's IQ. Charlie used to have this quality, but he seems to have lost it amidst his tumultuous mental changes.

Charlie can't stand listening to Alice. He orders her to leave immediately. He accuses Alice of pushing him, just like his mother. When Alice denies this, Charlie yells for Alice to leave. She leaves the apartment, weeping.

In this heartbreaking scene, it finally seems clear that Charlie is regressing emotionally as well as intellectually. He's not just losing his intelligence, but also his wisdom.

October 25. Charlie tries to stave off his mental decline by teaching himself new things. He goes to the library and tries to read as much as he can—even when he doesn't understand the books.

Charlie's struggle to remain intelligent is both heartbreaking and inspiring. The fact that we know Charlie won't succeed also gives his attempts a tragic nobility.

Charlie sees Fay in his apartment building, but she avoids Charlie as much as possible—she seems frightened of him. Charlie also gets a visit from Mrs. Mooney, his landlady. She brings him soup and other food. Charlie knows that either Alice or Doctor Strauss has arranged for Mrs. Mooney to take care of him.

At the beginning of the novel, Charlie depended entirely on other people's generosity. Now, we've returned to where we started.

November 1. Charlie tries to read as much as he can, but he gets frustrated with himself for not understanding the books. He reads "a book about a man who thought he was a knight." Although he recognizes that the story has a "hidden meaning," he can't understand what the hidden meaning is. This makes him angry, because he knows that he used to understand.

We can deduce that the book Charlie reads is, appropriately enough, Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes—a novel in which a man loses his mind after reading too many books.

November 2. Charlie spends his evenings watching a woman in another building. Every night she takes a bath, and Charlie enjoys watching her.

Charlie still clings on to some sense of sexuality, but it's becoming cruder and more immature.

November 5. Charlie spends all day sitting in his apartment. Mrs. Mooney brings him food and suggests that he's being lazy. Charlie tries to read books, but has to look words up in the dictionary. He puts flowers on Algernon's grave, even though Mrs. Mooney finds this silly. Finally, Charlie tries to visit Fay, but she tells him to leave her alone.

Although Charlie is becoming less intelligent, he seems to be more in touch with his innate sense of decency again. This is symbolized by putting flowers on Algernon's grave, the motif that also gives the book its title.

November 9. Charlie gets headaches. His TV is broken, and the woman who takes baths at night pulls down her window shade, so that Charlie can no longer watch her.

The woman prevents Charlie from "peeping" at her any longer—a subtle symbol of the fact that Charlie is quickly losing all sense of sexuality.

November 10. Mrs. Mooney sends "a strange doctor" to see Charlie. Charlie tells the doctor that he used to be a genius. Charlie gets annoyed with this doctor, since he clearly doesn't believe Charlie.

As we come full circle, Keyes suffuses his book with dramatic irony once again. We know that Charlie used to be a genius, even if the doctor doesn't.

November 11. Alice and Doctor Strauss visit Charlie, but he refuses to let them into his apartment. Later on, Mrs. Mooney visits Charlie, and suggests that Charlie get a job. Charlie remembers his job at the bakery, but doesn't want to go back. Nevertheless, he knows that he needs a job, since he doesn't want to depend on other people—as he says, "I wont take charety from anybody."

Charlie's fundamental characteristic is his pride and ambition, and we can see this very clearly here. Charlie refuses to accept charity from anyone: he wants to feel competent and self-sufficient, even when he's not.

Novemerb 15. Charlie looks back on his old progress reports, but can't understand most of the words. He also buys pornographic magazines from the drugstore, but when he has "funny dreams" about the women in them, he decides not to read them anymore.

Charlie has lost his intelligence, his sexuality, and his curiosity. The question remains: has he kept anything from his time as a genius?

November 16. Alice visits Charlie, but Charlie refuses to see her. This makes Alice cry, and she explains that she's the one who's been sending Charlie money and food. Charlie decides that he needs to get a job immediately. He prays, "don't let me forget how to reed and rite."

In this heartbreaking section, Charlie reveals that he doesn't really remember his time with Alice. Although Charlie once felt sincere romantic love for Alice, he can't remember this feeling any longer. Keyes also shows Charlie's regression through the deterioration of his spelling and grammar.

November 18. Charlie goes back to the bakery and asks Mr. Donner for his old job. Mr. Donner sadly agrees, saying, "Charlie, you got guts." Charlie resumes work as a janitor. He tells himself that even if his coworkers make fun of him, there was a time when he was smarter than they were.

Here, we see that Charlie does, *in fact, remember something from his time as a genius. He's gained a new perspective on life, and knows how to see the bright side of things, even when people make fun of him. As Mr. Donner says, he has guts.*

At work, a new hire named Klaus mocks Charlie, daring him, "Say something smart." Charlie tries to ignore Klaus, but Klaus grabs Charlie by the arm and threatens to hurt him. This makes Charlie cry and soil himself. Joe Carp angrily pushes Klaus away from Charlie, saying that Charlie is a "good guy." Later, Joe and Gimpy tell Charlie they're going to convince Mr. Donner to fire Klaus. Charlie tells them that they shouldn't fire Klaus—Klaus has a wife and a kid. Charlie says this because he remembers the experience of being fired. Gimpy nods and tells Charlie that Charlie "has friends here."

Another suggestion that Charlie's time as a genius wasn't a waste arrives in this section, when Klaus tries to bully Charlie, and Charlie still stands up for him. It seems that Joe and Gimpy have also gained some wisdom and maturity over the course of the novel: their experience with Charlie has taught them to be kinder and more accepting of their intellectual "inferiors." They now protect Charlie from bullies instead of bullying him.

November 21. Charlie goes to Miss (Alice) Kinnian's class at the adult learning center, forgetting that he's not in the class anymore. Alice begins to cry and runs out of the classroom.

It would seem that Charlie has forgotten almost everything about his love affair with Alice—as suggested by the fact that he no longer calls her Alice, but "Miss Kinnian," as he did at the book's beginning.

Charlie decides that he's going to go to the Warren Home. He doesn't want people feeling sorry for him—not his coworkers, and not Miss Kinnian. He tells Miss Kinnian, "If you ever reed this Miss Kinnian dont be sorry for me." Charlie explains that he got to meet his family and learn about science, so he doesn't regret the operation at all.

In this section, Keyes provides his most compelling answer to the question, "Was Charlie's experience as a genius all for nothing?" Contrary to what we might think, Charlie has *gained something from his time as a brilliant man. He's reached a resolution with his childhood trauma, has experienced the pleasures of discovery, creativity, and artistic appreciation, and has been able to potentially help many others as well.*

Charlie remembers a book he read when he was intelligent. He thinks about the man who read the book, and imagines him "from the window."

Charlie's situation is now tragically reversed. As a genius, he had visions of himself as a mentally disabled man or child, but now Charlie can only remember his time as a genius via a hallucination of a man with a book, separated from him by a "window"—as was the case with his earlier visions as well.

Charlie says goodbye to Miss Kinnian, Doctor Strauss, and everyone else. He asks Professor Nemur not to be such a grouch, and points out that it's easier to make friends when you let people laugh at you. He also asks that someone put more flowers on Algernon's grave.

Keyes steers his novel toward a bittersweet conclusion, as Charlie seems to return to "blissful ignorance"—bitter because he's ignorant, but sweet because he's blissful. And yet Charlie has gained something from his experiences that he still retains: a sense of respect, empathy, and wisdom, and memories of connections to many other people. All this is ultimately represented by his request for "flowers for Algernon," as Charlie still feels a sense of connection to the mouse, and retains a kindness and empathy that has nothing to do with his IQ.

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