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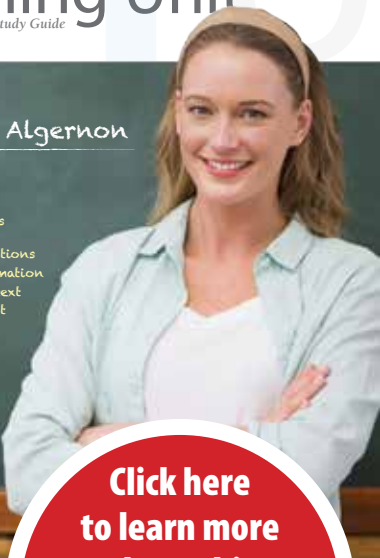
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



**Flowers for Algernon**

by Daniel Keyes

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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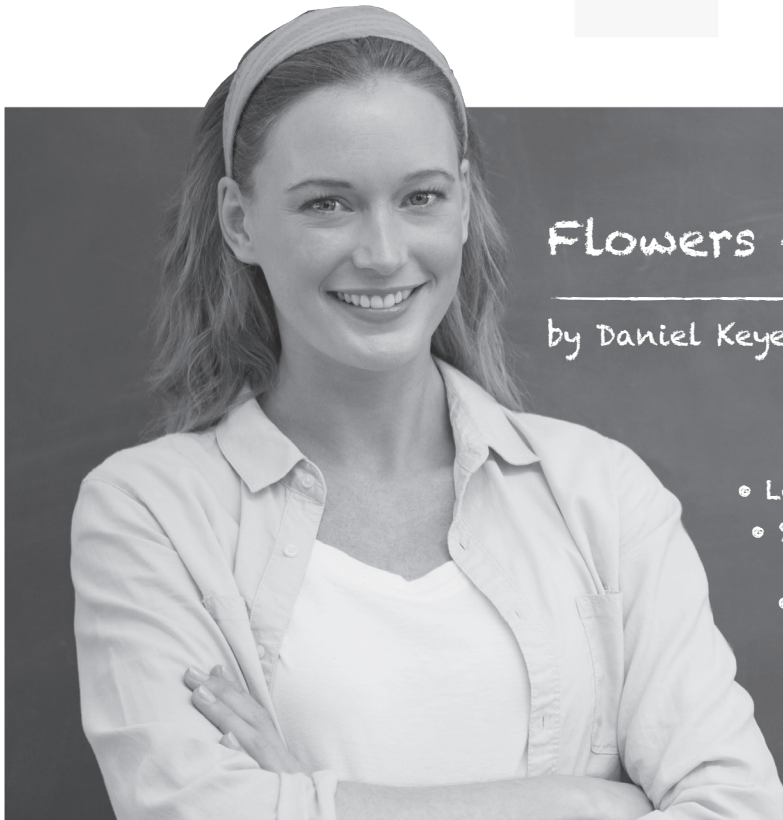
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# Literature Teaching Unit

*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



## Flowers for Algernon

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Item No: 201017

# Flowers for Algernon

## Note to the Teacher

This novel is a collection of progress reports, almost a diary, written by the main character, who is the subject of an experiment designed to increase human intelligence. The novel, an enlargement of a popular science fiction short story, also written by Daniel Keyes, critically evaluates the hypothesis that intelligent humans are better, happier people and lead better lives than their less-intelligent counterparts.

All references come from the Bantam Books edition of *Flowers for Algernon*, published 1975.

There are various references to sex and sexual behavior in *Flowers for Algernon*; they are dealt with sensitively and are an essential part of the story.

# Flowers for Algernon

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student should be able to:

1. distinguish between first-person narrative and third-person narrative and comment on the advantages of each.
2. support that *Flowers for Algernon* is a loss-of-innocence novel by referring to incidents in the text.
3. trace how Charlie's style of writing changes as his intelligence both grows and decreases.
4. recognize the following literary devices and point out examples of each in the story:
  - allusion
  - foreshadowing
  - flashback
  - euphemism
  - symbol
5. find examples that lead to the conclusion that this is a science fiction novel.
6. define "symbol" and discuss how light and a knife are used as symbols in the story.
7. comment on the significance of the title and how the title applies to the theme that making a lasting contribution to the betterment of mankind may validate one's life.
8. discuss the issue of human experimentation as it applies to the main character.
9. list the qualities that Charlie believes make a human life valuable:
  - in the beginning of the story before the operation,
  - at the height of his intelligence,
  - when he accepts his ultimate fate.
10. point out examples of metaphors found in the novel.
11. discuss the following generalizations about intelligence:
  - It is better to have friends than to be intelligent.
  - The more intelligent people become, the more problems they will have.

# Flowers for Algernon

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Support the idea that this novel is a coming-of-age book even though the main character is thirty-two years old.
2. This story was originally published as a short story. What do you think may have been added to make it a novel?
3. Why does Charlie's doctor think it is important for him to remember childhood?
4. Why do you think this story is told in first-person narration, revealing to the reader the inner thoughts and motivations of only one character?
5. Do you think it is ethical for the doctors to experiment on Charlie? How do they justify their decision to operate? What does the mentally-advanced Charlie think about his role as a laboratory animal?
6. What emotions do you, as the reader, feel when Charlie's spelling begins to deteriorate and his diary entries get shorter? At what point in the story does the reader understand that he will not retain his increased intelligence?
7. Support or refute the following statement by supplying evidence from the novel: A knife symbolizes the power that someone close to Charlie has to hurt him.
8. What does the light in the cave represent to Charlie?
9. Find support in the book for this statement: After Charlie becomes aware that his intelligence will fade, he is more afraid of wasting his life than he is of dying.
10. Support or refute the idea that *Flowers for Algernon* suggests that the quality of a person's life is not determined by intellectual level but by personal connection to other humans.
11. What is the "scientific method"? Are the proposed scientific advancements in the novel believable and interesting?
12. Why does Charlie insist on burying Algernon and wanting flowers on the mouse's grave?
13. Relate the novel's title to a major theme in the book.

11. Find an example of an allusion. Explain how it pertains to Charlie.

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12. What subject does Miss Kinnian try to teach Charlie?

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## PROGRESS REPORT 9

### VOCABULARY

**bother** – to confuse or annoy  
**ignorant** – lacking knowledge  
**outstrip** – go further than

1. Why are Frank and Joe mad at Charlie?

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2. What in the April 3 report points to Charlie's growing awareness?

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3. What incident explains Charlie's innocence and lack of understanding about other people.

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9. Which sexual memory is probably at the root of Charlie's problem? Why?

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## PROGRESS REPORT 12

### VOCABULARY

**clarity** – coherence, clear understanding  
**docile** – submissive, accepting of control  
**gratitude** – thankfulness, appreciation  
**insufferable** – unpleasant or annoying  
**ironic** – opposite of the expected  
**labyrinth** – maze  
**patronizing** – condescending  
**preliminary** – in preparation for something  
**undermined** – weakened

1. How has “language [become] a barrier instead of a pathway”?

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2. Describe how Charlie's “power of recall” is growing beyond the limits of most people.

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3. Why does Norma not want to share a dog with Charlie?

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