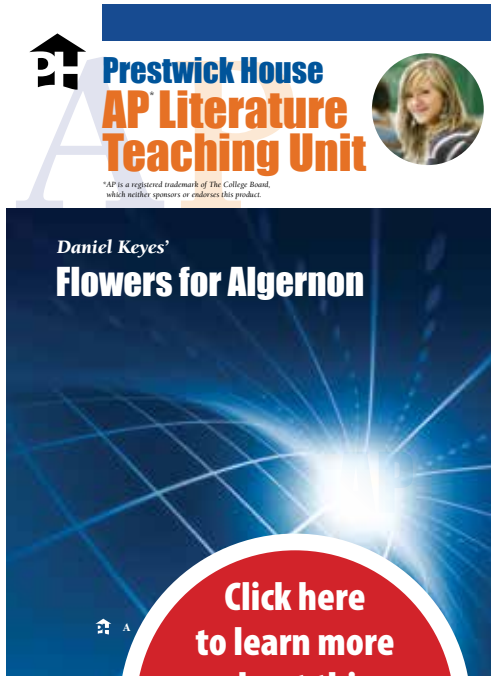




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Teaching Unit

# Flowers for Algernon

by Daniel Keyes

written by Kay Hampson



**Prestwick House**

Item No. 305340

# Flowers for Algernon

## Objectives

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

1. support the following major themes in the novel with evidence from the text
  - a. a tension exists between the emotions and intellect
  - b. the past has the power to affect the present
  - c. society mistreats and misunderstands the mentally challenged
2. identify significant incidents and comments that signal the author's themes.
3. analyze Keyes's techniques of character's development
4. examine the use of the following narrative techniques and devices:
  - a. the journal format
  - b. the changes in Charlie's use of language
  - c. flashbacks
5. explain changes in tone in the novel
6. discuss Keyes's use of sexuality to reflect emotional growth
7. analyze the use of foreshadowing, irony, simile, metaphor, and allusion in the book
8. trace the development and evolution of symbols in the text, particularly the window and the knife
9. trace the development of the connection between Charlie and Algernon and explain how it contributes to the text as a whole
10. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam
12. offer a close reading of *Flowers for Algernon* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel

## Lecture Notes

### THE HISTORY OF *FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON*

*Flowers for Algernon* was originally a short story. Daniel Keyes, who left his position as associate editor at Marvel Comics to teach high-school English, used his experience working with special-needs students to write “Flowers for Algernon.” The story was initially submitted to the magazine *Galaxy Science Fiction* in 1958, but when the editor asked Keyes to alter the ending—having Charlie retain his intelligence and marry Alice Kinnian—Keyes refused. “Flowers for Algernon,” with Keyes’s intended ending, was soon after published in the April 1959 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. It was an instant success, and it received the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1960.

Between 1961 and 1965, Keyes expanded the story into a novel and received an offer of publication from Doubleday Publishers. However, like *Galaxy Science Fiction*, Doubleday wanted Keyes to give the story a happy ending, and Keyes—who still maintained that such an ending was not appropriate for the novel—once again refused. After returning the publisher’s advance, Keyes sent the book to five other publishers; each one rejected the book. However, Harcourt, Inc. finally agreed to publish the novel without changes, and since its initial publication, *Flowers for Algernon* has not gone out of print. The novel won the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 1966, and in 2000, Daniel Keyes was presented with the Science Fiction Writers of America Author Emeritus Award.

### SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction is a genre that is difficult to define, primarily because it encompasses several subgenres and often overlaps with other categories of literature, television, and film. Generally speaking, however, the plots of science fiction works involve advanced, often fantastic, scientific research and innovations. These may include time travel, space shuttles and flying machines, advanced information technology, machines with artificial intelligence, and bioengineering. The settings in the science fiction genre also vary, and the story may be set on present-day earth, an alternate reality, outer space, a dystopian community, or a post-apocalyptic world. The genre is so broad that it can encompass novels and films widely recognized as science fiction—such as H.G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* and George Lucas’s *Star Wars*—as well as those that may be classified primarily under another genre, such as George Orwell’s *1984* and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.

*Flowers for Algernon* was written as a work of science fiction, and Keyes intended for it to be published in the *Galaxy Science Fiction* magazine. The novel examines the implications of using scientific principles to study human beings: How can a great disparity between the level of emotional and intellectual intelligence be detrimental? Is an individual with a mental disability considered less human than a person with normal awareness and mental aptitude? What role does sexual development play in an individual’s life? How important is social interactivity in an individual’s life?

# Flowers for Algernon

## progris riport 1 march 3

1. What is immediately noticeable about the form and structure of this novel?

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2. Who is Charlie Gordon?

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3. Judging by this first entry, what is Charlie’s personality like? What seems to be the main focus of his life?

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4. For what purpose does the doctor need Charlie?

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5. Why does Charlie hope that Dr. Strauss will use him?

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6. Why does a “journal” work as the form for this story?

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**March 28 – 31**

1. Why does the author have Charlie look up the word “subconscious”? What is the significance of this particular word?

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2. What victory does Charlie achieve? Why is this significant to the plot? To Charlie’s character development?

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3. What does Charlie’s response to his victory suggest about his character?

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4. How have Charlie’s feelings toward Algernon changed?

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5. How does Charlie’s relationship with Algernon mirror what he begins to remember about his family’s dynamic?

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6. What does Charlie’s evaluation of *Robinson Crusoe* reveal about his values? Why would he empathize with Crusoe?

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**May 15**

1. How have Charlie's thoughts about the discussions in the college cafeteria changed?

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2. How have his thoughts regarding the professor and doctor changed?

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**May 17**

1. What in this passage further explores the theme of emotions versus intellect?

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2. Who is standing behind the tree watching Alice and Charlie? Why might he be there?

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3. Why does Charlie hear buzzing and experience the sensation of prickly legs and numb fingers?

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**PROGRESS REPORT 14**

**June 15**

1. Summarize the news article mentioning Charlie’s sister.

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2. How does Keyes’s choice of words to describe Charlie’s mother suggest the type of relationship she and Charlie had?

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3. What was the difference between Norma and Charlie when it came to avoiding their mother’s wrath?

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4. Interpret Charlie’s use of the word “cathedral” in describing his relationship with his mother.

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5. Interpret Charlie’s comparison of Norma to a flower.

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**June 29**

1. Why has Charlie become preoccupied with work?

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**June 30**

1. How does Fay's attitude about the parking tickets reflect Charlie's new attitude about life?

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2. How does Fay have a positive effect on Charlie's development?

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**July 5**

1. How does Fay's anecdote about the stolen money characterize her?

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5. How does Charlie justify his ingratitude to Professor Nemur?

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6. How does Keyes use language to reveal that the original Charlie is manifesting himself while Charlie is in a drunken stupor?

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7. Interpret the scene with the bathroom mirror.

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8. How is this section a turning point in the novel?

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