

# **Flowers for Algernon Book Notes**

## **Flowers for Algernon by Daniel Keyes**

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## Author/Context

A native New Yorker and hero of the science-fiction genre, author Daniel Keyes was born in Brooklyn in 1923. He studied psychology and literature, earning his undergraduate and masters degrees from Brooklyn College. Keyes subsequently built a colorful résumé of odd jobs, including photographer, merchant seaman, ship's purser, fiction editor, high school teacher, and English professor at Ohio University.

Keyes first conceived *Flowers for Algernon* as a short story in 1959, for which he won the 1960 Hugo Award for Best Novelette of the Year from the World Science Fiction Society. In a 1997 interview with *Locus Magazine*, Keyes recalled clashing with his editors over the story's tragic ending:

*"[An important editor named] Horace came in from the other room and said, 'Dan, this is a good story, but I'm gonna tell you how to make it a great story: Charlie does not lose his intelligence; he remains a super-genius, and he and Alice fall in love, they get married, and live happily ever after.'..."*

Going against his editor's advice proved rewarding, for the story of Charlie's mental rise and fall pulled on the public's heartstrings and achieved enduring success. The story came to the small screen in a 1966 televised play, "The Two Worlds of Charlie Gordon," was expanded into a full-length novel in 1966, and inspired the 1968 film, "Charly," for which Cliff Robertson snagged an Oscar for best-actor. Of his own story, Keyes wrote in the *Library Journal*:

*"Flowers for Algernon is the story of a man's inner journey from a world of retardation to a world of high intelligence. Charlie Gordon lives through comic, sad, and ironic experiences as he emerges from mental darkness, through the various stages of perceiving and understanding levels of knowledge, into the light of complex awareness of the world, of people, and of himself."* (Small, 251)

As scholar Robert Scholes notes, *Flowers for Algernon* transcends the genre of science fiction through its emotional mass appeal. "This tale is beautifully problematic," he says. "It conveys to us the deprivation involved in mental retardation as no amount of reports or exhortations could possibly do it." (57) Echoing Scholes' praise, critic Robert Small, Jr. commends the novel's journalistic style, saying "...the story as told through Charlie's own journal, effectively carries out one of the main qualities that proponents of literature claim for it, immediacy of experience, that is, empathetic power." (252)

Daniel Keyes' acclaim, however, was not universal. Some critics found his novel pornographic, sexually explicit, and irreligious. Consequently, censors kept *Flowers for Algernon* on the top of their "banned books" list for years (Small, 254). Though best known for *Algernon*, Keyes' prolific body of published works also includes novels *The Touch* (1968), *The Fifth Sally* (1980) and *Unveiling Claudia* (1986), the non-fiction true-crime novels *The Minds of Billy Milligan* (1981) and *The Milligan Wars* (1986), many

short fictional pieces, and the recent memoir, *Algernon, Charlie and I : A Writer's Journey* (2000).

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Scholes, Robert. *Structural Fabulation*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.

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# Plot Summary

Narrated through a series of first-hand progress reports, *Flowers for Algernon* traces the mental and emotional development of Charlie Gordon, a retarded young man who becomes the first human test-subject for an ambitious brain experiment. Author Daniel Keyes stylistically portrays Charlie's startling progress and eventual decline through the ever-changing sentence structure, spelling, and vocabulary of Charlie's journal entries.

Charlie begins his report on March third, expressing hope that Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur will choose him for an operation capable of raising his IQ to that of an intellectual superman. Miss Kinnian, Charlie's reading teacher at the Beekman College Center for Retarded Adults, recommended him for the experimental surgery. Charlie is good-natured and hard-working, and he wants more than anything "to be smart."

Impressed by Charlie's motivation, Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur decide to use Charlie in the experiment. At the laboratory, Charlie undergoes inkblot personality tests administered by graduate student Burt Selden. He also runs mazes against Algernon, a super-smart white mouse. Algernon is the first animal to have retained his artificially increased intelligence through Nemur and Strauss' experiment. After surgery, the doctors give Charlie a strange teaching machine. The odd television set repeats words throughout the night, implanting knowledge and stimulating memories as Charlie sleeps.

Progress is very slow at first, but soon Charlie beats Algernon at the mazes and gets a promotion at Donner's Bakery, where he works. He also learns spelling and punctuation, becomes interested in philosophy, politics, and the symphony. Soon he moves on to advanced calculus and ancient languages. Charlie reads and comprehends everything he lays his hands on; he has become a genius. This intellectual boom is not completely positive, however. With his new awareness comes the realization that many of his so-called friends have mocked him all his life. Vivid memories of childhood abuse remind Charlie that even his own mother was ashamed of him.

Charlie falls in love with Alice Kinnian, his old reading teacher, but he panics whenever he contemplates intimacy. During therapy, Dr. Strauss explains that Charlie is sexually immature and not yet ready for a relationship. Lonely and depressed by vivid dreams and painful memories of his family, Charlie stops trusting people. He becomes an arrogant "big-shot." Though a genius, Dr. Strauss believes that Charlie remains emotionally retarded. Charlie's breaking point comes at the International Psychological Convention in Chicago when Professor Nemur treats Charlie like an inanimate test subject. The angered genius disrupts the convention, steals Algernon from his cage and flies back to New York alone.

At the peak of his intellectual powers, Charlie realizes that there is a flaw in Nemur's experimental calculations. In a report entitled *The Algernon-Gordon Effect: A Study of Structure and Function of Increased Intelligence*, Charlie explains that "Artificially-induced intelligence deteriorates at a rate of time directly proportional to the quantity of the increase." Algernon becomes erratic and dies. Devastated, Charlie realizes that his

own mental deterioration is inevitable. With his remaining time, Charlie visits his family and has a tender love affair with Alice. Tragically, Charlie's regression proves nearly complete. Unable to bear everyone's pity, Charlie plans to go away to the Warren State Home and Training School. He closes his progress report on November 21<sup>st</sup>, urging everyone not to feel guilty and reminding his friends to lay some flowers on Algernon's small backyard grave.

# Major Characters

**Charlie Gordon:** Charlie Gordon is a thirty-two year old retarded man. He works at Donner's Bakery and attends reading classes at the Beekman College Center for Retarded Adults. Recognizing Charlie as a hard-working and friendly young man, doctors at Beekman College choose him for an experimental brain operation that raises his IQ of 68 to that of a genius. Charlie's intellectual progress is astounding; he learns obscure languages and performs complex mathematical equations. This intelligence comes with a price, however. Charlie's stimulated memory allows him to recall painful abuse from family and friends. He becomes bitter, arrogant, and lonely, and his 'emotional retardation' interferes with his love for Alice Kinnian. Tragically, Charlie discovers a flaw in the experiment and he realizes that his mental regression is inevitable. With little time remaining, Charlie visits his estranged family and spends time with Alice. At the end, Charlie commits himself to the dismal Warren State Home and Training School.

**Dr. Strauss:** A psychiatrist and neurosurgeon, Dr. Strauss is Professor Nemur's partner in the experiment. Strauss performs the surgery and conducts Charlie's therapy sessions. He recognizes that Charlie's intellectual growth has outstripped his emotional development, and he worries that Professor Nemur's experimental results are premature.

**Professor Nemur:** Professor Nemur is the egotistical mastermind of the experiment. Nemur often aggravates Charlie by referring to him as non-human before the experiment. The professor arrogantly believes that he created Charlie, and that Charlie should be grateful. As Burt explains, Professor Nemur may seem conceited, but he is really just an ordinary man attempting to help mankind. Furthermore, Nemur's home life is difficult. His wife, Bertha Nemur, is a controlling woman who pushed him into the premature presentation at the Chicago convention.

**Alice Kinnian:** Alice is a young, beautiful, brown-haired reading teacher at the Beekman College Center for Retarded Adults. She recommends Charlie for the experimental brain surgery because she considers him good-natured and hard-working. When Charlie's intellect progresses, Alice and Charlie's platonic, teacher-student relationship becomes a deep and passionate connection. Charlie loves Alice, but his adolescent subconscious interferes with their intimacy. At his peak intellect, Charlie's arrogance makes Alice feel self-conscious and inferior. However, when Charlie's mind begins to regress, the couple reconnects and consummates their love. Alice stays with Charlie during his mental regression until he angrily sends her away.

**Algernon:** A small white mouse who is the first animal test subject to have retained his artificially-increased intelligence. Charlie and Algernon run mazes in the Beekman laboratory under Burt Selden's supervision. Charlie identifies with the mouse, especially when it becomes apparent that the experiment is flawed and mental regression is inevitable. Algernon becomes erratic, listless and forgetful. The mouse eventually dies, and Charlie buries him under a bouquet of wildflowers in the backyard.



## Minor Characters

**Burt Selden :** A psychology graduate student at Beckman College. He administers the Rorschach test and conducts races between Charlie and Algernon through the maze. At the psychology convention in Chicago, Burt disapproves of Charlie's overly harsh criticism of Nemur and Strauss. He tells Charlie that scientists are ordinary men attempting the extraordinary, and he advises Charlie to be more tolerant.

**Uncle Herman:** Charlie's Uncle Herman took custody of the young boy when Rose Gordon threatened to send him to the Warren State Home and Training School. Herman secured work for Charlie in his best friend's bakery before he died.

**Rose Gordon:** A meticulous, bird-like woman, Charlie's mother was cruel to her retarded young son. Before the birth of her normal child, Norma, Rose constantly tried to change Charlie. Denying his retardation, Rose brought Charlie to numerous doctors and forced him into normal schools. Her constant criticism, sharp slaps, and emotional neglect often led Charlie to wet his pants in terror. After Norma's birth, Rose Gordon's attitude switched to aversion. In a particularly painful memory, Charlie recalls how Rose pulled out a knife and threatened to harm him unless he was sent immediately to the Warren institution. Charlie's drive to become smart results largely from his mother's constant pushing and rejection. When he realizes the inevitability of his mental regression, Charlie visits Rose in his old childhood home. He tries explain that he is not retarded; that an experiment made him smart and Rose can finally be proud of him. Somewhat senile, Rose does not understand. In a bizarre reenactment of the past, Rose threatens her son with a kitchen knife and Charlie leaves the house in tears.

**Matt Gordon:** Charlie's father, who always defended and accepted him as he was, unlike Rose Gordon. During Charlie's childhood, the high cost of Charlie's phony medical visits prevents Matt, a salesman, from accomplishing his dream of opening a barber shop. Later, acting on a tip from the newspaper, Charlie visits Matt at Gordons Barber Shop in the Bronx, but does not reveal his identity to his father.

**Norma Gordon:** Charlie's sister and Rose Gordon's only pride and joy. As a child, Norma resented having a retarded brother. When Charlie indirectly ruined her chances for getting a dog, Norma rejected her brother and treated him cruelly. When familial permission is required for using Charlie in the experiment, the Beekman doctors contact Norma. Later, when Charlie visits his childhood home, Norma is surprisingly happy to see him. Matured and sensitive, Norma realizes that Charlie was sent away because of Rose's concern for her welfare. Norma begs Charlie to live with them in the house; times have been tough and Norma needs her big brother's help.

**Joe Carp:** Joe Carp and Frank Reilly taunt Charlie at the bakery, but Charlie thinks his friends are simply laughing because they like him. A mean-spirited jokester, Joe constantly concocts plans to humiliate Charlie. Frank and Joe get Charlie drunk at a bar and then ditch him, they try to make him look foolish by making him work the complicated dough mixer on April Fool's Day, and Joe trips Charlie on the dance floor at

a party. Charlie realizes that Joe and Frank are not his friends; they are stupid people who mock the less-fortunate to make themselves feel superior.

**Frank Reilly:** A jerky coworker at the Bakery who joins Joe Carp in making fun of Charlie. Frank Reilly is a fast talker and ladies man who follows Joe's lead in humiliating Charlie.

**Gimpy:** Gimpy is a club-footed baker in Mr. Donner's bakery. He often defends Charlie and shows him kindness. Charlie remembers how Gimpy compassionately rewarded him a shiny good-luck piece even though he failed to learn how to make rolls correctly. With his increased intelligence, Charlie makes the astonishing discovery that Gimpy has been stealing from Mr. Donner by undercharging regular customers and pocketing the change. What is worse, Charlie realizes that Gimpy used him as an unwitting accomplice during deliveries. Charlie implies that he will tell Mr. Donner about the theft only if it continues, and Gimpy bitterly gets the hint.

**Mr. Donner:** Mr. Donner promised Herman, his best friend and Charlie's uncle, that Charlie would always have a place to work in his bakery; he would never allow Charlie to be sent away to the Warren State Home. Donner is a kind-hearted man and a fair boss. When Charlie's unexplained intelligence and peculiar behavior frightens his coworkers, Mr. Donner is forced to fire him from the bakery. During Charlie's tragic regression, however, Mr. Donner kindly takes him back.

**Fanny Birden:** A sympathetic cake decorator at Donner's Bakery who defends Charlie against their coworkers' cruel wisecracks. Years ago, Fanny referred Charlie to the Beekman Center for Retarded Adults when she learned of his desire to read and write.

**Dr. Guarino:** A fat, balding quack doctor who performs phony procedures and cheats patients out of their money. Guarino straps Charlie to a blinking, buzzing machine weekly, claiming that repeated sessions will increase his intelligence. Young Charlie becomes so upset that he wets his pants. Rose Gordon, desperate to make her son normal, forces Charlie to continue

## Objects/Places

**Progress Report:** According to Dr. Strauss' instructions, Charlie must record everything he thinks and remembers in these journal entries. The evolving sentence structure, spelling, and vocabulary of Charlie's first-hand reports exhibit his startling progress and eventual decline throughout the experiment. The Beekman doctors take photographs of the reports and read them to monitor Charlie's state of mind. When life becomes more complex for the emotional genius, however, Charlie decides to keep his progress reports private.

**Beekman College Center for Retarded Adults:** An old schoolhouse that has been used by the Beekman University clinic to provide special classes for the handicapped. On Fanny Birken's suggestion, Charlie registers for reading classes there and meets Miss Kinnian, his teacher. At the height of his intellectual powers, Charlie revisits the Center and disgusts Alice with his arrogant attitude. Finally, when his regression nears completion, Charlie forgets that he is no longer in Alice's class. He shows up at the Center and Miss Kinnian bursts into tears.

**Donner's Bakery:** Charlie works as a janitor in Mr. Donner's bakery. His uncle Herman, Mr. Donner's best friend, got him the job. Young Charlie loves the warm, comforting smells of the warm pastries, and he thinks that his mocking coworkers are actually his friends.

**Rorschach test:** A psychological personality test in which a person is asked to describe what he sees in a series of 10 inkblots. The test administrator gauges the subject's response to form, color, location, and content, and then attempts to describe the subject's personality by comparing scores to established norms.

**Maze:** Charlie and Algernon run mazes in the Beekman laboratory under Burt Selden's supervision. The maze administers a small electrical shock when Algernon makes a wrong turn, and it rewards him with food when he finds the solution. The mouse is too fast for Charlie at first, but when his intelligence begins to increase, he beats Algernon easily. When Charlie hijacks Algernon from the Chicago psychology convention, he buys an apartment and sets up a three-dimensional maze for Algernon's continued practice and mental exercise. Fay humorously calls the maze 'modern art with a living element.' When Algernon's behavior becomes erratic, he refuses to run the maze; he slams himself against the walls and becomes listless and forgetful.

**Warren State Home and Training School:** The gray, hopeless institution which houses retarded children and adults. Charlie's mother threatened to send him to Warren as a child, but Uncle Herman rescued him from the dismal institution. Charlie learns that the Beekman doctors arranged for him to be sent to Warren in the event of the experiment's failure. When mental regression seems probable, Charlie visits the Warren State Home on a drizzly day. The overworked staff, vacant expressions, disinfectant smell, and affection-starved boys depress him. When Charlie's mental depletion occurs, he goes to Warren to avoid everyone's pity.



**Lucky rabbit's foot:** When Charlie's IQ is low, he clings to superstitious good-luck pieces like his rabbit's foot, horseshoe, and lucky penny. He keeps these good luck charms with him during his operation. Later, when the experiment fails, Charlie wonders if the loss of his lucky rabbit's foot caused his mental regression.

**Welberg Foundation:** The foundation that funds Nemur and Strauss' experiment and later supports Charlie's individual research project. Professor Nemur concludes his research prematurely because he wants to impress his Welberg foundation colleagues .

**Teaching Machine:** An odd, television-shaped set that repeats words throughout the night. It implants knowledge and stimulates memories as Charlie sleeps. More often, however, the set keeps Charlie awake and makes him cranky.

**Dough mixer:** Joe Carp and Frank Reilly mischievously encourage Charlie to operate the complex dough mixer, intending to humiliate him on April Fool's day. To their surprise, however, Charlie handles the mixer like an expert and Mr. Donner gives him a promotion.

**Locket:** Young Charlie presented a locket and a valentine to his pretty classmate, Harriet. The valentine contained an obscene message written by Hymie Roth, rather than Charlie's intended love-note. Charlie was beaten up and forced to leave the school. Charlie remembers, however, that Harriet never returned the locket.

**Spinner:** Young Charlie loves bright, shiny toys. His 'spinner' is a string threaded with bright colored beads and rings. He spends many hours watching the spinner twirl and unwind. Angry that her son is abnormal, Rose slaps the spinner out of Charlie's hands and orders him to play with alphabet blocks instead. Without his spinner, Charlie loses control and wets himself.

**Knife:** Rose Gordon hysterically threatened young Charlie with a knife the night she demanded Matt to send him away to Warren. The painful memory and bloody knife reoccur in Charlie's nightmares. When Charlie visits his mother and sister as an adult, Rose lapses into a bizarre reenactment of the past and threatens her son with a kitchen knife.

**The International Psychological Convention:** Charlie and Algernon are the prime exhibits at the psychological convention in Chicago. During Professor Nemur's presentation, Charlie feels like a side-show attraction; no one treats him like a human being. Acting on impulse, Charlie opens Algernon's cage and sends the convention into an uproar. The mouse leads the psychologists on a race throughout the hotel. Charlie heads back to New York with Algernon secure in his pocket.

**IQ:** Meaning 'intelligence quotient,' the IQ is a number used to express a person's relative intelligence. IQ is calculated by dividing a person's 'mental age' (as reported on a standardized test) by his chronological age, and then multiplying the resulting number by 100. Through the course of the experiment, Charlie's IQ jumps from a low of 68 to a superhuman peak of 185.



**Gordons Barber Shop:** Matt Gordon always dreamed of getting out of sales and opening up his own barber shop. Charlie learns from a newspaper article that his father opened up a shop in the Bronx. Charlie visits the run-down, empty little barber shop as a regular customer, never revealing his identity to his father.

**The Algernon-Gordon Effect: A Study of Structure and Function of Increased Intelligence:** Charlie's independent research report, funded through the Welberg Foundation. In the study, Charlie pinpoints the flaw in Nemur's experiment: 'Artificially-induced intelligence deteriorates at a rate of time directly proportional to the quantity of the increase.' That is, the higher the gain in IQ points, the faster the subject's mental regression will occur. Charlie sends his report to Professor Nemur, Dr. Strauss, and the Welberg Foundation. Later, when his IQ declines, Charlie can no longer make sense of his own discovery.

## Quotes

Quote 1: "Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eye are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other..." *The Republic*, Preface

Quote 2: "...all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb and my mom always tollde me to try and lern just like Miss Kinnian tells me but its very hard to be smart and even when I lern something in Miss Kinnians class at the school I ferget alot." PR 3, pg. 3

Quote 3: "I dint know mice were so smart." PR 4, pg. 6

Quote 4: "If your smart you can have lots of frends to talk to and you never get lonley by yourself all the time." PR 7, pg. 11

Quote 5: "Some times somebody will say hey lookit Frank, or Joe or even Gimpy. He really pulled a Charlie Gordon that time. I don't know why they say it but they always laff and I laff too." PR 8, pg. 17

Quote 6: "I beet Algernon. I dint even know I beet him until Burt Selden told me. Then the second time I lost because I got so excited. But after that I beet him 8 more times. I must be getting smart to beat a smart mouse like Algernon. But I dont feel smarter." PR 8, pg. 22

Quote 7: "She says Im a fine person and Ill show them all. I asked her why. She said never mind but I shouldnt feel bad if I find out everybody isnt nice like I think." PR 9, pg. 26

Quote 8: "One thing? I, like: about, Dear Miss Kinnian: (thats, the way? it goes; in a business, letter (if I ever go! into business?) is that, she: always gives me' a reason" when - I ask. She"s a gen'ius! I cou'd be smart like-her, Punctuation , is? fun!" PR 9, pg. 28

Quote 9: "I never knew before that Joe and Frank and the others liked to have me around just to make fun of me. Now I know what they mean wen they say 'to pull a Charlie Gordon.' I'm ashamed." PR 9, pg. 30

Quote 10: "Now I want you to look at this card, Charlie. What might this be? What do you see on this card? People see all kinds of things in these inkblots. Tell me what it makes you think of..." PR 9, pg. 41



Quote 11: "I was seeing them clearly for the first time - not gods or even heroes, but just two men worried about getting something out of their work." PR 10, pg. 49

Quote 12: "It had been all right as long as they could laugh at me and appear clever at my expense, but now they were feeling inferior to the moron. I began to see that by my astonishing growth I had made them shrink and emphasized their inadequacies. I had betrayed them, and they hated me for it." PR 10, pg. 74

Quote 13: "Our relationship is becoming increasingly strained. I resent Nemur's constant references to me as a laboratory specimen. He makes me feel that before the experiment was not really a human being." PR 12, pg. 79

Quote 14: "What did you expect? Did you think I'd remain a docile pup, wagging my tail and licking the foot that kicks me? I no longer have to take the kind of crap that people have been handing me all my life." PR 11, pg. 85

Quote 15: "Remembering how my mother looked before she gave birth to my sister is frightening. But even more frightening is the feeling that I wanted them to catch me and beat me. Why did I want to be punished? Shadows out of the past clutch at my legs and drag me down. I open my mouth to scream, but I am voiceless. My hands are trembling, I feel cold, and there is a distant humming in my ears." PR12, pg. 92

Quote 16: "It may sound like ingratitude, but that is one of the things I hate here - the attitude that I am a guinea pig. Nemur's constant references to having *made me what I am*, or that someday there will be others like me who *will become real human beings*. How can I make him understand that he did not create me?" PR 13, pg. 101

Quote 17: "They had pretended to be geniuses. But they were just ordinary men working blindly, pretending to be able to bring light into the darkness. Why is it that everyone lies? No one I know is what he appears to be." PR 13, pg. 105

Quote 18: "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." PR 14, pg. 136

Quote 19: "I'm not your friend. I'm your enemy. I'm not going to give up my intelligence without a struggle. I can't go back down into that cave. There's no place for *me* to go now, Charlie. So you've got to stay away." PR 16, pg. 175

Quote 20: "ARTIFICIALLY-INDUCED INTELLIGENCE DETERIORATES AT A RATE OF TIME DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO THE QUANTITY OF THE INCREASE." PR 16, pg. 177

Quote 21: "...the men of the cave would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes..." PR 17, pg. 199

Quote 22: "I passed your floor on the way up, and now I'm passing it on the way down, and I don't think I'll be taking this elevator again." PR 17, pg. 201

Quote 23: "P.S. please if you get a chance put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard." PR 17, pg. 216





# Topic Tracking: Faith

## Progress Report 6

Faith 1: Charlie puts his faith in luck; he carries his rabbit's foot, horseshoe, and lucky penny wherever he goes. Dr. Strauss tells Charlie not to be so superstitious because he is a man of science. While Charlie believes in fortune, Dr. Strauss believes in the scientific method.

## Progress Report 8

Faith 2: Another form of faith is religion. Charlie knows that religion involves a god, and that one should love God and pray to him. Charlie does not know how to pray, but he remembers his mother constantly asking God to make Charlie smart when he was small. At the hospital, a busy-body nurse suggest that Charlie has interfered with God's plan by allowing doctors to operate on his brain. The nurse's faith tells her that man should accept what God gives him rather than eating from the Tree of Knowledge like Adam and Eve. Finally, Miss Kinnian expresses personal faith in Charlie himself; becoming smart will take a lot of hard work, but she believes in Charlie and has faith that he will succeed.

## Progress Report 9

Faith 3: Fanny Birden quotes the Bible and says it was wrong for Charlie to know more than what God originally gave to him. Fanny says it is evil to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and she worries that Charlie has sinned. Charlie puts his faith in science rather than religion. He says that science can help millions all over the world. Through science, man can see the light.

## Progress Report 17

Faith 4: Charlie experiences an out-of-body experience during a therapy session with Dr. Strauss. He feels light and free as he floats through time and space. Shaking off the mortal world, Charlie opens his mind to the new experience. He wonders if he will see God, or if God even exists.

Faith 5: Charlie's faith regresses back to the primitive level of superstition. He considers his mental deterioration as bad luck resulting from the loss of his rabbit's foot and horseshoe.

# Topic Tracking: Friendship

## Progress Report 3

Friendship 1: Gimpy hollers at Charlie when he makes mistakes at the Bakery. Charlie does not take Gimpy's yelling personally, however, because Gimpy is a friend. Charley naively believes that everyone at the bakery is his friend, and he looks forward to surprising them when he becomes smart.

## Progress Report 6

Friendship 2: Professor Nemur tells Charlie that he will be famous if the experiment proves successful. Charlie does not care about being a celebrity. Instead, he says he simply wants to be like other people so that he will have lots of friends who like him.

## Progress Report 7

Friendship 3: Charlie longs to participate in conversations with his coworkers, Joe, Frank and Gimpy. He believes that intelligence will bring him friends and he will never be lonely again.

## Progress Report 8

Friendship 4: Charlie's so-called "friends" taunt him at the Bakery about his unexplained operation. Frank and Joe laugh at Charlie's surgical scar, and Charlie joins in because he thinks his coworkers really like him. In an example of true friendship, Mr. Donner explains how he promised Charlie's uncle Herman that Charlie would always have a place to work in the bakery. Herman was Mr. Donner's best friend. Now, Mr. Donner transfers that friendship onto Charlie by protecting him from the Warren State Home, and by helping him to earn a living.

Friendship 5: Mocking Charlie's desire to read and write, Joe and Frank tell Charlie not to forget them when he becomes a genius. Charlie's buddies are very important to him, and writes that he would never forget his friends.

Friendship 6: Joe Carp and Frank Reilly humiliate Charlie by getting him drunk and ditching him at a bar. Charlie cannot understand why his friends left him. He cannot wait to become smart so that he can be like his best friends, Joe and Frank.

Friendship 7: Charlie finally beats Algernon at running the maze. Concerned for the mouse's feelings, Charlie decides to be nice to Algernon. He feels sorry that Algernon must solve problems before the scientists give him food. Charlie identifies with Algernon and decides to be friends with him. Later, when Charley reads *Robinson Crusoe*, he contemplates how lonely it must feel to be stranded on an island without any friends.

## Progress Report 9

Friendship 8: Miss Kinnian warns Charlie not to feel too bad if he finds out that people are not as nice as he once believed. Charlie does not understand. He maintains that all of his friends are smart, good people; they like him and would never do anything unkind. This naïve belief crumbles when Frank and Joe invite Charlie to a party in order to make him look foolish. Charlie realizes that his "friends" are laughing at him, and that they just keep him around to make fun of him. This crushing awareness fills Charlie with shame.

#### **Progress Report 14**

Friendship 9: Charlie feels completely alone and craves human contact. Even with his intellectual superiority, Charlie feels empty; he needs friendship. Wandering the streets at night, Charlie goes to the movies in order to surround himself with people.

#### **Progress Report 16**

Friendship 10: At the height of his genius, Charlie realizes that intelligence without human affection is worthless. When he was retarded, Charlie had many friends, even if they were not always genuine. As a genius, however, Charlie realizes that he has become arrogant, condescending, and incapable of making friends. He feels completely alone and he understands that the self-centered search for intellect, to the exclusion of human relationships, leads only to pain and mental breakdown. Echoing his embarrassment when he first discovered that Frank and Joe made him the butt of their jokes, Charlie again feels ashamed when he realizes his own arrogance.

#### **Progress Report 17**

Friendship 11: Regressed to his original IQ, Charlie returns to work at Donner's Bakery. A new hire named Meyer Klaus harasses Charlie and hurts his arm. Joe and Frank defend Charlie and Gimpy tries to get Klaus fired. In genuine friendship and sympathy, Gimpy, Joe, and Frank protect Charlie. They are his friends, and Charlie feels happy.

# Topic Tracking: Sexuality

## Progress Report 9

Sexuality 1: Just for laughs, Joe and Frank set Charlie up with a dance partner named Ellen at an after-work party. Ellen dances close to Charlie and he feels aroused. At night, Charlie has a wet dream about Ellen. He does not understand that this is a normal part of sexual development.

## Progress Report 11

Sexuality 2: Charlie sees Alice Kinnian as a very attractive woman. Fumbling in a stage of sexual adolescence, Charlie feels painfully nervous at the thought of intimacy. In his childhood, sexuality was always associated with punishment. Charlie remembers how his mother abused him for being "dirty-minded" and how he was punished for peeking through the bathroom keyhole during his sister's bath.

Sexuality 3: Intimacy makes Charlie nauseous and agitated. Alice wants Charlie to kiss her, but an overwhelming anxiety prevents Charlie from getting close to her. Dr. Strauss explains that, emotionally, Charlie remains in a state of sexual adolescence; just the thought of a woman or sex is enough to make him panic and hallucinate. Sexual nightmares remind Charlie of his mother's warning against ever touching a girl. Charlie remembers when, on a delivery errand for the bakery, a middle-aged woman opened her bathrobe and exposed herself to him. The woman asked Charlie if he knew how to make love, and whether he had ever seen a naked woman. The experience terrified Charlie because his mother always told him never to look at woman's body.

## Progress Report 12

Sexuality 4: A promiscuous woman on a park bench sexually propositions Charlie. He is excited by her lustful advances until, pulling back her overcoat, she exposes her pregnant belly. Charlie's mind flashes back to the woman who exposed herself to him as a young delivery boy, and he grabs her angrily. Echoing his mother, Charlie calls the woman filthy and tells her to be ashamed of herself.

## Progress Report 14

Sexuality 5: Charlie's new neighbor Fay exudes sexuality. Undergarments and nude portraits clutter her apartment, and her sexual freedom makes Charlie uncomfortable.

Sexuality 6: Fay cannot figure out why Charlie has not responded to her sexual advances. She asks Charlie if he is homosexual or if he is simply not interested. Charlie wants to spend the night with Fay, but he needs to drink gin in order to relax. Charlie soon becomes intoxicated and the old Charlie Gordon makes an appearance. Speaking like a child, Charlie says he cannot play with girls because his mother will take away his peanuts and put him in a cage.

Sexuality 7: Charlie visits Alice's apartment and panics at the thought of making love to her. To avoid his usual nausea and hallucinations, he pretends that he is making love to the less-threatening Fay. Charlie's visualization scheme fails, however, because he cannot make love to Alice without being truthful. Returning to his own apartment, Charlie becomes sexually aggressive and he forces himself to overcome his sexual impotence with Fay. He imagines the old Charlie Gordon watching with wide eyes through the window, but he ignores the hallucination and surrenders to the passionate experience. Charlie is not in love with Fay, but she is important to him and he enjoys their free-spirited sexual relationship.

### **Progress Report 17**

Sexuality 8: Love is mysterious and wonderful. Charlie loves Alice with his body, mind and soul; their love-making is more powerful than merely physical intercourse. Charlie realizes the importance of physical love coupled with a strong emotional connection. Sex with Fay was merely physical, but intimacy with Alice is physical, mental, emotional, and quite mysterious. Charlie loves Alice, even though their time together is short.

# Preface

Author Daniel Keyes prefaces *Flowers for Algernon* with a quotation from Plato's *The Republic*, in which the Greek philosopher discourages men from laughing at those who are sightless, perplexed or weak. As Plato says:

*"Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eye are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other..."* Plato, *The Republic* Preface

# Progress Report 1

Charlie Gordon begins his first "progris riport," or progress report, on the third of March, in hopes that Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur will choose him for an experiment intended to raise his IQ. Miss Kinnian, Charlie's reading teacher at the Beekman College Center for Retarded Adults, recommended him for the experimental surgery. According to Dr. Strauss' instructions, Charlie must record everything he thinks and remembers in these journal entries. Charlie reports that he is thirty-two years old, that he works for eleven dollars a week at Donner's Bakery, and that he wants more than anything "to be smart."

## Progress Report 2

Charlie worries that Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss will exclude him from the experiment because he has failed a "raw shok test," or a Rorschach test. A nice man in a white coat named Burt instructed him to imagine pictures created by the inkblots, but Charlie saw nothing on the cards beyond spilled ink.



## Progress Report 3

When Professor Nemur asks Charlie why he tries so hard to learn, Charlie explains, "...all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb and my mom always tolld me to try and lern just like Miss Kinnian tells me but its very hard to be smart and even when I lern something in Miss Kinnians class at the school I ferget alot." PR 3, pg. 3 Charlie wants to take part in the experimental operation, even though it has never been tested on humans and may be dangerous. The doctors need permission from Charlie's relatives, but apart from his deceased uncle Herman, Charlie has not spoken to his mother, father, nor sister Norma for many years. Tired of writing, Charlie hopes he will not have to make many more progress reports. The hard work of writing has caused Charlie to lose sleep, and has interfered with his work at Donner's Bakery.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 1

## Progress Report 4

Charlie undergoes further "crazy tests" to determine whether or not he is a suitable subject for the Beekman experiment. A Thematic Apperception Test requires Charlie to invent story lines based on pictures, but he fears he will be hit for telling lies about people whom he does not even know. Later, Burt Selden brings Charlie to the Psychology lab to conduct "spearminits," or experiments, and to run the "amazed," or maze. Burt introduces Charlie to Algernon, a white laboratory mouse who runs the maze quickly and successfully. Charlie races against the smart mouse ten times, and each time Algernon solves the maze first. Surprised by Algernon's ability, Charlie writes, "I dint know mice were so smart." PR 4, pg. 6

## Progress Report 5

Impressed by Charlie's motivation, persuaded by Miss Kinnian's recommendation, and having obtained Norma Gordon's permission, Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur decide to use Charlie in the experiment. He will be the first human being to have his intelligence raised by surgery. Professor Nemur worries about the emotional risks of increasing Charlie's IQ of 68 to that of an intellectual superman, but Dr. Strauss reassures him that Charlie is good-natured and determined to learn. Besides, argues Strauss, Charlie will be making a great contribution to science. Professor Nemur warns Charlie that the experiment might fail or succeed only temporarily, and that Charlie may be institutionalized at the Warren State Home as a result. Full of courage and superstition, Charlie believes his lucky rabbit's foot will help make the operation a success.

## Progress Report 6

Writing from his hospital bed the day before the operation, Charlie feels scared. Well-wishers send flowers and Joe Carp delivers a chocolate cake from Donner's Bakery. Charlie's co-workers have not been told why Charlie is having an operation. Miss Kinnian visits and Charlie senses that she is nervous. Clutching his lucky rabbit's foot, his good-luck penny, and his horseshoe, Charlie hopes the operation will make him smart like other people so that he will have many friends.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 2

Topic Tracking: Faith 1

## Progress Report 7

Charlie resumes his progress report three days after the operation, when the bandages are finally removed from his eyes. Though being strapped down on the table in the operating theater was frightening, Charlie reports that the operation did not hurt; to his surprise, the doctors even performed it while he was asleep! A nurse teaches Charlie the correct spelling of "progress report," and he makes an effort to spell it correctly through the rest of his entry. Charlie hopes the operation will make him smart enough to discuss religion and politics with Joe Carp, Frank, and Gimpy, his chatty co-workers at Donner's bakery. He believes that, "If your smart you can have lots of frends to talk to and you never get lonley by yourself all the time." PR 7, pg. 11 Professor Nemur encourages Charlie to write more about his thoughts, feelings, and memories. Charlie complains that he does not know how to remember, and he feels impatient to know the "fancy things" already understood by smart people.

A skinny nurse named Hilda suggests that Charlie has tampered with God's plan by allowing doctors to operate on his brain. This worries Charlie, but the busy-body nurse is soon replaced by a pretty blond named Lucille. Charlie looks forward to the day when he will show his friends at the bakery and his mother that he can be smart like everyone else. Miss Kinnian visits and tells Charlie to be patient. Becoming smart will take time and a lot of hard work, but she has faith that he will succeed.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 3

Topic Tracking: Faith 2

## Progress Report 8

Discharged from the hospital, Charlie reports back to the Beekman Psychology department for further testing. Algernon continues to win the maze races, and Charlie feels discouraged by his own apparent lack of progress. Frustrated and suffering from headaches, Charlie grumbles that the personality tests, the mazes, and the progress reports are all plain stupid.

Charlie longs to understand the philosophical and political debates carried on between students at the Beekman College cafeteria. Burt assures Charlie that, if the experiment works, he will soon surpass the college students. Charlie's patience wears thin and he returns to work at the bakery. Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur forbid him from telling anyone about his operation; both doctors fear failure and they do not want to be embarrassed in front of their colleagues at the Welberg Foundation.

Dr. Strauss soothes Charlie's irritation by explaining that Algernon's intellect likewise took a long time to develop after surgery. Charlie had not realized that the same operation performed on him was also performed on Algernon. Encouraged by the mouse's increased and lasting intelligence, Charlie regains a positive attitude.

Joe Carp and Frank Reilly taunt Charlie when he returns to the bakery, but Charlie thinks his friends are simply laughing because they like him. As Charlie explains, "Some times somebody will say hey lookit Frank, or Joe or even Gimpy. He really pulled a Charlie Gordon that time. I don't know why they say it but they always laff and I laff too." PR 8, pg. 17 Mr. Donner hired a new delivery boy named Ernie, and Charlie worries that he will loose his job. Donner assures Charlie that, as promised, he will never allow Charlie to be sent away to the Warren State Home. Charlie surprises Mr. Donner when he asks to be an apprentice baker; Charlie has never before expressed the desire to learn such a complicated task.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 4

Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss visit Charlie's apartment and ask why he has not come to the lab lately. Dispirited and resistant, Charlie explains that he does not want to race with Algernon anymore. Nemur presents Charlie with a strange television set that is really a teaching machine. Nemur instructs Charlie to turn the set on at night and to absorb the repetitious sounds and pictures as he sleeps. Charlie reacts suspiciously to the odd set and Strauss notes that Charlie has begun to question authority. The "crazy TV" keeps Charlie up all night, and he wonders why people must go to school if machines can make them smart in their sleep.

Prompted by the night machine's commands of "remember....remember....remember," Charlie recalls his first meeting with Miss Kinnian. When Charlie asked his jeering coworkers how they learned to read and write, Fanny Birden sympathetically referred him to the Beekman College center for retarded adults. Eager to learn immediately, Charlie purchased a newspaper on his walk to the school. At Beekman, Miss Kinnian

introduced herself as Charlie's reading teacher and instructed him to return tomorrow for registration. She gently warned her new over-eager student that learning to read and write would take a long time, possibly years.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 5

Now that memories are resurfacing through Charlie's dreams, Charlie must attend therapy sessions with Dr. Strauss. Tired because the strange machine still wakes him at night, Charlie falls asleep on the therapist's couch. The night TV gives Charlie strange dreams, and Dr. Strauss explains that the dreams are Charlie's subconscious at work. The doctor gives Charlie a dictionary to look up words such as "subconscious," so that he will begin to understand and spell them correctly.

Charlie suffers another headache, but this time it results from a hangover and not from the experiment. Joe Carp and Frank Reilly invited Charlie to Halloran's Bar for drinks after work, intending to get him drunk and humiliate him. After laughing at Charlie's expense, Joe and Frank sent Charlie around the corner and ditched him. Inebriated and confused by his friend's disappearance, Charlie was taken home by a concerned policeman.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 6

Back at the lab, Charlie finally beats Algernon at running the maze. Thrilled, Charlie remarks, "I beet Algernon. I dint even know I beet him until Burt Selden told me. Then the second time I lost because I got so excited. But after that I beet him 8 more times. I must be getting smart to beat a smart mouse like Algernon. But I dont feel smarter." PR 8, pg. 22 Feeling friendly towards the mouse, Charlie wants to feed Algernon, but Burt does not allow it. To Charlie's disappointment, food is only used as an incentive for Algernon to solve puzzles. Dr. Strauss gives Charlie sleeping pills because his excitement makes it impossible to rest. Sleep is important because the brain changes most during the sleep cycle. Charlie remembers his Uncle Herman as an unemployed painter, and he recalls how Norma was often slapped for being cruel to him. Miss Kinnian visits and Charlie is attracted by her youthful appearance. She teaches him spelling rules and they begin to read *Robinson Crusoe*, a book about a man stranded on a desert island.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 7

## Progress Report 9

On April Fool's Day, Joe Carp and Frank Reilly set Charlie up for another mean-spirited joke at the bakery when they encourage him to work the complicated dough mixer. To everyone's surprise, Charlie operates the machine like an expert. Mr. Donner promotes Charlie from janitor to mixer and gives him a five dollar raise. Bewildered, Charlie's coworkers agree that Charlie has been very peculiar lately.

Miss Kinnian reads Charlie's progress reports and is outraged to learn how Charlie's coworkers take advantage of his simplicity. As Charlie records, "She says Im a fine person and Ill show them all. I asked her why. She said never mind but I shouldnt feel bad if I find out everybody isnt nice like I think." PR 9, pg. 26 Miss Kinnian's kindness reminds Charlie of his mother before Norma's birth. Charlie recalls Rose Gordon slapping him in a rage when he innocently picked up his crying baby sister one night. Disturbed by the memory, Charlie resolves to discuss it with Dr. Strauss during therapy.

Miss Kinnian teaches Charlie how to use punctuation, and the over-zealous student writes, "One thing? I, like: about, Dear Miss Kinnian: (thats, the way? it goes; in a business, letter (if I ever go! into business?) is that, she: always gives me' a reason" when - I ask. She"s a gen'ius! I cou'd be smart like-her, Punctuation , is? fun!" PR 9, pg. 28 Charlie reads a grammar book overnight and his punctuation instantly improves. The doctors are excited about his rapid progress and they no longer ask him to race against Algernon.

On the following night, the gang from Donner's bakery mischievously invites Charlie to a party, intending yet again to humiliate him. Joe spikes Charlie's soda with alcohol and urges him to dance with a girl named Ellen. Charlie stumbles as they purposefully trip him and push him down. For the first time, it dawns on Charlie that his so-called friends are laughing at him. Deeply ashamed, Charlie writes, "I never knew before that Joe and Frank and the others liked to have me around just to make fun of me. Now I know what they mean wen they say 'to pull a Charlie Gordon.' I'm ashamed." PR 9, pg. 30 This realization of false friendship upsets Charlie so much that, for the first time in his life, he purposefully stays home from work.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 8

Topic Tracking: Faith 3

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 1

Vivid memories of abuse from neighborhood bullies fill Charlie's head. He remembers running for safety into the bakery as a young delivery boy, leaning up against the wall, and having his legs suddenly kicked out from under him. Dr. Strauss comforts Charlie and explains how his intellectual growth has so far outpaced his emotional growth. While Charlie's mind progresses to an adult level, with an IQ topping 100, he is nevertheless still emotionally and sexually in a state of adolescence.



Charlie experiences another strange dream and, through Strauss' therapeutic method of free-association, he uncovers a memory from his schooldays. It was Valentines Day at P.S. 13, and young Charlie had a crush on a classmate named Harriet. Charlie asked Hymie Roth to write a love letter, so that Charlie could present it to Harriet with a golden locket that he found in the street. Instead of recording Charlie's innocent love note, Hymie wrote an obscene message and signed Charlie's name to it. Harriet's furious big brothers beat Charlie up and he was forced to change schools.

Charlie realizes that trusting people can be dangerous and that many friends are false. Back in the lab, Burt Selden conducts another Rorschach test on Charlie. Burt instructs Charlie to describe the images suggested by the inkblots. Charlie suspiciously accuses Burt of changing the directions to make him look foolish. Charlie believes that Burt told him last time that there were images hidden in the inkblots, and now Burt is saying that there is no particular image, just whatever the test subject happens to think of. Charlie angrily storms out of the lab. Burt and Professor Nemur prove to Charlie that Burt did not change the instructions by playing a tape recording of the original session. On the tape, Charlie hears Burt's voice as he reads the standard instructions: "Now I want you to look at this card, Charlie. What might this be? What do you see on this card? People see all kinds of things in these inkblots. Tell me what it makes you think of..." PR 9, pg. 41 Charlie realizes that his anger and suspicious were unfounded, yet he still feels unable to trust Burt completely. He is wary of everyone around him, and he wishes to keep his progress reports private for a while.

## Progress Report 10

Charlie restructures the mixing machines to speed up production at the bakery, and Mr. Donner gives him a fifty-dollar bonus and a ten-dollar raise in his wages. Everyone at the bakery is frightened by the unexplained changes in Charlie. Nobody talks to him and he feels lonely. Charlie recalls when, as a young delivery boy, Frank kicked his legs out and caused his head to clunk against the bakery wall. Charlie sees himself in his memories, yet he feels as though he is watching someone else. Remembering more deeply, Charlie recalls when Frank and Gimpy attempted to teach young Charlie how to make rolls. Gimpy promised young Charlie a shiny new good luck piece, a brass STABRITE METAL POLISH lid on a chain, if he learned to make rolls correctly. Charlie tried to learn the process, but he panicked when Frank criticized and rushed him. Even though young Charlie failed, Gimpy gave him the good luck piece anyway. Looking back, Charlie is touched by Gimpy's kindness.

Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss make a deal with Charlie: he can keep his progress reports private as long as he continues to record everything truthfully, and so long as he agrees to hand over the reports to professor Nemur before the doctor's presentation to the Welberg Foundation. Charlie eavesdrops on a heated conversation between Nemur and Strauss. Nemur feels confident about Charlie's progress and wants to present the results of their experiment early at an upcoming convention in Chicago. Urging Professor Nemur to be patient, Dr. Strauss argues that the Nemur's results are premature. The egotistical doctors trade insults and Charlie becomes frightened; he writes, "I was seeing them clearly for the first time - not gods or even heroes, but just two men worried about getting something out of their work." PR 10, pg. 49

Charlie hangs out in the Beekman College cafeteria, soaking up the intellectual conversation and trying to fit in. He also frequents the library, reading anything and everything. Charlie's mother always wished for him to be normal; she dreamed that he would go college someday and prove to everyone that he was smart. In his dreams, Charlie remembers the principal of his old elementary school, P.S. 13, telling Rose Gordon to send young Charlie away to the Warren State Home and Training School. When Charlie wakes, his memories lead him further into his childhood. He sees himself at age six, playing with his shiny spinner while Rose Gordon screamed hysterically that her son was normal. Frightened by his mother's outburst, young Charlie soiled himself and recoiled from his mother's sharp slap. Looking back, Charlie can see his family clearly, and he finds it odd that he has not thought of them in years.

# Progress Report 11

After much deliberation, Charlie finally asks Alice Kinnian out to a movie and dinner to celebrate his promotion at work. Strongly attracted to his beautiful teacher, Charlie feels painfully nervous throughout the movie. Miss Kinnian admires Charlie's progress and potential, but she still worries that Charlie may be hurt in the end. Charlie tries to express his intense attraction, but he fumbles like a clumsy adolescent. Male-female relationships confuse him, and he feels rejected when Alice avoids his romantic advances. Though disappointed, Charlie resolves to give Alice a good-night kiss on their next date. Charlie's sexual feelings for Alice reappear in his dreams; pleasant visions of kisses and caresses soon warp into a bloody nightmare about a knife. Free association allows Charlie to remember how he was punished for peeking into the bathroom keyhole during his sister's bath as a child.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 2

At Donner's Bakery, Charlie makes the astonishing discovery that Gimpy has been stealing from Mr. Donner by undercharging regular customers and splitting the remaining balance, keeping half and giving the other half to the customer. Emotionally conflicted, Charlie does not know whether to expose Gimpy or to overlook the theft. Mr. Donner deserves the truth, yet Gimpy has a family to support and Charlie does not want Gimpy to lose his job. Even worse, Charlie realizes that Gimpy used him as a tool in the theft during deliveries; Charlie had been made an unwitting accomplice. Charlie brings his moral dilemma to Alice, but she advises him to follow his own instincts. Finding a compromise, Charlie corners Gimpy and hints that he knows of Gimpy's cheating. If Gimpy stops, Mr. Donner will never have to know. Gimpy grudgingly complies.

Charlie's mind surpasses normal intelligence. It takes him merely seconds to absorb complex Calculus and ancient languages, and he now views students and professors in the college cafeteria as childish and elementary. Even Alice Kinnian seems less like a goddess in Charlie's estimation. Attending a concert in Central Park with Alice, Charlie again feels ill at the first signs of intimacy. He panics and imagines that someone is watching him. During therapy, Dr. Strauss explains these hallucinations as signs that Charlie is still an adolescent; he is sexually immature and not yet ready for a relationship.

Afraid of Charlie's unexplained intellectual boom, Charlie's agitated coworkers force Mr. Donner to fire him from the bakery. Devastated, Charlie realizes that, "It had been all right as long as they could laugh at me and appear clever at my expense, but now they were feeling inferior to the moron. I began to see that by my astonishing growth I had made them shrink and emphasized their inadequacies. I had betrayed them, and they hated me for it." PR 10, pg. 74 Alice tries to comfort Charlie, but nausea and painful childhood memories prevent Charlie from enjoying their physical closeness.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 3

## Progress Report 12

It is early June and the International Psychological Convention in Chicago is only one week away. Professor Nemur arrogantly treats Charlie as a mere scientific exhibit of his own creation. Charlie notes, "Our relationship is becoming increasingly strained. I resent Nemur's constant references to me as a laboratory specimen. He makes me feel that before the experiment I was not really a human being." PR 12, pg. 79

Charlie vividly recalls the day his sister Norma turned against him completely. The Gordons had promised Norma a dog if she brought home good grades from school. Norma received an "A" on her history test, but Charlie spoiled Norma's good news by telling it first. Norma's ensuing temper tantrum and cruelty towards Charlie angered their father, and Matt Gordon consequently refused to buy her a dog. Charlie painfully recalls how Norma rejected him from that day on.

Seeking comfort, Charlie visits Alice at the Beekman Center for Retarded Adults. Charlie's old classmates marvel at his new "big-shot" attitude, and Alice is furious. She accuses Charlie, the newly-made intellectual genius, of being cold-hearted and condescending. Charlie yells back, "What did you expect? Did you think I'd remain a docile pup, wagging my tail and licking the foot that kicks me? I no longer have to take the kind of crap that people have been handing me all my life." PR 11, pg. 85 Alice reveals that Charlie's genius makes her feel self-conscious and inferior. Charlie realizes that his new genius I.Q. of 185 poses as much of a barrier in their relationship as his old I.Q. of 70.

Depressed, Charlie wanders through Central Park and meets a promiscuous woman on a park bench. Her sexual advances excite Charlie. Surprisingly, he does not feel the usual panic and nausea. Charlie's discovery that the lewd woman is pregnant triggers negative memories, and he grabs the woman in disgust. Her fearful cries attract a crowd of men who pursue Charlie through the woods. Troubled by the crude experience, Charlie writes, "Remembering how my mother looked before she gave birth to my sister is frightening. But even more frightening is the feeling that I wanted them to catch me and beat me. Why did I want to be punished? Shadows out of the past clutch at my legs and drag me down. I open my mouth to scream, but I am voiceless. My hands are trembling, I feel cold, and there is a distant humming in my ears." PR 12, pg. 92

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 4

## Progress Report 13

Charlie and the Beekman doctors sit on a jet bound for the International Psychological Convention in Chicago. The stewardess' polite attempts to strap Charlie's seat belt conjure memories of his childhood visits to the swindler Dr. Guarino. Promising to make young Charlie smart, Dr. Guarino strapped Charlie down under a blinking, humming machine. Terrified, Charlie wet his pants and mortified his mother. Matt Gordon objected to continued treatment with the phony doctor, preferring to use the money to get out of sales and to open his own barber shop. Even though Dr. Guarino took advantage of his parents, Charlie remembers Guarino as a kind and encouraging man. Unlike his current doctors, Guarino always treated him like a human being. As Charlie says:

*"It may sound like ingratitude, but that is one of the things I hate here--the attitude that I am a guinea pig. Nemur's constant references to having made me what I am, or that someday there will be others like me who will become real human beings. How can I make him understand that he did not create me?"* PR 13, pg. 101

Tension between Charlie and Professor Nemur builds during the convention's opening night parties. Charlie challenges Professor Nemur's experimental conclusions by citing recently published Indian research in the *Hindu Journal of Psychopathology*. Nemur is unaware of the new study; he cannot even read Hindi! Charlie's discovery of Professor Nemur's intellectual inferiority humiliates Nemur and maddens Charlie. He considers the Beekman doctors and professors frauds, for "They had pretended to be geniuses. But they were just ordinary men working blindly, pretending to be able to bring light into the darkness. Why is it that everyone lies? No one I know is what he appears to be." PR 13, pg. 105 Burt Selden disapproves of Charlie's overly harsh criticism of Nemur and Strauss. Though a genius, Charlie has not yet learned tolerance.

Charlie resumes his progress report several days after abandoning the convention. During the main presentation, Charlie listened bitterly as doctors portrayed him as an inhuman "mistake of nature" prior to the experiment. Audience members gawked at videotaped footage of Charlie's early laboratory sessions, and he felt like a side-show attraction at a circus. Worst of all, Charlie realized that Professor Nemur's experimental results were premature; the permanence of the results are questionable. Overwhelmed with anger, Charlie impulsively opened the door of Algernon's cage and turned the mouse loose, sending the convention into an uproar. In the chaos, Charlie scooped the liberated lab rat into his pocket and caught a plane back to New York. Charlie takes a hotel room near Times Square and considers visiting his parents. Nemur's experimental mistake weighs heavily on Charlie's mind, and he worries that his intellect will prove impermanent after all. He must visit his family while he still has time.

## Progress Report 14

Newspapers seize upon the sensational story of Charlie's flight from the convention. Charlie stumbles across a background article on his own family, accompanied by a jarring photograph of his mother and sister. The picture reminds Charlie of the night his frustrated mother decided to send him away to the Warren State Home for Norma's protection.

Charlie moves into a new apartment and meets his strange next-door neighbor, a free-spirited artist named Fay Lillman. Locked out of his apartment, Charlie hopes to use Fay's fire escape to access his own window. The flirtatious and half-naked painter invites him in and, surrounded by her mess, they quickly become friends. After a few drinks, Fay follows Charlie across the fire escape and back into his own orderly apartment. Fay discovers a three-dimensional plastic maze that Charlie constructed for Algernon's routine exercise. Charlie finds his nutty and vivacious neighbor very attractive.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 5

Acting on information gathered from the newspaper article, Charlie finds his father's barber shop in the Bronx and pays him a visit. Charlie remembers his father warmly, for Matt Gordon had always accepted Charlie, unlike his mother. Instead of revealing his identity, Charlie enters Gordon's Barber Shop as a regular customer. Sitting in the barber's chair, Charlie's thoughts return to the tumultuous night when his mother decided to send him away. Rose Gordon hysterically threatened to attack young Charlie with a knife unless Matt took him immediately to the Warren State Home. When the haircut, shave, and suntan are finished, Charlie waits expectantly for Matt to recognize him. Charlie feels ill, almost forgets to pay his bill, and leaves the shop without revealing his true identity.

Back in his apartment, Charlie worries that Algernon's behavior has become erratic. Fay brings Algernon a female companion, a small white mouse named Minnie. Following Fay's sexual advances, the neighbors drink gin and spend the night together. When he becomes intoxicated, however, Charlie's old self resurfaces; he became confused and childlike, to Fay's delight. Charlie writes, the old Charlie Gordon was still there. "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." PR 14, pg. 136

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 6

Charlie roams the streets at night and goes into movie theaters, craving human interaction. At a diner, a retarded busboy drops a tray full of dishes, and the entire restaurant laughs at his distress. In an embarrassing outburst, Charlie tells the patrons to shut up and stop laughing; the busboy is a human being just like anyone else.

#### Topic Tracking: Friendship 9

Feelings of compassion inspire Charlie to return to work on the project, hopeful to help millions of people. Charlie contacts Alice Kinnian and explains his search for emotional, not just intellectual, maturity. Alice and Charlie rekindle their romance, yet his subconscious will not allow him to make love to her. Starved for human contact, Charlie returns home and is finally able to overcome his impotence with Fay. Although he does not love Fay, Charlie's sexual relationship with the free-spirited artist is exciting and important to him.

#### Topic Tracking: Sexuality 7

Algernon's raving behavior becomes more serious as he bites Fay and injures Minnie. Charlie knows that he must take the mouse back to the lab and he resolves to start working with the Foundation again.

## Progress Report 15

Charlie has made arrangements with the Welberg Foundation to conduct his own research at Beekman, and Professor Nemur feels slighted. Burt is happy to have Algernon back at the lab, but Algernon's forgetfulness and erratic behavior disturb him. Algernon has regressed. Charlie notices a freezer and an incinerator in the lab. He realizes that animal test subjects are disposed of when experiments fail. Charlie asks Burt to give Algernon to him if and when the mouse dies; he does not want Algernon merely to be disposed of in the incinerator. Algernon's fate makes Charlie think of his own: what provisions were made for him in the event that the experiment failed? Professor Nemur admits that, in the event of failure, Charlie would be sent to the Warren State Home.



## Progress Report 16

On a gray, rainy day, Charlie drives out to the Warren State Home for a tour. The disinfectant smell, vacant faces, and hopeless doctors of the cold institution depress him. At the lab, Algernon refuses to eat or run mazes. Alarmed by Algernon's decline, Alice visits Charlie at his new apartment. Fay crashes in on Alice and Charlie's meeting. Contrary to Charlie's expectations, Fay and Alice become instant friends and the three chat late into the night. Alice worries that Charlie's drinking, dancing and late nights with Fay interfere with his work at the lab. Charlie reassures Alice that he loves her. Though he continues sexual relations with Fay, he will never tell her the truth about his past.

Charlie works all hours at the lab, to Fay's annoyance. He cannot rest, for he must fit a lifetime of research into several weeks. Fay finds a new boyfriend, but Charlie hardly cares; he is deeply involved in his work. Professor Nemur's controlling wife throws a cocktail party, and Charlie attends with friendly intentions. Bertha Nemur's nasty digs anger Charlie, and he begins to drink heavily. Rude and emotional, Charlie loses control and reverts back to the old Charlie Gordon. He rushes to the bathroom and sees the old Charlie, staring back at him in the mirror. Confronting his reflection, Charlie says, "I'm not your friend. I'm your enemy. I'm not going to give up my intelligence without a struggle. I can't go back down into that cave. There's no place for *me* to go now, Charlie. So you've got to stay away." PR 16, pg. 175 Charlie feels lonely and ashamed; he realizes that his arrogance and self-centeredness have driven away all of his friends.

Topic Tracking: Friendship 10

With a clear mind, Charlie finally pinpoints the flaw he has been searching for in the experiment. In a report entitled *The Algernon-Gordon Effect: A Study of Structure and Function of Increased Intelligence*, Charlie explains that "ARTIFICIALLY-INDUCED INTELLIGENCE DETERIORATES AT A RATE OF TIME DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO THE QUANTITY OF THE INCREASE." PR 16, pg. 177 The higher the gain in I.Q. points, the faster the regression will occur. Charlie sends his report to Professor Nemur, Dr. Strauss, and the Welberg Foundation. He tells Alice that his mental deterioration is inevitable, and he begs her not to feel guilty. Algernon dies several days later. Charlie buries him in the back yard and places a bunch of wildflowers on the small grave.

Charlie returns to his childhood home to visit his mother before his intelligence vanishes. Rose Gordon is startled by her son's appearance, and she tries to send him away. Charlie pushes against the door, breaking the glass and cutting his hand. He tries explain that he is not retarded; that an experiment made him smart and Rose can finally be proud of him. Somewhat senile, Rose does not understand. Suddenly, the dog Napoleon barks as Norma returns from work. Norma is surprisingly happy to see her long lost brother. Mature and sympathetic, Norma realizes that Charlie was sent away because of Rose's concern for her welfare. Norma begs Charlie to live with them in the house; times have been tough and Norma needs Charlie's help. In a bizarre reenactment of the past, Rose interrupts the emotional moment by seizing a kitchen

knife and threatening her "dirty-minded" son. Charlie left the house, crying like a child in the street.

## Progress Report 17

Deeply depressed, Charlie contemplates suicide until he realizes that his life belongs to the old Charlie Gordon. During a therapy session with Dr. Strauss, Charlie experiences a bizarre out-of-body hallucination, filled with light and the sensation of floating. He envisions a dark cave and Plato's words haunt him: "...the men of the cave would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes..." PR 17, pg. 199

Topic Tracking: Faith 4

Charlie refuses to run more mazes and he panics when he forgets the meaning of responses to the Rorschach test. Unable to bear his loss, Charlie asks Burt to say goodbye to everyone for him. "I passed your floor on the way up, and now I'm passing it on the way down, and I don't think I'll be taking this elevator again." PR 17, pg. 201

Books that Charlie can no longer read and records he no longer enjoys pile up in the corner of his apartment. Alice visits Charlie, saddened at the thought of losing him. Charlie feels the barriers between them have finally fallen, and he makes love to her tenderly. Alice promises to stay with Charlie until he tells her to leave. Mental deterioration accelerates, and Charlie can no longer read foreign languages or even his own scientific report. Charlie feels that he is falling apart. After a quarrel, he orders Alice to leave. Rapidly deteriorating, Charlie's punctuation and spelling worsen and he prays that he may retain the ability to read and write. Charlie attributes his lousy luck to the loss of his rabbit's foot and horseshoe. Charlie explains the failed operation to Mr. Donner and regains his job at the bakery. His coworkers take pity on him and Charlie is happy to have friends again.

Topic Tracking: Faith 5

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 8

Falling into his old routine, Charlie attends Miss Kinnian's class at the Beekman adult center. Alice is shocked by Charlie's regression, and Charlie suddenly remembers the failed operation. Everyone feels sorry for Charlie, and he cannot bear it. He decides to go away to the Warren State Home. Charlie closes his final progress report by telling Miss Kinnian not to feel sorry; he is grateful for all that he learned about his family and himself. Charlie pledges to keep on learning and trying to get smart, and he urges Professor Nemur to stop being such a grouch. Finally, in a postscript, Charlie writes, "P.S. please if you get a chance put some flowrs on Algernons grave in the bak yard." PR 17, pg. 216

Topic Tracking: Friendship 11