### Flowers for Algernon Text-Dependent Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text-dependent Questions</th>
<th>Evidence-based Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using evidence from Progress Report 1, who is Charlie Gordon?</td>
<td>He says, “My name is Charlie Gordon. I am 37 years old and 2 weeks ago was my birthday.” Based upon his writing and the fact that he says, “They can make me smart” we can infer that he is of below-average intelligence and he wants to be smart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we learn about Charlie Gordon’s character from Progress Report 2?</td>
<td>When he says, “I had my rabbits foot in my pockit” we learn that he is superstitious; he says “I spilled ink too”, revealing that he has no ability to think abstractly. Make sure students understand Charlie’s test phobia and desire to be right or smart by his persistence with the test. Also, “I’m a slow reeder too in Miss Kinnians class for slow adults but I’m trying very hard” shows that Charlie wants to be smart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On pg. 58, why does the author tell us that Charlie thinks, “maybe white mice are smarter than other mice?”</td>
<td>This line indicates that he is aware that there are differing levels of intelligence. (Students may also reflect upon racial inequality hinted at by the “white” mice terminology – refer to time period of 1965 – historically relevant).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Charlie a good candidate for the experiment?</td>
<td>The doctors are looking for a subject that has a low I.Q., but is willing to work. On page 58, Charlie mentions that he “felt proud when he [Dr. Strauss] said that not everybody with an eye-q of 68 had that thing [motivation].” The doctor’s mention of apathy and being uncooperative are directly related to motivation. They need a patient that has motivation because they are going to complete many tests on the subject and they are going to monitor intellectual growth, thus they need someone who is willing to try. (Some readers may also feel that Charlie is too sensitive and should not participate in the study. This is acceptable so long as text evidence is used to support the answer.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we learn about Charlie through his own analysis of Robinson Crusoe on p. 63?</td>
<td>Based upon the quotes, “He’s all alone and has no friends,” “marooned on a desert island,” and “I hope he gets a friend and not be lonely,” Charlie is coming to understand what loneliness is. Some students may also see the direct comparison between Charlie and Robinson Crusoe. Also, his ability to think about someone else and their place in the world shows an increased emotional intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On p. 66, what does Charlie mean when he says “I felt naked”?</td>
<td>Other lines surrounding the line “I felt naked” show Charlie’s embarrassment. These lines include: “I wanted to hide myself, and I ran out into the street and I threw-up,” and “Charlie is blushing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “nakedness” is a reference to the Garden of Eden and the casting out of Adam and Eve from Paradise after they have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge (this mention of nakedness will later be used in reference to Fanny’s remarks about the evilness of Adam and Eve and even later alluded to when Charlie is unable to read *Paradise Lost* and has lost the knowledge that he gained.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>On p. 66, how have Charlie’s feeling changed from earlier in the story?</strong></th>
<th>Charlie is beginning to understand social acceptance and question the motives of others. Earlier in the text, on p. 60 Charlie says “We had a lot of fun at the factory today.” Then, he tells a story about George losing a package and sometimes people will say, “Look, he really pulled a Charlie Gordon. They’re really my friends and they like me.” This passage shows that he was unaware of being made fun of and had no shame or embarrassment about his intelligence. In comparison, Charlie’s understanding about “nakedness” allows the reader to see Charlie’s progression toward understanding that not everyone is his friend and laughing with him, especially Joe and Frank.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On p. 68, what do you think that the “pair of bats tugging at something” and “two men fencing with swords” symbolizes?</strong></td>
<td>Possible answers include the two doctors arguing, Charlie’s subconscious and conscious desires conflicting, Charlie’s old life versus new life, Charlie’s emotional versus intellectual intelligence. Note: if students struggle in generating these answers, tell them to look at the conflicts that arise in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Note: give a Rorschach to show how the test is administered)</strong></td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>At the bottom of p. 69 it says, “when I left afterwards, I found myself trembling,” why does Charlie react this way?</strong></td>
<td>He says, “I felt like I’d seen both men clearly for the first time.” Charlie is coming to realize that the doctors have motives that go beyond simply helping him become smarter. And, Doctor Nemur calls Charlie “his experiment.” Clearly, this shows that Doctor Nemur views Charlie as a professional asset and not as a patient. Charlie is learning that people, himself included, act with ulterior motives in mind. This understanding is essential to his emotional growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On page 70, Miss Kinnian remarks to Charlie,” I just hope I wasn’t wrong to advise you to go into this in the first place.” Looking back through the text, and considering your own beliefs, do you feel that Miss Kinnian properly advised Charlie to go through with the experiment?</strong></td>
<td>Students can take many viewpoints on this issue and sight multiple moral reasons behind the ethics of the operation. Looking back at the text, students might cite Miss Kinnian’s earlier comments on page 64, where it says, “She read some of the Progress Reports and she looked at me kind of funny. She says Im a fine person and Ill show them all. I asked her why. She said never mind but I shouldn’t feel bad if I find...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
out that everybody isn’t nice like I think. . . Then she
got something in her eye and she had to run out to
the lady’s room.” Miss Kinnian’s comments show that
she is aware of negative consequences with the
experiment, such as the fact that people are mean
spirited, will use others for their own glory, and will
use others to gain profit. Very early on in the short
story, in progress report 4, when the doctors decide
that Charlie will be their subject, Charlie remarks,“
Their going to use me.” On the April 27th progress
report, the doctors also argue about the ethics of the
experiment and publishing results too early. They also
call Charlie an “experiment” instead of a patient.

How does the following passage, “it was evil when
Eve listened to the snake and ate from the tree of
knowledge” (71) compare to Charlie and his
experience?

Charlie’s operation is equivalent to Eve eating from
the tree of knowledge. His increased intelligence has
shown him a darker side of human nature. Students
may reference the experiment on Charlie, his
awareness of Frank and Joe making fun of him, or the
experimentation on animals and human subjects.

Read through page 74. At this point in the story, how
are things going for Charlie? How does this connect
to what the author told us before?

On p. 74 he says that he “seldom speaks to anyone”
and “Dr. Nemur appears to be uncomfortable around
me”. He says “I must be careful to speak and write
clearly and simply so people won’t laugh.” When
talking to Miss Kinnian, he says that “when I tried to
explain she stopped me and laughed.” While Charlie
has increased his intellectual intelligence, emotional
intelligence takes much more time and experience to
develop. People laughed at Charlie both before AND
after his operation.

Using context clues from the passage on p. 76, “I felt
sick inside as I looked at his dull, vacuous smile, the
wide, bright eyes of a child, uncertain but eager to
please. They were laughing at me because he was
mentally retarded, “ what does the word vacuous
mean?

Vacuous means void and empty like a vacuum.
Context clues are “The wide bright eyes of a child,
uncertain but eager to please”; “vacant eyes”; “an
uncertain grin”

What does the anecdote of the dishwasher boy
reveal about Charlie?

He says, “I felt sick inside as I looked at his dull,
vacuous smile…I felt ashamed for both of us.” Charlie
has realized that he was once ridiculed like the
dishwasher boy and he, too, misunderstood the
taunting as acceptance. He had the same vacuous,
unaware existence. He says, “It infuriated me to think
that not so long ago I, like this boy, had foolishly
played the clown. And I had almost forgotten.”
(Higher level students might use the plate as a symbol
for Charlie’s brokenness)

On page 77 and 78, what is driving Charlie?

It is the same force that propelled him to work so hard
when he was mentally disabled: a strong desire to
succeed. At the moment, however, he realizes that
time is probably running out for him.

Charlie could also just have a strong desire to understand the inequality of intelligence that he struggled to comprehend when he was mentally challenged. On page 78, in reference to the calculus of intelligence, Charlie remarks, “In a sense it is the problem I have been concerned with all my life.” Some students might indicate that this is the driving force for Charlie’s diligence to complete his data.

Likewise, it would be valid for students to say that he wants to show up Dr. Nemus and Dr. Strauss, or that he feels a moral obligation to stand up for those who are mentally challenged who might be possible test subjects after his own mental decline. He makes references to this at the end of the book when he says, “Anyway I bet Im the first dumb person n the world who ever found out something important for sience.”

On May 31, Charlie says, “I’ve got to know if and when it will happen to me,” what evidence exists that Charlie will or will not regress like Algernon?

On p. 77 Algernon was “unusually disturbed and vicious.” Charlie tells the reader that “he [Algernon] snapped at my hand.” Charlie also says that Algernon is “less cooperative,” and “everyone is upset about what this may mean.” All of the above quotes suggest that Charlie will in fact regress like Algernon because the reader has been given several examples of Charlie’s changing personality. Prior to this incident, Charlie snaps at Miss Kinnian when she is unable to understand his intellectual discussion on Vrostadt.

Also, Algernon is also being characterized the same way as many of Charlie’s lower-IQ peers were at the beginning of the story.

What are some of Charlie’s symptoms of deterioration in his June 5 progress report?

Possible answers include: motor activity is impaired, reduction of glandular activity, accelerated loss of coordination, and progressive amnesia.

On p. 80, what words or phrases help you define the word senility?

Senility means the loss of mental ability. “amnesia”, “second childhood”, and “deteriorating rapidly”

What evidence suggests Joe and Frank have or have not developed as characters?

On p. 83 Joe says, “leave him alone you lousy cracker or I’ll break your neck.” Student can argue both sides because Joe has identified the moral depravity of making fun of someone yet still uses a racial slur to attack the attacker. (Some kids may come back to the “white mouse” comment from earlier in the text with this racial commentary here).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What evidence in the text do you have that Charlie has or hasn’t changed since the beginning of the story? | 1. Charlie changed but then regressed back to an intellectual place very similar to where he began. On p. 76, before his regression, he says, "I'd hidden the picture of the old Charlie Gordon from myself because now that I was intelligent it was something that had to be pushed out of my mind. But today in looking at that boy, for the first time I saw what I had been. I was just like him!" But, later Charlie says "Please tell Dr. Nemur not to be such a grouch when people laugh at him and he would have more friends", indicating that Charlie has regressed back to a point where he does not understand the nature of friendship.  

2. Charlie has changed by the end of the story. When he initially finds out that his "friends" were just mean people who made fun of him, he says, on p. 66, "Everyone was looking at me and laughing and I felt naked. I wanted to hide myself. I ran out into the street and I threw up." He cannot handle the embarrassment. However, at the end, when he says, "Please tell Dr. Nemur not to be such a grouch when people laugh at him and he would have more friends. Its easy to make friends if you let people laugh and you" he is showing the ability to let the embarrassment go. He has recognized that he will be happier if he lets go of his shame. |