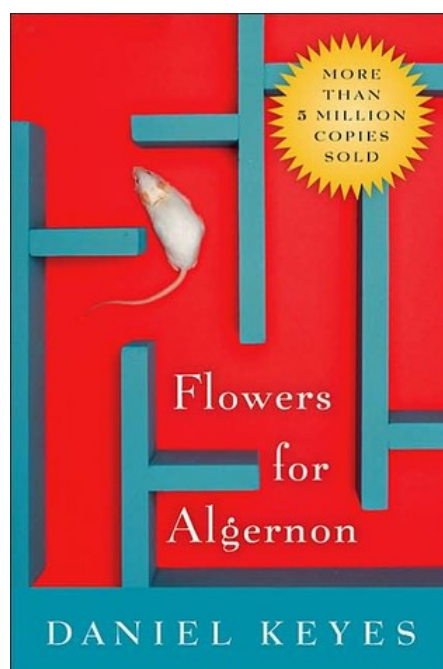




Flowers for Algernon

Daniel Keyes

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The story of a mentally disabled man whose experimental quest for intelligence mirrors that of Algernon, an extraordinary lab mouse. In diary entries, Charlie tells how a brain operation increases his IQ and changes his life. As the experimental procedure takes effect, Charlie's intelligence expands until it surpasses that of the doctors who engineered his metamorphosis. The experiment seems to be a scientific breakthrough of paramount importance--until Algernon begins his sudden, unexpected deterioration. Will the same happen to Charlie?

Flowers for Algernon Details

Date : Published May 1st 2005 by Mariner Books (first published March 1966)

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Author : Daniel Keyes

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From Reader Review Flowers for Algernon for online ebook

Emily May says

I am finding it hard to put into words the vast range of emotions I experienced whilst reading this little tale of hope, perseverance, truth and humanity. When it comes to science fiction, I would hesitate before declaring myself a fan, simply because there's only a certain amount of aliens, spaceships and intergalactic battles I can take before I start to become distracted. A good action scene on a distant planet only takes my enjoyment so far and the books I have enjoyed most from this genre tend to be the softer, more humanity-focused stories. I'm a huge fan of science fiction that doesn't seem too far away, something that I could imagine lingering just around the corner after a few more scientific experiments - and that's how I feel about Flowers for Algernon, I can imagine it as a possibility and that makes it all the more meaningful for me.

This story is about Charlie Gordon who with an IQ of 68 can only hope to sweep the floors at the bakery... well, that is until he is invited to participate in an experiment previously only tested on animals. The experiment is an operation that will gradually make him a genius and allow him to become the person he's always longed to be. But, as with Adam and Eve in the genesis story we all know, intelligence comes with a price. Charlie learns that the people he's known for years are not what he'd always thought, where he once associated laughter with friendship, he soon learns that it is mockery. Stephen Fry once said that intelligence is almost entirely about the strength of your memory - and Charlie Gordon finds that out the hard way. Memories that had been forgotten come flooding back, bringing pain with them.

Flowers for Algernon looks at so many different things: mental disabilities, human nature, intelligence and love. It made me feel sad, angry, frustrated and hopeful, it made me shake my head at people's behaviour and it made me incredibly thankful for so many things - I know how cliché that sounds but it's true.

Even though Charlie's intelligence grows to beyond that of a normal human, he is emotionally still very much a child and has to learn the things other people learned long ago. He doesn't understand what is happening when his body becomes sexually responsive to a woman and he often doesn't understand why people say one thing but mean something completely different. The abuse he has endured because of his disabilities runs back through the years to his first public school and even his own mother. This is a very sad story that made me think about so many things and the ending just about broke my heart.

James says

Book Review

4 out of 5 stars to Flowers for Algernon, a classic novella written in 1966 by Daniel Keyes, often read in high school as standard curriculum in America. A few shorter versions of the story exist, as well as film or TV adaptations for those who want to compare the literary art with the visual. I enjoyed this book when I read it the first time and even returned to reading the shorter version during a college English course. If you're not familiar with it, it's the story of Charlie, who at the time when this was written, may have been called "mentally slow." If this took place in current times, it'd be a very different approach to both telling the story and to trying to help Charlie. So the book must be read and interpreted based on it being written nearly 50 years earlier.

Charlie takes his time understanding everything around him, but at his core, you immediately see that he's a good guy. He loves a pet mouse named Algernon. They both go through a similar experiment and their intelligence begins growing, but then Algernon becomes very sick. No spoilers here, so you'll have to read it

to see what happens to the mouse and to Charlie. The book for me was a great story to immerse yourself in from an emotional stance and a philosophical stance. People are different. Some are smart. Some are not smart. But there's a purpose for everyone. How far do we take medicine to help everyone? If everyone continues to get smarter, will we run out of supplies and space? If we don't help those who need it, will they become the less fortunate asked to do the harder manual work because they cannot think as well as others? All of these are questions which plague your mind as you read... as they did readers 50 years ago. I believe it's books like these that helped shape who America is today -- some great things came out of it, but also, some hurtful and potentially dangerous things came out of it. Though the intentions are not to divide people into segments and groups, that's what ends up happening. That said, the author and the story are to me, simply trying to tell a perspective, and then conversation and education help navigate that middle line of how to move forward. When you think about the mouse, you have love, guilt, fear, pain. When you see Charlie, you wonder... what happens to the future of our race? It's a great comparison and contrast to difference aspects of life and humanity. I'd like to read this again now that it's been over 20 years... just to see if I feel any differently. But I definitely think it's something people who enjoy reading should give a chance to. It's a broad sweep of what people think should be done to help others, as opposed to what the right decision is for the good of that individual.

About Me

For those new to me or my reviews... here's the scoop: I read A LOT. I write A LOT. And now I blog A LOT. First the book review goes on Goodreads, and then I send it on over to my WordPress blog at <https://thisismytruthnow.com>, where you'll also find TV & Film reviews, the revealing and introspective 365 Daily Challenge and lots of blogging about places I've visited all over the world. And you can find all my social media profiles to get the details on the who/what/when/where and my pictures. Leave a comment and let me know what you think. Vote in the poll and ratings. Thanks for stopping by.

Dana Ilie says

While this is clearly speculative fiction, the point of *Flowers for Algernon* isn't the technology that lets Charlie become more intelligent but rather how people react to him, both before and afterwards, as his perceptions of the world change. This is, in part, a sharp rebuke of the way that the mentally retarded are treated, but there are also interesting explorations of identity, friendship, and the results of revisiting one's past. There are several wonderfully memorable characters, particularly the free-living artist living next door. The journal technique is quite effective in bringing the reader into the story and conveying Charlie's intelligence level, using spelling and grammar as superficial clues and the sophistication of Charlie's observations as a deeper clue to his current intelligence level. Over the course of the book, the writing slowly becomes more sophisticated, in tune with the underlying thoughts. I liked the balance between first-person immediacy and thoughtful retrospective that the format of a journal entry at the end of each day or two provides.

The reader's growing ability to understand Charlie and Charlie's attempts to understand himself touch on the exploration of alienness and human reactions to it that underpin so many great science fiction stories. Highly recommended.

Simon says

This has to be one of my favourite sub-genres; psychological science fiction. This is up there with the likes of *A Scanner Darkly* and *More Than Human*. These are the sort of SF books that I would recommend to

those who look down on the genre.

This book explores such themes as the nature of intelligence, the effects of intelligence on the way you see others and the world around you, as well as social attitudes towards people with mental problems.

The narrative structure is a series of progress reports, written by the protagonist, detailing his experiences throughout his period of experimental treatment. Thus we have a simple but clever way of portraying the changes in his perception and mental abilities which I don't think would have been as effective had it been written in the third person.

One of the fascinating things about this story is seeing the way the attitudes of others towards him changed as he became more intelligent (not always for the better) and the way his view of others changed as he surpassed them. This has certainly changed the way I think about people with mental problems. A great example of how SF can give a writer tools for examining people and society that other genres lack.

Amy says

I first read this book in 8th grade, in my english class. I remembered enjoying it, being fascinated in how the author painted the picture that I really was reading Charlie's journal by use of spelling, grammar and punctuation related to the level Charlie was at when writing the entries. What I didn't know at the time was the people who created the text book I used felt it was okay to chop whole chapters out of the middle of the book. They felt pulling out whole sections was okay in the name of protecting children from "bad" concepts like sex, alcohol, and violence. They didn't consider that perhaps leaving the story intact and waiting for the children to mature before handing them this story was a better route.

I discovered this injustice when I was in a used bookstore, and remembered this story I read in class I enjoyed, so I dug up a copy and bought it. When I got home, I jumped right in and started to reread it, only to get a shock in the middle of the book where suddenly there were whole chapters about this neighbor Charlie gets involved with that I didn't remember. When I reread the book more recently, there were more things that I realized would have been chopped out of a version intended for 8th grade students to read, and I just hadn't noticed as much the first time reading the complete copy because they were tucked in with the more mundane things towards the beginning of Charlies developments.

All ranting aside, I find this book to be a fascinating look at human nature, personality and development. It's well written, and does a good job placing you into Charlie's head as he goes up and down through this experiment. If you read it in school like I first did, do yourself a favor and buy or borrow a complete copy of the book to read. The lessons learned by all characters in the book certainly give you lots of think about your own behavior and that of others.

EDIT: There have been a few comments pointing out that the story was a short story first, likely the version I read in my school textbook, that was later expanded into the novel. I only wanted to add this note to my review, as it seems some people comment without reading the other comments left, so I'm seeing both comments informing me of this fact and comments of outrage that the book was censored.

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

Omg!!!! I can't even!!

Mel ???

Pouting Always says

Wow I'm so glad I finally read it. I had only read passages of it before but it was totally with sitting and reading the whole thing through. I don't even know what to say I can't stop crying because of how things are for Charlie and I guess I just wish that they way he was treated wasn't so close to reality. Also it's kind of painful to have to question things like intimacy vs intelligence and self actualization which are brought up so poignantly in the book. I don't even know if anything I'm saying is making any sense but the book really got to me and now I need to be alone to cry and consolidate myself with it and the new ideas it has made me consider.

Raeleen Lemay says

what a great read! I sort of feel like it was too simple, but still an enjoyable enough book.

Adina says

I read this 2 years ago, before I started writing more detailed reviews. I am not planning to modify my thoughts from back then but I want to add my father's thoughts. I gifted this book to him last Christmas and he finally got to read it. He was as deeply moved by this magnificent heart wrenching novel as I was and he felt the need to send me a message when he finished to tell how impressed he was. It was the first time he sent me an emotional message about a book so with his permission, I will paste here most of his words:

"Intelligence, a gift or a curse? Yes, I finished the book and I am overwhelmed by many thoughts. Flowers for Algernon is one of those books that after you read you realize how much you would have lost if you hadn't read it. We can think of Charlie or of each of us who, as he does, we accumulate and then we lose what we got through hard work. However, as he, we need to know that it wasn't for nothing. Knowledge, accumulation, though, happiness, sadness, they all come from learning, books, from the ones around us. Intelligence might be a gift but it still has a price which we have to pay." There is more but that is a private daddy-daughter talk. I love sharing my love of books with my dad and I am emotional each time he loves one of the books I recommend.

Read Flowers for Algernon! It is amazing, words cannot describe it.

My original review:

This book is extraordinary, one of my favorites. It is a fast read but is very powerful and heartbreaking. I read it in the plane and I felt a little embarrassed when I started to weep at the end of the book. Even though I was expecting the ending the way it is written still broke my heart.

I loved the way the book is written, as journal entries of an adult retard which is the subject of an experiment that makes him smart (a lot smarter). The writing at first is very childish but as the narrator changes so does the writing. Very clever.

One of the things that I found to be most powerful was the way the narrator changed his view of others after becoming more intelligent and the way others changed their attitude towards him.

I believe this should be read by everybody. Highly recommended.

Lyn says

Captivating and heartbreaking.

Daniel Keyes 1958 novel about an intellectually disabled man who, through an experimental medical procedure, gains genius level IQ is a classic of science fiction.

Charlie Gordon began attending classes at night for “retarded adults” so that he could learn to read and to “be like other people”. With the assistance of his night school teacher, he is interviewed by scientists and is accepted into the experimental program.

At the laboratory he meets Algernon, a mouse who has undergone a similar treatment and who can traverse a series of mazes faster than Charlie. Once through the procedure, Charlie first becomes able to out pace Algernon in the maze game and then advances far beyond what the researchers thought possible.

But intellectual advancement is not the same as emotional and social development and Charlie runs into problems as his life is turned upside down by the changes. His family and social interactions undergo significant transformations. Charlie is not the same person as he was before.

Keyes’ conflict develops when Algernon begins to show signs of reversals and the question becomes: will Charlie also lose that which he has gained?

Presented as a series of “progress reports” written by Charlie to document and chronicle his perceptions during the months long experiment, the reader is taken on a journey through Charlie’s unfortunate past, the amazingly rapid intellectual improvements and the sad terrors of what may come. Told with empathy and compassion, Keyes explores what it means to be human and what is most important.

A book that everyone should read.

Wil Wheaton says

Heartbreaking and beautiful. Required reading, as far as I am concerned.

Dan Schwent says

When Charlie Gordon, a mentally disabled man, undergoes an experiment to increase his intelligence, his life changes in ways he never imagined. But will the intelligence increase be permanent.

I first became aware of Flowers for Algernon when it was mentioned in an episode of Newsradio. I forgot about it until that episode of The Simpsons inspired by it, when it was discovered Homer had a crayon lodged in his brain. I'd mostly forgotten about it again until it popped up for ninety-nine cents in one of my BookGorilla emails.

Flowers for Algernon is one of those stories I wish I would have read years earlier. It's simply marvelous. It's about the nature of intelligence and how intelligence can be divisive. It's a very emotional book.

Personally, this was a very powerful book for me. For a lot of my time in school, I was way ahead of the curve and didn't really click with other kids. As Charlie's intelligence grew, eventually surpassing even the scientists that experimented on him, his feelings of isolation increased and I felt a lot of kinship toward Charlie. His difficulties fitting in were the cherry on top of the loneliness sundae.

As Charlie's intelligence grew and he comprehended things from his past, it was hard not to feel sorry for him. Once he starts sliding backward, the book keeps getting more and more sad. Keyes doesn't mind kicking you in the emotional junk, that's for sure.

I love the way the book is written in periodic progress reports from Charlie. It's perfect vehicle to show his increase in intelligence and eventual decline. There were man-tears shed over the course of the book. I had to set the book down a few times to keep from sobbing in my cube.

Flowers for Algernon is one of those rare science fiction novels that transcends the genre. Five out of five stars.

Michael Finocchiaro says

Flowers for Algernon is a wonderful book about how raw intelligence can be both a gift and a curse. The protagonist, Charlie Gordon, has his IQ increased via a surgical procedure from that of a barely functional mentally retarded person to superhuman intelligence and writes the book in first person based on his experience. The procedure was first tried on lab mouse Algernon who the protagonist befriends and who is a litmus test of what he experiences. The maturity of the writing improves as he becomes smarter and smarter. However, (spoiler alert but then why would anyone read a book that left the story there?), things are not all rosy and Algernon has a sudden precipitous drop in IQ and dies in considerable confusion and pain. Now, can Charlie discover a cure and maintain the enhanced smarts? Does he want to? Is he condemned to go full circle and lose all his self-awareness? These questions are tackled throughout the book and make for great reading. This theme has since been addressed in sci fi (I read "Understand" by Ted Chiang this week on the same idea), but Keyes' treatment of it is both moving and insightful and a great read.

Nota bene: At WebSummit in Lisbon this week, Bryan Johnson spoke of his new venture (after the \$1B sale of Braintree to PayPal some years back) about bringing this kind of cognitive enhancement into the real world, but based on Charlie's experience, this terrified rather than excited me. How do you feel about this inevitable new field of neuroscience? Let me know in the comments.

Bionic Jean says

I first came across **Flowers For Algernon** as a short story in a science fiction anthology many years ago. It seemed an enjoyably poignant and perceptive slight tale. By 1966 the author Daniel Keyes had developed his story into this full length novel, the joint winner of the year's Nebula award for the best Science Fiction

novel. It was the high point of Daniel Keyes's career. As well as nonfiction he has written several other science fiction books which explore the workings of the mind. But the classic **Flowers for Algernon** has sold more than five million copies, and has never been out of print since its original publication.

Daniel Keyes's science fiction stories were intermittently published during the 1950s, before he became a fiction editor at Marvel Science Fiction. He also worked as a high school teacher for developmentally disabled adults. These two experiences resulted in the masterpiece, **Flowers for Algernon**. Daniel Keyes said that the idea for the story struck him while he waited for an elevated train to take him from Brooklyn to New York University in 1945. In his 1999 memoir, he wrote,

"I thought: My education is driving a wedge between me and the people I love. And then I wondered: 'What would happen if it were possible to increase a person's intelligence?'"

The best speculative stories start from a simple idea: "What if?" This is such a story. It has no need for alien worlds, galactic swashbucklers, bug-eyed monsters or complicated spaceship technology. This is not the world of hard Sci Fi, focusing on science and the inhuman aspects of other worlds. Like all classic science fiction, it seems to transcend the limitations of the genre. It explores universal human themes such as the nature of intelligence, the nature of emotion, and how the two interact with each other. Even the intelligence-enhancing surgery is not detailed, except for brief mentions of the workings of the brain, and the rare genetic condition phenylketonuria, to add authenticity to the enhanced intellectual capabilities of the narrator.

The story is told from the point of view of a thirty-two-year-old man, who has been assessed as having an IQ of 68. The narrator, Charlie Gordon, works at Donner's Bakery in New York City as a janitor and delivery boy. He writes that he,

"reely wantd to lern I wantid it more even then pepul who are smarter even then me ... all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb".

His teacher Alice Kinnian, who works at the "Beekman College Centre for Retarded Adults", recognises his strong motivation and desire to learn. She has put him forward as a potential candidate to undergo experimental surgery designed to boost his intelligence.

A team of University researchers have already performed the experiment successfully on the lab mouse Algernon. Charlie has a number of tests, including a comparison with Algernon to indicate how quickly he can solve a maze. This part of the book sets the tone for the gentle humour which is to follow. Charlie reports the tests with perfect childlike clarity and literal incomprehension. He has no imagination; no ability to invent. The directors of the experiment, Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur, agree that Charlie is a good choice, and ask Charlie to keep a journal,

"Dr Strauss says I shoud rite down what I think and remembir and evrey thing that happins to me from now on."

The entire narrative of **Flowers for Algernon** is composed of this series of "progress reports" which Charlie writes in his diary. Charlie is excited and optimistic, despite the scientists' caution,

"You know Charlie we are not shure how this experamint will werk on pepul because we only tried it up to now on animils."

At this point the reader realises that not only we will be able to anticipate Charlie's progress by watching Algernon's burgeoning intelligence, but we will be able to deduce it by the content and linguistic competence of Charlie's journal. It is a brilliantly inspired device on the part of Daniel Keyes. Charlie's teacher Alice continues to help him improve his spelling and grammar, and he determinedly reads adult books, filling his

brain with knowledge from a wide range of academic fields. His progress is slow at first, but his comprehension accelerates as he devours his reading, delighting in his new-found knowledge and understanding,

"This is beauty, love, and truth all rolled into one. This is joy."

The story follows both the events in the laboratory, and events in Charlie's personal life. It becomes clear that the owner of the bakery is being kind to Charlie in keeping him in work, and that it has really been an act of charity. His co-workers however frequently make fun of and mock him. Charlie, on the other hand, has always viewed them as his true friends. The realisation that what he thought of as shared jokes are taunts, and that he is a laughing stock, is very hurtful to him. We feel his pain through his faithful record,

"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 when they say 'to pull a Charlie Gordon'. I'm ashamed."

as he begins to realise the truth of the psychiatrist Dr. Strauss's observation,

"The more intelligent you get the more problems you'll have Charlie."

Charlie continues to work hard at the bakery, (view spoiler)

"Before, they had laughed at me, despising me for my ignorance and dullness; now, they hated me for my knowledge and understanding."

Perplexed, Charlie approaches the scientists to help him, and the advice from each reflects their differing world views. Alice recognises that he needs to develop and experience moral quandries for himself, and tells him to trust his heart. This is an everyday moral dilemma, but one which has no easy or right answer.

"What's right? Ironical that all my intelligence doesn't help me solve a problem like this."

There are many layers to Charlie Gordon. As he develops, his personality changes. Thrilled at first to learn, he begins to be alternately angry and embarrassed when he remembers what he sees as his earlier foolish self. He also begins to remember his early childhood, and we learn all about his parents, Rose and Matt Gordon.(view spoiler)

All the flashbacks are interspersed with the narrative, so that the stories of Charlie's present and past intertwine and reflect upon each other, adding to both Charlie's and the reader's understanding of the current situation.

As his brain becomes more incisive, Charlie learns sarcasm, suspicion, and resentment. His faith in the people around him begins to crumble,

"Now I understand that one of the reasons for going to college and getting an education is to learn that the things you've believed in all your life aren't true, and that nothing is what it appears to be."

"I'm confused. I don't know what I know any more."

(view spoiler) Charlie's feeling of his "other self" becomes stronger as the novel proceeds, continually resurfacing at crucial points, in the form of the old Charlie, perceived as a separate entity existing outside of himself. In this and other ways, the past persists in the present.

For instance, he remembers long ago watching through a window in his apartment, as other children played.

Later, with his enhanced intelligence, he feels as if the old Charlie is watching him through a window. The window seems to represent an emotional distance: a barrier to normal society, which the mentally disabled Charlie cannot cross. Later, he is just as distanced from his former self as the children he used to watch playing had been. Once he sees the other Charlie face-to-face in a mirror, a glimpse of his other self: a very frightening experience.

Delighted with Charlie's progress, Dr. Strauss and Professor Nemur take both Charlie and Algernon to a scientific convention in Chicago. But Charlie has reservations,

"How different they seem now. And how foolish I was ever to have thought that professors were intellectual giants. They're people - and afraid the rest of the world will find out."

"I'm not an inanimate object ... I'm a person ... I was a person before the operation. In case you forgot."

Dr. Strauss has always been concerned with his psychological health, but Charlie feels that Nemur treats him like just another lab animal. It is transparently clear that Charlie's scientific knowledge has advanced beyond Professor Nemur's.

(view spoiler)

Because **Flowers For Algernon** is essentially about the human condition, it is a timeless tale, touching upon many different ethical and moral themes. As such it can be seen as a moral fable about society's mistreatment of the mentally disabled. Charlie's story reveals that all the attitudes towards his early self were rooted in feelings of superiority. Some were cruel, some were kind; but nearly all were condescending.

"The best of them have been smug and patronising - using me to make themselves superior and secure in their own limitations. Anyone can feel intelligent beside a moron."

Because Charlie was regarded as an intellectual inferior, an assumption was made consequent on that: that this made him less of a human being. Yet even here there are nuances. In one episode Charlie takes people to task for making fun of a mentally disabled boy in a restaurant. But later, horrified by the blank faces of the mentally disabled people he encounters when visiting the Warren Street home, he displays the same feelings. Is this because he does not want to accept that he was once like them and may soon be like them again? Or is it a latent tendency he has inherited from his mother? How much does society demand that we conform to its

ideas of normality?

There is much in the book which explores the apparent conflict between the intellect and the emotion. The early Charlie is trusting and friendly with a good heart. But as his intelligence increases he becomes distant and detached, and sometimes arrogant. At one point he even says that his genius has erased his love for Alice. Because Charlie is the subject of an experiment, he has aptly internalised a lot of science's methodology, and eventually his knowledge surpasses Professor Nemur's. But Professor Nemur is not a good role model for Charlie. These two factors have made Charlie view the "scientific method" as being the only way to approach life, and he approaches his emotional problems in a scientific manner.

The two emotional extremes are represented by Professor Nemur and Charlie's free-spirited neighbour Fay. Professor Nemur is highly intelligent, but lacks any humour or friends. Dr. Strauss is more empathic - but it is Fay who is an embodiment of the opposite extreme. She is ruled entirely by her feelings, acting both foolishly and illogically. Alice however represents human warmth and kindness. She never believes that a disability makes anyone a lesser human, but takes genuine satisfaction from helping people. She also greatly admires Charlie's strong desire and motivation to learn, encouraging him to integrate both his intellect and his emotion.

Charlie employs the scientific method throughout his intelligence-boosted phase. It is all he has seen, and becomes his guiding principle. But when he becomes aware that in order to further his research, he is manipulating other people - especially Alice - and treating them like laboratory rats, he begins to deplore what he is doing. His highest level of emotional development is when he becomes aware of the dangers of dehumanisation which accompany the scientific pursuit of knowledge. Twinned with this is his determination to go on living as long as he can, keeping on with his progress reports, in order to pass on his unique knowledge to humanity. His miraculous experience has given him a new perspective on life.

Flowers For Algernon dates from 1959, as an acclaimed short story in a magazine, winning the Hugo award for best short story a year later. It has been successfully adapted for television in both 1961 and 2000. In 1968 the film "*Charly*", won an Oscar, and its star an Academy Award. It was even adapted as a Broadway musical in 1978.

To expand a short story into a masterly novel such as this does not often succeed. Far too often the reader can see the "cracks" and realise which parts have been artificially padded out. **Flowers For Algernon's** popularity alone proves that this is not the case here. Daniel Keyes has taken his promising initial idea, and developed it into a perfectly balanced and satisfying novel. The best science fiction has the potential to explore various philosophical ideas to do with ethics and responsibility. The author has chosen this scenario to explore the extremes of human nature, by imagining an altered version of the world, peopled with realistic characters, in a realistic environment. His genius lies in creating a work which appeals both to the people who are usually indifferent to science fiction, and also to those who love it.

The blurb on the cover of my copy says,

"The story of a young man's quest for intelligence and knowledge. Charlie Gordon will break your heart."

How true that is. The story of Charlie Gordon did indeed break my heart.

Please ... please ... don't let me forget how to read and write.

PS please if you get a chance put some flowers on Algernon's grave in the back yard.

Candi says

"The walls between people are thin here, and if I listen quietly, I hear what is going on. Greenwich Village is like that too. Not just being close - because I don't feel it in a crowded elevator or on the subway during the rush - but on a hot night when everyone is out walking, or sitting in the theater, there is a rustling, and for a moment I brush against someone and sense the connection between the branch and trunk and the deep root. At such moments my flesh is thin and tight, and the unbearable hunger to be part of it drives me out to search in the dark corners and blind alleys of the night."

This book is absolutely a must-read! I've had it on my list to read for quite some time, not because I thought it would be fantastic, but because I thought to myself that here is a book almost everyone has read and somehow I have not. Well, having finished this masterpiece, I have to say wow! - **Flowers for Algernon** is truly incredible. So thought-provoking and almost emotionally overwhelming, I really felt this novel speaking to me about love, humanity, and our purpose and place in the world.

Categorized as "young adult" and "science fiction", **Flowers for Algernon** is most certainly not just for the young adult and is not a science fiction novel in the typical sense (no space travel or otherworldly beings in these pages), but is instead a novel that goes just outside the box of realistic fiction. It goes just beyond the boundaries of what we have accomplished in science and medicine. Charlie Gordon is a young man with an I.Q. of 68. He works in a bakery doing custodial work while taking classes to learn to read and write. He is a happy person, feels he has many friends, and is also driven to please people and to make himself smarter. Having been cast aside by his family, most notably his mother, much of Charlie's thoughts and actions throughout the book are a result of how he was treated and rebuked as a child and his desire to be viewed as a "normal" individual. In fact, much of this book causes the reader to think that each and every one of us has the right to be regarded with dignity and respect no matter what our deficiencies or differences. When given the opportunity to increase his intelligence by a procedure previously tried only in animals, Charlie jumps at this rare chance. Feeling confident in their positive results with a mouse named Algernon, the experts are prepared to make the first step with this experimental surgery in humans and agree that Charlie is an ideal candidate. *"Dr. Strauss said I had something that was very good. He said I had a good motor-vation. I never even knowed I had that. I felt good when he said not everbody with an eye-Q of 68 had that thing like I had it. I dont know what it is or where I got it but he said Algernon had it too."* Here, too, we can see Charlie's need to satisfy his family, even now that they are no longer a part of his life: *"If the operashun werks and I get smart mabye Ill be abel to find my mom and dad and sister and show them. Boy woud they be serprised to see me smart just like them and my sister."*

Following a successful surgery, Charlie indeed becomes smarter; he eventually surpasses the very individuals that achieved this medical and scientific accomplishment. But, with intelligence Charlie is confronted with hidden and often painful memories, an awareness of true human behavior and a struggle with the desire to rid himself of a feeling of loneliness. *"Intelligence is one of the greatest human gifts. But all too often a search for knowledge drives out the search for love."* Charlie shifts from being a humble, mentally handicapped young man with many friends (though some of these friends had in fact been laughing at him) to a brilliant man whose intelligence and attitude of superiority isolates him from those friends. He is tormented by emotional and sexual immaturity despite his genius I.Q. As the novel is written in diary format, the reader is privy to Charlie's innermost thoughts throughout his journey and I was completely consumed by Charlie's emotions. I felt hopeful, joyful, enlightened, angry, confused and heartbroken right along with Charlie... I cried. Charlie begins to understand something very vital about human nature: *"I could see how important physical love was... The universe was exploding, each particle away from the next, hurtling us into dark and lonely space, eternally tearing us away from each other - child out of the womb, friend away from friend, moving from each other, each through his own pathway toward the goal-box of solitary death. But this was the counterweight, the act of binding and holding. As when men to keep from being swept overboard in the storm clutch at each other's hands to resist being torn apart, so our bodies fused a link in the human*

chain that kept us from being swept into nothing."

I felt just as enraged as Charlie when he realized that prior to his surgery, he was not even considered a human being by some of the scientists to whom he owed his new-found intelligence. Professor Nemur termed his prior existence as being "*nature's mistake*" and went further to say that "*Charlie Gordon did not really exist before this experiment.*" Here, Charlie turned a corner and a sudden realization prompted him to dissociate himself from the other scientists and immerse himself in his own research to predict the final outcome of this experiment on both Algernon and himself. Is artificially-induced intelligence a permanent state? What can Charlie contribute to this field and does he have time?

Flowers for Algernon is a beautiful and poignant story. Daniel Keyes effectively teaches us about the issue of living with a disability as well as parenting a child with a disability, love, respect, and the essential need for human connection and affection. If you have not yet read this book, I highly recommend that you take a moment and move this one up to the top of your list!
