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10/12/16

### False Hope for Self-Improvement

Everyone constantly craves to be better than they already are, including the mentally ill. “Flowers for Algernon”, is a fictional short story, written by Daniel Keyes. Charlie, a mentally challenged 37-year-old man, really would like to become smarter. He yearns to be tested on, in an operation that triples a person’s intelligence. A mouse named Algernon has already received this risky operation and seems to be holding up quite well. Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur make a difficult decision in selecting Charlie as their test subject to operate on. When he came out of the operating room he felt no different. It took a while to kick in, but soon Charlie became real smart. After some time, Charlie’s intelligence decreased and he slowly went back to himself. Throughout all of this, Charlie perpetually wanted to improve himself, to become better. In this story, the theme is self-improvement. It is explored through his view of himself, how others influence him, and how society views him.

First of all, his view of himself is a way self-improvement is explored in this story. Charlie has been wanting to increase his brilliance for a while now, and he is finally given the chance to. Charlie explains, “They said you know it will probly be tempirery. I said yes. Miss Kinnian told me. I dont care if it herts”(p. 286). What Charlie is referring to is the operation he wants to receive to increase his intelligence. He is willing to do whatever it takes to become

smarter. This shows that Charlie views his low intellect as awful. Charlie thinks that the operation is worth it, even with its temporary effects and the risks. Charlie Gordon writes, "I told him I didnt think I was going to get smart and he put his hand on my sholder and said Charlie you dont know it yet but your getting smarter all the time. You wont notice for a while. I think he was just being nice to make me feel good because I dont look any smarter"(p. 289). Charlie believes his low intelligence is preventing him from doing amazing things in his life, even after the perilous operation he endures. He really wants the operation to work, so nervous feelings arise when the implied effects of the operation are not happening quickly to him. This shows that he views himself very dismissively in the idea that he can't even grow into a more intelligent individual because he believes he can not do it. The examples of the lesson in this short story shown, all relate to his view of himself.

Pursuing this further, how others influence him is another way self-improvement is explored in this story. Ms. Kinnian, Charlie's adult night school teacher, instructs Charlie on reading, writing, and punctuation. The main character states, "Dr Nemur was worryed about using me but Dr Strauss told him Miss Kinnian rekemmed me the best from all the people who she was teaching. I like Miss Kinnian becaus shes a very smart teacher. And she said Charlie your going to have a second chance. If you volenteer for this experamenl you mite get smart. They dont know if it will be perminint but theirs a chance. Thats why I said ok even when I was scared because she said it was an operashun. She said dont be scared Charlie you done so much with so little I think you deserv it most of all"(p. 286). Ms. Kinnian has influenced Charlie and his way of thinking of whether or not to get the operation. Since Ms. Kinnian put her faith in Charlie, he now knows for sure that the right choice would be getting the operation to increase

his intelligence. Furthermore, Charlie writes, “Then Dr Nemur nodded he said all right maybe your right. We will use Charlie. When he said that I got so excited I jumped up and shook his hand for being so good to me. I told him thank you doc you wont be sorry for giving me a second chance. And I mean it like I told him. After the operashun Im gonna try to be smart. Im gonna try awful hard”(p. 287). Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss’s decision to use Charlie has made Charlie very excited to become more astute. This shows that the vital decision of Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss influences how Charlie feels about himself ever becoming brainy. These examples shown all correlate to how others influence Charlie.

A final example is, how society views Charlie. Charlie works at Donnegon’s Bakery as a janitor. As stated in the text, the author illustrates his point when he states, “We had a lot of fun at the factery today. Joe Carp said hey look where Charlie had his operashun what did they do Charlie put some brains in. I was going to tell him but I remembered Dr Strauss said no. Then Frank Reilly said what did you do Charlie forget your key and open your door the hard way. That made me laft. Their really my friends and they like me. Sometimes somebody will say hey look at Joe or Frank or George he really pulled a Charlie Gordon. I dont know why they say that but they always laft. This morning Amos Borg who is the 4 man at Donnegans used my name when he shouted at Ernie the office boy. Ernie lost a packige. He said Ernie for god sake what are you trying to be a Charlie Gordon. I dont understand why he said that. I never lost any packiges(p. 289).” His co-workers seem to treat him like a doll with string. They say something to him, but Charlie responds the same way over and over again and does not understand what they mean to respond any differently. Charlie’s co-workers and even his boss use his disadvantage to their own amusement. This shows how society views Charlie because of his

intellectual detriment. Moreover, he writes, "The boy saw that he was not going to be punished. His frightened expression disappeared and he smiled and hummed as he came back with the broom to sweep the floor. A few of the rowdier customers kept up the remarks, amusing themselves at his expense. "Here, sonny, over here there's a nice piece behind you ..." "C'mon, do it again .. " "He's not so dumb. It's easier to break 'em than to wash 'em ..." As his vacant eyes moved across the crowd of amused onlookers, he slowly mirrored their smiles and finally broke into an uncertain grin at the joke which he obviously did not understand. 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 him because he was mentally retarded. And I had been laughing at him too. Suddenly, I was furious at myself and all those who were smirking at him. I jumped up and shouted, "Shut up! Leave him alone! It's not his fault d he can't understand! He can't help what he is! But for God's sake ... he's still a human being"(p. 299)! The young boy is certainly just like Charlie before he got the operation, dumb, childish, and hopeful for the best. The before version of Charlie and the young boy do not seem to be socially accepted in society. This explains that the way society views Charlie is antipathetic. Charlie is embarrassed to have been mentally retarded. His behavior suggests that he might be feeling glad, but at the same time bitter that he improved his knowledge. This shows that society can not accept him because he is a mentally challenged man. These examples shown connect to the theme of self-improvement and how society views him.

To summarize, the theme of this eye-catching short story is self-improvement. It is explored through his view of himself, how others influence him, and how society views him. The theme of self-improvement is significant because most people think of themselves as not perfect

and they feel they can be exceptional. The problem is that no one is perfect. They are chasing fantasy. This story demonstrates what happens when you wish to become something you're not to satisfy the feeling of wanting to improve. It is essential to take themes from literary works because to truly understand what you are reading you need to know why it was written in the first place. Most importantly, it is essential because you need to know what lesson the book attempts to teach you. The theme educates people or influences lives or humanity, society, or the world by showing how our lives truly are and how we affect others to want something they do not need. The story "Flowers for Algernon", has given people new ideas of how the world treats each other and the consequences of these actions.