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FFA Essay

About 18% of the adults in the population of the United States suffer from a mental illness that isolates them from the rest of society. In a short story called “Flowers for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes, it shows the struggle of a 37-year-old man by the name of Charlie Gordon that is struggling with himself to overcome a mental illness that blocks him from having the average intelligence of a human being. In this short story, Charlie goes through a fatal operation after being authorized by Dr. Strauss and Dr. Lemur, two psychology researchers, to be tested on for their experiment that could triple Charlie’s IQ. The theme in this novella is how fulfilling one’s desires in vain negatively impacts people’s perspectives because of how Charlie’s life was before he got the operation, then later on in the story when Charlie’s intelligence starts to increase slowly due to the fact that the operation worked, and finally, how Charlie’s life dramatically changes once he becomes a genius reaching levels than an average person could possibly reach.

As a matter of fact, the theme is well explored in the beginning of the story as we see the way that Charlie’s life is on a regular day basis and how Charlie wants to be bright. In Charlie’s progress report he wrote, “I told them because all my life I wanted to be smart and not dumb. But its very hard to be smart. They said you know it will probably be tempirery. I said yes. Miss Kinnian told me. I dont care if it herts” (286). In this part of the story, Dr. Strauss and Dr. Lemur discussed with Charlie about the circumstances that having the operation, Charlie did not think twice about agreeing because he has always had that desire to

be intelligent, which results in his character being very determined and also very cooperative. Even though Charlie is eager to learn, through the perspectives of Dr. Strauss and Dr. Lemur, they want to make sure that Charlie is the right person for the procedure, this operation may help other people who are like Charlie, therefore they must not make a wrong choice in selecting their test subject. After the operation, Charlie must go through a series of daily tests in order for Dr. Strauss and Dr. Lemur to be able to determine the results of the operation. After Charlie takes the Rorschach Test, a test that is used to measure the creativity a person has, he fails to see any pictures within the inkblots so soon after he writes, "Dr Strauss said I got to play those games. And he said some time I got to take those tests over again. These inkblots are stupid. And those pictures are stupid too," (288). After not being able to see any sort of pictures in the inkblots, Charlie becomes very frustrated and impatient with himself because he does not see any progress after the operation. However, both Dr. Strauss and Dr. Lemur know Charlie's growth in intelligence will develop over time if the experiment is successful.

Not only is the theme explored well in the beginning of the story, but it is also shown later in the story when Charlie's intelligence starts to increase slowly showing that the operation was working resulting with the people around him becoming afraid of him. Charlie points out that, "Tonight after work Miss Kinnian was at the laboratory. She looked like she was glad to see me but scared. I told her don't worry Miss Kinnian I'm not smart yet and she laughed"(291). Miss Kinnian is a teacher at a night school that works with adults on how to better their grammar, reading and writing. She sees Charlie as being the best student in her class during the time that he had attended night school however her point of view of Charlie changes as she begins to notice that he is gaining intelligence resulting in her being intimidated. In a progress report

Charlie writes, "Everybody seems to be frightened of me. When I went over to Amos Borg and tapped him on the shoulder, he jumped up in the air. People don't talk to me much any more or kid around the way they used to. It makes the job kind of lonely" (295). For as long as Charlie could remember he has always desired to be sharp, but now that he has that, the people he used to once be friends with seem to not want him around anymore and those who do are simply afraid of him.

An equally important way on how the theme of the story is showed is because of how Charlie's life changed from when he was feeble-minded to later in the story when he is a genius. A kind hearted, old woman by the name of Fanny Girden mentioned to Charlie that, "You used to be a good, dependable, ordinary man-not too bright maybe, but honest. Who knows what you done to yourself to get so smart all of a sudden. Like everybody around here's been saying, Charlie, it's not right," (297). Fanny is saying that although Charlie was not so smart, he had something that many people did not, and that was honesty and kindness. In the very beginning, Charlie's character shows to be determined, cooperative, and enthusiastic, but as Charlie's intelligence increases later on in the story, he begins to be less cooperative. Charlie claims that "Dr. Strauss is very angry at me for not having written any progress reports in two weeks... I told him I was too busy reading and writing..." (297). Charlie begins to become unsympathetic about being tested on. Dr. Strauss begins to view him as being willful compared to the way that he was in the very beginning of the research. Along with gaining intelligence, Charlie also gained aloneness and sadness because everyone that was once in his life had decided to not be there for him, knowing that Charlie had changed. He finally had what he always desired to have, intelligence, however Charlie wasn't as happy as he used to be before.

In conclusion, in the story “Flowers for Algernon” the theme is how fulfilling one’s desires in vain negatively impacts people’s perspectives because of how Charlie’s life was before he got the operation, then later on in the story when Charlie’s intelligence starts to increase slowly due to the fact that the operation worked, and finally, how Charlie’s life changed dramatically once he became a genius. It is important to be happy with yourself and how you are as a person because if you ever decide that you want to change any aspect from yourself, always know that you are also changing the way others view you. Whether it’s a positive or negative change about yourself, there will always be those who will not accept the new changes you have made.