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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Flowers for Algernon
by
Daniel Keyes
(New York: Harcourt, 2004)

Author:

Daniel Keyes, the author of eight books, was born in Brooklyn, New York, and received his BA and MA degrees from Brooklyn College. Professor emeritus at Ohio University, he lives in Boca Raton, Florida. [From the book jacket]

Summary:

Charlie Gordon is about to embark upon an unprecedented journey. Born with an unusually low IQ, he has been chosen as the perfect subject for an experimental surgery that researchers hope will increase his intelligence – a procedure that has already been highly successful when tested on a lab mouse named Algernon.

As the treatment takes effect, Charlie's intelligence expands until it surpasses that of the doctors who engineered his metamorphosis. The experiment appears to be a scientific breakthrough of paramount importance until Algernon suddenly deteriorates. Will the same happen to Charlie? [From the book jacket]

Questions:

1. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read his or her favorite passage out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) How does this particular passage relate to the story as a whole? Does it reveal anything specific about any of the characters or illuminate certain aspects of the story?
2. How important is the setting to the story? If applicable, discuss the time period in which the book is set. Does the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story?
3. Is the author equally invested in both character and plot? Or did the author put more effort into developing the story than in creating compelling and believable characters? Were the motivations of the characters believable, or did their actions feel like a means to further the plot?
4. Would you recommend this work on the basis of its literary merit? Would you endorse it purely because of the skillful writing and the well-developed characters?

5. Is your group familiar with the author's previous works? If so, did this book live up to or exceed your expectations of the author?
6. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more work by this author?

[Questions from Reading Group Guides

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/content/index.asp> and Library Staff]

Further Reading:

John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

A dramatic novelette about two itinerant ranch workers, George and Lennie. George has assumed responsibility for the childlike Lennie, a giant so strong that he unconsciously kills what he attempts to caress. The characters are mainly ranch hands whose natural speech is profane and often bawdy. The simple, tragic tale is moving, vivid, and well told. [Booklist]

Ernest Hebert, *A Little More Than Kin*

Evicted from the New Hampshire shack he proudly called home, Ollie Jordan--ignorant, ingenious, angry, bedeviled, and doomed--pursues his independence, though bound to an idiot son he both dotes on and despises.