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The Power of Intelligence

During the decade of the 1960's, treatment for mental disorders was not as advanced as it is today. In the short story, "Flowers for Algernon", by Daniel Keyes, Charlie Gordon, the main character, has a learning disability and undergoes surgery in order to raise his intelligence. The surgery he goes through is a part of the trial experiment, run by Dr.Strauss and Dr.Nemur. Miss Kinnian, the teacher of the night school that Charlie was attending in order to gain more intelligence, recommended Charlie to Dr.Strauss and Dr.Nemur because of his motivation. The theme in the story, "Intelligence represents power, the more you have, the more it is taken advantage of", this is explored throughout the story with the arguments of two intelligent doctors, the way Charlie's co-workers treat him, and how Charlie uses his knowledge when he receives it.

Indeed, Dr.Strauss and Dr.Nemur argue constantly about who should have more recognition on the experiment and who deserves to have their intelligence be credited. In the story, Charlie feels eager to ask Dr.Strauss about the dinner they planned to have with Miss Kinnian. Rather than asking him, Charlie hears Dr.Strauss and Dr.Nemur arguing about who would take credit for the pivotal experiment. Disputing against Dr.Nemur, Dr.Strauss claims that he performed the crucial operation and some day neurosurgeons all over the world would be using his vital technique (295). The doctors are so driven by their intelligence and determination

to fight for it, to get recognized that they aren't even aware that they are arguing ignorantly with one and other. They are so rapacious with getting credit and getting famous recognition in the medicine world that they let their intelligence get the best of them. Meaning, that they try to out do each other, they let their ego get in between them in order to receive the most credit when their research goes public. In a different scene, the doctors argue-- once again-- on what is definition of an IQ. Irritated, Dr. Strauss claims that an IQ doesn't weigh intelligence at all, but how intelligent you can get, angrily opposing the definition of Dr. Nemur (293). Obviously, both doctors are infuriated with each other and each other's ideas simply because they aren't the same ideas as each others. You would think that two intelligent doctors would be less cruel towards each other especially if they are working on a momentous experiment together. These two doctors use their intelligence as power in order to determine who will get a larger amount of the credit.

Not only do the arguments of the two doctors express the theme but also the cruel treatment Charlie receives from his apathetic co-workers, Joe and Frank. In a distinct scene, Joe willingly invites Charlie to go out to a bar with friends to get a couple of drinks. At the bar, Frank and Joe make Charlie drink and he does, because he trusts his "best friends." Joe suggests for Charlie to show the girls how he mops at work. Charlie gleefully agrees and enthusiastically shows the girls how he mops and Joe and everybody else starts laughing, including Charlie (290). Joe and Frank take advantage of Charlie's condition and the opportunity to make fun of him and entertain themselves. Frank and Joe in this part of the story are sick, immature, ruthless people. What makes them more ruthless and immature is the fact that they are making fun of a grown man with a learning disability that blocks him from seeing the true motives of Joe and

Frank. In the scene where Charlie realizes the true intentions of Frank and Joe, he gets drunk when Joe puts alcohol in the drink, Coca Cola, ignoring Charlie's polite order to not bring him alcohol. Charlie dances with a woman named Ellen, while Joe sticks his foot out in order to trip Charlie, they all have a laugh, except this time Charlie realizes something dominant, that Joe and the rest of them were making fun of him and laughing at him (292-293). Both Frank and Joe ruthlessly make fun of Charlie and his serious learning disability. Charlie is unaware that Frank and Joe's intentions are to make fun of him and not become friends with him. Charlie's child-like ignorance makes him believe that he is always laughing and having fun with Joe and Frank because they are his "best friends." The intelligence of Joe and Frank go against Charlie. They take advantage of their intelligence and of the intelligence that Charlie doesn't have, and use it as a power over him and make fun of him.

Equally as important, Charlie's intelligence development helps him use his new knowledge in an excellent way. He uses his new knowledge of things and people to defend a 16 year old boy that became the laughing stock of the restaurant when he broke the dishes. In this scene, Charlie goes out to eat dinner, when his attention gets caught with the loud crash of the plates hitting the floor. The dishes were dropped by a 16-year-old boy with a mental disorder. People make rude remarks and laugh him. Charlie jumps out of his seat furiously, and yells at everybody for mocking the boy (299). He realized that just a few weeks ago he was that clueless boy who laughed along with the joke that was made about him. Charlie felt a connection with the boy, he knew what it felt like to not know what was really happening. He knew how it felt like when everyone would partner up and laugh and make fun of you and no one would defend you. Soon after, Charlie feels the need to contribute to the experiment he and a mouse named

Algernon are a part of, so he does research of his own. He explains how he has knowledge from “both sides”, that he can use in order to carry out the research. He works really hard and is determined to find something crucial know as the “Algernon-Gordon Effect” (300). Charlie explains that he knows what it is like to be in both worlds, him as a genius and him as someone with a learning disability. It amazes me how Charlie is such a hard worker and has so much determination when he is a genius and when he had his learning disability. Charlie, unlike Joe and the others used his intelligence as power to help him unlock something beneficial to the experiment.

Predominantly, there are people in the story who let power their of intelligence to be used in a positive way or negative way. The theme is the main role in the story, it is what the story is revolved around. It is necessary to extract themes from literary works in order to see what you think the author wants you to learn from the story. The theme affects the lives of humanity because it can show a certain part of you as a person. The theme is universal because in the world intelligence is used as power and is either use it positively or atrociously.