

Flowers for Algernon- Change

Intelligence is something you can fix and it can be good or it can be bad and hurtful. In the story “Flowers for Algernon”, written by Daniel Keyes, a man is used in an operation to improve his low IQ. After the operation he claims to not feel anything changing. It’s only a matter of time until he realizes what kind of world he has been living in. He and other people around him notice the changes in his life. The universal theme of this story is “change” for three reasons: the unknown becomes known, new discoveries are found, and growth in intelligence is seen.

In the beginning, we see change in “Flowers for Algernon when the unknown becomes known. As the story goes along, we see that Charlie was blind to the things that were said about him at work and other places. “It’s a funny thing I never knew that Joe and Frank and the others liked to have me around all the time to make fun of me” (292,293). This evidence shows that Charlie’s eyes were opened to the reality of this cruel, rude world. This connects to the universal theme “change” because before the operation, he didn’t know about this but now his mind is developing and he is learning about the feeling of rejection and embarrassment. When Charlie went out to eat his evening meal at his favorite place, he saw a boy was being laughed and it reminded him of himself. “It infuriated me to think that not too long ago I, like this boy, had foolishly played to clown” (299). Both of these boys are being judged by the people surrounding them. Charlie because he furiously stood up for the young boy, and the boy because he wasn’t smart and had mental health problems as well. This relates to “change” because Charlie doesn’t

want others to go through what he went through when he was dumb. This is part of the theme because it shows that Charlie's way of being changed when he knew what being made a fool felt like.

Secondly, change is most relevant to the main lesson of the story because new discoveries are found. When Charlie noticed odd changes in Algernon, he decided to lead on an investigation of increasing human intelligence. "I've got to find the reason for the sharp aggression in Algernon. I've got to know *if* and *when* it will happen to me" (301). This proves that change was seen in the story because Charlie made the discovery that improving a person's intelligence only works for a short while. Maybe in the eyes of others the operation works perfectly fine but changing the way a person should think is wrong in the first place. Thanks to Charlie Gordon, Dr Strauss and Dr Nemur know that tripling human intelligence does not work. "The facts and results of my experiment are clear, and the more sensational aspects of my own rapid climb cannot obscure the fact that the tripling of intelligence by the surgical technique developed by Drs. Strauss and Nemur must be viewed as having little or no practical applicability to the increase of human intelligence" (301). This evidence highlights the change from the beginning to the end of the story. It shows that operating someone in hopes that they'll get smarter does not work because the person they first tried it on found out that his change of mindset was temporary. New discoveries are found when Charlie notices strange things happening to the animals that were operated the way he was.

Lastly, the growth of intelligence in this person is a reason for the universal theme topic. In the limited time that he had, Charlie went from knowing nothing to knowing many things. "I know punctuation and I can spell good. Besides history, geography, and arithmetic, Miss

Kinnian says I should start to learn a few foreign languages” (293). Miss Kinnian sees the ability growing inside of Charlie’s mind and wants him to try new things while he can. He is constantly learning things that he thought he would never know of before. “You’re accomplishing in days and weeks what it takes normal people to do in half a lifetime” (296). This shows that Charlie has changed because everybody else notices that he is learning things really fast. Even the smartest person can’t learn things the way he is. Charlie shows a form of change when he begins to show his ability to learn.

In conclusion, I believe the universal theme expressed in this short story is change for three reasons: the unknown becomes known, new discoveries are found, and growth in intelligence is seen. This theme is important because we have to see that change is something that can be positive but it will always have a negative to it. It is necessary to extract themes from literary works because it allows us to understand stories better. The theme is universal because there is change in everything we do, say, feel, and think. The character of this story was determined that the change in his life would be a positive one and it was, but only for a certain amount of time. People are perfect the way that they are. It doesn’t matter if they have a disease or simply aren’t as smart or good looking as others. We don’t have to change for anybody because what we were born with is something that God gave for a reason. We don’t have to allow anybody to change us either. Stay the way you are forever!