"Flowers for Algernon" by Daniel Keyes

Prereading

Reteach the Key Idea

Review Narrative Elements  It can be difficult for English-language learners to decipher the language and follow the plot of a story simultaneously. Review the definitions of subplot and parallel episodes. Explain the basic plot of “Flowers for Algernon” (Charlie’s intellectual rise and fall), and point out that the story also has a parallel episode, the story of Algernon, the lab mouse. Ask students to look for the similarities between the main plot and the parallel episode. “Flowers for Algernon” has several other subplots that add richness and detail. Identify two other subplots. (Charlie’s effort to form a relationship with Miss Kinnin; the effect of the experiment on the careers of Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur)

Vocabulary Practice

Identify Science Vocabulary  The words below are commonly used in science classes. Ask students to use the words in a paragraph describing Charlie’s relationship with Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss.

- research (p. 46): careful, well-documented study to find out facts and principles about some subject
- experiment (p. 46): test to find out something or to see whether a theory is correct
- technique (p. 46): way of using tools and materials; following established rules to carry out a scientific experiment
- facts (p. 47): things that have happened or that are true

Play a Science Vocabulary Game  To help students master the science vocabulary, write each word on a strip of cardboard and each definition on another strip. Put the words in one pile, the definitions in another, both face down. Ask a volunteer to pick one word and read it aloud. Ask another to find the definition for that word. After the definition has been matched to the word, help the class use the word in a sentence. Write the sentence on the board.

Alternative Activity

Use Spanish Resources  Spanish-speaking English-language learners may benefit from reading or listening to the selection summary in Spanish in preparation for reading the selection in English.
Reading

Alternative Activities

Use the Audio Recording  You may want to have struggling readers listen to the audio recording of the selection as they follow along in their books.

Keep a Journal  To enable students to identify with Charlie's efforts in "Flowers for Algernon," have them keep a journal. Ask them to jot down a few sentences to summarize each day's reading.

Alternative Teaching Strategy

Diagram the Plot  To help students understand how plot and subplots advance together, draw a three-layer cake on the chalkboard. Beginning with the top layer, label them:

- **PLOT:** (Charlie's efforts to be smarter)
- **SUBPLOT 1:** (Charlie's efforts to form relationships)
- **SUBPLOT 2:** (Algernon's progress)

Have students write in the ingredients that form the plots and subplots. Ask them to draw a slice of the three-layer cake on a piece of paper. Then, ask them to re-read a section of the story where the plot and subplots are obvious—for example, the period from June 10 to June 30. Tell them to write two or three details in the proper layers, advancing each level of the story.

Postreading

Alternative Assessment

Check Comprehension  To reinforce students' understanding of plot elements, ask:

- What is an inkblot test?
- What clue do you have that Charlie is getting smarter after the operation?
- How does Charlie feel about the changes in his life?
- Why do Charlie's friends make fun of him?
- How does Charlie's relationship with Miss Kinnian change?
- As Charlie gets smarter, what does he think of his doctors?
- What do Charlie's co-workers at the factory do about Charlie?
- What does Charlie do when he discovers Algernon is getting worse?
- What happens to Charlie at the end of the story?
Vocabulary Development

Reteach the Key Idea

The English Language Changes Show students a map of Europe, and number each country whose people contributed to English. Assign the numbers in the order in which each country’s people brought their language to the island of Britain.

1. Italy (Romans)—Latin (43 B.C.)
2. Germany (Anglo-Saxons)—Anglo-Saxon (Germanic) (A.D. 449)
3. Scandinavia (Vikings)—Norse (A.D. 787)
4. France (Norman)—French (A.D. 1066)

The languages of all four of these peoples had an impact on English. The impact of French is a good example. At first it was only the people at court and in government service who spoke French. Then, more and more French lawyers, clerics, and merchants came to England to deal with the newly established French court. Within a hundred years of the conquest, French terms had become common in legal and mercantile vocabularies.

The History of English The English of the twelfth century became known as Middle English. At that time, English was written as it was spoken; people spelled words as they thought the words sounded, much as Charlie did in “Flowers for Algernon.” It was Henry VII’s (1485) attempt to standardize spelling and rules of grammar that was the beginning of Modern English.

Alternative Teaching Strategy

Introduce Etymologies Introduce students to etymologies. Begin with the etymology of flowers, as used in the title of “Flowers for Algernon.”

Flower < ME [Middle English] flowre, flour, OFr. [Old French] flor, flour (French fleur) < L [Latin] florum

Walk students through the etymology step-by-step, explaining that the symbol < means “is derived from, comes from.” Discuss the variations in spelling of the Middle English terms. Then, look up the history of several other words from the story or the Word Bank.

Reading Skills Development

Mixed Ability Group Use Context Clues To help students develop and apply their skills of using context clues, arrange students in odd-numbered, mixed ability groups to read together a challenging article from a national newspaper or newsmagazine. Have group members take turns reading from the article. Each group should circle any unfamiliar words on a copy of the article and use context clues to infer the unfamiliar words’ meanings. Each group should then summarize its article. Have one group member present to the class his or her group’s lists of words with context-derived definitions, and have another member present the group’s summary.
Prereading

Background

Preview the Story  Summarize “Flowers for Algernon.” Tell students it is the story of a man named Charlie, who is not as smart as most people. Explain that other people often make fun of Charlie, and describe a scene in which Charlie’s co-workers play a trick on him. Ask students why they think people make fun of Charlie. How do they think it makes a person feel to be treated that way? Tell students that everything in the story happens because Charlie wants to be smart and is given a chance to participate in an experiment that will make him smarter.

Reading

Additional Practice

Increase Understanding and Fluency  Some students may have difficulty reading on their own. Read parts of the story aloud. Read with energy and emotion. Encourage volunteers to do the same when they read aloud, and praise their efforts.

Postreading

Alternative Activity

Make Posters  Provide posterboard and markers. Tell students to make posters for a new movie of “Flowers for Algernon.” Ask them to pick an important moment from the story to draw for their posters. Have them make small drawings of one or more subplots around the edges of their posters. To check comprehension, ask them to explain why the small drawings are important to the story.

Alternative Assessment

Check Comprehension  To check students’ understanding of “Flowers for Algernon,” guide them through the following questions:

• How does Charlie become smarter? (He has an operation.)
• What do Charlie and Algernon have in common? (They are both subjected to the same experiment.)
• What happens to Algernon? (He dies.)
• What does Charlie do at the end of the story? (He loses the intelligence he gained from the experiment.)
“Flowers for Algernon”

A. Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

   1. hypothesis  a. fooled; led to believe something wrong
   2. misled        b. prove wrong using evidence
   3. regression    c. always
   4. refute        d. return to an earlier or less advanced condition
   5. invariably   e. theory to be proved

B. Choose three words from above. Use each word in a sentence.

   1. ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________

   2. ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________

   3. ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________

C. Answer each question below.

   1. Why did Charlie have to take tests before he had his operation?
      ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________

   2. What did Charlie realize at the party he wrote about on April 20?
      ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________

      ____________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________
Additional Vocabulary Practice

“Flowers for Algernon”; “Memory a Matter of Brains and Brawn”

A. Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

1. introspective  
   a. seen and felt
2. tangible  
   b. highly important
3. deterioration  
   c. unavoidable
4. verified  
   d. worsening; decline
5. crucial  
   e. looking inward
6. inevitable  
   f. confirmed
7. provocative  
   g. in a way that cannot be undone or changed
8. irrevocably  
   h. stirring up thoughts or feelings

B. Choose six words from above. Use each word in a sentence.

1. __________________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________________
6. __________________________________________________________
Collection 1: Telling Stories

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Broken Chain, p. 37
A. 1. c 3. e 5. b
2. a 4. d
B. Sentences will vary.
C. Sample answers given.
1. Without a chain for his bike, Alfonso can’t go bike riding with his date.
2. Ernie is jealous because he thinks the girl that Alfonso has met is the same one who had stood him up.
3. Ernie comes back in time to lend his bike to Alfonso.
4. Alfonso and the girl are having fun.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Road Warriors, Listen Up, p. 39
A. 1. a 3. d 5. c
2. e 4. b
B. Sentences will vary.
C. Sample answers given.
1. A bike helmet is the best protection because it reduces the risk of head injuries.
2. If you are wearing headphones while riding a bike, you won’t be able to hear approaching traffic, dogs, or drivers.
3. You must obey all rules of the road.

Additional Vocabulary Practice

Broken Chain; Road Warriors, Listen Up, p. 40
A. 1. h 4. i 7. a 10. f
2. b 5. g 8. c
3. d 6. e 9. j
B. 1. apparent 4. retrieved
2. sullen 5. emerged
3. impulse

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Flowers for Algernon, p. 45
A. 1. e 3. d 5. c
2. a 4. b
B. Sentences will vary.
C. Sample answers given.
1. Charlie had to take tests because the doctors wanted to know if he would be a good person to use for their experiment.
2. For the first time, Charlie realized that the men at the factory were making fun of him.
3. He concludes that his intelligence will decrease in direct proportion to the quantity that it increased. He will lose his intelligence as quickly as he acquired it.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Memory a Matter of Brains and Brawn, p. 47
A. 1. inevitable 4. cognitive
2. crucial 5. irrevocably
3. provocative

Additional Vocabulary Practice

Flowers for Algernon;
Memory a Matter of Brains and Brawn, p. 48
A. 1. e 4. f 7. h
2. a 5. b 8. g
3. d 6. c
B. Sentences will vary.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

The Landlady, p. 53
A. 1. b 3. a 5. d
2. e 4. c
B. Sentences will vary.
C. Sample answers given.
1. Billy thinks she is terribly nice.
2. [Accept all reasonable answers.]
3. The landlady has put something in it that is most likely poison.
4. [Accept all reasonable responses.]

Additional Vocabulary Practice

The Landlady, p. 54
A. 1. c 4. g 7. d
2. b 5. e 8. f
3. a 6. h 9. i
B. 1. lodgings 6. congenial
2. swanky 7. compelling
3. briskly 8. peculiar
4. decent 9. bitter
5. rapacious

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Comparing Literature: Story Motifs, p. 57
A. 1. e 3. a 5. d
2. c 4. b
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. F 3. F 5. F
2. T 4. F

Additional Vocabulary Practice

Comparing Literature: Story Motifs, p. 58
A. 1. c 3. b 5. d
2. a 4. e
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. broach
2. wont
3. betoken
4. aghast
5. installment