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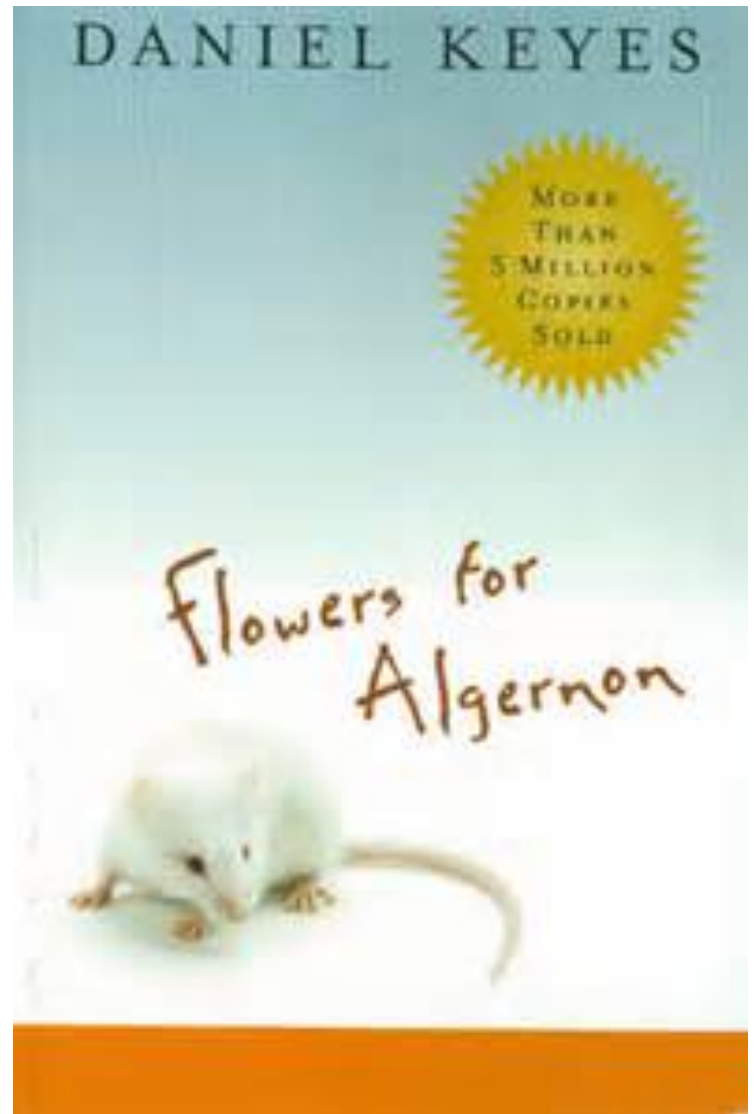


Building Communities that
Support Children's Reading

Flowers for Algernon

by Daniel Keyes

New Mexico/Colorado
Grades 11-12



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Flowers for Algernon

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Synopsis

Flowers for Algernon



Flowers for Algernon is an inspiring novel about a middle aged man's dream to be like any normal person. Charlie Gordan, protagonist in the novel, spent the majority of his life working in a bakery for a family friend. Growing up, the bakery was his second home and it was all he knew. Then, Charlie's life changes drastically when he is selected to take part in a brand new scientific experiment which has never been tested on humans before. The experiment makes his intellectual skills higher than the scientists who had designed the experiment. Although his dream has come true, Charlie starts realizing the true outcome of the experiment. He started becoming distant to the people that had once been so close to him and starts to unravel the truth about his life before the experiment. At the peak of his achievements, Charlie's life starts becoming more and more complex. He starts learning about adult things such as the value of money, women, and how scary the big world actually is. Join Charlie on his complex adventure of discovering his untold past, developing skills he never dreamed he would have, and befriending a mouse he once hated; Algernon.

New Mexico/Colorado CCSS

- RL/RI 11-12.1:** I can cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain,
- RL/RI11-12.2** I can determine two or more themes or central idea of a text and analyze in their development over the course of the text, including they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL. 11-12.3** I can analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- RL. 11-12.4** I can determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings for language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- RL. 11-12.5** I can analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- RL. 11-12.6** I can analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
- RI. 11-12.4** I can determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

- RI.11-12.5** I can analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- RI.11-12.6** I can determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
- RI.11-12.7** I can Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- W.11-12.1** I can write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning, relevant, and sufficient evidence.
- W. 11-12.3** I can write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- W. 11-12.4** I can produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- W. 11-12.6** I use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- W. 11-12.7** I conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- W. 11-12.9** I draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- SL. 11-12.4** I can present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- SL. 11-12.5** I can make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.



High Level Questions

Flowers for Algernon

Text-dependent Questions	Evidence-based Answers
Using evidence from Progress Report 1, who is Charlie Gordon?	
What do we learn about Charlie Gordon's character from Progress Report 2?	
On pg. 36, why does the author tell us that Charlie thinks, "maybe white mice are smarter than other mice?"	
Why is Charlie a good/bad candidate for the experiment? p.36	
What do we learn about Charlie through his own analysis of Robinson Crusoe?	
On p. 43, what does Charlie mean when he says "I felt naked"?	
On p. 43, how have Charlie's feeling changed from earlier in the story?	
What do you think that the "pair of bats tugging at something" and "two men fencing with swords" symbolizes?	
At the bottom of p. 46 it says, "when I left afterwards, I found myself trembling," why does Charlie react this way?	
On page 48, Miss Kinnian remarks to Charlie, "I just hope I wasn't wrong to advise you to go into this in the first place." Looking back through the text, and considering your own beliefs, why do you feel that Miss Kinnian properly/improperly advised Charlie to go through with the experiment?	

<p>How does the following passage, “it was evil when Eve listened to the snake and ate from the tree of knowledge,” compare to Charlie and his experience?</p>	
<p>What evidence do you have that Charlie’s heightened intelligence has created difficulties in his relationship with others? How does this connect to what the author told us before?</p>	
<p>Using context clues from the passage on p. 54, “I felt sick inside as I looked at his dull, vacuous smile, the wide, bright eyes of a child, uncertain but eager to please. They were laughing at me because he was mentally retarded.” What does the word vacuous mean?</p>	
<p>What does the anecdote of the dishwasher boy reveal about Charlie?</p>	
<p>On page 56 and 57, what is driving Charlie?</p>	
<p>Reread page 55. On May 31, Charlie says, “I’ve got to know if and when it will happen to me,” what evidence exists that Charlie will or will not regress like Algernon?</p>	
<p>What are some of Charlie’s symptoms of deterioration in his June 5 progress report?</p>	
<p>On p. 59, what words or phrases help you define the word senility?</p>	
<p>Reread page 62. What evidence suggests Joe and Frank have or have not developed as characters?</p>	
<p>What evidence in the text do you have that Charlie has or hasn’t changed since the beginning of the story?</p>	

Vocabulary Introduction

Flowers for Algernon

A selection of vocabulary words are identified for each reading section. The vocabulary meanings are according to the context of the writings. You may want to either add to this list or decrease it depending on your students. You can decide whether to introduce vocabulary before reading the section, during, or after.

Vocabulary activities could include giving the word and definition, and then having the students give the definition in their own words, drawing a picture of what the particular word means to them, including a synonym/antonym, the part of speech, etc... The students may also write original sentences using the vocabulary words, finding the words on the pages and making a guess based on context clues.

Students may be quizzed on each section of words, assign them to write their own stories with vocabulary words, or play games to reinforce word meanings.



Vocabulary-Flowers for Algernon

Directions: Use the page numbers to find the words. Using context clues, write the definitions.

Page#	Vocabulary Word	Definition
56, 68	Raw Shok (Rorschach)	
62	subconscious	
62	conscious	
63	marooned	
63	laboratory	
66	unconscious	
68	feeble	
69	shrew	
70	petition	
73	justified	
73	sensation	
73	tangible	
73	specter	

75	Mazel Tov	
76	vacuous	
77	naiveté	
78-9	regression	
79	amnesia	
79	hypothesis	
79	obscure	
79, 80	deterioration	
80	brain fissures	
80	fugues of amnesia	
80	senility	
80	introspective	

Vocabulary Concepts – *Flowers for Algernon*

Directions: Use the page numbers and definition to explain how the vocabulary words below relate to the story. Some of the words are in the story, others are NOT. Use COMPLETE sentences and PROPER punctuation.

Pg #	Vocab Term/Concept	Definition	Relationship to the story
55-59	phonetically	the way words sound, particularly: words written phonetically describe the sound rather than the dictionary spelling.	
55-69	platonic	friendly, without love	
55-71	depraved	hopelessly bad	
55-71	docile	ready and willing to be taught; calm and accepting.	
57	Thematic Apperception Test *	T.A.T. is given to a subject to assess personality, in which the subject looks at a series of pictures and creates stories and explanations based upon the images.	

57, 59, 60, 64-5	progress report	report of work accomplished during a specific period of time	
59-63	interim	the time between; temporary, coming between two points in time	
60, 62-3, 65-6, 70-1	affront	an insult	
63	stimulus	a signal to which a person or animal responds	
66-67	Intelligence	capacity for learning, reasoning, understanding, and similar forms of mental activity; aptitude in grasping truths, relationships, facts, meanings, etc.	
67	IQ	Intelligence Quotient. A measurement of human intelligence	
69, 73-4	pompous	an exaggerated show of dignity or self-importance.	
78-80	refute	provide evidence or proof to prove a statement untrue or false	

Vocabulary-Hooked on Phonics – *Flowers for Algernon*

In order to write his journal entries, Charlie uses a strategy called phonetic spelling. Many words in English can be spelled (and read) using phonics... but not all of them.

Directions: Correctly spell these words from Charlie's writing.

Charlie's Word		Charlie's Word	
shud		laffed	
rite		practis	
faled		lerved	
skared		factery	
pockit		pactise	
happind		lesin:	
acheve		sholder	
intelek		discoridged:	
operashun		memary:	
nuthing		bandijis:	
pepul		natcher	
dint		intristed	
argament		brede	
hospitil		experament	

Vocabulary – *Flowers for Algernon*

Directions: Using the vocabulary words from this packet, complete the sentences with the appropriate word.

1. Charlie read *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel about a man _____ on an island.
2. Dr. Nemur and Dr. Strauss told Charlie about his conscious and _____ mind.
3. Charlie overheard a conversation in which Dr. Nemur's wife is described as a _____.
4. A _____ was written to have Charlie fired.
5. The main setting of the story takes place in a _____.
6. Charlie had a child-like quality due to his below-average _____.
7. Dr. Nemur was _____ in being angry with Charlie for not writing his reports because he was being paid a regular salary.
8. Charlie and Algernon caused a _____ at the Psychological Convention.
9. The incident with the dishwasher in the diner caused Charlie to be more _____ about his own life.
10. Charlie became so overloaded with information that he suffered from _____ and could no longer recall some of the facts.
11. Dr. Nemur's wife pushed him to publish the results of his work so that the world could see the _____ success of his experiments.
12. Dr. Nemur's _____ of self-doubt haunted him constantly, especially as Charlie got smarter than he.
13. After the operation, Charlie realized how intellectually weak or _____ he was before.
14. Charlie empathized with the _____ boy at the diner who was treated poorly by staff and patrons while they made fun of him.
15. Charlie reflected back on his first progress reports and realized the degree of his child-like _____.
16. Algernon's _____ began when he bit Charlie, who realized the process would soon happen to him.
17. In his progress report of June 5th, Charlie worried that the excitement of his tripled intelligence would hide, or _____ its lack of permanence.
18. Observing Algernon's _____ helped Charlie predict his own regression.

Thank you www4.smsd.org/...sadvancedenglish/docs/Doc-167258.doc



Using Choice Boards

Choice boards give students the opportunity to participate in multiple tasks that allow them to practice skills they've learned in class or to demonstrate and extend their understanding of concepts. From the board, students either choose or are assigned tasks to complete. Individual tasks address the grade level specific Common Core State Standards and also learning style modalities.

To scaffold the activities for struggling readers, teachers can modify the tasks using the blank template provided or give more details for performance criteria. Some teachers like to assign point values for the different tasks.

In order to support teachers, the choice boards developed for BSCBR are coded for specific CCSS standards.

Choice Board - *Flowers for Algernon*

<p>Using the same format the author, write 5 journal entries from Charlie's point of view, picking up from the end of the novel.</p> <p>Be sure to include irony, proper word choice according to Charlie, and how he might write or speak.</p> <p>RL.11-12.4</p>	<p>Interview a special education teacher, keeping Flower for Algernon in mind.</p> <p>Prepare your interview questions beforehand.</p> <p>After the interview, organize a final draft, and tie in what you learned from the interview to what you learned from the novel.</p> <p>W.11-12.4</p>	<p>Create a Prezi, at least 5 frames, on <i>Flowers for Algernon</i>. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main characters • The setting • Major themes • The Algernon-Gordon effect • Conflict/Resolution <p>RL.11-12.5.4</p>
<p>Research a disability and the services that are provided in your area.</p> <p>Create an annotated resource guide for that particular disability, using businesses in your area.</p> <p>Present the information to your class.</p> <p>RI.11-12.6; W.7-8.6</p>	<p>Create 3 comics that reenact sections of the story which involve characters communicating with others. Identify the theme of the story in the comic.</p> <p>RL.11-12.2</p>	<p>Create Algernon's coffin from a shoe box or any item that would fit a mouse his size. Think about items he would have liked to have buried with him. Include them in the box.</p> <p>Write a eulogy (one page) and present to the class.</p> <p>SL.11-12.4</p>
<p>Research current work in the field of neurobiology. The gene NR2B has been identified as crucial to learning.</p> <p>Write a 3 page report on the current findings, as well as any mathematical research that was completed.</p> <p>Connect it back to Charlie in <i>Flowers for Algernon</i>.</p> <p>RI.11-12.7</p>	<p>Create a scrapbook that follows Charlie's journey, and the changes that occur in him throughout the novel. The story takes place over a period of about 4 ½ months, so there should be at least 5 pages.</p> <p>RL.11-12.3</p>	<p>There are many themes throughout this novel. Consider each theme and discuss how each is developed in the novel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual identity vs. social expectations • Coming to terms with abandonment and loss • Forming relationships with others • Concern with self vs. concern for others <p>RL.11-12.2</p>

Choice Board

Dramatic Irony

Flowers for Algernon

Dramatic irony occurs when there is a contrast between what the audience KNOWS and the character BELIEVES. Dramatic irony is used to create an emotional effect within the audience. As you read “Flowers for Algernon”, analyze how the differences in your point of view and in Charlie’s point of view create emotional effects upon you, and identify the emotional effect you had while experiencing each occurrence of dramatic irony.

Charlie wrote/believed...	But I knew...	This is an example of dramatic irony because...	The effect/reaction this dramatic irony had upon me as an audience member was...
page # _____			
page # _____			
page # _____			
page # _____			

Journaling Activity

Flowers for Algernon

Answer the following questions by being as detailed and specific as possible. Give examples and create meaningful connections to take your answers to the next level.

Journal Entry #1

- In today's world, does having a disability prevent one from succeeding in life?
- What does success look like to you? How would you define it?

Journal Entry #2

- After researching the Rorschach test method, what is your initial reaction? What do you think it would feel like to partake in the test?
- Even though it has been stated that this test may not always work, what is your perspective? Could it be effective in analyzing an individual?

Journal Entry #3

- If one of your family members had a low IQ, how would you help him/her?

Journal Entry #4

- Why did Charlie want to become smart? Think about his emotions/mood as he writes each progress report, his IQ, how he performed on the psychological tests, and his idea of intelligence and success.

Journal Entry #5

- Make as many connections as you can with your independent reading book characters to the characters in *Flowers for Algernon*. This could be any of the main characters or even the smaller characters. Try and make at least four character connections with a strong explanation filled with details.

Journal Entry #6

- What do you think is Charlie's most important character trait? Is it his kindness? His drive and determination? Something else? Explain.

Journal Entry #7

- Two parts:
 - Recall a time that you made a conscious leap in learning (e.g. riding a bike, playing a song without mistakes, solving an algebra equation). Describe this accomplishment, as well as your feelings leading up to and after achieving it.
 - Imagine yourself as a character in *Flowers for Algernon*. How would you react to Charlie's excitement? What would you tell him? What advice would you offer him?

Journal Entry #8

- Reread the progress reports from March 25 and April 3. What do you think about the way Charlie's coworkers treated him? Why do you think they make fun of Charlie? What would you have done when Joe Carp started to make fun of Charlie?
- Write about a time where you had made fun of someone or a time that you were ridiculed. Compare your experience to Charlie's. How were they alike? How were they different? Was your situation ever resolved? If so, how?

Journal Entries #9 and 10

Please select TWO of the following journals to complete..

- **OPTION 1:** Irony occurs when a situation turns out the opposite of what was hoped or planned. When Charlie states, "I must be careful to speak and write clearly and simply so that people won't laugh," he is realizing the irony of his own situation. Please use text evidence to prove why this statement is indeed ironic.
- **OPTION 2:** There are advantages and disadvantages to having "super intelligence" or having "no intelligence". Apply your opinion to both Charlie and his situation. Charlie's whole persona changes when his intelligence is altered. Were the changes good or bad for Charlie?
- **OPTION 3:** Charlie's past makes him want to work in the field of human intelligence. Use this detail as a starting point for the following journal:
 - Some people choose a career based on something that happened to them when they were young. For example, a person who was very ill as a child may want to become a doctor. Think about any personal experiences that have greatly impacted or changed you. Write about your experience; as well as how this experience may lead to possible careers (be specific).

Extension Activities

Flowers for Algernon

Writing – Research: W.11-12.7-9

Students will conduct sustained research projects to answer question (including a self-generated question) or solve problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Students will gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Students will draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, claims, reflection, and research.

Possible Research Topics:

- Intelligence Quota
- Causes of Mental Retardation
- Genetics and Mental Retardation
- Mental Retardation in the Work Force
- Achievement Tests in Schools
- Mistreatment of Mentally Retarded Individuals
- Identity Struggles
- History of Rorschach Test / Credibility
- Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligence
- Human Subjects in Scientific Experimentation
- Animal Subjects in Scientific Experimentation
- Tolerance/Intolerance
- Einstein’s Theory of Relativity
- Inferiority Complex
- Contrast Between Emotions and IQ
- Dysfunctional Families
- Social Similarities Between Highly Intellectual and Mentally Retarded Individuals
- Propaganda in advertising

Writing – Argumentative: W.11-12.1

Students will compose narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Possible Argumentative Topics

- What is true friendship?
- Should intelligence be measured?
- Can a person be both a genius and happy?
- Is talent worth more than hard work?
- Is hard work more important than talent?
- Can one survive without talent or hard work?
- How should schools be run?
- Should schools focus on the 4-point grading scale?
- Should grade levels exist?
- Should learning goals be shared with the student?
- Can past events affect the future?
- Can both harm and good result from technology?
- Should people be judged before their circumstances are known?
- Is love a saving force?
- Does every person deserve human dignity?
- Should surgery be available for non-life threatening conditions?
- Which matters most...motivation or intelligence?
- Which matters most...friendship or identity?
- Is the science fiction genre important to education?
- Is genetic engineering justified?
- Should animals and/or humans be used for scientific advancement?
- Should people with disabilities be treated differently?

News Article and Letter Writing

Write a letter to a local Congressman on behalf of intellectually disabled people who are not granted the same rights that all people are receiving. The letter should be 5-6 paragraphs in length—an introduction, 3-4 body paragraphs, and a conclusion, and should refer to both articles (see on following pages), “Disabled Couple Forced to Live Apart” and “Social Sensitivity”, as well as the novel, *Flowers for Algernon*. Be sure to explain a brief history of the rights of intellectually disabled people, provide a literary example of mistreatment of intellectually disabled people, using *Flowers for Algernon*, and a real life example of intellectually disabled people such as Paul Forziano and Hava Samuels who are denied rights. Next, explain which rights you believe the intellectually disabled deserve, and what types of laws should be put in place to ensure that they receive them.

Disabled Couple Forced to Live Apart

PORT JEFFERSON, N.Y. (AP) –

With the beaming smiles of newlyweds, Paul Forziano and Hava Samuels hold hands, exchange adoring glances and complete each other's sentences. Their first wedding dance, he recalls, was to the song "Unchained ... "Melody," she chimes in.

They spend their days together in the performing arts education center where they met. But every night, they must part ways. Forziano goes to his group home. His wife goes to hers.

The mentally disabled couple is not allowed to share a bedroom by the state-sanctioned nonprofits that run the group homes — a practice the newlyweds and their parents are now challenging in a federal civil rights lawsuit.

"We're very sad when we leave each other," Forziano says. "I want to live with my wife, because I love her."

The couple had been considering marriage for three years before tying the knot last month, and they contend in their lawsuit that they were refused permission from their respective group homes to live together as husband and wife. The couple's parents, also plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said they have been seeking a solution since 2010.

"It's not something we wanted to do, it's something we had to do," said Bonnie Samuels, the mother of the bride.

The lawsuit contends Forziano's facility refused because people requiring the services of a group home are by definition incapable of living as married people, and it says Samuels' home refused because it believes she doesn't have the mental capacity to consent to sex.

Legal experts are watching the case closely as a test of the Americans With Disabilities Act, which says, in part, that "a public entity shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures ... to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability." The group homes are licensed as nonprofits by the state and receive Medicaid funding on behalf of their clients.

"This is a case that is moving into uncharted territory," says George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley. "If a state licenses the couple to be married, they are afforded all of the protections and privileges of marriage. The most fundamental right is to be able to live together as a married couple."

The couple's attorney, Martin Coleman, says he has not come across any similar court cases. "What the group homes are saying is that for this class of people, you shouldn't be married. ... What point of intellectual disability is too low for someone to be married?"

Sara Gelser, an Oregon state legislator and member of the National Council on Disability board of directors, says Americans have increasingly come to recognize the rights of the disabled to choose to live their own lives, and marriage and sex is part of that.

She says the couple's sex life is nobody's business.

"No one has a right to tell an adult what they can do," Gelser says. "Sex is a healthy and full part of the human experience. I know it makes some people uncomfortable to think people with intellectual disabilities are engaging in sexual relations, but I don't understand that."

A spokeswoman for the Catholic Health Systems, which runs the Maryhaven Center of Hope, has declined to comment, citing pending litigation. Maryhaven has 2,000 clients, ranging in age from 5 to 80, in facilities across Long Island. The facility in Manorville where Samuels lives is for women only.

David Arntsen, attorney for the Independent Group Home Living program in Manorville, where Forziano lives, says that it doesn't have facilities for married residents and that there is no specific legal requirement forcing the home to house them. The program's residences have between three and 12 men and women; the home where Forziano lives is coed, according to his attorney.

The lawsuit cites a letter from the director of program services at Independent Group Home Living, saying its homes "are not staffed or designed to house and supervise married couples or assist married couples with the dynamics of their relationships, sexual or otherwise."

Also named in the lawsuit is the state Office of Persons With Developmental Disabilities, which the couple claims sided with the agencies in refusing to accommodate their wishes and has not done enough to find a solution. The office has declined to comment on the lawsuit.

Experts say it is difficult to estimate how many mentally disabled people are married, since states ask no questions about a person's mental capacity on marriage licenses.

Tiffany Portzer, a spokeswoman for the state developmental disabilities office, says the agency does not keep data on the marital status of its clients. "I can tell you that we know it's a small minority of everyone in a group home, she says.

The couple's parents say they have reached out to other state-certified group homes to see if they had space. They were told that although other facilities welcome married couples, nothing was available anytime soon, according to the lawsuit. Their attorney says the couple needs to live near their parents on eastern Long Island, as well as the Maryhaven Day Program, which each has attended for years.

Forziano, 30, is classified in the mild to moderate range of intellectual functioning, with recent IQ scores of 50 and 58. He has limited reading and writing skills and cannot manage money.

Samuels, 36, is in the moderate range of intellectual functioning, with recent IQ scores of 50 and 44. She has a significant expressive language disability, which can make it difficult sometimes for others to understand her.

The Social Security Administration offers disability benefits when a person's IQ is below 70.

The couple met several years ago while attending the performing arts education program for mentally disabled adults, which teaches the basics of staging and set design, and offers singing and acting lessons.

"She's very beautiful and she helps me," Forziano says of his new bride.

Samuels says she fell for her future husband because he was funny; she particularly liked his "knock-knock" jokes.

Social Sensitivity

Written during the height of the civil rights movement in the United States, *Flowers for Algernon* shows a profound concern with the rights of individuals to be treated as individuals, no matter what their condition in life. The early pages of the novel paint a grim portrait of how the mentally handicapped are treated, as Charlie is continually abused, verbally and physically, by his coworkers at the bakery. And when he becomes a genius, he is subject to a different sort of dehumanization, as the scientists in charge of the experiment regard him “as if I were some kind of newly created thing.... No one ... considered me an individual—a human being.” This is perhaps most dramatically expressed when, witnessing a slow-witted boy being ridiculed for breaking dishes in a restaurant, Charlie lashes out at the customers: “Leave him alone! He can’t understand. He can’t help what he is ... but for God’s sake, have some respect! He’s a human being!”

1959 to 1966, the period from the first publication of *Flowers for Algernon* as a short story to its publication as a novel, saw the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States. Although most immediately and dramatically focused on the task of securing equal rights for African Americans, the civil rights movement was accompanied by increasing attention to the issue of fair and equal treatment for all. The 1964 Civil Rights Bill prohibited racial discrimination; 1966, the year *Flowers for Algernon* was published, saw the founding of the National Organization for Women. The rights of the mentally handicapped were also addressed during this time: in 1962 the President’s Panel on Mental Retardation was organized, leading in 1968 to the Declaration of the General and Specific Rights of the Mentally Retarded. By the 1970s, the term “retardation” was replaced with “developmental disability,” and specific provisions for the protection of the mentally handicapped from violence and discrimination became law. *Flowers for Algernon*’s message of tolerance and understanding for the mentally handicapped reflects the social and political struggles of its day, and the years following the novel’s publication saw many of these issues regarding developmental disability finally addressed in the legislature and the courts.

In addition to the Civil Rights movement, the 1950s and 1960s also saw the rise of psychoanalysis as a generally accepted method of dealing with emotional disorders. The theories of Sigmund Freud, which saw human motivation as stemming largely from unconscious desires which are often traceable to childhood experiences and which frequently center on sex, were particularly influential during this time. Freud’s theories were so widely discussed that most people, even if they were not trained in psychoanalysis, probably had some familiarity with concepts such as repression, neurosis, and the unconscious. Accordingly, the novel’s focus on psychological themes, especially Charlie’s emotional problems stemming from the abuse he suffered from his mother, was immediately familiar to the readers of the 1960s.