Picture Book Activity

Purpose:
This activity helps the students to understand Charlie’s experiences growing up mentally handicapped. By looking at first-hand accounts of other handicapped children, they will better understand Charlie’s situation and how he felt about the way he was treated as a child. They will also help prepare them to better understand Charlie’s final decision to commit himself to an institution.

Context:
This activity can be used at any time early in the novel, before Charlie’s intelligence peaks. These early sections focus more on Charlie’s treatment while he was mentally handicapped and offer more connections for the students to make with Charlie’s experiences.

Materials:
either several copies of What It’s Like to Be Me by Helen Exley or a few photocopied pages from the book for each group
• suggested sections include “About mentally handicapped kids,” “Helping is an art,” “It could be you,” “Lumping us Together,” “Keep your pity for animals,” “We have certain rights,” “Feeling left out,” “Don’t scorn me,” “Please don’t tease me,” and “I feel the same as you”
a copy of the worksheet for each group

Directions:
• Prior to the activity, ask the students to characterize Charlie’s experience growing up mentally handicapped. How did people treat him? How did he view himself? What kinds of emotional trauma did he experience?
• Put students into their pair-share groups and give each group a worksheet and either a copy of What It’s Like to Be Me or a photocopied section from the book.
• Read the directions on the worksheet to the students.
• Give them about 10 minutes to read through their section and find a connection with Charlie’s situation. Have them discuss it with their other group members.
• Give them about 5 minutes to fill out their worksheet.
• Have each group come up to the front of the class and share the connection they found.

Segue:
Ask the students how doing this activity helped them better understand Charlie’s situation and the way he is treated. Ask them: Is Charlie different than the children in the book? If he is, how is he different? How is he like these children? How do you think Charlie felt when he experienced being excluded from his peers? What about when his mother rejected him? When he went to the ‘doctor’ to get smarter? Do people treat Charlie like a real human being, or like something less than a human being? Why do they think that is ok? Do you think Charlie was a complete human being before the operation?

Try to emphasize the fact that although he was not as intelligent as other people, Charlie still had feelings. Encourage them to think about what makes someone human.

Assessment:
Assess the students based on completion of the worksheet and participation in sharing in front of the class. The purpose of this activity is mainly to spark class discussion, so students should be graded mostly on participation and completion.
Flowers for Algernon

Picture Book Activity

Instructions:
Read through your assigned section of What It’s Like to Be Me. With your group, answer the following questions about one child who has experienced something similar to what Charlie experienced.

1. How is this child’s experience like Charlie’s?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

3. How does the child say he or she feels about the experience?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

4. Are there any differences between this child and Charlie? (Different feelings or reactions, different situation, etc.)

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

5. How did Charlie react or feel about the situation or experience?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________