Problematic Situation

Context
This strategy is meant to help students personally connect to the text by making their own decisions about a situation facing the novel’s characters. Charlie is treated as a scientific experiment by Nemur and Strauss, which leads him to become angry and rebel. This activity helps the students understand Charlie’s situations and the emotions he is feeling. This strategy should be used after Charlie’s August 26th letter to Strauss.

Purpose
This strategy helps students utilize problem-solving and decision making skills and connect the text to their own ideas and values. This activity will help them think about how they would react in a similar situation and whether Charlie is being exploited or whether he should be grateful for the increased intelligence he has gained. It will help them understand Charlie’s situation and his reaction to his rapidly increasing intelligence.

Materials
copies of the worksheet for each student
copies of *Flowers for Algernon*
one 3x5 card for each student

Directions
Day 1:
1. Read the situation out loud to the students
2. Give students the instructions for the task and review the rules for coming to a consensus. They should already have learned how to come to a consensus and respect others’ ideas, so this should only be a quick review.
3. Give the students 10 minutes to re-read the situation and think about it.
4. Have students write down their decision on their 3x5 card. This may be good as a homework assignment so students will have time to weigh their options, and so they won’t be able to see the decisions others are making. This way they will come to their own conclusion

Day 2:
5. Put students in their pair-share groups.
6. Remind students that they are a committee and must come to an unanimous decision. Also make sure to remind them to show courtesy even when they disagree with each other.
7. Give students time to discuss. Circulate to make sure students are on task, and to serve as a mediator if there is a disagreement or stalemate.
8. Once the groups have chosen, have them write the reflection.
9. Bring the class together for a full discussion. Have each group write their decision on the board. Have each group explain their reasoning to the class. Ask them how their decisions differed. What did they decide was most important in the situation? Look for a cure? Your own happiness? How do you weigh your own interests against those of humankind? Do you owe something to the scientists?

Segue
Discuss how this situation is like or unlike Charlie’s. Did he have a responsibility to Nemur and Strauss? Were they treating him unfairly? Do you think Charlie was wrong to take Algernon and run away? How does the fact that Charlie’s intelligence is now going to start decreasing affect your opinion?

Ask the students to predict what Charlie will do now. Do they think he should continue participating in the experiment or should he go enjoy his intelligence while he still has it? What would it tell you about Charlie’s character if he left? What about if he stayed?

Assessment
Take note of student participation during the class discussion, and grade based on evidence of thought on the reflection.
Problematic Situation
Scenario:
Imagine that you have volunteered to undergo an experiment that makes you live forever. The scientists who performed the experiment are counting on you to learn as much as you can in your lifetime in order to help society. Their theory is that the reason we cannot cure cancer is that no one individual has lived long enough to learn enough to find a solution. You have a pill that you take every day that stops you from aging, and you are now immortal. For the sake of this scenario, you will never run out of the pills. After a few generations everyone you know has died. You have no friends or relationships because people are uncomfortable about the fact that you don’t age. You are learning everything you can about cancer, but you haven’t yet found a cure. What do you do?

Directions
Read through the scenario and decide what you would do. Does your responsibility to society outweigh your own happiness? Do you have an obligation to continue the experiment that you agreed to be part of? Should you give the pills to someone else and let yourself start to age and die? Decide what you would do and write it down on your 3x5 card in pen.

Next, you will meet with your group. You will have to compare your choices and come to a consensus about what the best decision is and why. Read the following rules about how to come to a consensus before completing this part of the assignment.

Reflection
Write a one-page reflection about why you made the decision you made, how your decision differed from the opinion’s of the other students in your group and why your group made the final decision that they did. Did you group convince you to change your mind, or do you still think that your choice was better? This portion will constitute most of your grade for this activity, so make sure to show evidence that you were thoughtful and logical in your decision.
Rules for Coming to a Consensus

10. Avoid arguing for your own rankings. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but listen to the other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.

11. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for a next-most-acceptable alternative for all parties.

12. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict. When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.

13. Avoid conflict reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, coin flips, and bargaining. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don’t feel that he or she must be rewarded by having his or her own way on some later point.

14. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the group’s decision because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance that the group will hit upon more adequate solutions.