

Extension Task Exemplar Student Response

In “Flowers for Algernon,” Charlie learns about intelligence. He says he wants to be smart, but he doesn’t have a good experience when he gains intelligence. In the end, Charlie loses everything he gained. He loses his intelligence and he is lonely and isolated. Scientists have also debated the topic of intelligence and have conducted research to figure out what makes people smart. There are many theories of intelligence. Some researchers believe intelligence is best measured by IQ, whereas other researchers believe that there are multiple intelligences that all work together to make humans smart in different ways.

Some scientists believe that intelligence is best measured by an intelligence quotient or IQ. An IQ is “a score derived from a set of standardized tests developed to measure a person's cognitive abilities (‘intelligence’) in relation to their age group” (“Intelligent Quotient”). Many researchers originally believed that a person’s IQ determined how intelligent that person was. They also believed that it was the most important test scientists could use to determine a person’s intelligence. As time has gone on, though, people have found issues with IQ. For example, in “Flowers for Algernon,” the doctors and Burt have different opinions about the value of IQ. Dr. Nemur believes IQ is “something that measured how intelligent you were—like a scale in the drugstore weighs pounds” (Keyes). Dr. Strauss believes IQ shows “how much intelligence you could get, like the numbers on the outside of a measuring cup” (Keyes). Burt believes “IQ measures a lot of different things some of the things you learned already and it really isn’t any good at all” (Keyes). These opinions are similar to the opinions of by real-life researchers. For example, according to Stephen Ceci, “At the very least, intelligence can be defined as the ability for complex thinking and reasoning. One thing the research shows for sure: much of the ability for complex reasoning depends on the situation.” So, Stephen Ceci is saying that a person might be more or less intelligent depending on the situation they are in. This kind of thinking is different from how people used to look at IQ because before they saw it as the best measure of human intelligence.

Another way to measure intelligence is to look at multiple types of intelligence. As Kaufman says, “Most (but not all) researchers fully admit that IQ tests only measure a piece of the intelligence pie (although they argue it is an important piece).” What that means is that people may be intelligent in different ways, and IQ tests do not seem to measure all of the different ways people can be intelligent. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences agrees with this idea. Gardner’s theory says that there are more than eight different kinds of intelligences that people can have. That means that being “smart” and good in school is just one of the ways a person can be intelligent. Some of the other intelligences are things like being smart at music or sports or working with people. Howard Gardner says his theory of multiple intelligences is “a critique of the notion that there’s a single intelligence which we’re born with, which can’t be changed, and which psychologists can measure” (“Howard Gardner”).

The understanding of what intelligence is and how we can determine the level of a person’s intelligence in comparison to others has changed over time. At first researchers thought IQ was the most important and reliable indicator of a person’s intelligence. That has changed, though, as more people believe an IQ score does not represent all aspects of intelligence. Now many researchers believe that there are multiple ways to be smart. If what these researchers believe is true, Charlie may have been smart in different ways all along!

Works Cited

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