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**Stephen Chbosky’s   
*The Perks of Being a Wallflower***

**Study-Guide**

Why We *Need* to Read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

**High school.** It is, most probably, the most exciting, but confusing time, when you find yourselves moving ever closer to adulthood. During this time, you will also face some difficult, potentially life-altering decisions as well as some temptations. You are old enough and mature enough to start making some of these decisions on your own. But wouldn’t it be nice to have another perspective? Why should teenagers have to go through the toughest time in their lives all alone? *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*can become one sort of perspective, along with various other art forms.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky is a popular but highly controversial book that deals with a number of important issues including sex, drugs, alcohol, abusive relationships, homosexuality and suicide from an adolescent perspective. Although many parents and educators may protest the content in the novel, I believe that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*is important for the very reason that said issues need to be handled maturely, and what better way to do so than in the safe space that we will create in this classroom.

As you navigate through high school, you are faced with a tremendous amount of new issues that you will be forced to deal with, some of which include the temptation of drugs, dealing with bullying, and the struggle to find a place where you feel like you can fit in. As such, it has become more important than ever for teachers to do their part in preparing their students for these issues. As teenagers, you are used to television, movies, music, the internet, and video games to deal with your issues, but why not use classroom literature as well?! You may not realize it yet, but you engage with art on a daily basis. So, now is the time to understand how these art forms shape your identity, and what you learn about yourself - conscious or unconsciously - by interacting with art daily.

As you read the book, you are encouraged to think about your own lives. Have you faced what Charlie faces? If so, how have you dealt with the issues? If not, what did you learn about these issues and yourself while reading? Of course, you are not expected to agree or disagree with the choices that Charlie makes, nor are you expected to become the person that Charlie is; however, I encourage you to read the novel and consider what you are learning about yourself by engaging with Charlie's identity. By stepping into the world of this art piece, think about how you are similar or dissimilar to Charlie or any other characters in the novel. Art is **all**around us, whether it be fiction or non-fiction, so, throughout the unit, consider how your identity is shaped, moulded, and influenced by external forces.

In discussing the novel and the issues it presents, I insist that all students cooperatively work together to form a safe space in our classroom, in which students can share their opinions and judgments, without spreading hate or creating animosity between students and myself. Let’s enjoy our time spent discovering how stepping into the world of a different character can help shape your own identity!

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***The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky**

Anticipation Guide

Part 1 Directions: Before reading *The Perks of Being a Wallflower,* in the “Before” column, respond to each statement by putting a plus sign (+) if you agree with it, a minus sign (-) if you disagree, and a question mark (?) if you are unsure of your belief. For one of the statements below, respond on a cue card (200 words or more) as to why you have the belief you do. I will pick up the cue card at the end of the class and only hand it back to you on the last day of reading.

Part 2 Directions: After reading the novel, in the “After” column, respond to the statements again. Then, reply in your “entrance card” (400 words or more) to a statement where your belief changed since having read the novel. If not, write about a different statement than you had responded to in Part 1.

**Before**

**After**

1. Feeling like you are alone in the world with nowhere to turn to for support is a normal part of being a teenager.
2. Freely expressing your hopes and fears in letters, notes, or e-mails, allows you to connect with others and heal the problems that challenge you.
3. Learning how to make friends is more difficult in high school than it is in elementary school.
4. Adults forget what the intensity of a crush is like for a teenager.
5. The dangers of drug use by teenagers are exaggerated.
6. Your first serious kiss should be by someone you truly love.
7. If adults really knew what happened at teenage parties, they would be shocked.
8. Experiencing new things helps teenagers develop emotionally and intellectually in ways that reading a book can never match.
9. Getting involved sexually as a teenager can only make your life more confusing and difficult.
10. Brothers and sisters are closer to one another than parents and their children.

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**Major Themes in   
*The Perks of Being a Wallflower***

1. Growing up (coming-of-age): Charlie is about to start his freshmen year of high school, and his entire year is spent navigating the issues that all adolescents face on their way to adulthood. How much more relative can you get?!
2. Making friends: Charlie starts the year being a loner and “standing on the sidelines of life.” His teacher, Bill, tells him to start “participating” in his own life and, as he begins to participate, he gains friends, loses friends, and learns how to cultivate good relationships.
3. Drugs / sex / parties: Charlie enters high school being fairly naïve to the world of parties and substances. As he makes friends, he finds himself getting invited to more and more parties, and exposed to more and more situations involving drugs and sex.
4. Seeing family in a new light: As Charlie begins to grow up he starts observing his family with the eyes of an adult rather than the eyes of a child. He becomes disappointed with his family as he begins to take them off of their pedestals and see their mistakes, shortcomings, and who they really are.
5. Teachers as mentors: Charlie’s freshmen English teacher, Bill, plays a big role in his life as the school year goes on. Bill sees talent and potential in Charlie and helps him cultivate that as the year goes on. Bill gives Charlie extra reading and writing assignments in order to push him further academically, and Charlie really enjoys this. Charlie also looks to Bill for a great deal of advice as the year moves forward. Have you ever had this sort of relationship with a teacher before?
6. Books as mentors: Charlie does a lot of extra reading for Bill, and Charlie learns a lot about life from the books that he reads. He is constantly referencing the novels he reads and what the authors are trying to say. What do you think about the value of books? Do you have a favourite book, in which you find yourself, or a favourite character to which you can relate?

**Can you name and explain any other themes in the novel? You can write down notes on the next page or in your copybook.**

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**Part One:**  
*Comprehension Questions*

**Directions:** As you read, you are responsible for answering the following questions in your copybook. The questions are more or less in the order that they appear in within the novel.

Pgs. 1-40

1. Who is the author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower?*
2. What makes this book an epistolary novel? What does this mean?
3. Who do you think Charlie is writing to? Are there certain age groups/people who listen better than others?
4. What is the setting of the novel?
5. What is Charlie’s brother’s name?
6. What is Charlie’s sister’s name?
7. Who is Charlie’s “favourite person in the whole world?” Tell me what you know about this person so far.
8. How did Charlie react to Michael’s suicide?
9. Describe Charlie’s family. What is his relationship with the various people in his family?
10. Who is Susan? Do you think she is a typical freshman having made the transition from middle school to high school?
11. Describe the incident with Sean.
12. Name some of the stereotypes that come up in part one.
13. Describe the relationship between Charlie’s sister and her boyfriend. Is this a healthy relationship?
14. What happens to Charlie’s sister on the couch?
15. Who is Nothing? What do you think the significance of this name is to Charlie? Write some notes about Nothing.
16. Who is Sam? What is Charlie’s immediate reaction to her?
17. What do we learn about Charlie during his last letter?
18. Sam says that girls like guys who give them a “purpose.” Do you agree with this statement?
19. Do you agree with Bill’s statement, “We accept the love we think we deserve?”
20. What relationship does Charlie have with Bill? Is this a healthy student/teacher relationship?
21. What did Charlie see at the party at his house? What bothers him the most about recounting the experience?
22. What does Charlie see at Bob’s house? Was this event foreshadowed earlier in the novel?
23. What is a wallflower? Does Charlie fulfill your definition?
24. Explain the quotation found on p. 30, “And in this moment, I swear we were infinite.”
25. Describe the feeling of being “infinite.” Is it something you have ever experienced?
26. After reading part one, what are you impressions of Charlie? Is he a “typical” teenager? Does he fit within our ideas of who teenagers are?

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**Part Two:**  
*Comprehension Questions*

**Directions:** As you read, you are responsible for answering the following questions in your copybook. The questions are more or less in the order that they appear in within the novel.

Pgs. 42-96

1. Who is Mary Elizabeth?
2. Describe the relationship between Patrick and Brad.
3. What is the Rocky Horror Picture Show? How might this show/scene appeal to Charlie?
4. Charlie says, “Old pictures look very rugged and young, and the people in the photographs always seem a lot happier than you are.” Do you agree with this statement?
5. What do you think about the rat/mouse experiment on p. 50? What does it symbolize/mean?
6. What does Charlie think about the “glory days” and old photographs?
7. What is the significance of the poem Charlie read aloud? Is there a connection to Michael or Charlie?
8. Describe, in your own words, what “unconventionally beautiful” means.
9. What presents was Charlie given by his friends? Do any stand out as being symbolic?
10. What is significance of the typewriter?
11. Why does Sam decide to kiss Charlie?
12. Where do Patrick and Sam to for the holidays and how does Charlie react?
13. Charlie refers to the “bad place” where he used to go. What does this imply?
14. What happens on the car ride to Grandma’s house for Christmas?
15. One of the books Charlie is given is Catcher in the Rye. Why is that novel “appropriate for this time?”
16. Describe Aunt Helen’s life. Why is Charlie so sad?
17. Does Charlie have problems at home? Explain.
18. What happened to his Aunt Helen? Why was it particularly hard on Charlie? Describe their relationship.
19. Detail what happens to Charlie at the New Years Eve party.

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**Part Three:**  
*Comprehension Questions*

**Directions:** As you read, you are responsible for answering the following questions in your copybook. The questions are more or less in the order that they appear in within the novel.

Pgs. 98-139

1. Charlie speaks of the “good” things that have begun happening to him. Explain them.
2. How do the drugs affect Charlie (mentally)?
3. What happens to Charlie’s sister? Do relationships grow out of turmoil?
4. How does Charlie feel at the clinic? Do you think the experience brought Charlie and his sister closer together? Why or why not?
5. Briefly outline the February 8th, 1992 letter.
6. Describe the Sadie Hawkins dance. What happens during and after?
7. Describe Charlie’s relationship with Mary Elizabeth.
8. Evaluate this quote, “Everything can’t be low self-esteem, can it?”
9. At this point Charlie has made many references to his Psychiatrist. What do you think he’s suffering from (if anything)?
10. What did Charlie do at Craig’s house? Was he right in doing this?
11. Do you feel bad for the situation Charlie is in?

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**Part Four & Epilogue:** *Comprehension Questions*

**Directions:** As you read, you are responsible for answering the following questions in your copybook. The questions are more or less in the order that they appear in within the novel.

Pgs. 142-213

1. Why does Charlie go to the mall and what does he observe there?
2. What is the significance of the little boy being lost and returned by the “older kid?”
3. Describe Charlie’s people watching during his April 29th letter. How is this impacting his outlook?
4. Has Charlie regressed? Explain.
5. What happened in the school cafeteria and what are the consequences?
6. What happens with Brad and Patrick?
7. How does Patrick deal with the breakup?
8. What happens between Charlie and Patrick?
9. What does Charlie do at the party?
10. How does Charlie react to everyone being gone? What does this say about the power of friendship?
11. Explain the quotation found on p. 200: “It’s great that you can listen and be a shoulder to someone, but what about when someone doesn’t need a shoulder? What if they need the arms or something like that? You can’t just sit there and out everybody’s lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can’t. You have to do things.”
12. What does Craig finally confess to Sam? What are the consequences?
13. What happens in Sam’s room?
14. What do we learn about Charlie’s past? Does this answer Charlie’s question of “what is wrong with me?

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***Guided Reading Activity:***Allusions

*What is an allusion, exactly?*

An allusion is a literary device that stimulates ideas, associations, and extra information in the reader's mind with only a word or two. Allusions in writing help the reader to visualize what's happening by evoking a mental picture. However, the reader must be aware of the allusion and must be familiar with what it is referring to. The author includes an allusion for a significant reason. Don’t simply read past it! The allusion will most likely come back to haunt you!

*Activity:*

In the grid below, make a record of the titles to which Charlie references (things he listens to, watches, and reads). On the next page or in your copybook, write down some notes about the importance and significance of each allusion in the novel. This may help you work through your final assignment!

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Songs | P# | Films | P# | Books | P# | Television | P# |
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***Guided Reading Activity:***Character Notes

**Make some notes about the characters from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower.* You can write down notes in your copybook if you’d prefer.**

Charlie

Michael

Charlie’s brother

Charlie’s sister

Charlie’s father

Charlie’s mother

Aunt Helen

Susan

Sean

Bill

Patrick

Sam

Bob

Brad

Mary Elizabeth

Craig

Charlie’s grandfather

Alice

Charlie’s grandma

Peter

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Guided Reading Activity:***Vocabulary Words in Context

Below is a list of word used in the novel, as you come to each word take time to define using the context of the book, looking it up in a dictionary, or by looking it up on urbandictionary.com. Turn in your definitions when you finish the book.

Page-13    muttonchop

Page-14    corpulent

Page-14    jaundice

Page-16    pragmatic

Page-19    analysis

Page-24    affirmation

Page-25    provoking

Page-29    concession

Page-30    smug

Page-35    paranoia

Page-37    wallflower

Page-42    Zen

Page-45    rehabilitation

Page-52    rugged

Page-56    definitely

Page-80    luminaria

Page-82    denouncing

Page-83    transcendental

Page-86    auspicious

Page-93    gyp

Page-94    morbid

Page-102    metaphoric

Page-105    jaded

Page-105    idealist

Page-106    cynical

Page-114    objectification

Page-114    bourgeoisie

Page-123    snippy

Page-132    adroit

Page-139    passive aggressive

Page-144    ashen

Page-146    karma

Page-165    philosophical

Page-183    retribution

Page-197    closure

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Guided Reading Activity:***Issues

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* addresses many issues that teens face as a part of their adolescence. Make some notes about how Charlie (and other characters) deal with these issues. You may want to record the names of the characters who have these problems and/or how these characters must face them as a result of other characters’ lives, roles, beliefs, choices and limitations.

Social anxiety:

Dating:

Friendship:

Grades:

Teacher-student relationships:

Parent-child relationships:

Problems at home:

Divorce:

Violence:

Hazing:

Depression:

Suicide:

Death:

Physical abuse:

Sexual abuse:

Drug abuse:

Alcoholism:

Homosexuality:

Other:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Unit Reflection Survey**

**\*Due on the same day as your final assignment.**

Please answer each question that follows on a separate sheet of paper. Your comments will strongly influence my efforts to revise this unit for future use, so I’d appreciate your complete honesty in responding. You do not need to identify yourself, though you are welcome to if you wish.

1. We read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky during this unit. Please write your honest opinion of the work. Did you like it? Did you hate it? Why? Why not? Is there anything that I could have done differently that would have helped you to better enjoy your study of this work? Do you recommend I use this text with future students? Why or why not?
2. What did you learn from participating in group work activities? Did you feel that these were a good way of engaging with each other and with the literature? Please explain. Do you think that I should continue to use group work activities of this sort? Why or why not?
3. Out of all of the activities and assignments that we did during the unit, while in class or out of class, which activity or assignment was your favourite? Why?
4. What did you learn from completing your “Anthology of Self-Discovery” assignment? Would you recommend that I include this assignment in this unit again next year? Why or why not?
5. What would you recommend that I do the same if I taught this unit again to other students? What would you recommend that I do differently?