

Literary criticism on perks of being a wallflower assignment

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A Wallflower to a Participant The complexities of growing up can be overwhelming, but one must overcome the realities of the wild and poignant roller coaster of youth in order to live a sensible and productive life. The Perks of Being a Wallflower begins as the protagonist Charlie, starting his first year of high school, deals with the suicide of his single close friend named Michael and the lingering feeling of guilt over the death of his aunt. Prone to depression, introverted, and on the fringe of trouble in many aspects of life, Charlie is a wallflower who, with the help of his English teacher and two friends Sam and Patrick, comes to terms with life and learns to interact. It is difficult to come out of one's shell and accept the reality that one has recently lost two very important people. As an entering freshman, Charlie lives a remarkably passive existence primarily due to the loss of his favorite aunt and best friend Michael.

This can be seen as Charlie expresses his thoughts and feelings toward people that revolve around him: I look at people holding hands in the hallways, and I try to think about how it all works. At the school dances, I sit in the background, and I tap my toe, and I wonder how many couples will dance to " their song. " In the hallways, I see the girls wearing the guys' jackets, and I think about the idea of property. And I wonder if anyone is really happy. I hope they are. I really hope they are. (23). As the quote indicates, Charlie " uses thought to not participate in life. Instead of being an active participant in life, Charlie creates a protective wall of timidity and despair, which prevents him from interacting with peers. An English teacher named Bill recognizes Charlie's wisdom and intuition, and assigns books to the troubled teen for stimulation beyond the classroom. Bill befriends Charlie

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and assists the boy throughout the story. One day, as Bill spots Charlie looking at other students during class, he calls Charlie to his desk and asks him what he was thinking about.

After hearing Charlie's response, Bill encourages his student to redirect his thoughts away from himself and to try to "participate". Before Charlie leaves, Bill tells him, "Charlie, we accept the love we think we deserve" (24). Charlie never forgets these potent words throughout the entire school year. This is when his mind, at first filled with thoughts of hopelessness, slowly begins to grow more optimistic. Charlie tries his best to "participate" during his days at the high school. Bill's support encourages

Charlie to begin a new life without the weight of a tragic past. Also, Charlie attends school-sponsored social events such as the homecoming football game and dance, and attempts to make new friends. One day, when Charlie attends a football game, he meets two seniors, Patrick and Sam, who are later revealed to be siblings. Coincidentally, Patrick was one of the students in Charlie's shop class. Charlie mentions that "Sam was very pretty and nice, and she was the first girl I ever wanted to ask on a date" (30).

Charlie is happy to make friends who "didn't just throw around inside jokes and make people struggle to keep up." Charlie's friendship with Patrick and Sam introduces Charlie to the world of first dates, sex and drugs. It is a world Charlie has never witnessed. Throughout his friendship with Patrick and Sam, Charlie discovers moments when he feels genuinely accepted. This is shown when Charlie mentions how he feels at his first real party: I didn't know that other people thought things about me. I didn't know that they looked.

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I was sitting on the floor of a basement of my first real party between Sam and Patrick, and I remembered that Sam introduced me as her friend to Bob. And I remembered that Patrick had done the same for Brad. And I started to cry. And nobody in that room looked at me weird for doing it. And then I really started to cry. (38). Charlie is happy to finally be accepted by his peers and to be judged by his heart and soul instead of his outward appearance. He is no longer afraid of high school and people in general. He discovers the value of friendship and “participating” in life.

Though Charlie has improved in openly expressing his feelings, this does not apply when it comes to his affection towards Sam. Since Charlie knows he does not have a chance with Sam due to the age difference, he tries to “not think of her that way”. However, this becomes increasingly difficult as Charlie sees Sam’s attractive qualities each day. As a result, Charlie tries to innocently show his affection for Sam by giving her an old 45 record, which was given to him by Aunt Helen. He had promised himself to “give it to a person as beautiful as the song. Later in the story, Charlie shows his deep affection for Sam by kissing her when Patrick dares him to “kiss the prettiest girl in the room on the lips.” Though Charlie had a girlfriend named Mary Elizabeth at that time, he kisses Sam because he knows that if he kissed Mary Elizabeth, he would be lying to everyone including himself. Although Charlie expected that his action would lead Sam to understand his love for her, it instead made Sam mad since he had broken Mary Elizabeth’s heart. Since Charlie’s attempt to court Sam was unsuccessful, he begins to rethink his whole situation.

This is indicated when Charlie remarks about the break up between Sam and her boyfriend, Craig: I remember going to sleep last night, and I realized something. I realized that throughout the course of the evening, I wasn't happy about Craig and Sam breaking up. I never once thought that it would mean Sam might start liking me. All I cared about was the fact that Sam got really hurt. And I guess I realized at that moment that I really did love her. (179). These thought processes show a growth and maturity in Charlie not present in the teen earlier in the novel.

It proves that his feelings for Sam have evolved from a self-centered infatuation to a sincere form of love. When Sam asks Charlie why he didn't ask her out after the breakup with Craig, Charlie responds by repeating the above quote. Sam immediately reacts by saying: Charlie, don't you get it? I can't feel that. It's sweet and everything, but it's like you're not even there sometimes. 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?

You can't just sit there and put everybody's lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can't. You have to do things asking someone for a date or telling people what you need and want. (200). This makes Charlie return to what Bill had told him earlier in the year regarding becoming a "participant" and accepting the love we think we deserve. After everything Sam and Bill say, Charlie figures that he should just do what he wants to do. He starts kissing Sam where they lay down on the floor and later attacks the ocean bed. He officially becomes a "participant".

In order for our lives to be content and effective, we must learn to open up and interact with others so that we can discover who we are and who we are to become. Today, there are many teens who have low self-esteem due to their appearance or timidity. They do not realize that there are chances of being accepted by others and judged by their inner body instead of the outward appearance once they start participating. Though Charlie had the same feeling as these teens at the beginning of his freshmen year, his active participation in life leads him to feeling infinite and grateful without any sensation of terror.