

A process of growing up in the perks of being a wallflower

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Growing up and learning about new aspects of life is one of the most important stages of adulthood — it's encountered in some time in life times, teenagers especially over other people. And not only does Stephen Chbosky's novel *Perks of Being a Wallflower* connect each other to this climaxing life stage perfectly, but it also breaks it down even more by putting those life events into small stages; such as friendships, relationships, sexuality, and sadness. As people experience these themes through characters like Susan who's magically grown boobs and "got dumber" from puberty and an increasing sexuality, there's also main characters like Charlie who are in a new environment in Freshmen year and help all remember the fright and awkwardness of being alone in the hallways at start. With all of these events going on, it is clear to see that everyone goes through life stages quicker than others, however, Charlie is the epitome of humanity by showing all of the phases that people must go through to become who they are tomorrow.

Friendship is one of those things that *Perks of Being a Wallflower* shows extraordinarily well because it not only includes the positives of friendship, but also the negatives, and loss of it, as well. In the beginning, when starting off with Charlie starting a new school, the reader feels sorrowful for Charlie as he goes through a mourning after his friend, Michael, committed suicide. Still, Charlie gains some friend through the book, Sam and Patrick, who truly help him to understand himself and the world better. In fact, they help both him to observe the environment around him while also keeping him grounded to reality. However, once he was alone, Charlie would get a different taste of reality. According to the text, "I don't know how much

longer I can keep going without a friend. I used to be able to do it very easily, but that was before I knew like what having a friend was like.” (Chbosky, 144). Because Charlie really only has two solid friends in the book, he is contained to only their walls, which means that when both of those friends somehow disappear, that he must go through a time of loneliness, which turns into withdrawal, which adds on to his already subtle depression shown throughout the book.

Because of what was learned at the end of the book with Charlie and his past sexual abuse story with Aunt Helen, mixed with Charlie’s overall Coming of Age, and the loss of his friend Michael that was heard of in the beginning of the book, he is stuck in the mental hospital for a little while. However, with rising hormonal levels, depression is actually very common among teenagers, and Charlie connects the readers back to reality to show that they are not alone. Charlie even mentions symptoms like sadness and starts drinking and smoking more marijuana recreationally. The text states, “ I don’t know if you’ve ever felt like that. That you wanted to sleep for just a thousand years. Or just not exist. Or just not be aware that you do exist.” (94). Throughout the book, Chbosky makes Charlie’s mental health well noted as he will top off some situations with social anxiety, not just his introversion. It could even be noted that Charlie is using the beginning “ Dear Friend” remark as a journal to just to someone he met once a party throughout the novel because he is lonely. According to the text, “ But he’s so desperate to convey the turbulence of his inner world that he decides to

write letters - anonymously - to a person he once heard about, who did a nice thing for someone at a party." (Fresh Air, n. p).

Although it may not seem like it, but the hardest part of loving and accepting others is learning to put yourself first before others. At least that is what individuals are told and shown in the novel through the character Sam. Sam being so kind and loving, while also being a caring friend towards Charlie helps him to appreciate himself more as well as love and understand the environment around him that he might not understand quite otherwise. She doesn't do what she does to flirt with him or end up together in a relationship, however, she does what she does to keep himself on his own two feet and provides him stability, which will more or less allow Charlie to grow and move onto more serious commitments for someone else later on down the road, such as a relationships. According to the text, " We accept the love that we think we deserve." (24). Coming back to what has previously been discovered about Charlie and Aunt Helen, it can be assumed that Charlie's innocence and introversion might be because he is generally afraid to get sexually involved after what has happened to him. However, Sam significantly aids Charlie in the process of letting go while also teaching him to move on from his past.

Although sexuality might not seem like such a big deal for most people, face-to-face experiences with the theme might become a little intimidating for starters. Even though this might be the case, Chbosky does an excellent work of not only defining sexuality and puberty, but also identifying homosexuality along with heterosexuality, creating a solid standard of

equality in today's society. At the start of the book when Charlie sees Susan again, he's a little, well, dissatisfied with what she has become over the Summer. The text states, " Over the Summer, Susan got a little taller and prettier and grew breasts. Now she acts a lot dumber in the hallways, especially when the boys are around." (6-7). But in the same time, Charlie also encounters a dream derived from his sexuality and fantasies about Sam, which he admits he later feels later for. According to the text,

" And we were both naked. And her legs were spread over the sides of the couch. And I woke up. And I had never felt so good in my life. But I also felt bad because I saw her naked without permission. I think I should tell Sam about this." (Fresh Air).

Charlie experiences the things that everyone is usually too scared to talk about, but secretly experiences regardless.

Growing up for the most part is much harder than it looks, and reaching the point of coming of age is a blessing in disguise. As people grow older, they all experience things such as sadness, love, friends, and sexuality that comes together and ties the whole world into one thing: humanity. And that is exactly how Charlie lives the exact definition of humanity.