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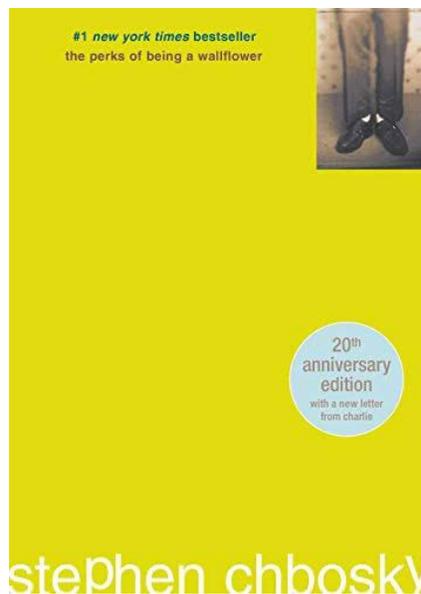
Book Talk Presentation

Dr. Mary Warner

Due 3 October, 2022

English 112B

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky



About the Author:

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Stephen-Chbosky/1843916>



*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is Stephen Chbosky's debut novel written in 1999. Chbosky has written one other novel titled *Imaginary Friend* which was written in 2019. Chbosky has no official release dates for new novels, however previously he has worked alongside others in film and television. These works include the film version of the Broadway musical *Rent* (2005) as well as writing and directing the film adaptation of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012). Chbosky is described on his website as being a "native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania" as well as having graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in Filmic Writing.

#### Summary:

Just like every teenager entering high school, Charlie is looking for friendship, and navigating how to accept his past experiences that make him the way he is in hopes of bettering himself.

During the first few weeks of high school, Charlie meets a group of friends that change his outlook on not just the world around him, but also on himself. He begins to see things and understand them: he becomes a Wallflower.

Quotes:

“And I thought that all those little kids are going to grow up someday. And all of those little kids are going to do the things that we do. And they will all kiss someone someday. But for now, sledding is enough. I think it would be great if sledding were always enough, but it isn’t.”

(73-74)

In this quote, protagonist Charlie reflects upon his childhood experience of sledding during the holiday season. This reflection presents the idea of how difficult it is to grow up, but also the beauty of growing up as well. The metaphor of sledding as a reflection of childhood and growth is pertinent to the understanding of Charlie’s character. He is stuck in this limbo of wanting to change and grow into a “real” teenager, though he is seemingly stuck in the past, reflecting upon his want for “sledding to just be enough”, when in reality childhood is never enough, and the want for independence and adulthood will always outweigh everything else.

“...And all the books you’ve read have been read by other people. And all the songs you’ve loved have been heard by other people. And that girl that’s pretty to you is pretty to other people. And you know that if you looked at these facts when you were happy, you would feel great because you are describing “unity”.” (95-96)

The themes expressed in this quote are the ideas of friendship as well as the idea of unity, each going hand in hand. Charlie’s search for friendship throughout the entirety of the novel is

one of the major themes, however this presentation of this idea of unity is Charlie's understanding that friendship is more than just an absence of loneliness, it is a production of unification. Charlie's reflection that things have been done by other people is reaffirming not just for his character and experiences, but also for the audience as well. As teenagers grow into young adults, the search for meaning and acceptance is prominent in their everyday lives. This reflection presents the idea that everything you have thought and done has happened to others before you, and you should find comfort and solace in that fact.

"...But because things change. And friends leave. And life doesn't stop for anybody." (145)

This quote deals with difficulty accepting change in your adolescent life. Before and during high school, Charlie struggles with societal and self acceptance, though this quote presents a shift in tone from Charlie's inability to accept the fact that people and places around him will change, to an overall acceptance of this hard to swallow fact of growing up. The end of the quote that states "And life doesn't stop for anybody" is especially pertinent because everywhere around him, Charlie notices people changing and moving forward, while he feels stagnant. His friends are moving away for college, as well as both of his siblings, and though he spent the beginning parts of the novel navigating this change, he has finally come to accept and understand that one day he will experience this, too.

"I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we'll never know most of them. But even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. We can still do things. And we can try to feel okay about them." (211)

This quote deals with the theme of self-acceptance. Charlie's reflection and acceptance of his unfortunate circumstances due to his childhood experiences form the presentation of this powerful quote. Though Charlie has experienced difficult and tragic things throughout his life, he chooses to find peace in the fact that these things have shaped him into who he is, and though each day is a constant struggle to deal with his trauma, he is grateful to have the choice to make a life for himself aside from his past experiences that have negatively affected him. Charlie's final pronouncement "And we can try to feel okay about them" is an important piece for the audience to reflect on. Charlie is not saying that he will immediately feel okay about what has happened to him, and he will completely move away from his trauma. Charlie recounts that what is most important is that "we can try", and that must be enough.

Teaching:

### **Why Teens Should Read This Novel**

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* presents many important themes for young adults alike. The major themes in this novel include self-acceptance, coming of age, and struggles with mental health. Aside from these themes universal to young adults, the format of the novel is very undemanding and easy to digest, as the novel is presented in the format of a group of letters addressed to a "friend", that friend being us as the reader.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* hits a majority of the Honor List Book Characteristics, the most represented in the novel being Characteristic 7: Successful YA novels deal with emotions that are important to young adults. The theme of mental health and struggles with mental health are extremely prominent in this novel, as our main character struggles with anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder. These struggles are seemingly universal to

the age group YA novels pertain to, and seeing a character grow from these difficulties is important.

This novel forms to each of the Exeter Qualities, making this a novel in which young adults are presented with important themes and ideas for development.

### **Presenting to Your Class**

Some ideas for presenting this novel in class would be a character study in which after reading the novel each student chooses one character to fully analyze and develop a stronger connection and understanding to. Each of the characters in the novel are extremely complex and the narrator reveals many interesting things about each of them which would reveal to the students a larger and more complete understanding of the novel. This novel could also be supplemental material to a larger group of study regarding coming of age, or perhaps a unit on how mental health is addressed in YA literature compared to recommended literature for high school students. It could also be interesting to have students write a letter to their past self in the way that the main character Charlie writes in the novel. The format in the novel being a letter, students could write about past experiences in which they have grown from and reflect upon them.

### ***Adolescents in the Search for Meaning Connections***

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* forms to Chapter 4 “Books about Real-Life Experiences: Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living through Family and Relationship Issues”, Chapter 5 “Books about Facing Death and Loss”, Chapter 6 “Books about Identity,

Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions”, and Chapter 7 “Books about Courage and Survival”.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* connects to Chapter 4 through multiple characters and experiences in the novel. Focusing primarily on the main character Charlie, Charlie is forced to overcome trauma from past sexual abuse from his Aunt Helen. This abuse leads into his having to overcome issues in his personal romantic and sexual relationships, as well as issues in his family in which his trauma affects his every day life and those around him.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* connects to Chapter 5 through Charlie’s navigating his Aunt Helen’s death, and how he feels he is responsible for it. Charlie’s largest struggles throughout the novel include both his inability to remove himself from being at fault for his Aunt Helen’s death, as well as navigating the negative and positive presence his Aunt Helen had in his life, and how her death makes him feel years later.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* connects to Chapter 6 through the character of Patrick, main protagonist Charlie’s friend. Charlie aids Patrick in his struggle with accepting his identity, as well as the discrimination he faces due to his sexuality. Patrick’s presence and perseverance is important in the novel as YA readers see a character who overcomes discrimination, as well as the presentation of a character who is part of the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* connects to Chapter 7 through Charlie’s experience with trauma and thoughts/actions of self-harm and suicide. Charlie’s attempt with suicide at the end of the novel results in his finding courage to dig into his past trauma in order to overcome his struggles, and ultimately lead a happier life.

Text Complexity:

### **Quantitative**

Readability: Grade Level 5-6 ages 10-11

Lexile: ages 13-17, 720L

AR: ATOS book level 4.8, interest level grades 9-12

### **Qualitative**

#### **1. Structure**

A.) First person POV for the entirety of the novel, Charlie's POV

B.) Linear Chronology

- Reflections of past events due to the letter-like format of the novel
- No future reflections or flashes to the future, stays consistent in the past

#### **2. Language Convention and Clarity**

A.) Written in first person throughout the novels entirety, the writing feels as though we are really reading a teenagers journal

B.) Simple, non complex language throughout

C.) Literary devices include descriptive language, metaphors, and similes

#### **3. Knowledge Demands**

A.) Societal knowledge needed for understanding

- Awareness of differing forms of mental health including PTSD, depression, and anxiety
- Awareness of homosexuality and gender issues including the understanding of the time period in which homosexual relationships were considered illegal, as well as women's rights severely lacking

- Awareness of race based issues due to the time period in which the novel was written (e.g. disrespectful comments on race and ethnicity throughout the novel)
- Awareness and understanding of domestic/relational abuse (specifically physical), sexual abuse outside of domestic relationships including rape

#### 4. Levels of Meaning

A.) Multiple levels of meaning which include the story on a literal sense (e.g. the specific events taking place within the novel) as well as on a metaphorical level in which the experiences of the main character are understood in terms of growth and development

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is far more qualitatively complex as opposed to quantitative due to the multitude of difficult themes and experiences presented within the novel. However, Appendix A on the English 112B handouts page reminds us that it is quite common for YA fiction to be more complex qualitatively as opposed to quantitatively. This novel would work best being taught alongside grades 9-11. Though the age group represented in the qualitative analysis suggests grades 5-6, the level of understanding and the difficult themes in the text makes it so a higher grade level may accomplish a further understanding of said difficult themes. However, the language in the novel is not as demanding for students in grades 9-11 which calls for some re-evaluation of whether or not this is a novel suitable for students to analyze in terms of complexity.