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Wallflower: A Character Analysis of Charlie

A wallflower is used to describe someone who is introverted and tends to stay on the sidelines, away from the limelight or crowds, at parties. This is also what Patrick used to describe Charlie on their first meeting. Throughout the novel, *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*, Charlie embraces this descriptor. However, as he matures, he becomes more comfortable in his own skin, and confronts his repressed traumatic past.

The term “wallflower” earns a different connotation from the usual derogatory one.

Charlie starts out seeing himself as a “wallflower” in the traditional sense—someone who lives on the sidelines, observing, not really taking part in life. But, upon meeting his friends who accepted him, he blooms into a “wallflower” in a different sense—someone who is understanding, caring, and dependable.

Summary of *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*

The Perks of Being A Wallflower is an epistolary novel written by Stephen Chbosky. The novel is told from Charlie's point of view—through his letters to a fictional friend. Charlie starts writing to his fictional friend as a way to cope with the death of his best friend, which left him isolated as he starts high school. Through these letters, Charlie talks about the people around him and the things that happen around him. This paper is property of Custom Essay Meister. It is only when Charlie meets Patrick and Sam, and becomes part of their group, that he starts to write about things involving

himself. Charlie struggles with being his usual passive self and taking part in life. Being surrounded by friends who encouraged him, allowed him to embrace himself.

The term wallflower is first mentioned by Patrick. When Charlie accidentally walks in on Patrick and the star-footballer, they come to an agreement that Charlie will keep it a secret (Chbosky, p.24). It is after this instance that Patrick endearingly tells Charlie that he is a wallflower—"You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand" (Chbosky, p.25). As Charlie starts to be more comfortable in his actions and joins more social activities, he experiences some challenges, one of which is being isolated from his new group of friends, but he overcomes this. Toward the end of the novel, Charlie becomes a strong, dependable individual.

Charlie as the Traditional Wallflower

At the beginning of the novel, Charlie fully meets the traditional description of "wallflower." Following his best friend's death, he starts high school without friends. He is referred to as a "freak" multiple times (Chbosky, p.18). He does not join in any social activities with his peers, not even answering questions in class. This paper serves only as an example of a Character Analysis paper written using the MLA Citation Style. One instance that demonstrates his passive role in life is when he witnesses his sister's boyfriend hit her (Chbosky, p.8-9). This instance is similar to when he witnessed a date rape during one of his brother's parties wherein he did not know what to do (Chbosky, p.20-21). This time, however, Charlie, confided in his English teacher about what he saw. It is the English teacher who essentially does something directly about Charlie's sister getting hurt.

Charlie is often ignored or left unnoticed by the people around him. From his childhood, he is used to being overshadowed by his brother—a football star—and her sister—who is often the center of family drama. The only special treatment he received were from his Aunt Helen, who as is revealed toward the end of the novel, had treated Charlie inappropriately. These things contributed to Charlie's current personality and the comfort he finds being in the background and, essentially, not participating in life. He essentially sits by the wall and watches everyone else, like the classic wallflower. Charlie does not seem to realize this until his English teacher points it out to him and advises him to participate (Chbosky, p.16-17). His participation in life, so to speak, begins when he befriends two seniors, Patrick and Sam, who both welcome him.

Charlie's Growth as A Wallflower

As Charlie becomes part of Patrick and Sam's group of friends, he is introduced into a lot of things—drinking, drugs, and sexuality. Charlie feels part of the group, and he starts to form a bond with them. He is able to be his true self around them because this group is very inclusive. Charlie feels positive emotions while with his friends, such as feeling “infinite” while driving through the tunnel with Patrick and Sam (Chbosky, p.22). Charlie is also able to let go of some of his inhibitions when he is with his friends, such as when they performed the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Chbosky, p.62-63). However, participating in life inevitably includes complications, which Charlie had some difficulty navigating. Part of the reason he gets into awkward predicaments is because of his tendency to be passive. He started dating Mary Elizabeth, one of his friends, because he could not say no to her. For the same reason, Charlie allowed Patrick to kiss him and use him as an emotional crutch (Chbosky, p.90-91). This pattern in

Charlie's relationships mirror his relationship with his Aunt Helen who took advantage of Charlie as a child. Participating in life is the first step of Charlie's growth, however standing for himself is also crucial for him to come into his own.

Charlie slowly learned to stand up for himself by first standing up for people he loved. The difference in how he reacted to seeing his sister get hurt and how he reacted when he saw Patrick get beaten up demonstrates this growth. Charlie did not just watch Patrick get beaten up by five guys on the sidelines as he would have done in the past. Instead, he jumped in and beat the others (Chbosky, p. 84-85). From there, Charlie evidently has become his own person. He still has his demons and issues, but he has started to bloom into the wallflower Patrick saw him to be.

Toward the end of the novel, Charlie achieves numerous milestones signifying his maturity, such as getting his driver's license. However, he has also developed a strong sense of self and confidence. Although he now participates actively in his life, he is still the same understanding and caring person he was before. When his sister got pregnant and asked him to drive her to get an abortion, he took care of her throughout the process. His ability to step up in this moment marks his growth physically and emotionally.

Conclusion

At the start of the novel, Charlie was a wallflower in the traditional sense of the word—he was reserved, and he did not act or step up for himself or other people. However, meeting a caring group of friends allowed Charlie to be more confident and be involved in his life. This allowed him to be a better version of himself—observant, understanding, and caring—which leads back to the title of the novel. *The Perks of*

Being A Wallflower hints at Charlie's coming-of-age in that his quiet, unassuming personality—although a product of sexual abuse—is what let him to grow into a strong and dependable friend.

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Bibliography

Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*. Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1999.

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