



The Perks of Being a Wallflower

by Stephen Chbosky

Supplies

- Nametags
- Markers
- Copy of Sam's quotes (see small group discussion)
- *You are Special* by Max Lucado

Optional

- DVD of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Ways to Set the Atmosphere

- Post pictures of bands mentioned (The Smiths, Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, etc.)
- Post pictures of covers of books that Charlie reads (*The Fountainhead*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *This Side of Paradise*, *Peter Pan*, *The Great Gatsby*, etc.)
- Play *Asleep* from the Smiths as students enter.
- Post pictures of TV shows referenced (M*A*S*H*, *Love Boat*, SNL, etc.)

Entering Activities

10 minutes

1. Nametags: As students enter, instruct them to create a nametag that includes their first name in the middle of the nametag. In the bottom, left corner, ask students to write down a nickname they have been called. This nickname can be positive or negative. Make sure they know that they will be asked to share it with a partner/trio. In the bottom, right corner of the nametag, ask students to write one word to describe how they are special.
2. Introductions: In pairs or trios, have students share their name, nickname, the story behind the nickname, and the word they used to describe how they are special.

Discussion Questions

20 – 30 minutes

- The book begins with Charlie explaining why he is writing letters to the recipient. He states, "I just need to know that someone out there listens and understands and doesn't try to sleep with people even if they could have. I need to know that these people exist."¹ Why do

you think Charlie needs this affirmation that people pay attention to others and make good choices? Who do you think Charlie writes these letters to? Is it us, the readers, himself, someone else in the story? Why do you think Charlie wants to stay anonymous to the recipient of the letters?

- On page 13, Charlie describes a boy in his shop class, who's name is Patrick, but is referred to as "Nothing." Why do you think Patrick allows this nickname to be used? Is he embracing this name? Do you think this name effects how Patrick feels about himself? Explain.
- Charlie confides in Bill, his English teacher, about an incident where his sister is hit by her boyfriend. Bill says, "We accept the love we think we deserve."² What do you think Bill means by this? Read Isaiah 43:1-4. If we truly believe that God claims us, calls us by names, identifies us as precious, and loves us, then what kind of love do we deserve? Why do some people act as though they deserve less?
- Bill encourages Charlie to participate, after he says, "Sometimes people use thought to not participate in life."³ Give examples of times when Charlie chooses not to participate and times where Charlie tries to participate more in the world.
- When driving with Sam and Patrick, Charlie exclaims, "I feel infinite."⁴ What does he mean? Have you ever felt like that? What gives you that feeling?
- Patrick describes Charlie as "a wallflower. You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand."⁵ Is this a gift or a hindrance for Charlie? Explain.
- On page 45, why is Brad crying? What mask does he use to hide his sexuality? What pressures does Brad have? How do others enable Brad to continue hiding?
- On page 55, Charlie reminisces about a sleepover he had with Michael. What is the significance of him remembering walking around the neighborhood and Michael looking in to the windows of each house? What do you think Michael was looking for?
- Charlie takes great care in choosing Secret Santa gifts for Patrick. What does he give him? What does each gift symbolize? What gifts does he give the others in the group? Why? (page 65) How is Charlie's gift-giving an affirmation of his being a wallflower? How is he able to affirm who each person is and what they are passionate about? What gifts does Charlie receive? Are those gifts as equally thoughtful as the ones he gives?

1 Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. (New York: Gallery Books, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc. 1999), 2.

2 Chbosky, 24.
3 Chbosky, 24.
4 Chbosky, 33.
5 Chbosky, 37.

- A large portion of Charlie’s letters involves Aunt Helen. We, along with Charlie, only discover the tragic events that took place with Aunt Helen at the end of Charlie’s letters. What does Charlie mean when he writes about Aunt Helen, “There was no pain anymore.”⁶ Was he referring to Helen or himself? Why does Charlie blame himself for Helen’s death? (page 92) Why do you think Charlie suppresses these memories? What impact do you think these events have on Charlie?
- How did Charlie make “a terrible mess of things”⁷ with his group of friends? What do you think is healthy or unhealthy about the way Charlie responded to the “dare?” What consequences does Charlie face due to his actions? How does Charlie cope with this period of friendlessness?
- Charlie stands up for Patrick in the cafeteria. What prompts Charlie to react? How does this act of bravery by Charlie restore his friendship with Sam? (page 152) Why do you think Brad acts outwardly negative to Patrick? When Charlie serves detention with Brad, Brad thanks Charlie? Why?
- Patrick and Charlie share gossip, astounding stories of embarrassing moments, about people. Charlie says, “By the end, all I could think was what these people must feel like when they go to their class reunions. I wonder if they’re embarrassed, and I wonder if that’s a small price to pay for being a legend.”⁸ How do you think people feel when their brazen and embarrassing moments are shared with or without truth?
- In reference to a quote from *The Fountainhead*, Charlie writes, “I think the idea is that every person has to live for his or her own life and then make the choice to share it with other people. Maybe that is what makes people “participate.” I’m not really certain.”⁹ How do you choose who to share your life with? Is it easy or difficult to share who you are? What obstacles prevent you from sharing?

Small Group Questions

10 minutes

Split students into three groups. Assign each group a quote from Sam to Charlie. Ask students to discuss what the assigned quote means, when it would be good to implement this idea into their lives, and if it would be unhealthy to live out this idea. Once groups have had time to discuss, ask them to share what discussed with the larger group.

- “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.”¹⁰
- “You weren’t being his friend at all. Because you weren’t honest with him.”¹¹

6 Chbosky, 90.

7 Chbosky, 132.

8 Chbosky, 160.

9 Chbosky, 169.

10 Chbosky, 200.

11 Chbosky, 201.

- “If somebody likes me, I want them to like the real me, not what they think I am. And I don’t want them to carry it around inside. I want them to show me, so I can feel it, too. I want them to be able to do whatever they want around me. And if they do something I don’t like, I tell them.”¹²

Closing Questions

5 minutes

In the epilogue, Charlie reveals he is in the hospital due to a breakdown related to the incidents with Aunt Helen. Listen to two quotes from the epilogue:

- “So 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.”¹³
- “I thought about Bill telling me I was special. And my sister saying she loved me. And my mom, too. And my dad and brother when I was in the hospital. I thought about Patrick calling me his friend. And I thought about Sam telling me to do things. To really be there. And I just thought how great it was to have friends and a family.”¹⁴

What do these two quotes say about how Charlie realizes he is special? What do these quotes speak to us? How can we use these quotes and Isaiah 43:1-4 to help us determine how to live?

Closing Activities

15 – 30 minutes

Read *You are Special* by Max Lucado. Ask each student to write a letter to someone (themselves or an anonymous reader) about what makes them special. When students finish their letters, say “Amen.”

Optional Activities

- Watch DVD of MTV film, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, after discussion.
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about grief, bullying, teen suicide, or sexual consent.

Written by: Shannon Guse Edited by: Gina Yeager-Buckley

¹² Chbosky, 201.

¹³ Chbosky, 211.

¹⁴ Chbosky, 213.