



## Searching for Identity in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

Identity- (noun)- the distinguishing character or personality of an individual

Wallflower- (noun)-

a : a person who from shyness or unpopularity remains on the sidelines of a social activity (such as a dance)

b : a shy or reserved person

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Earlier this year in EFL we analyzed the idea of community and how many different ways we can determine the communities to which we belong. The exploration of **identity** also requires analyzing to discover ideas of how it is developed in ourselves, our communities, our culture and our countries. With the reading of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, we meet Charlie, a high school student searching for self-identity .

“First published in 1999, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a modern classic that captures the aching, confusing, and glorious experience of being a teenager—all through the eyes, ears, and letters of the book’s narrator, Charlie. We don’t know where Charlie lives and we don’t know to whom he is writing. But Charlie’s haunting letters, addressed only to “Dear Friend,” bring readers straight to the heart of his struggles to fit in, to find the will to “participate” in life, and to cope with the realities of the larger world as he learns how to grow up.” (Simon and Schuster)

As you read, complete the following assignments:

- 1- Study Guide Questions
- 2- Read the Essay assignment and follow the directions carefully
- 3- Create a vocabulary word list of unfamiliar words and define them.

### Study Guide Questions

1. Discuss the epistolary format of the book. Why do you think Chbosky chose to use letters as his narrative structure? How did this structure affect the book, both in terms of the story and in terms of

your reading experience? How would the book have been different if Chbosky had written it in first-person or third-person narrative?

2. Who do you think Charlie was writing to? Does it ultimately matter whom, or even if he is, writing to someone? Why or why not?

3. Who did you identify with the most? Did you see parts of yourself in any one specific character?

4. Discuss Charlie's character. Is he sympathetic? Would you be friends with Charlie? Why or why not?

5. What do you think kept Charlie from "participating" when he entered high school? What held him back? Have you ever felt this way before?

6. Who is Charlie's greatest ally? Who is his worst influence?

7. From *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs to Harold and Maude to The Beatles' song "Dear Prudence," Charlie references numerous pieces of literature, film, and music. How did these references shape your reading? Why are they so important to Charlie?

8. When Bill invites Charlie over for lunch Charlie observes, "He was talking for real. It was strange." (p. 181) What do you think Charlie means by "real"? How does he discern between what is real and what is not real?

9. Sam confronts Charlie before she leaves for college, pleading: "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." (p. 200) Do you agree with Sam? How does this exchange relate to their relationship on a grander scale?

10. Discuss Aunt Helen's character and presence in the novel. Were you surprised when the truth about her relationship with Charlie was revealed? In what other ways did seemingly positive aspects of Charlie's life turn out to be negative?

11. After watching an art film with Mary Elizabeth Charlie says: "The movie itself was very interesting, but I didn't think it was very good because I didn't really feel different when it was over." (p. 124) Do you agree with Charlie that in order to be "good," creative works must make you feel differently? How did you feel after reading *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*?

12. Discuss the following passage: "Maybe it's good to put things in perspective. Sometimes, I think that the only perspective is to really be there." (p. 213) How has Charlie's outlook shifted from the beginning of the story?

13. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* grapples with a complex, universally difficult stage of life. What reflections did it inspire about your own life? What parts of the story resonated most deeply with you?

## Essay Topics for The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Directions: Read all of the topics below and **circle five that most interest you**. Then, **narrow your list down to three** by putting stars next to them. For each of those, **write three or more sentences explaining why this topic most interests you**. Lastly, put a check-mark by the one you ultimately want to write about because you know you'll be able to **develop a powerful and persuasive thesis statement that can be proved by directly citing examples from the book and research on the Internet if appropriate**.

*Write an essay explaining how friends can be addictive as Sam and Patrick were to Charlie.*

*Write an essay explaining all the types of love in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.*

*Write an essay explaining how Mary Elizabeth and Charlie's sister got their hearts broken and how this can prepare them for future relationships.*

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie's loneliness results from low self-esteem and poor social skills.*

Write an essay explaining how the books Charlie read affected him by providing experiences in fiction rather than experiencing those same things in his life.

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie has a difficult time making friends because of all the different personalities and interests they have.*

Write an essay explaining the negative affects parties had on Charlie.

*Write an essay explaining how getting involved sexually at a young age complicated Charlie's or his sister's life.*

Write an essay explaining how being molested by his Aunt Helen was foreshadowed throughout the novel.

*Write an essay explaining whether the loneliness Charlie experienced is typical of a teenager's life.*

Write an essay explaining whether Charlie's relationship with girls benefited or complicated his life.

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie put others feelings first and how this ultimately had a negative or positive affect on his life.*

Write an essay explaining how peer pressure influenced Charlie to make unhealthy choices.

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie's relationship with his parents is beneficial.*

Write an essay explaining how Charlie's friends had a positive influence on his self-esteem.  
*Write an essay comparing and contrasting the role music played in Charlie's life to your life.*

Write an essay explaining any pros and cons in having an addictive personality and what made Charlie have an addictive personality.

*Write an essay explaining whether Charlie was in love or infatuated with Sam.*

Write an essay explaining the effect drugs had on Charlie's life.

*Write an essay explaining how sexual abuse damaged Charlie's life.*

Write an essay explaining how being a wallflower has its advantages and disadvantages for Charlie.

*Write an essay explaining the positive aspects of Patrick's behavior.*

Write an essay explaining how Charlie's personality changed during his freshman year.

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie was emotionally alone and how that affected his behavior.*

Write an essay explaining how high school is a learning experience for Charlie.

*Write an essay explaining how Charlie's body language communicated his true feelings regarding Mary Elizabeth and Sam.*

Write an essay explaining why Charlie gave Patrick a tape with songs he loved and what those songs meant for Charlie or Patrick.

*Write an essay comparing Charlie to one of your close friends and what you would do to help him cope.*

Write an essay explaining the affect Michael's death had on Charlie's life.

*Write an essay explaining Charlie's relationship with his family and how they communicated with each other and the affect it had upon Charlie's choices in life.*

Write an essay comparing Charlie's relationship with Sam to his relationship with Patrick.