

= The Perks of Being a Wallflower =

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a coming @-@ of @-@ age epistolary novel by American writer Stephen Chbosky which was first published on February 1 , 1999 by Pocket Books . Its narrator is an introverted teenager known as Charlie , who describes his experiences in a series of letters to an anonymous stranger . Set in the early 1990s , the novel follows Charlie through his freshman year of high school in a Pittsburgh suburb . Intelligent beyond his years , he is an unconventional thinker ; as the story begins , the reader learns that Charlie is also shy and unpopular .

Chbosky took five years to develop and publish The Perks of Being a Wallflower , creating the characters and other aspects of the story from his own memories . The novel addresses themes permeating adolescence , including introversion , sexuality , and drug use . Chbosky makes several references to other literary works , films , and pop culture in general .

Although Chbosky 's first book was a commercial success , it was banned in some American schools for its content and received mixed reviews from literary critics . In 2012 , he adapted and directed a film version starring Logan Lerman , Ezra Miller and Emma Watson . The film boosted the novel 's sales , and the book reached The New York Times Best Seller list .

= = Plot = =

The story begins with a quiet , sensitive , 15 @-@ year @-@ old boy named Charlie writing letters about his life to an unknown recipient . Charlie chooses that person because he said that he heard he was nice and thought that this person would not be judgmental . He discusses his first year at high school , grappling with two traumatic experiences from his past : the suicide of his only middle @-@ school friend , Michael , a year before , and the death of his favorite aunt , Helen , during his early childhood .

His English teacher , Mr. Anderson , notices Charlie 's passion for reading and writing , and acts as a mentor by assigning him extracurricular books and reports . Although he is a wallflower , Charlie is befriended by two seniors : Patrick and Sam . Patrick is secretly dating Brad , a closeted football player , and Sam is Patrick 's stepsister . Charlie quickly develops a crush on Sam and subsequently admits his feelings to her . It is revealed that Sam was sexually abused as a child , and she kisses Charlie to ensure that his first kiss is from someone who truly loves him .

In parallel , Charlie witnesses his sister 's boyfriend hit her across the face , but she forbids him from telling their parents . He eventually mentions the occurrence to Mr. Anderson , who tells Charlie 's parents about it . Charlie 's relationship with his sister rapidly deteriorates and she continues to see her boyfriend against her parents ' wishes . Eventually , he discovers that his sister is pregnant and agrees to bring her to an abortion clinic without telling anyone . His sister breaks up with her boyfriend , after which her and Charlie 's relationship begins to improve significantly .

Charlie is accepted by Sam and Patrick 's group of friends and begins experimenting with tobacco , alcohol and other drugs . As Charlie engages with his new friends he can control his flashbacks of Aunt Helen , who died in a car crash on her way to buy him a birthday gift . Eventually , Mary Elizabeth , a member of the group , invites Charlie to the school 's Sadie Hawkins dance and the two enter into a desultory relationship . During a game of Truth or Dare , when dared to kiss the prettiest girl in the room he kisses Sam ; Mary Elizabeth storms out , the rest of the group shuns him and Patrick suggests that Charlie stay away from Sam for a while . His flashbacks return .

Patrick and Brad 's relationship is discovered by Brad 's abusive father , and Brad disappears from school for a few days . Upon returning , Brad is cold and mean towards Patrick , while Patrick attempts to reconnect with him . However , when Brad derogatorily attacks Patrick 's sexuality in public , Patrick physically attacks Brad until other football players join in and gang up on Patrick . Charlie breaks up the fight , regaining the respect of Sam and her friends . Patrick begins spending much of his time with Charlie and Patrick kisses Charlie impulsively and then apologizes , but Charlie understands that he is recovering from his romance with Brad . Soon Patrick sees Brad engaging with a stranger in the park and Patrick is able to move on from the relationship .

As the school year ends , Charlie is anxious about losing his older friends ? especially Sam , who is

leaving for a summer college @-@ preparatory program and has learned that her boyfriend cheated on her . When Charlie helps her pack , they talk about his feelings for her ; she is angry that he never acted on them . They begin to engage sexually , but Charlie suddenly grows inexplicably uncomfortable and stops Sam . Charlie begins to realize that his sexual contact with Sam has stirred up repressed memories of having been molested by his aunt Helen as a child .

In an epilogue , Charlie is discovered by his parents in a catatonic state and does not show any movement despite being hit reluctantly by his father . After being admitted to a mental hospital , it emerges that Helen sexually abused him when he was young , and his love for her (and empathy for her troubled youth) caused him to repress his traumatic memories . This psychological damage explains his flashbacks and derealization phases throughout the book . In two months Charlie is released , and Sam and Patrick visit him . In the epilogue , Sam , Patrick and Charlie go through the tunnel again and Charlie stands up and exclaims that he felt infinite .

He comes to terms with his past : " Even if we don 't have the power to choose where we come from , we can still choose where we go from there " . Charlie decides to " participate " in life , and his letter @-@ writing ends .

= = Background and writing = =

Chbosky first conceived random ideas , including " a kid standing up in a tunnel , " a girl he likes , and parties he goes to . After five years with these elements in mind , he had the idea of writing the novel during a difficult period in his life . He was experiencing a " bad breakup " which led him to ask , " Why good people let themselves get treated so badly ? " The author tried to answer the question with the sentence " we accept the love we think we deserve " . That meant to be an advice to remark that one is in charge of one 's life as he is referring to " not just romance love but also love of self , it 's love of your future , it 's the love you have for your life . "

The story began when Chbosky was in school , evolving from another book on which he was working . In that book he wrote the sentence , " I guess that 's just one of the perks of being a wallflower " , which led him to realize " that somewhere in that ... was the kid I was really trying to find . " Chbosky began writing the novel in the summer of 1996 while he was in college , and within a month and six weeks he completed the story . He rewrote it into two more drafts , concluding the published version in the summer of 1998 .

Charlie , " [his] hope in the form of a character " , is loosely based on the author and Chbosky included " countless details " in the novel from the time he lived in Pittsburgh . The other characters were " pieces of real people in [his] life " ; Chbosky focused on people 's struggles and what they are passionate about , attempting to " hone in [on] the essence of each . " The characters of Sam and Patrick were an " amalgamate and celebration " of several people Chbosky has met ; Sam was based on girls who confided in him , and Patrick was " all the kids I knew who were gay and finding their way to their own identity . "

= = Style and themes = =

The idea of anonymous letters came from a real experience ; during his senior year in high school , Chbosky wrote an anonymous letter to Stewart Stern about how Rebel Without a Cause had influenced him . A year and a half later , Stern found Chbosky and became his mentor . By using a series of letters from Charlie to an anonymous character , Chbosky found " the most intimate way " to talk directly to the reader . He thought the letters would help him keep the story cohesive , " to convey the highs and lows of being young ? one day , you 're on top of the world and you ? ve had the greatest of times " .

Critics have identified primary themes of teenage reality and (for adults) nostalgia . According to David Edelstein of the New York Magazine , Chbosky captures the " feeling [that] you belong when among friends , yet you 'd soon be alone " and notes that " the pain of loss ... [is] almost as intense as the bliss ... it 's nostalgia with an emphasis on nostos , pain [sic] . " Word Riot 's Marty Beckerman said that The Perks of Being a Wallflower connects with young people because its

scenes are " so universal and happen to so many teenagers . " Chbosky wanted to convey respect for teenagers , to " validate and respect and celebrate what [teenagers] are going through every day " , and said that the novel is for " anyone who 's felt like an outcast . "

Although it is also read by adults , *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is targeted at a teenaged audience . The book addresses a range of themes (including sex and drugs) dispassionately . Other themes include friendship , body image , first love , suicide , eating disorders and sexuality . Chbosky appreciates the importance of entertainment in adolescence : " Books , songs , and movies are more than entertainment when we 're young . They help all of us discover who we are , what we believe , and what we hope our life can be . " As such , there are several cultural references : musical (*The Smiths* and *Fleetwood Mac*) , literary (*This Side of Paradise* , *On the Road* , *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and theatrical (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) .

= = Publication and reception = =

The Perks of Being a Wallflower was first published on February 1 , 1999 by Pocket Books through its MTV Books imprint . It became the subsidiary 's best @-@ selling book with 100 @,@ 000 copies in print as of 2000 , and was included on school reading lists and gathered a cult following . In spite of it , *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has appeared six times on the American Library Association 's list of 10 most @-@ frequently @-@ challenged books . Usually , there are request to remove it from high school public libraries because it deals with drugs use among teenagers , homosexuality , suicide , and has sexually explicit scenes and " offensive language . " Since Chbosky " didn 't write it to be a controversial book , " he was surprised by the bans .

Critical response was mixed ; *Publishers Weekly* called the novel " trite " , dealing with " standard teenage issues " in which " Chbosky infuses a droning insistence on Charlie 's supersensitive disposition . " Although *Kirkus Review* said it had " the right combination of realism and uplift " , the reviewer criticized Chbosky 's " rip @-@ off " of J. D. Salinger 's *The Catcher in the Rye* . Although other reviewers made similar comparisons , Chbosky said he " was not trying to mimic [Salinger 's] style as a writer " ; he saw " how readers could compare Charlie to Salinger 's Holden Caulfield " , but " they are very different people with unique problems and perspectives " .

Francisca Goldsmith of the *School Library Journal* said the novel " cleverly " makes the readers the recipients of Charlie 's letters , and it " will engage teen readers for years to come . " *Common Sense Media* 's Kate Pavao praised its relevant themes for teenagers : " Readers will find themselves quickly feeling sorry for the protagonist and worrying about him throughout his transformative journey . " In an Amazon.com review , Brangien Davies wrote : " What is most notable about this funny , touching , memorable first novel from Stephen Chbosky is the resounding accuracy with which the author captures the voice of a boy teetering on the brink of adulthood . " For *The A.V. Club* , Marah Eakin wrote that although for an adult " *Perks* suffers from an overabundance of pure , raw angst ... unlike some more arrested development @-@ friendly YA fare like *Harry Potter* , *Perks* speaks to a more specific age range and does it well . "

With the announcement of a film adaptation the novel received more attention ; it sales increased from 88 @,@ 847 copies in 2011 to 425 @,@ 933 in 2012 , and it reached the *New York Times* bestseller lists . It entered the *Children 's Paperpack Books* category on the June 23 , 2012 list , and had 1 @.@ 5 million copies in print in November 2012 . As of May 11 , 2014 it appeared on *The New York Times* top 10 list for the 71st non @-@ consecutive week , and was in the top 15 on the November 23 list . The novel has been published in 16 countries in 13 languages .

= = Film adaptation = =

Since he wrote *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Chbosky aspired to adapt it into a film , calling this " a lifelong dream of mine . " After the publication of the novel Chbosky said he received film offers , refusing them because he " owed the fans a movie that was worthy of their love for the book . " In 2010 Mr. Mudd began developing a film version , and the author was signed to write and direct the film by producers John Malkovich , Lianne Halfon and Russell Smith . The film , shot in the

Pittsburgh area from May 9 to June 29 , 2011 , starred Logan Lerman as Charlie , Emma Watson as Sam , Ezra Miller as Patrick , and Nina Dobrev as Charlie 's sister , Candace .

It premiered on September 8 , 2012 at the Toronto International Film Festival , and was released theatrically in the United States by Summit Entertainment on September 21 . According to Metacritic it has received " generally favorable reviews " , with an average of 67 out of 100 based on 36 reviews . Rotten Tomatoes reported an 85 % approval rate , based on 151 reviews . The film was a commercial success , grossing over \$ 33 million worldwide from a \$ 13 million production budget .