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ENGL 112B Young Adult Literature
02 November 2020

Wonder by R.J. Palacio



<https://wonderthebook.com/>

About the Author: R.J. Palacio

Raquel Jaramillo, her pen name being R.J. Palacio, is an American graphic designer and *New York Times* bestselling author. A first-generation American, Palacio was born in New York City and currently resides in Brooklyn, New York, with her family. She attended The High School of Art & Design in Manhattan and later pursued the major of illustration at the Parsons School of Design. Palacio then studied at The American University in Paris. Before her debut novel,

Palacio had designed thousands of book covers. Along with her two sons, it was when she had an encounter with a child who had a facial difference, she decided to write *Wonder*. She quotes on her website,

I was with my two sons one day in front of an ice cream store, and we found ourselves in close proximity to a child with a severe facial difference. My younger son started to cry because he was scared, and I was nervous that his tears might hurt the child's feelings, so I left the scene very quickly and rather abruptly. I realized afterward that I had handled the situation terribly. **What I**

wished I had done was to turn that encounter into a teaching moment for my kids. I wished I had stopped to talk to the child, and shown my own kids there was nothing to be afraid of. It made me wonder what it must be like for that child, facing a world every day that doesn't know how to face you back.

Being one of the *New York Times* bestsellers, *Wonder* inspired Palacio to publish *365 Days of Wonder: Mr. Browne's Book of Precepts* (August 2014), and *Auggie & Me*, (October 2015), and *We're All Wonders* (March 2017).

Summary



August “Auggie” Pullman is a ten-year-old boy diagnosed with Treacher Collins syndrome, a rare genetic condition that affects the way a child's face develops. From little kids screaming and older kids teasing, Auggie has faced the worst of social interaction. After being home-schooled for a sum of years, his parents decide to send him to a private middle school, Beecher Prep. *Wonder* tells the story of

Auggie’s fifth grade year, told from Auggie's perspective, and partially narrated by the other characters in his story— his sister Via, his new friend Summer, his other new friend Jack, Via's boyfriend Justin, and Via’s old friend Miranda. All of these voices combine to portray a body of people that struggle with the unusual and unpredictable. *Wonder* teaches young and old readers to reflect on their ways to show compassion and kindness.

Representative Quotes

<p>“‘It was bad how we did that,’ she said. ‘Just getting up like that, we’d just seen the devil. I was scared for what Jamie was going to say, you know? I didn’t want him to say anything that would hurt that little boy’s feelings. But it was very bad, us leaving like that. The momma knew what was goin on.’ ‘But we didn’t mean it,’ I answered. ‘Jack, sometimes you don’t have to mean to hurt someone to hurt someone. You understand?’” (137)</p>	<p>This passage relates back to Palacio’s encounter that inspired the novel. Jack has a flashback of when he first met August outside of an ice cream store. Once his little brother, Jamie, reacts inappropriately, Veronica, their babysitter, rushes along with Jack and Jamie, in the stroller. After getting away, Veronica realizes what she had done and teaches Jack an important life lesson of empathy. Throughout the novel, August is forced to face people’s stares, whispers, and sudden gasps. Many people unfortunately do not take the time to think about how to act when encountering something that may be unusual to them. Writing Jack’s perspective, Palacio teaches readers that their actions matter enough to impact someone’s day, week, or even life.</p>
<p>“‘I don’t know, sweetie.’ She sounded so tired. ‘They just feel it. You don’t need your eyes to love, right? You just feel it inside you. That’s how it is in heaven. It’s just love, and no one forgets who they love.’” (227)</p>	<p>After a tragic loss, August asks his mother about seeing and recognizing loved ones in heaven. Said by August’s mom, Isabel, this quote emulates the message of real love. To other people, August’s face is not easy to the eye. However, people who truly know him and have shared beautiful moments with him, know that he is more than just his medical condition. In addition to Isabel, his father, Nate, and his sister, Via, have unconditional love for August. Isabel talks about love being more than seeing—it’s feeling and understanding. Through Isabel, Palacio portrays the significance of unconditional love and how reassuring it is.</p>
<p>“‘Not just the nature of kindness, but the nature of <i>one</i>’s kindness. The power of <i>one</i>’s friendship. The test of <i>one</i>’s character. The strength of <i>one</i>’s courage... Courage. Kindness. Friendship. Character. These are the qualities that define us as human beings, and propel us, on occasion, to greatness.’” (304)</p>	<p>August’s fifth-grade year has finally come to an end, and his middle school director, Mr. Tushman delivers a memorable speech to present the Henry Ward Beecher medal. The children and adults of Beecher Prep School have come a long way in the past year, and Mr. Tushman acknowledges the hardships and triumphs of the medal recipient. In this quote, Mr. Tushman lists the characteristics of being</p>

	<p>a human being. The nature, the power, the test, and the strength of all four of these qualities are portrayed in each of the character's stories: Via's courage as a sister to August, Summer's kindness to August, Jack's friendship with August, August's character, and many more. This speech embodies Palacio's message of what really is important in life: courage, kindness, friendship, and character.</p>
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Teaching *Wonder* in the Classroom

- Before introducing the book, ask your students to answer this prompt: What does the word "kindness" mean to you? When was the last time you experienced kindness from another person or have shown it to another person?
- After Miranda tells Justin, "...the universe was not kind to auggie pullman,' Justin takes a step back reflects on "luck". He says, "so doesn't that make the universe a giant lottery, then? you purchase a ticket when you're born. and it's all random whether you get a good ticket or a bad ticket. it's all just luck,"(204). Have your students write about this quote answering the following questions: (1) Is Justin right? Why or why not? and (2) If you are able to choose how your life is going to be before you are born, would you do it? Why or why not?
- The story is told by six different people, and they all learn the meaning of kindness. Introduce the *Wonder* final project with the following guidelines:
 - Think about a time when you and 4-5 other people had to go through a learning experience.
 - The story can only be 4-5 pages. One page = one person's perspective. You may create fake names for your characters! You may create a fake one for yourself! Make sure each page is a first-person point of view narrative.
 - Your last (5th or 6th) page will be your reflection. What did you learn from this experience? What would you have changed if it were to happen again? Make sure that whatever you learned is the central idea/theme.

Why Teens Should Read *Wonder*

1. Many teens experience the hardships of growing up. Similar to August, teens may experience bullying, confusion, and the desire to be “normal.” However, this book teaches young readers to accept who they are and to strive to become better people. This book writes about real experiences of ordinary people that other teens can resonate with. (Exeter Quality #3)
2. This book has many themes: family, love, empathy, loss, friendship, compassion, and of course, kindness. Just from this novel alone, teens are able to learn quality lessons to apply to their own lives. (Exeter Quality #6)
3. Each character learns how to cope, react, or behave. They all learn what it means to be a human being and how that can impact themselves or another person. Teens would be able to witness the emotional and intellectual growth of all the characters. It’d help teens to reflect on their own character growth and seek ways to adapt.

Category of Books that *Wonder* fits from *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*

- I. Chapter 4: Real Life Experiences
- II. Chapter 6: Identity, Discrimination, Struggles with Decisions
- III. Chapter 7: Courage, Survival

Text Complexity

Quantitative

Lexile Range: 790L(Age Range 8-12)

ATOS Book Level: 4.8 (Interest Level: Middle Grades 4-8)

Dale-Chall Formula: Raw score 2.3268 | Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.3268) | Final Score: 6

New Dale-Chall Readability Index: Grade level: Grades 7 - 8

Qualitative

From the Lexile, ATOS, and Dale-Chall scores, *Wonder* is calculated to be more suitable for students within the grades of four and eight! The shifts between timelines and character perspectives are very easy to follow and well-organized. The text itself does not have a difficult vocabulary for an average young reader. It also has instances of colloquial language, or “casual talk,” that any young American reader would be able to understand.

The stories are told by three 10 year-olds and three 14 year-olds. August is a new student in his middle school who gets bullied by his peers. Jake is a returning student at Beecher Prep who faces conflict with being popular and doing what’s right. Summer is a new student at Beecher Prep who experiences loss but gains new relationships along the way. Via is an incoming freshman who feels trapped and confused. Justin is Via’s new high school boyfriend who tries to be the best partner he can be for her. Miranda is Via’s old friend who is secretly having familial issues at home. Each of these characters has their own stories, but are intertwined to portray themes of family, love, friendship, empathy, compassion, and kindness.

This book allows teens to put themselves into each of the characters’ shoes. The first-person narration invites young readers to experience the character’s world with the character’s raw emotions and thoughts. It adds reality. Not only does the novel concern the topic of bullying, it also talks about loss, the afterlife, selfishness, and classism. *Wonder* is an assemblage of morale that teens can take with them. Wrapping up the novel in one quote that would appeal to teen readers right off the bat, Palacio writes,

**WHEN GIVEN THE CHOICE BETWEEN BEING RIGHT OR BEING
KIND, CHOOSE KIND. (48)**