



Wonder

Written by R. J. Palacio
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August Pullman (Auggie) is a 10-year-old boy who likes such ordinary things as playing ball, eating ice cream, riding his bike. Owing to a genetic condition, Auggie was born with no ears, eyebrows, eyelashes, and cheekbones that has caused his face to sag, his nose to protrude, and his bulging eyes to be asymmetrical and lower on his face. After homeschooling Auggie for years, his parents decide that he should begin 5th grade at Beecher Prep. Auggie describes himself as having a “mushed-up face” and even though he has become accustomed to people recoiling, looking away, or staring, he

is nervous because he fears he’ll never be an ordinary kid who has friends, the empathy of others or the freedom to be himself.

Auggie initially tells his story from his point of view. He describes his family, including his parents and older sister, Via; growing up, having 27 surgeries; and, his difficult struggles when beginning school at Beecher, where he is teased and bullied. Through his voice readers come to appreciate Auggie’s sense of humor, intelligence, gentleness, courage, and honesty. Then a range of voices (i.e., Via, two of Auggie’s first friends, Jack and Summer) continue the story from their points of view. These voices provide different perspectives on Auggie and how he and his condition affect those who love and care about him. Auggie’s voice comes in again to bring his story to a close. The varying voices reveal the changes that occur not only in Auggie but in all those around him.

In this unforgettable, moving novel Palacio gracefully weaves Auggie’s story together through different voices that converge around compassion and acceptance. The idea for the different voices came to the author when she realized that Auggie would not know the extent of his impact on others. Using different perspectives, Palacio skillfully explores the cruelties that may exist in school life, such as prejudice and bullying, but ends on a note of hope, showing the power of kindness, loyalty, and friendship. Readers can’t help but cheer for Auggie and agree with his mother who ends the book stating, “You really are a wonder, Auggie. You are a wonder.”

Wonder is Palacio’s first novel, after years of being an art director and designer in New York which she continues to do. The idea for the novel grew from an experience she had with her two children outside an ice cream shop (Palacio, 2013). When they happened to sit next to a mother and daughter with a severe craniofacial difference, her younger son, looking at the young girl, started to cry. As she hurriedly gathered her children and left, spilling shakes in the process, Palacio heard the mother calmly say, “It’s time to go” to her

daughter. Reflecting later on the incident, Palacio thought about the hundreds of times the mother and daughter must have had similar experiences and wished she had instead set an example and talked to the mother. The idea for *Wonder* was born that evening and she spent weeks researching genetics and craniofacial anomalies in children to write the story. While she was never bullied as a child, she did experience social isolation, ridicule, abandonment by friends, and knew kids who gained a sense of power by putting others down. Though her experiences were never to the extent of Auggie, they helped her envision how he and others felt (Palacio, 2013).

Wonder would work well with a text set for middle school readers on friendship and kindness. Other books in this text set might include *Freak the Mighty* (Rodman Philbrick, 2004) and *Out of My Mind* (Sharon Draper, 2012).

Reference

Palacio, R.J. (2013). *Frequently-asked questions*. Retrieved from <http://rjpalacio.com/faqs.html>, May 27, 2013.

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