

*Discussion &  
Educator Guide*

*R.J. Palacio*

**You can't blend in when  
you were born to stand out.**



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# WONDER

R.J. Palacio

## ABOUT THE BOOK

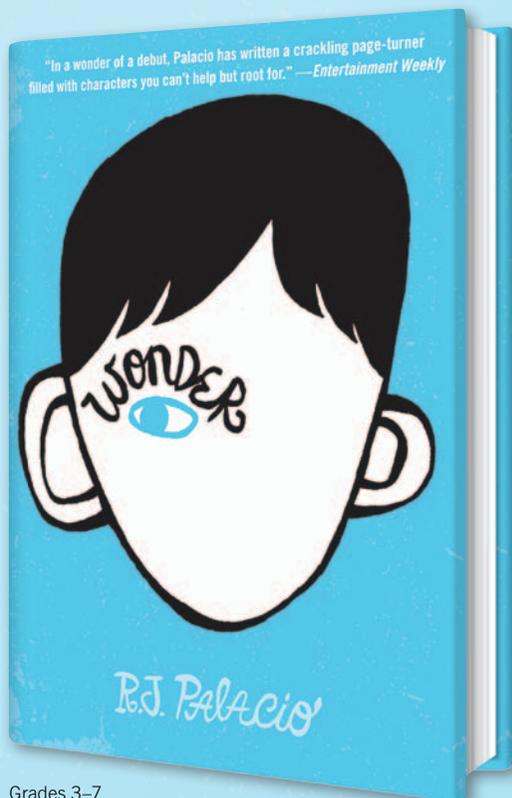
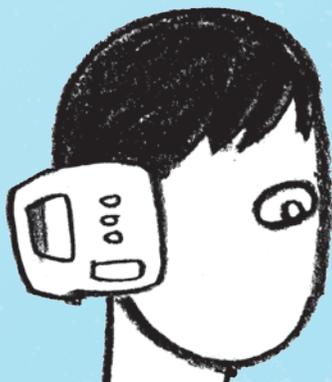
*After being home-schooled for four years, Auggie, who suffers from a severely deformed face, enters the fifth grade at Beecher Prep School and does his best to be just an ordinary kid with an extraordinary face.*

The first few days of school are more than difficult. Try as he might to ignore them, Auggie must endure the looks and whispers—even the cruel game, “The Plague,” where everyone is afraid to touch him. Julian especially causes Auggie’s days to be miserable, making references about Auggie’s face and veiled threats to harm him. The flip side is that Auggie has the steadfast support of his first friend, Summer, and his best friend, Jack, and his teachers and the principal like him. But for every positive, there is a negative: Jack betrays him, a gang of kids try to hurt him, and some particularly insensitive parents even try to have him removed from the school. Yet, Auggie shows amazing understanding and compassion. As the school year progresses, Auggie learns that, though there will always be people who want to taunt him and make his life miserable, he can have true friends despite his looks. The wonder of Auggie’s extraordinarily unique presence is that the people around him learn what it is to be kind and to be courageous.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Give the class an overview of Treacher-Collins Syndrome using information from the following website:

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002624](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002624)



Grades 3–7  
HC: 978-0-375-86902-0  
GLB: 978-0-375-96902-7  
EL: 978-0-375-89988-1

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS: QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**—Discuss Auggie’s relationship with each of his family members. How does Via react to Auggie’s deformity? How is Via’s life affected by Auggie’s deformity? She says, “I’m always going to be the sister of a kid with a birth defect; that’s not the issue. I just don’t always want to be defined that way.” (p. 91) What does Via mean by this statement? How could her parents help Via’s life be more normal even though Auggie’s isn’t? What sacrifices does Via have to make in her relationship with her parents? What qualities do Auggie’s parents possess that help them to be good parents to Auggie? How do respect and trust play a role in their family dynamics?

**FRIENDSHIP**—Discuss the characteristics of a good friend. Which of Auggie’s friends demonstrate these qualities? What characteristics of a good friend does Auggie possess? How does Auggie help his friends see him as an ordinary kid? How does Auggie’s ability to be comfortable in his own skin make it easier for his friends and family to relate to him? Share examples from the book to support your responses.

**OVERCOMING CHALLENGES**—Auggie’s attendance at Beecher Prep creates issues for students, parents, teachers, and the principal. What are some of the challenges that arise? How does each group of individuals overcome the challenges? What role does Auggie play in either helping or hurting the situation? What lessons are learned because of Auggie’s attendance at the school? In Mr. Tushman’s speech at the end of the year, he shares this quote, “Always try to be a little kinder than necessary.” How does being kind help someone overcome challenges?

**BULLYING**—Kids that are different are almost always bullied in some way. How does Auggie know the first time he meets Julian that he will be a bully? In what subtle ways does Julian bully Auggie? What purpose does Julian have in bullying Jack? What power does Julian have to force the other students to join in his cruelty toward Auggie and Jack? What prompts the seventh graders to attack and bully Auggie? In general, what is Auggie’s response to the bullying?

**BETRAYAL**—Auggie and Jack are great friends; they laugh together, they talk about anything and everything, and they feel comfortable together. So why does Jack betray Auggie by talking badly behind his back? How does Auggie feel when he hears what Jack has said? At the same time Auggie is experiencing betrayal by his friend, Via is also feeling betrayed by her two best friends, Miranda and Ella. How do Miranda and Ella betray Via? What is Via’s response? How do Via and Auggie resolve their individual conflicts and cope with the pain of betrayal?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

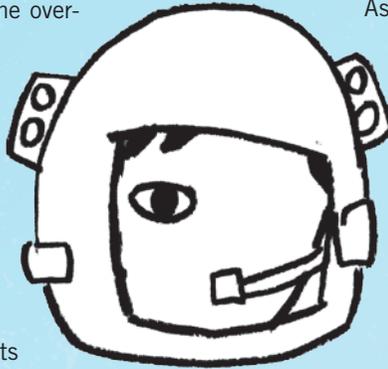
**LANGUAGE ARTS**—Auggie says, “I felt very sad and a tiny bit happy at the exact same time, kind of like that laughing-crying feeling.” (p. 33) Most everyone has experienced this juxtaposition of emotions. Ask students to select a partner and then to write a poem in two voices: one voice expressing Auggie’s sadness at various points of the story and the other voice expressing his happiness. Have students read their poems to the class.

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—Mr. Browne’s monthly precept helps students to see outside their world and to think about their beliefs. Mr. Browne’s definition of a precept is anything that helps guide you when making important decisions. Ask students to brainstorm precepts that could be applicable to all students in their school to make it a safer, kinder place to be.

Ask students to work in pairs and then choose one precept for which they create a poster illustrating its concept. Post the precept posters in all common areas of the school.

**SCIENCE**—Break the class into small groups to investigate Treacher-Collins Syndrome, answering questions about the causes, the treatment, the life expectancy, and the genetic make-up of the syndrome. Have students determine and explain why Auggie’s case was so unusual and severe. Then have each group select an extension project to spotlight their research: a classroom display, a PowerPoint or other media presentation, a nonfiction book, or an informational brochure. Have students present their projects to other classrooms and schools in the district to start open discussion on this and other childhood diseases.

**FINE ARTS**—In small groups or with a partner, ask students to find a scene in the book they can portray by illustrating the scene, creating a music montage to accompany an oral reading, or writing and performing the scene. Have students display or present their resulting projects to the class.



## VOCABULARY/ USE OF LANGUAGE

To help the reader make connections with Auggie and his life, the author uses allusions to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Star Wars*, and the *Augie Doggie* cartoons. Ask students working in small groups to brainstorm other allusions that would help convey Auggie's situation and then to write their best allusions on four sentence strips. Have each group swap allusions with another group and discuss how the allusions apply to Auggie and his situation. Post discussion comments along with allusion strips around the classroom.



Photo by Russell Gordon

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### CHOOSE KIND

[choosekind.tumblr.com](http://choosekind.tumblr.com)

Inspired by *Wonder*, this anti-bullying initiative encourages young readers to share their story and pledge to *choose kind* in their school and community.

### BULLYING: WHAT YOU CAN DO

[www.stopbullying.gov/kids/what-you-can-do/index.html](http://www.stopbullying.gov/kids/what-you-can-do/index.html)

### CHILDREN AND PET LOSS

[www.edenmemorialpetcare.com/children-pet-loss-article.htm](http://www.edenmemorialpetcare.com/children-pet-loss-article.htm)

## PRAISE

- ★ “A great discussion starter about love, support, and judging people on their appearance. A well-written, thought-provoking book.”—*School Library Journal*, Starred
- ★ “A memorable story of kindness, courage and wonder.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred
- ★ “It’s a rare story with the power to open eyes—and hearts—to what it’s like to be singled out for a difference you can’t control, when all you want is to be just another face in the crowd.”—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred
- ★ “Kids’ books about befriending somebody ‘different’ could fill a library. But this debut novel rises to the top.”—*Booklist*, Starred

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**R. J. PALACIO** lives in NYC with her husband, two sons, and two dogs. For more than twenty years, she was an art director and graphic designer, designing book jackets for other people while waiting for the perfect time in her life to start writing her own novel. But one day several years ago, a chance encounter with an extraordinary child in front of an ice cream store made R. J. realize that the perfect time to write that novel had finally come. *Wonder* is her first novel. She did not design the cover, but she sure does love it.

Prepared by Susan Geye, Director of Library Services, Everman ISD, Texas.

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