

Wonder

by R.J. Palacio · Language: EN

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Overview

Wonder by R.J. Palacio is a contemporary middle-grade novel that tells the story of August Pullman, a ten-year-old boy born with a severe facial deformity. After years of homeschooling and multiple surgeries, Auggie enters fifth grade at Beecher Prep, a mainstream private school in New York City. The novel follows his struggle to fit in, make friends, and be seen for who he is rather than what he looks like. The story is told from multiple perspectives, including Auggie's, his sister Via's, and his classmates', which deepens the reader's understanding of how one child's courage can ripple through a community.

The book's central arc moves from Auggie's anxiety about starting school, through the bullying and isolation he faces, to his gradual acceptance and eventual triumph as he earns the respect of his peers. Along the way, the narrative explores themes of kindness, empathy, and the power of ordinary acts of courage. The famous precept, "When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind," becomes a guiding principle for the characters and for readers. The story culminates in Auggie's successful school year, capped by a standing ovation at his graduation, affirming that inner beauty matters more than outward appearance.

Wonder matters because it challenges readers to confront their own biases about appearance and disability, and it offers a hopeful, accessible message about inclusion and compassion. It has become a staple in classrooms and homes, sparking conversations about bullying, friendship, and what it truly means to be normal. The novel's multiple perspectives remind us that everyone is fighting their own battles, and that a little kindness can go a long way.

Key Takeaways

- Choose kindness over being right, as the novel's central precept suggests, because kindness can transform relationships and communities.
- Everyone is fighting their own battle; try to see beyond a person's appearance to understand their inner self.
- Courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to face it, as Auggie does when he goes to school despite his anxiety.
- True friendship is based on character, not looks; Auggie's friends like Jack and Summer value him for who he is.

- Parents and teachers play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment for children who are different.
- Siblings of children with special needs also need attention and understanding, as seen through Via's perspective.
- Small acts of kindness, like a simple hello or a smile, can have a big impact on someone's day.
- Being different is not a flaw; it is what makes each person unique and valuable.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: August

The novel opens with Auggie Pullman, a ten-year-old with a facial deformity, preparing to start fifth grade at Beecher Prep. He has been homeschooled his entire life, and he is terrified of how other kids will react to his face. The part introduces his family: his mother, father, and older sister Via. Auggie visits the school, meets the principal Mr. Tushman, and is assigned three students to show him around: Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte. He also meets Summer, who will become a close friend. Auggie's first day is rough, with kids staring and whispering, but he begins to find his footing.

Part Two: Via

This section is narrated by Auggie's older sister, Olivia (Via). She reflects on her role as the 'normal' sibling in a family focused on Auggie's needs. She feels invisible at times but loves her brother deeply. Via starts high school and struggles with her own identity, especially when her best friend Miranda pulls away. She joins the drama club and finds a new sense of purpose. Via also deals with the emotional strain of Auggie's school year, and she learns to voice her own needs. Her perspective highlights the challenges faced by siblings of children with disabilities.

Part Three: Summer

Summer is a girl who sits with Auggie at lunch on the first day and becomes his loyal friend. In this section, she narrates her experiences. She explains that she chose to befriend Auggie because she saw past his face and liked his humor and kindness. She faces pressure from other kids, especially Julian, to stop hanging out with Auggie, but she refuses. Summer's story emphasizes the importance of standing up for what is right, even when it is unpopular. She also reveals that she and Auggie have a fun, easy friendship, playing games and talking about movies.

Part Four: Jack

Jack Will, who was assigned to show Auggie around, becomes one of Auggie's closest friends. However, this section reveals Jack's internal conflict. He initially agreed to be Auggie's buddy out of obligation, but he grows to genuinely like him. At a Halloween party, Jack makes a cruel

comment about Auggie, not realizing Auggie is nearby in a costume. Auggie overhears and is devastated. Jack later realizes his mistake and works to repair the friendship. He stands up to Julian's bullying and defends Auggie, even getting into a fight. This part shows the complexity of friendship and the power of apology.

Part Five: Justin

Justin is Via's new boyfriend, a quiet and observant boy who plays the violin. He narrates this short section, offering an outsider's view of the Pullman family. Justin is initially nervous about meeting Auggie but quickly accepts him. He witnesses the family's dynamics and supports Via as she deals with her own struggles. Justin also notices the strain between Via and her parents, who are often focused on Auggie. His perspective adds depth to the story, showing that even those who enter the family later are affected by Auggie's journey.

Part Six: August

Auggie returns as narrator, describing the second half of his school year. He and Jack have reconciled, and they spend time together. Auggie faces continued bullying from Julian and his clique, but he also gains more friends. He attends a school retreat in the woods, where he is harassed by older kids from another school. In a moment of courage, Jack and Auggie stand up for themselves, and they are helped by other students. The retreat becomes a turning point, as Auggie is accepted more fully by his classmates. He also deals with the death of his beloved dog, Daisy.

Part Seven: Miranda

Miranda, Via's former best friend, narrates this section. She reveals that she has been lying about her home life and about having a brother with a deformed face, pretending that Auggie is her brother to gain popularity at camp. She feels guilty about drifting away from Via. Miranda also struggles with her parents' divorce. She secretly helps Via by giving up the lead role in the school play so Via can have it. This act of selflessness begins to mend their friendship. Miranda's story shows that people's actions are often driven by their own insecurities.

Part Eight: August

The final section returns to Auggie's perspective as the school year ends. He reflects on how much he has changed and how his classmates have changed too. Julian has left the school, and the remaining students have become more accepting. Auggie receives a special award at graduation for his courage and kindness. He is overwhelmed when the entire audience gives him a standing ovation. His parents are proud, and Via is there too. The novel ends with Auggie feeling that he is just an ordinary kid, but one who has been given extraordinary opportunities to show who he really is.

Themes

- Kindness and empathy
- Acceptance of differences
- Courage and resilience
- Friendship and loyalty
- Family and sibling dynamics
- Bullying and its effects

Notable Quotes

- "When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind." — Mr. Browne's precept, which is introduced in the first part of the book and becomes a central theme.
- "I think there should be a rule that everyone in the world should get a standing ovation at least once in their lives." — Auggie says this after receiving a standing ovation at his graduation.
- "If every single person in this room made it a rule that wherever we are, whenever we can, we will try to act a little kinder than is necessary, the world really would be a better place." — Mr. Tushman says this in his graduation speech.
- "You can't blend in when you were born to stand out." — Via says this to Auggie, encouraging him to embrace his uniqueness.
- "I know I'm not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I mean, I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go." — Auggie's opening narration, establishing his self-awareness about his appearance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Wonder about?

Wonder is about August Pullman, a boy with a facial deformity who enters mainstream school for the first time in fifth grade. The story follows his struggles with bullying, his journey to make friends, and how his courage and kindness change the people around him. It is told from multiple perspectives, including Auggie's, his sister's, and his classmates'.

Is Wonder worth reading?

Yes, Wonder is widely praised for its heartfelt and accessible exploration of empathy, kindness, and acceptance. It appeals to both young readers and adults, offering valuable lessons about looking beyond appearances. The multiple perspectives add depth, and the story is both moving and uplifting. It is a quick, impactful read that has become a modern classic in children's literature.

How does Wonder end?

Spoiler: At the end of Wonder, Auggie completes his fifth-grade year and receives a special award for courage and kindness at graduation. The entire audience gives him a standing ovation, which moves him to tears. He reflects on how much he has grown and how his classmates have accepted him. The novel ends on a hopeful note, with Auggie feeling proud and ordinary.

Who should read Wonder?

Wonder is ideal for middle-grade readers (ages 8-12) but is also valuable for teens and adults. Teachers and parents often use it to spark discussions about bullying, kindness, and inclusion. Anyone looking for an uplifting story about overcoming adversity and the power of empathy will appreciate this book. It is also a great choice for family read-alouds.

How long does it take to read Wonder?

Wonder is about 320 pages long, and at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 6-7 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few days, depending on how much time they dedicate daily. It is a fast-paced, engaging read that is hard to put down.