

Wonder is a book about an ordinary boy called Auggie who looks very different from most boys his age.

What's *Wonder* about?

Wonder tells the story of August, a ten-year-old boy who lives with his parents and sister in New York. August, or Auggie as his family call him, is an ordinary boy in many ways. He rides a bike and likes playing with his Xbox. But Auggie was born with deformities of the face and looks very different from other kids. At the start of the book, he tells us 'My name is August. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse.' Auggie's appearance shocks people. People look at him for a long time or sometimes they look away as soon as they see him.

Auggie's had 27 operations on his face and has spent a lot of time in hospital. His mother has taught him at home, but now that he's ten, she thinks he should go to school. At first, Auggie hates the idea of school and doesn't want to go. He worries that other kids will look at him strangely or call him horrible names, but his parents persuade him to visit a school and meet the headteacher. After the visit, Auggie decides that, yes, he will go to school.

Like many kids, Auggie is really anxious on the first day. Because of his face, nobody wants to sit next to him and he notices other kids looking and talking about him behind their hands. Fortunately, he makes friends with Jack, a boy in his class, and Flower, a girl he chats with at lunch. But after surviving the first day, Auggie soon learns that his classmates are saying they will catch 'the plague' if they touch him. *Wonder* tells the story of Auggie's first year at school and how other kids treat him. It's a difficult year with good and bad times. But towards the end, a frightening and dramatic event at a school camp changes things completely.

Is it a good book?

Wonder is an excellent book that tells a moving and inspiring story. It's fast-moving and gripping too. I found myself reading it on the bus even if I only had time to read a couple of pages. It appeals to all age groups and is very popular with teenagers and adults. Auggie is a very likeable central character. He's got a good sense of humour, so the book is both funny and sad at times. It's a fascinating story about a regular kid who's living in a world that's not used to people who look different.

One great thing about the book is that it's told from the point of view of different characters. We begin with Auggie, but then the story is told by his sister, Via, and his schoolmates till we come back to Auggie at the end. This works really well as we find out what it's like for Via to have a younger brother who takes a lot of her parents' attention. We also learn how Jack is left out of the 'popular group' at school, just because he is Auggie's friend.

A bestseller

Wonder is RJ Palacio's first novel. On her website, she explains that the idea for the book came to her after seeing a girl with facial deformities on the street one day. *Wonder* has been a bestseller in the United States and has won several awards. Many schools are using it to start discussions about bullying, friendship and being different. A film version is being made, and many, including me, are looking forward to seeing what RJ Palacio writes next.

Robin Newton