

Wonder is an honest, funny and moving book about a boy who feels ordinary but looks different.

What's *Wonder* about?

Wonder tells the story of a year in the life of a ten-year-old boy called August who lives with his parents and older sister in New York. August, or Auggie as his family call him, is an ordinary boy in many ways. He rides a bike, has an Xbox and is a big fan of the Star Wars films. But Auggie was born with severe facial deformities and, despite having twenty-seven operations, he still looks very different from everyone else. On the first page 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 often shocks people. Some people stare while others look away as soon as they notice him. Both reactions hurt.

Because of the operations on his face, Auggie has spent a lot of time in hospital and has been taught by his mother. Now that he's ten, she realises she can't teach him any more and thinks it's time for him to go to school. Auggie hates the idea of school at first – he worries he'll be stared at or called names – but his parents persuade him to visit a school and meet the headteacher. During the visit, Auggie also meets three of the kids from his class and they take him on a tour of the school. Auggie has a small group of friends, but he isn't used to meeting new kids and finds it really hard to talk to them.

Having decided to go to school, Auggie then has to face his first day. Like every child starting at a new school, he is really anxious. But because of the way he looks, it's an agonising experience. Nobody wants to sit next to him and he notices other kids staring at him or talking about him behind their hands. Fortunately, he makes friends with Jack, a boy in his class, and Summer, a girl he chats with at lunch. But it's not just the first day that's hard. Auggie soon learns that his classmates don't want to touch him for fear of catching 'the plague'. As he goes through the school year, Auggie goes through many intense ups and downs till finally an unexpected and traumatic event at a school camp changes things completely.

Is it a good read?

Wonder is a moving, inspiring and, at times, a very funny book. It's also fast-paced and hard to put down once you get into it. I found myself getting the book out on the bus or in coffee shops, even when I only had time to read a couple of pages. It's a book with wide appeal and is proving to be very popular with pre-teens, teenagers and adults alike. Auggie is a very likeable central character. He's got a sense of humour and though readers will sympathise with him, I don't think they'll see him as a tragic character. More a regular kid who's dealing with a world that's not used to people who look different.

One thing I really liked 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 get to find out what it's like for Via to have Auggie as a younger brother. We also learn what it's like for Jack to be Auggie's friend and how this means other kids don't want to be his friend or that he can't be in the 'popular group' at school.

A bestseller

Wonder is New Yorker 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 already won several awards. Many schools are using it as a starting point for discussions about bullying, friendship and what it's like to be different. A film version is being made, and many, including me, are waiting eagerly to see what RJ Palacio writes next.

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