



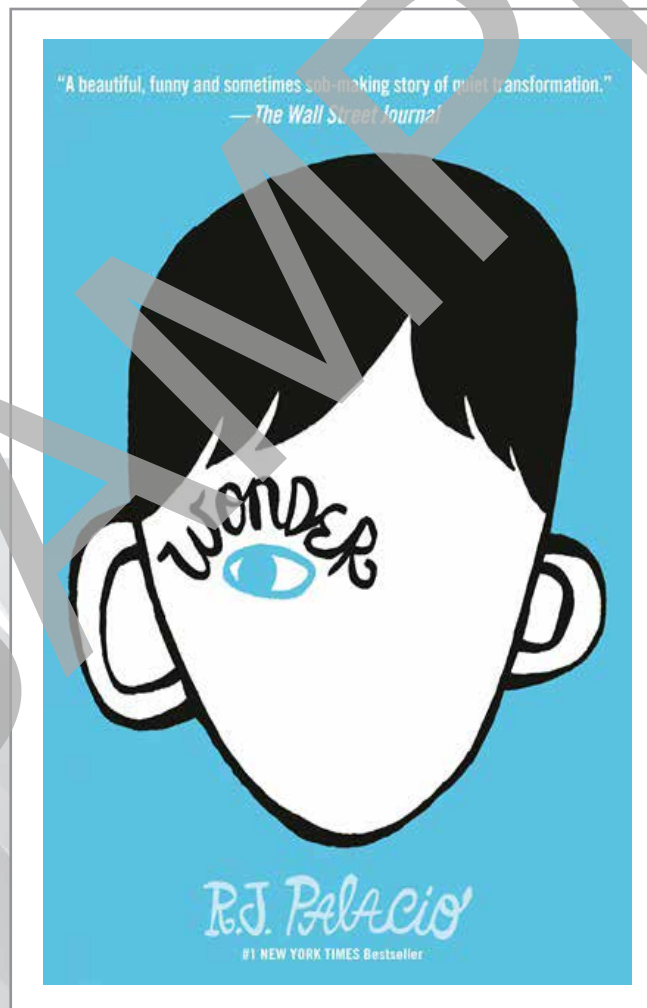
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Wonder

R. J. Palacio



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Wonder

R. J. Palacio

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Predictions, analysis, inferences,  
research, supporting judgments,  
compare/contrast, pros/cons

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, summarizing,  
identifying attributes

### Literary Elements

Epigraphs, allusions, theme,  
character analysis, figurative  
language, author's purpose,  
point of view, symbolism,  
conflict/resolution

### Vocabulary

Definitions, application, word  
maps, dictionary entries

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, presentation, skit

### Writing

Journal entry, alternate ending,  
essay, poem, newspaper review

### Across the Curriculum

Music—"Wonder" by Natalie  
Merchant, zydeco music, baroque  
violin vs. hardanger fiddle; Art—  
collage, watercolor, chalk drawing,  
pencil sketch, brochure, comic  
strip; Health—cleft lip/cleft palate,  
tics, bullying; Entertainment/  
Popular Culture—*Doogie Howser,  
M.D.*, *Star Wars*, *Auggie Doggie and  
Doggie Daddy* cartoon; Literature—  
*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff  
Kinney, novels about children with  
differences; Science—acids and  
bases, Punnett squares

**Genre:** realistic fiction

**Setting:** North River Heights (a fictional neighborhood in Manhattan, New York)

**Point of View:** multiple first person

**Themes:** identity, individuality, belonging, acceptance, unconditional love, family, bullying, friendship, coming of age, kindness, human relationships

**Conflict:** person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. person

**Style:** narrative from multiple perspectives (with occasional flashbacks)

**Tone:** poignant, candid, conversational, often humorous

**Date of First Publication:** 2012

## Summary

August (Auggie) Pullman is nervous about starting fifth grade at Beecher Prep—but not for the reasons most kids are nervous. Auggie was born with a rare facial deformity that instantly draws people's attention. For this reason, Auggie was homeschooled his entire life, but now Auggie's parents feel that he should attend regular school so he can socialize with other children his age. So, Auggie braves Beecher Prep, a local private school, and soon realizes that children his age can be unkind—even downright cruel. But he also finds allies in people like Summer, a genuinely kind girl who sees past Auggie's deformity to his true character, and Jack Will, a boy who learns much about himself because of Auggie. With the support of his loving parents and older sister Via, Auggie perseveres at Beecher Prep until, one day, things begin changing in his favor. The multiple perspectives of Via, Summer, Jack, and others provide insight not only into Auggie's birth, upbringing, and everyday challenges, but also into the lives of everyone he encounters. Because of his struggles, Auggie discovers a strength he never knew he possessed. Armed with new knowledge and experience, he begins the next chapter of his life.

## About the Author

R.J. Palacio grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Queens, New York. The writer, whose real name is Raquel Jaramillo, uses her mother's last name as her pen name. Palacio's Colombian-born mother surrounded her daughter with books and encouraged her authorial efforts, saying, "...remember, you're a writer." Palacio worked as an art director and book jacket designer for over 20 years, creating covers for a variety of genres and authors. She waited for the perfect time to write her own book but soon realized that "it's never the perfect time to start writing a book." After that realization, Palacio began writing *Wonder*, her first novel. Of the book's cover, Palacio says: "...I didn't design [it], but I sure do love it." While she has received much praise for *Wonder*, Palacio feels the most important praise she received was from her 15-year-old son, who loved the novel and claimed that it should be required reading for anyone entering middle school. Palacio currently lives in New York City with her husband, two sons, and two dogs.

## Ordinary–Locks

Auggie Pullman introduces himself as “not an ordinary ten-year-old kid” (p. 3). He relates how his facial deformity often startles adults and frightens children. Auggie, however, has grown accustomed to such reactions, as have his family members. The severity of Auggie’s birth defects was unanticipated, his appearance shocking even the doctor. As a child, Auggie underwent frequent operations, making homeschooling necessary. Now, as he enters fifth grade, Auggie faces a new set of challenges as he enrolls in a “normal” school for the first time. At the exclusive Beecher Prep, Auggie warms to Mr. Tushman, the school’s friendly principal, but is uncertain about interacting with his peers. On his first day of school, Auggie nervously sits in Ms. Petosa’s homeroom class, awaiting his fate.

### Vocabulary

extraordinary  
petrified  
surgeries  
hysterical  
hindsight  
electives  
percussion  
baritone  
incubator  
sarcastically  
obnoxious  
forewarned

### Discussion Questions

1. How is Auggie ordinary, yet not ordinary? (*Auggie is ordinary in that he acts like a typical ten-year-old—he likes ice cream, rides a bike, enjoys sports, and plays video games. However, Auggie also has an unusual appearance and realizes that “ordinary kids don’t make other ordinary kids run away screaming” or “get stared at wherever they go” [p. 3].*)
2. How do Auggie’s family members react when people are startled by Auggie’s appearance? What do you think their reactions demonstrate about them? (*Like Auggie, his parents “know how to pretend [they] don’t see the faces people make” [p. 3]. In short, they have learned to ignore or overlook people’s negative reactions to Auggie’s appearance. In contrast, Auggie’s sister Via cannot ignore people’s responses to Auggie. She is irritated by people’s rudeness and inability to suppress their reactions. She fiercely defends Auggie, especially against cruel children. Answers will vary, but students*

*should note that Auggie’s family loves him unconditionally. His parents and Via have dealt with these types of reactions for ten years, and each chooses to respond differently. Via’s responses may indicate a particularly strong bond with Auggie, as Via is closest in age to Auggie and likely knows how cruel young people can be to someone who is different.)*

3. How does Auggie’s mom describe Auggie’s birth? Why do you think she describes it in this way? (*Auggie’s mom tells the story humorously, giving the most focus to the “farting nurse” and “fainting doctor” in the delivery room. She also emphasizes that when she saw Auggie’s face for the first time, “all she could see was how pretty [his] eyes were” [p. 7]. Answers will vary, but students should infer that Auggie’s mom wishes to convey that she has always loved Auggie, despite his deformities and changing appearance since birth. Some students may speculate that Auggie’s mom exaggerated [or made up] certain funny elements to downplay the seriousness of Auggie’s condition and the shock of the hospital staff.)*
4. Why do Auggie’s parents disagree about whether Auggie is ready to attend school? Discuss how each parent’s view reflects concern for Auggie’s well-being. (*Auggie’s mom feels that her son needs more support and knowledge than she can provide. She is also concerned that she and her husband are sheltering Auggie from the real world by avoiding uncomfortable situations and unfamiliar people. Auggie’s dad feels that sending Auggie to school is like “sending...a lamb to the slaughter” [p. 10]. He is afraid that Auggie’s spirit will be destroyed by people’s judgment, misconceptions, and fear of the unfamiliar. Answers will vary. Auggie’s mom shows concern for his social and mental development, whereas Auggie’s dad seems more worried about his son’s emotional needs.)*

5. How does Auggie's initial meeting with Mr. Tushman differ from his initial meeting with Mrs. Garcia? Why do you think Auggie notices this slight difference? *(When Auggie meets Mr. Tushman, he notices that the principal looks directly at him, smiles, and extends his hand for Auggie to shake. Mr. Tushman also makes a point of kneeling before Auggie to address him face-to-face. When Auggie meets Mrs. Garcia, he notices that she does something that Auggie is accustomed to: she drops her eyes and smiles "a really shiny smile" [p. 17]. She is kind to Auggie, complimenting his firm handshake and offering to assist him with anything he needs. Answers will vary. Auggie has grown up looking different than everyone around him, and therefore he is highly sensitive to others' reactions to his appearance. He can "read" people extremely well and senses when someone feels uncomfortable in his presence. Students should note that Auggie still likes Mrs. Garcia, just not her "shiny smile.")*
6. How does Auggie use his hair as a defense mechanism (something that helps a person cope with uncomfortable or frightening situations)? *(Auggie explains that he grew his hair out so that his bangs would cover his eyes, helping him "block out the things [he doesn't] want to see" [p. 21]. Though Auggie is aware of others' negative reactions to his appearance, he frequently chooses to ignore such reactions rather than giving people the satisfaction of knowing they hurt his feelings.)*
7. How do Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte act toward Auggie? How do Julian's words and actions differ from Jack Will's and Charlotte's? *(Jack Will speaks matter-of-factly and acts slightly stiff. Charlotte speaks animatedly and is extremely energetic. Julian speaks indifferently and seems mean-spirited. Unlike Jack Will and Charlotte, Julian purposely tries to make Auggie feel foolish and inexperienced. He laughs at Auggie's uncertainty, stares openly at Auggie's face, and asks him, "What's the deal with your face? I mean, were you in a fire or something" [p. 29]? At the end of the tour, Julian intentionally blocks Auggie's path and apologizes, though Auggie notes from Julian's expression that Julian "wasn't really sorry at all" [p. 30].)*
8. Why do you think Auggie's mom and dad change their opinions about whether Auggie should attend school? *(Answers will vary. Though Auggie's mom initially thought school was an enlightening experience that Auggie needed, she seems rattled by Julian's candid questions about Auggie's appearance. Her protective instincts have most likely caused her to change her opinion. Auggie's father initially did not believe Auggie was ready for school, but he seems heartened by how Auggie handled an uncomfortable situation. He is not as worried as a result of Auggie's show of strength.)*
9. Why is the first day of school a particularly stressful experience for Auggie? *(In addition to the worries of any student [e.g., anxiety about finding one's classes, making friends, having the correct supplies, meeting new teachers], Auggie has never attended a real school before. And, as always, Auggie is apprehensive about how people will react to his appearance.)*
10. How is Auggie treated on his first day of school? *(Though some people are kind to Auggie [e.g., Ms. Petosa, Charlotte, and Jack Will], others are not. For example, a boy named Henry Joplin insists on sharing a desk with another student so he will not have to sit next to Auggie. When asked by Ms. Petosa to move to the empty desk next to Auggie, he does so sluggishly and "[plops] his backpack up really high on the right side of the desk so it was kind of like a wall" [p. 39]. As expected, Auggie feels "everyone's eyes burning into [his] back" [p. 39] in homeroom.)*
11. **Prediction:** How will Auggie adapt to Beecher Prep?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Character Analysis: Begin the Character Web on page 26 of this guide for Auggie. Continue to fill in information as you read.

2. Health/Research: Using your school library or online resources, find information about the conditions known as cleft lip and cleft palate. Then, research organizations that fund and perform operations to correct these conditions (e.g., Operation Smile). Write a one- to two-page report with your findings.
3. Popular Culture: Research the TV character Doogie Howser. As a class, discuss why Auggie's parents might have nicknamed the delivery room doctor "Doogie."

## Around the Room–Names

Auggie braves his first day of school, though he feels he is on display. To his surprise, Auggie realizes he is going to enjoy school. The high point of his first day is eating lunch with Summer, a smart, sunny girl who genuinely seems to want to be Auggie's friend. Auggie also feels he has found a true friend in Jack Will. Auggie's birthday party at a local bowling alley is a success, even though a significant portion of the invited guests do not attend. On Halloween, Auggie changes his costume at the last minute, arriving at school as the "Bleeding Scream" rather than Boba Fett, his planned costume. Effectively disguised, Auggie hears Jack Will making nasty comments about him. Crushed, Auggie fakes a stomach ache and is sent home early by the school nurse.

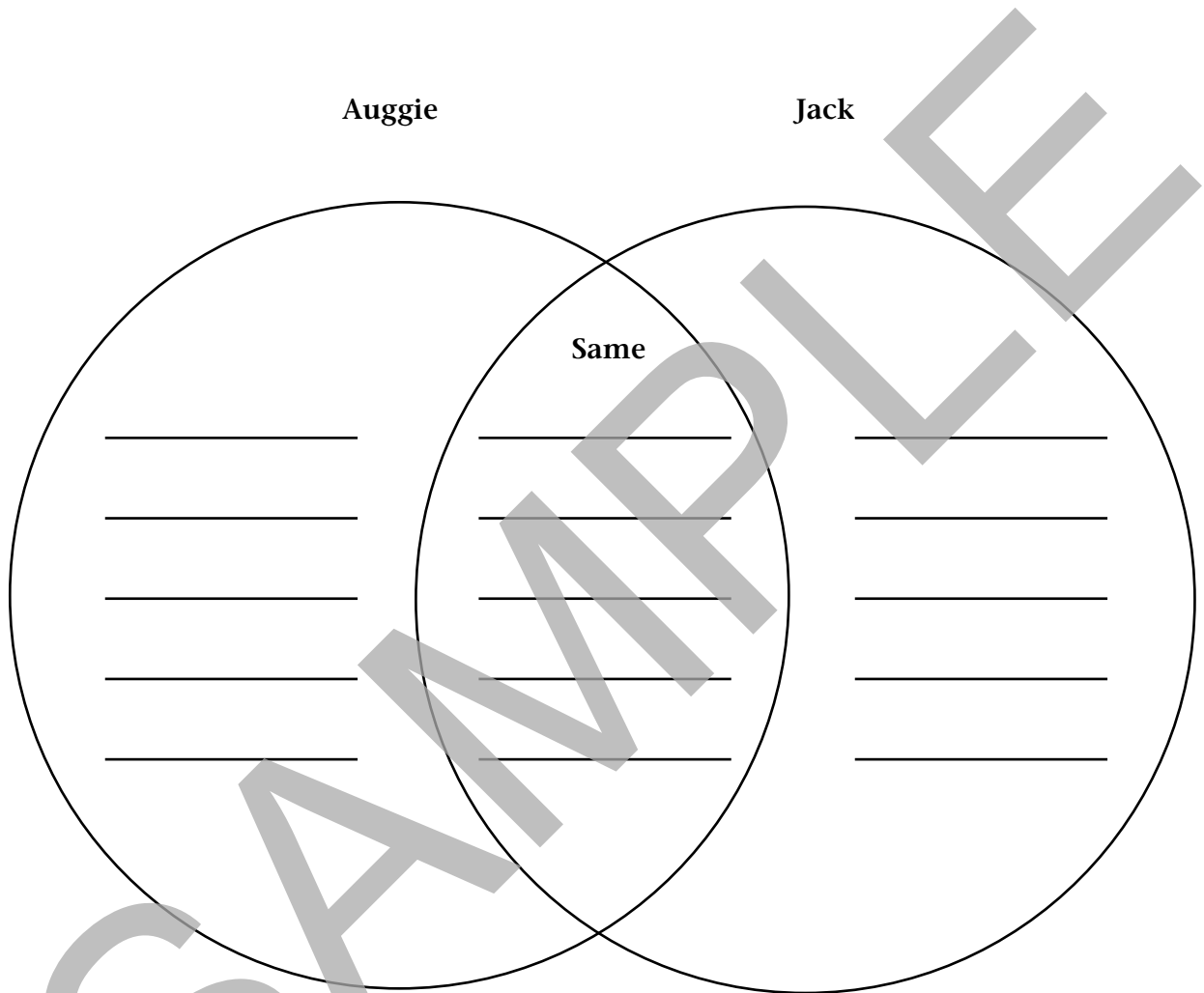
### Vocabulary

pursue  
motivate  
plaque  
alignment  
prehistoric  
exception  
straggle  
coincidence  
mortality  
aversion

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Julian cunningly insult Auggie while faking interest in *Star Wars*? Why do you think the chapter ends with the words, "Yeah, he knew what he was saying" (p. 44)? *(After establishing that Ms. Petosa is not familiar with Star Wars, Julian asks Auggie if he likes the character Darth Sidious—who just happens to be a character with a deformed, melted face. In this way, Julian insults Auggie without their teacher detecting it. Answers will vary. After peering at Julian, Auggie realizes that Julian "knew what he was saying" [p. 44], or, in other words, was being intentionally hurtful. Auggie's heightened awareness of others' intentions shows that he is accustomed to people being spiteful and insensitive toward him.)*
2. Judging from Mr. Tushman's, Ms. Petosa's, and Mr. Browne's words and actions, how might the staff at Beecher Prep best be described? Do you think having these types of adult role models will help Auggie adjust to his new school? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary. The staff at Beecher Prep is incredibly kind, very focused, and extremely energetic. Each teacher [or principal] seems excited about his or her new students and is very welcoming and open-minded. Though having these types of adults around will likely help Auggie, students should note that some of Auggie's peers lack the kindness and tact the adults at Beecher Prep demonstrate. The adults make up only half of the equation.)*
3. Why does lunchtime make Auggie feel more conspicuous than he already did? What improves his lunch drastically? *(Auggie eats differently than most children, since a hole remains in the roof of his mouth. He chews using only the front of his mouth, and though he has had numerous surgeries on his face, his meals can still get messy. Auggie's first-day lunch is vastly improved when a friendly girl named Summer sits down at Auggie's table and begins talking to him.)*
4. How do you think Auggie's mom feels when she picks up Auggie after his first day of school? *(Answers will vary, but Auggie's mom is probably extremely nervous since Auggie attending a "normal" school was her idea. She constantly worries about how others will treat Auggie, whom she*

## Venn Diagram





## Character Buzz Words

**Directions:** In the graphic below, write as many words as you can think of to describe Via. Your words may describe Via's appearance, personality, emotions, demographics, etc.

Character: \_\_\_\_\_ Via \_\_\_\_\_

