



## Wonder

Written By R.J. Palacio

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UK

## NOVEL STUDY

### *Wonder by R.J. Palacio*

#### SUMMARY

August Pullman wants to be an ordinary ten-year-old. He does ordinary things - eating ice cream, playing on his Xbox. He *feels* ordinary - inside. But ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. Ordinary kids aren't stared at wherever they go. Born with a terrible facial abnormality, August has been home-schooled by his parents his whole life. Now, for the first time, he's being sent to a real school - and he's dreading it. All he wants is to be accepted - but can he convince his new classmates that he's just like them, underneath it all? The novel follows August navigating his first year of school from the perspective both himself and other those closest to him.

The book has 310 pages in 8 parts and 121 short chapters of 1-3 pages each. Each part is written from the perspective of a different character.

#### MAIN CHARACTER REVIEW

August  
 August's Mum  
 August's Dad  
 Via  
 Mr Tushman  
 Jack Will  
 Julian  
 Charlotte  
 Summer  
 Miranda  
 Ella  
 Eleanor  
 Justin  
 Daisy

#### *SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK*

- Relationships – friends and family
- Starting school
- Making Friends
- Following Rules
- Kindness
- Bullying
- Celebrating difference
- Feelings vs. behaviours
- The Golden Rule
- Feelings – shame, sadness, happiness, worry, embarrassment, guilt, malicious, afraid, jealous, proud, annoyed, angry, safe, love, ashamed, rejected/included



## STUDY QUESTIONS

### **PART 1 – AUGUST (P3-80)**

1. **Why does August say he is not an ‘ordinary’ child? What do you think an ordinary 10 year old boy looks like?**  
August isn’t ordinary as he has a facial deformity. Discuss children’s views on ordinary
2. **Why do you think August is ‘petrified’ about going to school?**  
He is worried as he has always been homeschooled that people will notice he is different/he might have problems making friends.
3. **How did Dad make August feel happier?**  
Dad made August feel happier by making him laugh and telling jokes about Mr Tushman’s name.
4. **How did August’s mood change when the children entered the room? What similes/metaphors show you this?**  
August suddenly stopped laughing with Mr Tushman and being happy and became very scared. “My heart started beating like I’d just run the longest race in the world. The laughter I had inside just poured out of me.”
5. **What does August say is the difference in how little kids and big kids act towards him?**  
Little kids don’t try to say things to hurt your feelings and if they hurt you they don’t mean it but big kids know what they are saying.
6. **What makes Charlotte nervous? How might that be similar to how August is feeling?**  
Charlotte was nervous at opening night of her show with everyone watching her and having to remember her lines. August feels nervous when people are staring at him too.
7. **Why does August say that on his first day at school “the butterflies in my stomach were more like pigeons flying around my insides”? How did you feel on your first day of school?**  
When you are nervous people say you have butterflies in your stomach but August felt even more nervous than this - like pigeons that were flapping around inside him. Discuss feeling nervous/excited/afraid etc. and how we might feel many things at once.
8. **Why did August feel “eyes burning into his back” when he collected his folder?**  
The whole class was staring at him and it was like he could feel their gaze on him.
9. **“When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind” – This is Mr Brown’s precept. What do you think it means? Can anyone think of an example where they’ve chosen being KIND over being RIGHT.**  
Discuss children’s ideas/examples
10. **How did Summer act differently to the other girls?**  
Summer chose to sit with August when the other girls were making fun of him.
11. **Why do you think Mum asks how August feels on a scale of one to ten?**  
So she can see how strong the feeling is
12. **“Your deeds are your monuments” is Mr Browne’s October Precept. What do you think this means? If your deeds were monuments what would you want your monument to look like?**  
People will remember you for the things that you do even after you pass away. Discuss with children about the sort of behaviours/traits they want to be remembered as.



**13. What did mum mean by “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree?”**

She meant that Julian’s mum was rude and that’s why Julian was also rude.

**14. How do you think August felt when he realized the children didn’t want to touch him?**

Sad, Lonely, Isolated, Ashamed etc

**15. Why does August love Halloween so much? How can you tell August felt differently when he was wearing his costume at school?**

He loves Halloween because he can wear a mask and fit in with all the other children wearing masks. He walked with his head up instead of down and high-fived other children he didn’t even know.

**16. Why did August say that he was ill?**

August was so upset about what Jack Will had said and he wanted to get out of school as he didn’t want to face anyone at all.

**PART 2 – VIA (P81-118)****1. Why do you think it’s sometimes hard for Via to have August as her brother?**

People are always staring at them as a family, the way people act towards them makes her feel mad and she doesn’t get as much attention as August has special needs.

**2. Before the surgeries how could Via tell how August was feeling?**

She could tell from his face – When his eyes squinted he was happy, when his mouth went straight he was being mischievous and when his cheeks trembled he was about to cry.

**3. How did Via’s friendship with Miranda change over the summer?**

In middle school they were a group of three that were very alike and hung out a lot. Miranda was an especially good friend by being kind to August, buying him the astronaut helmet and always called a lot. After summer, Miranda didn’t call Via when she was back from camp, she changed her hair, her clothes and became more distant like Via was only a casual friend.

**4. Why, given they both share the mutant gene, do you think Via is so understanding of August’s needs?**

She realizes that it could have been her that had the facial deformities not August and she understands he’s done nothing to deserve it.

**5. How does Via feel differently about Halloween than August?**

Via doesn’t like Halloween as it reminds her of her Gran dying however August loves Halloween because he can wear a mask and a costume and fit in.

**6. What does Via do to show she is a supportive sister?**

She asks August how he is feeling, talks with him about his problems and takes him out to do something he enjoys (the Halloween parade).

**PART 3 – SUMMER (P119-131)****1. Why did Summer sit with August at lunch?**

At first she felt sorry for August as everyone was teasing him and she thought he was a nice kid and wanted to be his friend. Now she doesn’t feel sorry for him anymore and she just likes that he plays games like FourSquare when all the other kids do is gossip.

**2. Why did August shout at Summer?**

August was upset as the day before he had heard Jack Will saying mean things about him and he

had decided Mr Tushman had told Summer to be friends with him. He was angry as he thought Summer had been lying about wanting to be his friend.

**3. How is Summer a good friend to August?**

She sits with him at lunch, she doesn't make fun of him like the other children and doesn't say mean things about him behind his back like Jack Will. She also invites him over to her house and makes sure he feels comfortable and checks its ok to ask about his face. They have fun together and do class projects together and play games together.

**PART 4 – JACK (P134-186)**

**1. What made Jack change his mind about being on the welcome team?**

He realized that middle school would be hard and if a nice child like his brother would scream and run away from August and so August was going to have a difficult time. He also realized that Julian wouldn't be kind to August and he might need a friend.

**2. What does 'Fortune Favours the Bold' mean? When have you been brave?**

It means you will gain rewards if you are brave and try difficult things – discuss children's experiences.

**3. Why did Jack Will hit Julian? Do you think that it was the right choice?**

Julian called August a "freak" and Jack was already feeling bad because he realised August had heard what he had said so he defended August instead of bad mouthing him again. Discuss how hitting someone is never an OK choice and what he could have done instead eg. Talk to Julian/teacher etc.

**4. How did Jack's and Julian's mums react differently to August?**

Jack's mum encouraged Jack to help August integrate into school and make friends. Julian's mum photoshopped August out of the school picture and told Julian he didn't need to be friends with August because of his facial deformities as well as complaining to the school that he shouldn't have been let in in the first place.

**5. Which side would you pick? Jack's, Julian's or Neutral?**

Discuss how sometimes it's better to stay neutral/ being kind is more important than being popular etc.

**PART 5 – JUSTIN (P186-204)**

**1. Why did Justin lie and say he wasn't shocked by August?**

He didn't want to hurt Via's feelings as he really cares about her.

**2. Why was Justin nervous to meet Via's family and how do you know he felt safe by the end of the evening?**

Justin was worried he would tic with the family and wanted to make a good impression but by the end of the evening his tics went away.

**3. Why was Justin annoyed at Via?**

She didn't tell him she used to be friends with Miranda so Justin felt like an idiot when Miranda told him instead of her.

**4. Why did Miranda say "The universe was not kind to Auggie Pullman" and in what ways did Justin outline this wasn't entirely true?**

Miranda meant that August has had a tough life and that was just down to the universe and the way he was born – through no fault of his own.

Justin however saw that August was given the love and support of his parents, Via, Jack and

Miranda and so it wasn't all bad for August.

### **PART 6 – AUGUST (P205-234)**

**1. How are people treating August differently now?**

As people get used to August, they have stopped playing the Plague game and Maya even got him a little doll and said he was funny.

**2. How did August's feelings about his hearing aids change from when he first saw them to after he had tried them?**

At first he thought the headband was too big and would make him look like Lobot so he didn't like it at all but when he tried on the hearing aids he could hear so much clearer and no one at school even made any comments so his worries about being teased went away.

**3. Why do you think the chapter is called My Cave?**

When August was mad, he created a little cave from his duvet, pillows and stuffed animals to help him feel safe and calm down.

**4. How do you know Daisy was special to Dad?**

August had never seen Dad cry before but he cried when Daisy died.

**5. How do you think both Via and her parents felt watching her in the play?**

Proud of her achievements

### **PART 7 – MIRANDA (P235-248)**

**1. Why did Miranda lie at camp about her family?**

Miranda's parents were divorced and her mum and dad didn't have much time for her. As she grew up with Via's family she felt like they were her own and she wished they were so she pretended. As she told people about August it made her popular so she continued to lie about it, thinking it wouldn't hurt anyone.

**2. Who was hurt by Miranda's lie?**

Via – Because of the lie, Miranda didn't want her to find out so stopped spending time with her and this hurt Via, August as he doesn't get to see Miranda anymore (and also to some extent Miranda too).

**3. Why did Miranda say she was sick?**

Miranda didn't have anyone to come and watch her and she felt bad for what she had done to Via so gave her a chance to go on stage as her family had all come to support her.

### **PART 8 – AUGUST (P249-310)**

**1. How did August feel about going to the nature retreat?**

He was excited but also nervous as he had never slept away from home before and had had a bad experience at Christopher's.

**2. What rules did the children have to follow in the nature reserve during the film?**

- Don't leave litter behind – clean up after yourself
- Don't venture beyond the orange cones at the edge of the fairgrounds
- Don't go into the cornfields or the woods
- Keep free roaming to a minimum
- Be courteous – no talking, music or running around during the film

**3. Why did Jack try to fight the older boys? Do you think it was a good idea to fight them?**



They were calling August names and saying he was like an Orc or an Alien and Jack was standing up for his friend. Discuss how fighting is not the answer and as a result August got hurt and lost his hearing aids.

**4. How do you think August felt with his own personal Emperors Guard around him?**

He felt safe and protected from the bullies.

**5. Why do you think it was significant that August's hair was shorter than it had ever been?**

He is not trying to hide his face with his hair anymore because he is proud of who he is and more confident in himself.

**6. What do you think it means to be "kinder than necessary"?**

Discuss how some characters are kind like Charlotte and some kinder than necessary like Mr Tushman or Summer. How can you be kinder than necessary?

**7. How did August feel when his name was read out?**

Delighted, Happy etc., Shocked, Proud – discuss how he felt lots of things at once.

**8. How has August's experience of school changed from when he first started?**

When he started he didn't really want to go and he was upset because when he did everyone stared at him, teased him, called him names and only Summer wanted to be his friend. At the end of the year he received a standing ovation, had lots of friends who all cheered him on and supported him and felt great about school.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

### LITERACY

- Read the precepts at the end of the book and write your own
- Write a letter home from August to his parents while he's away on camp.
- Freeze frame drama key moments eg: Fight scene/Halloween scene etc. Stop and ask what the characters feel as Jack is about to hit Julian
- Create a Facebook page for one of the main characters – what would they post about? How would they speak? Can you decide on their personal information.
- Write a diary entry from August/Jack Will about the first few days of school
- Write a book review of Wonder
- Write a set of instructions on how to be a good friend to August
- Write a poem about "Things that make me special"

### ART/DESIGN

- Design your own monument to show what sort of person your actions show you to be
- Design a Halloween costume for one of the main characters

### PSHE/SEL

- Pick an emotion from feelings cards eg: Mad and find an example of how each character shows that feeling in the book. Discuss how different people feel mad in different situations.
- Create a poster about ' Things that make me special '
- Compare how different characters view August – what do they think about him, what do they see when they look at him?
- Discuss "Don't judge a book by its cover" – what does this mean? Show children a book cover and see if they can infer what sort of book it will be or discuss stereotypes of men/women.
- Make a compliment list for August/Jack/Summer/Via
- Complete a "things you can tell about me from the outside/things you can't tell about me from the outside activity"

**MATHS**

- Create a graph of Augusts feelings over time at key events

**MUSIC**

- Listen to 'Wonder' by Natalie Merchant – how does this song link to the novel?