

TALKING POINTS

CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist 2013



The CILIP Carnegie
& Kate Greenaway
Children's Book
Awards

Wonder by RJ Palacio

Structure of the book

- The story of the book is told from a variety of perspectives, often with sections overlapping. How effective do you think this is? What does it add to our understanding of events?
- What is the effect of the chapter where there is an exchange of e-mails between the parents and principal? Does it change the way you see any of the characters?
- What is the effect of the Facebook and text message exchange between Jack and August?
- Justin's chapter is written in an unusual way; take a look at the punctuation and note the lack of initial capitals. Why do you think his chapter is written like this?

Quotes and precepts

Each section of the book, when another character takes over the narrative, starts with a different quote, from literature or from song lyrics. Take a look at each of these.

- How do you think that each quote relates to the character whose chapter it prefaces?
- How do you think each quote relates to August?

The title of the book, *Wonder*, is taken from the song of the same name, by Natalie Merchant. Study the lyrics of this in full.

- Do you think these lyrics are appropriate for August? Why do you think the author chose this title?

At the end of the chapter 'Packing' and at the start of the chapter 'Sleep', there are quotes from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis.

- Do you think these quotes are significant, and if so how?

When August is born, the nurse tells Mom, 'Everyone born of God overcometh the world'.

- What does this mean and how does it relate to August?

At prizegiving, Mr Tushman quotes from J.M. Barrie's *The Little White Bird*, '... always try to be a little kinder than is necessary'.

- Discuss the idea of being kinder than is 'necessary'. What does this mean?

Other idioms are used during the book.

- Discuss the phrases 'Lamb to the slaughter' (with reference to August) and 'The apple doesn't fall far from the tree' (with reference to Julian).



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English teacher, Mr Browne, comes up with the idea of a monthly precept.

- What do you think of each of Mr Browne's precepts?
- Do they relate to August's story at all?
- At the end, when the children send in their own precepts, why do you think they chose the ones that they did?

August's face

The way that August's face looks, being heavily disfigured from a chromosomal abnormality, is one of the main themes of the book.

- August's sister, Via, hates the word 'disfigured'. Can you think of a better word?
- What is August's attitude towards the way he looks? Do his feelings change during the book?
- How do various people in the book react when they meet August for the first time? How does this make him feel?
- August describes how Julian looks at him out of the corner of his eye when the children are showing him round, stating that a lot of people do this. Why do you think people do this? Have you ever done this?
- Do you think that the way people react to seeing August's face for the first time is wrong?
- Why do people often not want to touch or be near August?
- Julian asks August what is wrong with his face, and if he has been in a fire. Later, Jack asks August what has caused his facial abnormality. Do you think it was ok for the boys to ask? What was different about the way that they both asked?
- Jack first meets August when he is a little boy, and their nanny Veronica rushes them off before his little brother Jamie can say something embarrassing. Do you think this was the right action to take? What should she have done?
- Julian's mother, in an e-mail, describes the boys being asked to look after August as 'pressure' and 'a burden'. Do you think this is fair? What did you think of Mr Tushman's response?
- Do you think that your reaction or attitude towards somebody who looked like August might be different after having read this book?

Humour

A lot of the more difficult issues in the book are dealt with using humour.

- August describes his own birth as a funny story. Do you think it is funny?
- When Jack asks August if he can get plastic surgery to fix his face and August points out that he has already had surgery, Jack says 'Dude, you should sue your doctor!' and both boys laugh. Do you think this is a funny comment? Is there a context in which it would not be a funny comment?

Characters of the book

August

- Why is Hallowe'en so important to August?
- Would you describe August as having 'special needs'?
- August describes the feeling of wanting to laugh and cry at the same time, before starting school. Why do you think he feels this way?



- August's face is not described in the book until Via details it in 'August Through the Peephole'. Is it like you imagined? How does the author give us an idea about his face before describing it?
- What is the significance of August getting his hair cut at the end of the book?
- Why does August draw himself as a duck in his self portrait? Why does Mr Tushman laugh and say 'sometimes a duck is just a duck'?

Mom

- Why does August describe his mum as being 'nervous' and 'more scared' than he was when he starts school?
- Why do you think August is angry with his mum after his first day of school?
- Via finds Mom one night watching August sleep. Why do you think Mom does this?
- What is the significance of August leaving his special soft toy for Mom, when he goes on the trip?
- There are times in the book when August calls Mom 'Mommie'. In what situations do you think this occurs?

Dad

- What kind of character is Dad? Do you like him?

Via

- What kind of sister is Via to August?
- Why is Via so angry when August cuts off his braid?
- Read the chapter 'A Tour of the Galaxy'. What do you think life is like as August's sister?
- Why is Grans so important to Via?
- How do you think Via's attitude towards August changes during the book?

Daisy

- What is it about Daisy that matters so much to August?

Jack

- Why do you think Jack says mean things about August behind his back?
- Does Jack change during the book? Do you like him?

Miranda

- When Miranda is at camp, why does she pretend that she has a little brother who is deformed?
- What is the irony in the fact that this makes her more popular?
- Why do you think Miranda gives up the lead role in the play for Via?
- Miranda says 'The universe has not been kind to Auggie Pullman'. Why does Justin disagree? Who do you agree with?



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- Why does the school's attitude towards August change after the events at camp?
- Do you think the book was realistic – both in terms of the initial reaction to August and the events that unfolded? Do you think this could happen at your school?
- When August does not want to go back to school, Via reminds him that everyone has problems.
- What do you think the problems of each character are? Can they be compared to what August goes through?

Further reading

- *Stick* by Andrew Smith
- *North of Beautiful* by Justina Chen
- *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick



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