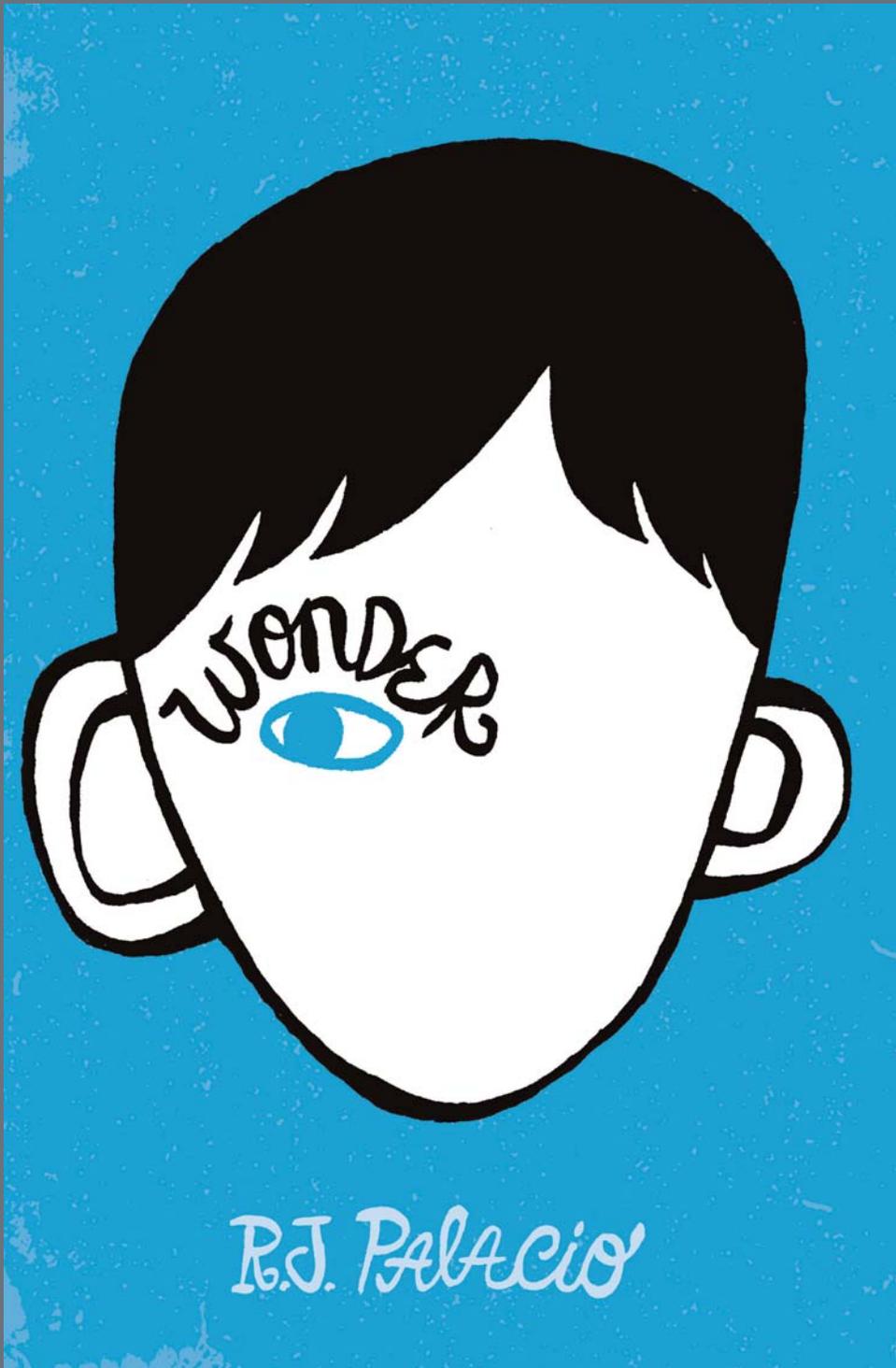


santa monica reads 2013



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For free public book discussion groups and other events, check the Santa Monica Reads website at smpl.org/SMReads.aspx or call 310.458.8600

WELCOME to the eleventh annual SANTA MONICA READS program. This community reading program encourages people who live, work in, or visit Santa Monica to read and discuss the same book at the same time in discussion groups and other events held around the city.

This year's featured book is *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. *Wonder* is the story of ten-year-old August (Auggie) Pullman, an ordinary boy in every way, except for a congenital facial deformity that has kept him away from most children his age. Previously home-schooled, Auggie begins attending school with other kids in the fifth grade, and the novel chronicles not only Auggie's transformation over the next year, but also the changes experienced by his family, friends and classmates. Embracing a message of kindness and compassion, *Wonder* reminds us all not to judge a book, or a boy, by its cover.

Wonder is available from the Santa Monica Public Library or your local bookstore. Please plan on attending one of the many free, public events being held around the city from February 16 to March 23.

I hope that your participation in SANTA MONICA READS is a rewarding experience that brings us together as a community through literature.

 Greg Mullen, Library Director, Santa Monica Public Library



ABOUT THE BOOK

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." – Helen Keller

Wonder is the moving story of ten-year-old August (Auggie) Pullman, an ordinary boy in every way, except for a congenital facial deformity that has kept him away from kids his own age for much of his life. The novel follows Auggie, previously home-schooled, as he attends school as a fifth grader and learns to navigate the challenging terrain of his peers' alternately cruel and kind reactions to his physical appearance. Narrated by Auggie, his older sister, her boyfriend and several of Auggie's classmates, *Wonder* is a universal story that everyone can relate to and is sure to provoke discussion among readers of all ages.

Raquel Jaramillo, under the pen name R.J. Palacio, began writing *Wonder* in 2007 following a real-life interaction with a young girl with a craniofacial disorder similar to Auggie's. Raquel's immediate reaction was to flee the scene, but mirroring Auggie's story of quiet transformation, she later realized this was the wrong move. "I wish I'd had the courage to turn around and look at the girl at the store," Raquel said in an October 2012 interview with Slate.com's Emily Bazelon. "Even if my son kept crying, I should have just said, 'I'm so sorry, my son's not used to seeing people like you. What's your name?' Just simply acknowledge her instead of running away. That would have set an example for my kids." In the end, *Wonder* is less an indictment of bullying than it is a call for all of us, when given the chance, to look past the surface and choose kindness in our interactions with others.

Wonder was first published in February 2012 by Alfred A. Knopf. *The New York Times Book Review* called the book "rich and memorable" and included it among their Notable Books of 2012. *Entertainment Weekly* raved that *Wonder* is "a crackling page-turner filled with characters you can't help but root for."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"

– Henry David Thoreau

R.J. Palacio is the pen name of first-time novelist Raquel Jaramillo. A publishing industry veteran for more than two decades, Jaramillo has worked as a creative director in the art departments of Scribner, St. Martin's Press and Henry Holt. Readers may have seen her book cover designs for such best-selling authors as Sue Grafton and Salman Rushdie. At Holt, she began illustrating books for her own kids and that prompted a career switch from adult cover design to the children's book editorial field. In 2006, Raquel became the director of children's literature at Workman Publishing.

The seed that bloomed into *Wonder* grew from a chance encounter in 2007 with an extraordinary child outside of an ice cream store. When a young girl with a face much like Auggie's sat down at a table next to Raquel and her sons, she became concerned with what her boys' reactions might be. Her three-year-old began to cry and her older son looked visibly discomforted, and as Raquel hustled to leave the store, she was struck by the grace and calm demonstrated by the young girl's mother. Embarrassed by her own response to the encounter and consumed with thoughts of the young girl's story, Raquel started writing that night the first words that would eventually become *Wonder*.

Upon the novel's completion, Raquel submitted the book to publishers outside her own firm under the pen name R.J. Palacio—taking her Colombian mother's maiden name. The book quickly won support from the Alfred A. Knopf imprint of Random House Children's Books, and was published to critical acclaim and enthusiastic reader support in February 2012.

Raquel Jaramillo lives in New York City with her husband, her two sons and their dog Bear. She is currently at work on her second novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1:** In *Wonder*, we hear from narrators other than Auggie. What do you think about this storytelling structure? How do you think it contributes to the scope and tone of the novel?
- 2:** One of the characters we do not hear from him is Julian. In what ways would his voice have contributed to or distracted from the story being told?
- 3:** How are Auggie's relationships with his family members changed after he starts at Beecher Prep? How effectively are the adults' stories told in the novel?
- 4:** *Wonder* is marketed by its publishers as a children's title, but it has drawn great interest from adult readers as well. Why do you think the book appeals to adults, as much as to kids?
- 5:** *Wonder* is set in a private school in New York. How would the story be different if it were set in a public school in your community?
- 6:** If you are an adult reader, you know that bullying is not a new problem among youth. Has the scope of the problem changed since you were a child, and if so, how has it changed?
- 7:** The first precept Auggie learns is Wayne Dyer's: "When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind." Why do you suppose there is such a great human need to be right?
- 8:** Since bullying usually comes from feelings of inadequacy on the part of the bully, how would you defuse a mean comment with kindness?
- 9:** If you could think of a precept to describe this book, what would it be? What would your own personal precept be?
- 10:** Can you describe a random act of kindness that someone has shown to you? That you have acted upon yourself? Or that you have witnessed and been inspired to pass on?

RESOURCES

R.J. Palacio and Choose Kind

The author's website includes information on the author and the book, a list of precepts, and an Annotations tab that provides backstory and information on many of the pop culture references made in *Wonder*. Following the publication of *Wonder*, Random House and R.J. Palacio also started Choose Kind, a campaign designed to extend the novel's messages of kindness and compassion and to share stories from readers of acts of kindness they've performed, received or witnessed. rjpalacio.com | choosekind.tumblr.com

Follow the author on Twitter @RJPalacio or discuss the book with other Twitter followers using the hashtag #thewonderofwonder

Children's Craniofacial Association

Created to empower and give hope to individuals and families affected by facial differences, the Children's Craniofacial Association website is also filled with information and stories for readers wanting to know more about conditions such as the one experienced by Auggie in *Wonder*. In particular, the Association's newsletters provide a great introduction to some of the extraordinary, real-life individuals that *Wonder* encourages us to embrace.

ccakids.org

RECOMMENDED READS

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

Pulitzer Prize-winner Toni Morrison's dazzling debut novel introduced readers to Pecola Brown, an 11-year-old girl in 1940s Ohio, who prays every night for blonde hair and blue eyes, which she believes will help her fit in with a world that shuns her for her dark skin, kinky hair and brown eyes. A poignant and graceful examination of society's obsession with physical appearance, *The Bluest Eye* is a strong companion piece to R.J. Palacio's *Wonder*.

Autobiography of a Face by Lucy Grealy

Stricken with cancer in her early youth, author Lucy Grealy endured agonizing pain and a distorted self-image when numerous reconstructive surgeries left her jaw and face disfigured. In this memoir, Grealy portrays the brutal rejection she suffered at the hands of her peers and the cruel abuse she inflicted on herself based on her fear of never being loved. This real-life story offers a hard look at the struggles we face in garnering social and personal acceptance.

Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

This Young Adult classic is a winning portrait of friendship against all odds. In the eighth grade, Max, a boy who is large for his age and struggles with learning difficulties, becomes friends with Kevin, a genius classmate who is physically disabled and empowers himself by assuming the name Freak before bullies his age can call him the same. These two unlikely allies become much stronger as a result and demonstrate the power of kindness and friendship.

Stop Bullying

Managed by the United States Department of Health & Human Services, the Stop Bullying website offers a wealth of resources for anyone affected by bullying and those who want to help. The site addresses the issues from the perspective of Teens and Kids, as well as Parents, Educators and Community Members. A great resource on the site is its section of videos, including animated shorts that help children recognize what is and is not bullying behavior and how to respond.

www.stopbullying.gov

Random Acts of Kindness

A foundation designed to inspire people to practice kindness and pass it on to others. Of particular note on this website is the Kindness Ideas tab, a regularly-updated list of suggestions of things one can do to practice kindness every day, plus a list of quotes from literary figures and others on kindness, as well as an online form to share your own ideas on how to treat others well.

www.randomactsofkindness.org