

Acknowledgments

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Lastly, but not least, I would like to thank the little girl in front of the ice cream shop and all the other “Auggies,” whose stories have inspired me to write this book.

—R.J.

Choosing Kind

Written exclusively for Waterstones

When I first started writing *Wonder*, I had no idea where it would end. I don't mean in terms of the storyline: I honestly didn't know if it would ever get published. A book about a boy with a severe craniofacial syndrome isn't exactly a popular topic these or any days, and there were moments during the writing of this book where I'd wonder to myself if, for the sake of finding an audience someday, I should turn Auggie into a magical being of some kind. Maybe he could be a young vampire, or a faerie, or a doomed prince who, like in *Beauty and the Beast*, would be transformed by the love of a beautiful girl. Any of those storylines seemed more likely to find an audience than my story about an ordinary kid who happens to have an extraordinary face. But, of course, if you're reading this you know by now that I ultimately didn't take that route. Somewhere deep inside of me I knew that Auggie's story needed to be told in a simple, pure way, and in a manner that would ring true to readers. The story is about a boy with a severe craniofacial difference, yes – but ultimately it's a meditation on kindness, on the impact and transformative power of kindness.

I was delighted when I realized that readers were, indeed, embracing this message. In the year since the book was first published, the most common comment I got from readers is that it made them want to be kinder people. It's touching enough hearing that from an adult, but coming from a ten-year-old child, well, it's absolutely wondrous.

I've also heard from many children who, like Auggie, have craniofacial differences. There are many types of craniofacial difference. Each one manifests itself in different ways and to different degrees. Auggie has two syndromes in *Wonder*. One he refers to as "Mandibulofacial dysostosis", which is more commonly called Treacher Collins Syndrome. The other syndrome is never named. I purposely avoided specificity of any kind because I was keenly aware that someday some child with a craniofacial difference might read *Wonder*, and I didn't want that child to be distracted or hurt by comments made by any of the more unenlightened characters in the book – especially if they thought it related to a syndrome they had in common with Auggie. What Auggie has, and to the degree he has it, is unique and largely mysterious. It's one of the reasons he's considered a medical wonder. Ultimately, of course, it doesn't matter what he looks like on the outside: the more he reveals what he's like on the inside, the more irrelevant his appearance becomes. Many people have reported that by the end of the book, they've actually forgotten that Auggie has a craniofacial difference. This is no writerly feat by any means, I tell them. It's the transformation that's taken place in their own minds, as readers, for which they get all the credit.

I have been touched by the overwhelmingly positive support and feedback I've received from members of the cleft/craniofacial community. I have been so moved by the stories they have shared, which all have in common the tremendous courage of people – children and adults alike – who deal with the very issues that Auggie deals with to some extent or another. They appreciate Auggie's grace

and his humour, and the fact that he's not perfect, either. In sum, he's just an ordinary boy. The mother of one such boy wrote to tell me that her son now felt like he had a hero of his own whom he could root for. She wrote about it on her blog, mentioning that although her son and Auggie shared many similarities, one of the differences between them was that her son had never received a standing ovation. After reading this, a classroom of kids who had never met the boy decided they would do something kind for him, so they sent him a video message for his birthday. I reiterate: they had never met this boy. And yet there they were, an entire classroom of students, taking a moment to give this boy his own standing ovation for his birthday.

That's what I meant by not having any idea how *Wonder* would end. Sometimes the culmination of something is greater than the sum of everything it took to get there. That is to say, where I thought *Wonder* had ended, I realize now it's just beginning. These kinds of stories, which I hear more and more, are something I never could have imagined when I set out to write this book – not even in my wildest dreams. I have been humbled and am grateful for every act of kindness that's been done in the name of *Wonder*, or by someone inspired to “choose kind” in any aspect of their lives. All I can say is, “Keep it up. Cool beans. And thank you.” If you'd like to share your stories about kindness, whether it's something you've done for someone else or something someone has done for you, please write about it on [choosekind.tumblr.com](https://www.choosekind.tumblr.com). I'd love to read about it, and I know other people will, too. What I realize now is that kindness spreads like wildfire. One act of kindness begets another begets another.

In the end, every character in this book is like Auggie – just an ordinary person trying to do the best he or she can with whatever life has dealt them. The important thing isn't the degree of their individual difficulties, but the path they choose to take to surmount them. It's about the journey. What I've learned from writing *Wonder*, or rather from the readers of *Wonder* who have shared their stories with me, is that the key to everything is remembering that we're all on our life journeys together. Knowing that we all have this in common makes it easier to look upon one another without judgment, with compassion, with gentleness, and yes, with infinite kindness.

—R.J.

Questions for you to think about:

You can't blend in when you were born to stand out

- What do you think of this line, which appears on the cover of the book?
- Did this affect how much you wanted to read the story?
- How much did this line give away about the story you were about to read?

Auggie's appearance

- Throughout *Wonder*, Auggie describes the way that many people react to seeing his face for the first time: by immediately looking away. Have you ever been in a situation where you have responded like this to seeing someone different? Having now read *Wonder*, how do you feel about this?
- Auggie's face is not fully described until quite far on in the story, in Via's chapter 'August: Through the Peephole'. How close was this description to your own mental picture of Auggie? Did you have a picture of his face in your mind while reading the book? Did this description alter that picture?

Auggie's personality

- How would you describe Auggie as a person in the first few chapters of the book? What about the final few chapters? Has he changed significantly?
- Are there any experiences or episodes during the story that you think had a particular effect on him? If so, how?

The astronaut helmet

- In the chapter 'Costumes' Auggie describes the astronaut helmet that he wore constantly as a younger child. We later learn that Miranda was the one to give Auggie the helmet, and is proud of the gift, but that it was Auggie's father who threw it away. What do you think the helmet signifies to each of these characters and why do you think they all view it so differently?

Star Wars

- Star Wars is one of Auggie's passions. Why do you think this is?
- Do you see any reasons for Auggie to identify with these characters, or to aspire to be like them?

The use of humour in Wonder

- Auggie's parents bring Auggie around to the idea of attending school by joking with him about Mr Tushman's name, and telling him about their old college professor, Bobbie Butt. To what extent is humour used as a tool throughout *Wonder* to diffuse difficult or tense situations, or to convey a part of the story that would otherwise be depressing or sad?

Via

- What did you think of Via as a character? Did you empathise with her?
- Why do you think Via was so angry to learn that Auggie cut off his Padawan braid?
- Do you think Via's own attitude towards her brother changes throughout the story?

Mrs Albans

- Look at the emails between Mr Tushman, Julian's parents and Jack's parents in the chapter 'Letters, Emails, Facebook, Texts'. Up to this point in the story we have seen how the children at Auggie's school have reacted to him. Is Mrs Albans' attitude towards Auggie different?
- What do you make of her statement that Auggie is handicapped?
- Do you think she is correct in saying that asking 'ordinary' children, such as Julian, to befriend Auggie places a burden on them?

At the ice cream parlour

- The author has explained that she was inspired to write *Wonder* after an experience at a local ice cream parlour, very similar to the scene described in the chapter 'Carvel', where Jack sees Auggie for the first time. In this scene, Jack's babysitter Veronica chooses to get up and quickly walk Jack and his little brother Jamie away from Auggie, rather than risk Jamie saying something rude or hurtful. What do you think you would have done, if put in that position?

WONDER
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