



WONDERS NEVER CEASE

Text Type: Book review
Suggested finishing time: 25 mins

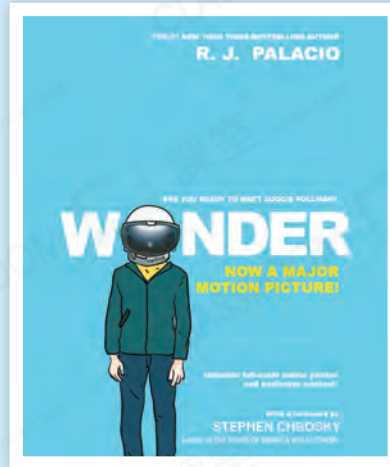
Let's Think!

1. What genres of books do you like reading?
2. Does reading give you a different experience than watching films?

Doing Wonders with a Book Samuel Wong

Wonder

By R. J. Palacio,
Published by
Alfred A. Knopf



[1] The experience of reading a coming-of-age novel like this one is comparable to the experience of being heart broken and in love at once. Before I delve into this page-turner's details, I'd like to highlight a fact: this story was inspired by the writer's real-life experience. An incident, to be exact. It traces back to the day when Palacio made a brief pause with her sons at an ice cream store, where her youngest son cried in fright upon spotting a facially disfigured girl. In a moment of panic, Palacio left the venue with her crying son so as not to further embarrass the girl. Ashamed and disappointed at her decision, Palacio decided to write a story, and then, there came the story of August Pullman, a child born with severe facial differences, in *Wonder*.

[2] The story starts with August telling us quite a lot of things, like how he perceives his appearance, how many surgeries he has had since birth, whom he usually spends time with, and who educates him at home. Due to the surgeries for his facial abnormalities, his mother has homeschooled him all along since his birth. As time goes by, as there are no longer pending surgeries, his mother starts to consider sending him to a mainstream

school, knowing that homeschooling has its shortcomings. Though averse to his mother's idea at first, after rounds of persuasion, he at last decides to receive education at a regular school. And this is the start of all miseries and bliss.

[3] Life at school is not sweet to August at first. On the first day of school, there is no significant difference between how August feels and how most other kids feel: nervous, anxious or perhaps slightly scared. However, everything becomes worse, if not agonising, as he goes about his day as a student. He finds himself being the subject of distant murmurs. He notices himself in a seat surrounded by empty chairs in the classroom. He watches others having lunch together while he is all by himself. Worst of all, he is confronted with the blatantly humiliating remarks from Julian, a major bully who is unreserved in his rudeness. Amidst these abuses, whether verbal or implied, August manages to find solace in his friendships with Jack and Summer.

[4] As the story progresses, the influence of the bullying inflicted on August starts to extend to those who are close to him, his family members and even other families, which further complicates the story. There are conflicts between different parties: between the children, between the siblings, and even

More to Take Away

The novel *Wonder* is named after Natalie Merchant's song 'Wonder', whose lyrics are about a child born with a birth defect.

Moral

'When given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind.'

R. J. Palacio, American author

between the parents. Indifference, betrayal, anxiety, heartbreak and anger are all across the pages. After all those storms, what we as readers see are moments of understanding, of reconciliation, of sympathy and, most essentially, of kindness.

[5] Throughout the novel, I witness most children's tendency to judge a book by its cover. It is because of this tendency that makes them think ill of August. As they become less concerned with August's appearance, they come to see that he is indeed as ordinary as any other boy of the same age, only a bit smarter, a bit more forgiving, a bit more sympathetic and a bit more humourous. Realising all these, many of them begin to see August as a genuine friend of theirs, offering him help whenever he needs and standing up for him when he is maltreated. The seemingly unbreakable wall that initially stands between August and his peers crumbles at this realisation. As a teenage boy, I am truly impressed by August's approach to the difficulties in life, however great they may seem.

[6] The novel is filled with scenes that shine with the glow of inner beauty and also sayings that have impacted my heart. Here is one that I really like: 'We carry with us, as human beings, not just the capacity to be kind, but the very choice of kindness.' This is absolutely true, considering that the story is told from the perspectives of different characters, which enables readers to witness how the characters think, how they change their mindset over time and what makes them choose 'kindness' at the end. For example, when Jack becomes the storyteller in chapter 4, he tells us about things like what he thinks about August and how much he regrets his cruel remarks on August's appearance. As a reader, I do enjoy getting to know August from the viewpoints of those around him.

[7] All in all, this is a book for people of all ages, despite being categorised as a work of children's literature. *Wonder* is not merely about the story of a bullied kid, but a world that revolves around an ordinary yet unordinary kid: you meet not only August, but also his parents, his sister, his sister's boyfriend, his classmates and his friends. If you have ever doubted your self-worth, felt self-conscious about how you look, or been unconfident of yourself, get yourself a copy of *Wonder*. It will keep you awake at midnight and sleep the next day, and it will be worthwhile, nevertheless.

~870 words



Looking into Grammar

'However' can be used to mean 'no matter how'. When used in this way, it can be used before an adjective or an adverb.

✓ However hard I tried to convince Grandpa, he refused to see a doctor.

✗ However I tried hard to convince Grandpa, he refused to see a doctor.

? Circle an example of 'however' in paragraphs 5-7.

Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the book review. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.

1. Paragraph 1 is mainly about _____.

- A. Samuel's perception of Palacio
- B. Palacio's background information
- C. the person that August is based on
- D. what prompted Palacio to write the novel



2. August did not receive a formal education as early as most kids do because of _____.

- A. his disabilities
- B. his need to frequent the hospital
- C. his need for special care
- D. his mother's decision

2 Pay attention to the cohesive devices.

3. In paragraph 2, 'averse to' can best be replaced by '_____'.

- A. strongly disliking
- B. irritated at
- C. depressed by
- D. terrified of

4. What does August experience on his first day of school?

- I. isolation
- II. insults
- III. intimidation
- IV. physical assaults

- A. I and II
- B. II and IV
- C. I, II and III
- D. I, III and IV

5. From paragraph 4, we can infer that _____.

- A. different characters suffer differently
- B. August learns to deal with conflicts later in the story
- C. most friction between the characters is resolved positively
- D. regular schooling is not suitable for August

6. In Samuel's opinion, August's being bullied is a result of _____.

- A. Julian's rudeness
- B. peer pressure
- C. the children's prejudgment
- D. ignorance and immaturity

6 Some information may not be given in the passage.

7. In paragraph 6, the word 'which' refers to _____.

- A. the variety of characters
- B. the fact that the story is narrated by more than one character
- C. the characters' perspectives
- D. what the characters say



8. Which of the following is least likely to be Samuel's opinion?

- A. 'I've never regretted reading this book.'
- B. 'The message of kindness resonates through the whole book.'
- C. 'That's the only children's book I like.'
- D. 'I don't think that's a book only to be read by kids.'



Self-evaluation Checklist

Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.

Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions with the information provided in the book review. For questions 1, 5 and 6, answer in complete sentences.

1 Note that it is a metaphor.

1. In your opinion, what gives rise to ‘the seemingly unbreakable wall’ mentioned in paragraph 5?



2. Which of the following is most likely to be Samuel’s opinion?

- A. Jack’s narration comes after chapter 3.
- B. August’s experience is similar to Palacio’s child’s.
- C. Much of what the characters express is emotionally affecting.
- D. Most readers stay up late to read the novel.

3. Look for words in the book review to match the definitions below.

- | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| (i) | _____ (para. 1-2) | (n.) | flaws |
| (ii) | _____ (para. 2-3) | (adj.) | mentally or physically painful |
| (iii) | _____ (para. 3-4) | (n.) | a source of comfort |
| (iv) | _____ (para. 6-7) | (adv.) | despite what has just been said |



4. Determine whether each of the following statements is true, false or undecidable because not enough information is given.

Statement	True	False	Not Given
(i) The girl was offended by Palacio’s crying son.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(ii) <i>Wonder</i> is an engrossing book to Samuel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iii) Despite the categorisation of the book, <i>Wonder</i> is most popular among young adults.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. In paragraph 7, why does Samuel describe August as ‘an ordinary yet unordinary kid’?

5 Think about what happens to August at first and later.

6. In Samuel’s opinion, who should read *Wonder*?

Part C Vocabulary Bank

Match the words for describing personality in the left column with the descriptions in the right column. Write the correct letters in the boxes.

A. cynical

B. sociable

C. big-headed

D. self-conscious

E. ill-tempered

F. compassionate

G. industrious

H. charismatic

1. fond of spending time with other people and engaging in activities with them in order to understand them better

2. feeling or displaying sympathy for others' suffering

3. having mysterious personal qualities that attract others

4. feeling nervous and uncomfortable with oneself or one's appearance

5. behaving in a way that shows one's belief of oneself being more important than others

6. impatient and easily annoyed or provoked

7. distrustful of signs of others' positive traits or motives because of one's inborn lack of trust or the influence of bad experience

8. inclined to work hard

Word Craft

Self-conscious (Refer to P.77.)

The prefix **self-** is used to construct nouns and adjectives with the meaning 'of or by oneself or itself'.

- e.g.** **self-esteem** (*n.*) (=the feeling of being satisfied with one's own abilities)
self-defence (*n.*) (=something one does to protect oneself)
self-sufficient (*adj.*) (=having all the things one needs without help from others)
self-employed (*adj.*) (=working for oneself and not employed by a company)

Let's Discuss!

1. What is the book or film that has impacted you most greatly? Share your thoughts.
2. It is said that reading fiction makes one more empathetic. Do you agree? Explain your thoughts.

Part D Cloze Passage

Complete the excerpts from the school yearbook below with the appropriate adjectives introduced on the previous page.



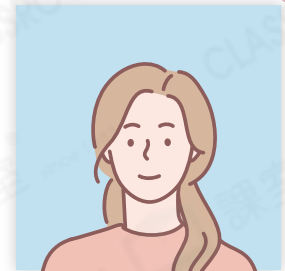
Cynthia Wong

My dearest Dora,

Thinking back, I seem to have been too (1) _____ to think of you once as being (2) _____, just because you like to explain difficult mathematical concepts to others like a teacher. Haha, I'm sorry! To be frank, without you, my school life couldn't in any way be described as pleasant at all. Always there to guide me and enlighten me, you're truly my perfect guardian angel. Your presence is comforting. My dear friend, I wish you all the best! 😊

To our eternal class monitor Noel,

Wherever you go, I'm sure you'll remain the (3) _____ person that those who work with you can always rely on. You're always the one to volunteer to do the donkey work, such as making schedules for class activities, and also the one who finishes it flawlessly! You're truly the pearl of our class! (No wonder you're hailed as the (4) _____ monitor. 😍)



Jackie Yip



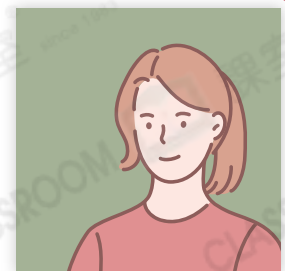
Ernest Lee

To my awesome school counsellor Tim,

Do you recall those days when you kept telling me how unnecessarily (5) _____ I was in my dealings with people—as if my worth were based on others' judgments? Perhaps that's why the word (6) '_____' is not a word for me. Although little has changed since then, I hope there will soon be a day when you marvel at my glowing confidence.

Dear Vanessa,

I used to think that you were an (7) _____ person because of the impatient expression you would sometimes show. As I came to know you better, I gradually found out how wrong I had been. What's more, I didn't expect you to be such a (8) _____ person. Once, I saw you feeding a stray cat outside the school gates. I remember feeling a bit ashamed at my assumptions about you. Yet, I trust that that very quality of yours will keep you from having any hard feelings about this.



Jenny Lai