

Wonder by R.J.Palacio

Wonder, by the American author R J Palacio, is a story about a boy called Auggie who was born with a condition affecting his face. This resource is suitable for primary classes and contributes to outcomes within PSHE, PSE, Health and Wellbeing, and Personal Development.

Activities

This resource will help support you as a teaching professional to work with your class to investigate the novel and what it means to have a visible difference. Your pupils may also have seen the film so you can use these resources for both the film and the novel. Depending on the amount of time you have you could use some or all the activities suggested below. The activities are suitable for years 5 and year 6 in England and P6 and P7 in Scotland.

The following pages contain.

- Discussion Activities—25 minutes (15 mins Discussion 10 minutes feedback)
- Creative Activity – 15 minutes.
- Bullying Behaviour Activity – 20 minutes (15 minutes discussion 5 minutes feedback)

Our teacher pages contain information about **safeguarding and disclosure**; it might be helpful to familiarise yourself with them before starting the activities below.

Difficult Questions

Questions you might get asked, and how to answer them.

Q: Why don't people who look different just get plastic surgery?

A: Just as Auggie says, he has already had many operations. Plastic surgery is not a miracle cure. In fact, many people who look different are very happy with the way they look and would not necessarily want to change their appearance or spend any prolonged time in hospital. It is up to each individual which treatment they choose.

Q: Why doesn't Auggie just stay at home and not go to school and then he won't be bullied?

A; Auggie deserves to go to school as much as anyone else. Many people who look different are confident, happy people, who live fulfilled lives and have learnt to be tough against the way other people might treat them or react to them. Society should accept and value us all, regardless of the way we look.

Discussion Activities—25 minutes (15 mins Discussion 10 minutes feedback)

This is an opportunity for students to discuss in small groups some of the issues in the book. You can do this in pairs or in small groups.

Resource Needed: Pen, paper, questions.

Use a of selection questions from the list below - these are also supplied separately so you can photocopy them or use a whiteboard. Some of these questions are more appropriate after reading the book or seeing the film. Each group should nominate a person to tell the rest of the class about their discussion.

Question 1: (Novel)

What was your favourite thing about the book?

Possible answers:

- The jokes that Auggie's Dad makes
- Auggie enjoying school and making friends.
- Auggie stand up for himself.

Discussion notes Try to get everyone to talk about the more profound meaning behind the film, rather than just the jokes or the happy ending. Get them to talk about the characters and why they liked or disliked the way they behaved.

Question 2: (Film)

What did you think when you first saw Auggie in the film?

Possible answers:

- Surprised at how different he looked to the other kids.
- Surprised by his scars and unusual features.
- Didn't see him as any different to the other kids.

Discussion notes Reassure your students that it is okay to be surprised by Auggie's appearance, this is a natural reaction. It is what you do next that matters – you should not make assumptions or make fun of Auggie or anyone else you meet who looks different. If you encounter someone who looks different then it is normal to be caught off guard, but you should not stare or react negatively as this could impact on the person and hurt their feelings.

Question 3 (Novel / Film)

What do you like about Auggie?

Possible answers:

- His strength and confidence
- His sense of humour
- His friendliness to others

Discussion notes Try to get the focus to be on all the different positive aspects of his personality and get them to see that he is not defined by his looks. This might be where he's good at science or making people laugh, or it could be about his ability to combat the negativity he has had to face at school from his peers through his positive attitude.

Question 4: (Novel / Film)

What do you think the main message was?

Possible answers:

- To treat others well, regardless of the way they look
- To value and respect each other.
- To be accepting of difference

Discussion notes Try to delve deeper than just being kind to each other and focus on accepting difference and 'looking different' as a whole. The story touches on some fundamental issues of inclusion and diversity which need to be explored and promoted.

Question 5: (Novel/Film)

What do you think the story can teach people about how we see people who are different?

Possible answers:

- Ultimately, we are all the same.
- We all deserve to be treated well.
- We all look different in some way, Auggie is not an exception.

Discussion notes Try to get pupils to think about the wider picture and the lessons that can be learned and taken forward into their lives. Changing Faces wants to create a society that values and respects all, irrespective of appearance. This story acts as a great way of raising awareness and promoting respect and kindness for young people in their schools and wider community. Try to discuss what the students have learnt, and how they will act in the future.

Question 6: (Novel/Film)

How did you feel when other characters treating Auggie badly? Possible answers:

- Felt sorry for him.
- Angry that they were treating him so badly.

Discussion notes Aim to get your students not to pity Auggie because he looks different. It should not be believed that this is the reason he is bound to be treated badly. We should not pity people who look different. Instead encourage students to feel a sense of injustice. No one deserves to be treated badly, regardless of the way that they look.

Creative Activity – 15 minutes.

The following two activities can be used as a display in the classroom.

Resource: Pen, paper, Photocopy the cover of the book - increase the size by roughly 50%

Ask you students to spend a few minutes think about

- Auggies story
- What they have discovered about visible difference
- All the discussions and activities they have taken part in.

Using the outline of the face on the cover of the book write a poem about appearance.

or

Ask your students to draw or paint a self-portrait and discuss the differences between everyone's pictures.

Bullying Behaviour Activity – 20 minutes (15 minutes discussion 5 minutes feedback)

Your school will have its own anti bullying policy, however studying Wonder is a perfect opportunity for your students to think about appearance related bullying.

Choose one or two case studies below as basis for discussion in small groups to explore the bullying behaviour. Each group reports back on what they discussed.

Resource Needed: Pen, paper, questions.

Question 1: Have you ever gone along with something your classmates/friends were doing that you thought was not okay? If so, why do you think you did that?

Possible answers:

- Yes, because everyone else was doing it.
- I felt pressured to go along with the crowd.
- I thought it was okay because everyone else said it was.

Discussion notes Try to encourage people to be free to chat as honestly as possible. It is important to understand why people go along with the crowd. We must encourage young people to make their own decisions to treat others fairly and with respect, and not feel pressured by others who might want to misbehave, just as Jack Will does in Wonder.

Question 2: Do you think bullying that targets people's appearance happens in your school?

Possible answers:

- Yes, all the time.
- No, I have never experienced this.
- Yes, but it is more targeting people's traits like hair colour, skin, size etc.

Discussion notes Try to get a discussion going about why people bully each other because of the way they look. Discuss why it is just as unacceptable to treat someone badly because they have a visible difference as it is for any other reason. Encourage young people to stand up against bullying if they see it.

Question 3: Imagine someone who looked different came up to you and asked you a question. How would you react?

Possible answers:

- I would treat them the same as anyone else.
- I would be a bit awkward and would not really know what to say.
- I would try to not to stare at them.

Discussion notes Try to encourage viewers to not feel awkward or uncomfortable, and to see everyone as the same; regardless of the way they look. Encourage young people to talk to this person, ask them questions like what their favourite film or sport is; and talk as you would in any other situation. Do you think the film has encouraged you to behave differently in the future?