

Title: Wonder
Creator: R.J. Palacio
Text type: Novel
Date written: Term 4

Wonder - R.J. Palacio

"I wish every day could be Halloween. We could all wear masks all the time. Then we could walk around and get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks."

Wonder is an amazing tale told by R.J. Palacio of a young boy named August Pullman. Woven together perfectly incorporating literacy techniques of first person, and including chapters from different peoples point of view, R.J. Palacio manages to seamlessly pull off what I would consider a life changing novel. The story is of August Pullman, a 10 year old who has had facial deformities ever since he was born, and his journey from homeschooling to middle school. Prejudiced against and judged throughout his entire life based on the way he looks, it is about to get a lot worse for August, but with the help of some unlikely friends he manages to make it through.

Throughout Wonder, I believe R.J. Palacio is trying to get across the concept that people need to be recognized for who they are and what they can bring to the world rather than their outward appearance. We each need the chance to strive and to try fulfill our potential. This is shown through the very last sentence in the book, August Pullman's precept: "Everyone deserves a standing ovation because we all overcometh the world. -Auggie". You can be robbed of self esteem and worth by prejudice, and through August's comment that he believes everyone deserves a standing ovation, he is basically saying that everyone deserves to be recognized, to feel appreciated. In Wonder, by showing the perspectives of all different people, the author is also trying to show that even if you love someone, it still is really tough to keep going and do the right thing, but that persevering is important.

The negative impact of prejudice is clearly demonstrated throughout the novel, Wonder. It leads to many problems that could have been completely avoided if there was no prejudice. Firstly, prejudice leads to division. The whole of Becher Prep Middle School ends up split in two, with some believing he should stay, and others wanting him to leave the school. This division escalates as parents begin to get involved, some parents such as Julian's mum going so far as to cut August out of the class photo.

Secondly prejudice leads to wrong assumptions. Students and parents wrongly assumed that just because August had a facial abnormality, he was mentally retarded. By allowing the prejudice to continue and making wrong assumptions, you risked losing all the potential August could bring to community and school and society. He was a funny, nice person, with great ideas, and a great sense of kindness, but if the prejudice people had their way, August would be banned from school. So all potential in a person is jeopardized by the prejudice.

Another negative impact of this prejudice demonstrated in Wonder can be reflected back into society and the world. Those who supported August ran the risk of being discriminated against themselves, which leads to less people supporting those being prejudiced against. Which as a cycle is a really bad situation for society to be in, as if no one sticks up for those being prejudiced against in fear of their own safety then what will the world come to? Thankfully, there are a few who take the risk of standing up for what is right and kind, notably Summer in the novel Wonder. Summer was friends with August even though she got discriminated against because of it. Relating this to a real world situation Summer

acted like one of the white people who took part in the bus boycotts in America alongside the black people who were facing the discrimination.

The part in *Wonder* that had the most significant impact on me was when August's dog Daisy died. I think this part impacted me so much leaving me in tears because Daisy was really the only creature that knew August and couldn't judge him. Because Daisy was a dog and couldn't tell the difference between August from any other humans and she loved August for who he was. When things went wrong Daisy would lick August's face all over, showing that even his face was loved, he was loved, Daisy could always make him happy.

Another part in the novel that impacted me was when August came wearing his "the scream" Halloween costume and saw Jack Will saying mean things out to him. Hearing Jack say to his friends that he was only August's friend because he had to be, and not because he liked him would be crushing, and it deeply affected me. There is a very important lesson to learn from this section of the book, being a false friend because you have to and not addressing prejudice can even cut more deeply than if the person was honest and upfront about their intentions and prejudices. To be hurt by someone who you have opened up to, and trusted you is worse, far worse than being hurt by a stranger. So when you make friends with someone who is a little bit different than normal, or anyone really, think about how you can be an honest friend, because this book displays just how hurtful words and false trust can be to a person.

From the novel *Wonder*, my first responses to people who look a bit different to normal have changed. Upon meeting a person who was badly burnt by a fire on their faces and arms, my immediate reaction was gosh, that is so awful, how could you live with that? Before I remembered *Wonder*. Thinking about what August went through when I meet people like this definitely helps to remind me to shape my opinions in a better way. Because really they are normal, they think just the same as you or I and so forming opinions on someone based on what they look like should be done with caution, "the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way."

Wonder by R.J. Palacio moved me, has impacted my perspectives, and has made me reflect on my life. I honestly cannot recommend this book highly enough. The tale of August is one we all should hear, and by seeing all of the different perspectives of the people around August, there is someone that every person could relate to.

Title: To Kill a Mockingbird
Creator: Harper Lee
Text type: Novel
Date written: Term 4

E

To Kill a Mockingbird - Harper Lee

To Kill a Mockingbird narrated by "Scout" Finch, an eight year old girl growing up in a small Southern town in Alabama during the great depression, is a tale presenting themes of prejudice, specifically racism, classism, and sexism. A lot happens over the three years that the book covers, the most significant being the arrest and trial of Tom Robinson a young black man who is accused of raping Maya Ewell, a 19 year old white woman. Scout's older brother Jem, and her father Atticus (who is Tom Robinson's lawyer in the trial) both feature as prominent characters throughout the book. Maycomb, the town in which the novel is set, and the people in it, portray how life may have been like at the time, with segregation and prejudice entrenched into society. As it could be predicted, the trial of Tom Robinson comes out with the verdict that he is guilty, even though there clearly is no substantial evidence that he committed the rape.

I think Harper Lee's intention with her novel To Kill a Mockingbird is to give a picture of how the world was in the 1930's, wanting to show that people deserve their rights, and bringing awareness to present prejudice that existed in the time Harper Lee wrote this novel (in the 1950's). TKAM still is relevant today and will probably always be relevant to some extent as I don't imagine there will ever be a time where we are rid of all prejudice.

"To Maycomb, Tom's death was typical. Typical of a nigger to cut and run. Typical of a nigger's mentality to have no plan, no thought for the future, just run blind first chance he saw. Funny thing, Atticus Finch might've got him off scot free, but wait-? Hell no. You know how they are. Easy come, easy go. Just shows you, that Robinson boy was legally married, they say he kept himself clean, went to church and all that, but when it comes down to the line the veneer's mighty thin. Nigger always comes out in 'em."
For me, this was one of the worst parts of the novel. It makes me feel sick realizing that people actually have this mindset. That the white town folk would go around thinking that, no, do whatever you like, but as soon as you make a mistake, well that there is the "nigger" coming out. The townsfolk don't even really seem to see Tom as a person, he is just a representation of a whole race. Thinking like the townsfolk did about Tom based on his skin colour is a prime example of racial prejudice. I am lucky enough that I haven't had to experience prejudices like this due to the colour of my skin throughout my life as yet, because my skin is fair, and it seems that somehow this exempts me from a large amount of racial prejudice based on the random chance of the genes I am made up of. I think for this reason, it is very important to have books like To Kill a Mockingbird because then people who are lucky enough to not have personally experienced prejudice, actually realize what goes/has gone on. Although prejudice isn't the same anymore as it was in TKAM, there is still a lot out there, making Harper Lee's novel still relevant. There are people still existing who are pro whites, and there are many groups across the world who are pro one race or another.

Sexism, another larger issue in TKAM that is still relevant today, gave me an insight into how the world used to be and just how much it has changed. Throughout the text, Scout never has any female role models, and truly believes that being a girl is something to be disgraced about. She has been told from an early age that girl things are bad and boy things are good, "I was not so sure, but Jem told me I was being a girl, that girls always imagined things, that's why other people hated them so, and if I started behaving like one I could just go off and find some to play with." Scout also is told throughout the novel that no she cannot wear this or that because of her gender, and has a quite clear gender role set out for her by society. Unlike Scout I have never had the experience of being treated

differently due to by gender which shows what a long way the world has come since the 1930's. Progressively since then equality between females and males has been slowly improving. In the 1980's there was a big push for "girls can do anything" in NZ which was my mothers generation. When I was born my mother was ready to tell me I could do anything, and so I have grown up like many others of my generation not realizing the struggles some women face until I have become older, because I have always believed I can achieve anything I set my mind to. Unfortunately, there is still a way to go to get true equality with men as there is still a pay parity, with women still earning less for the same jobs as men! As infuriating as this is, it is important to look at what has been achieved. In New Zealand women have broken through some of the glass ceilings, with New Zealand having a female Prime Minister, and females leading in various other important business roles. These things are all successes and show just how much our world has changed since the 1930's when TKAM was set.

Finally classism is also discussed in the text *To Kill a Mockingbird* and this also left me with some interesting thoughts. I found that because I have been in the privileged position of coming from an educated family and have had every opportunity to express myself, have even been lucky enough to attend a prestigious private school in Auckland before we moved to Wanaka, I haven't known what it is to be looked down on for background and for family. But the novel TKAM gave me more of an insight of what classism was like and helped me gain understanding into how everyone stood. Jem puts it quite well in the case of TKAM "I've thought about it a lot lately and I've got it figured out. There's four kinds of folks in the world. There's the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there's the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes."

A change that has happened in society today is the rights of gay and lesbian people. It not so long ago was a crime to even admit you were homosexual but now we are at a place where you can get married. Whilst this is not addressed at all in TKAM, as class, race, and gender prejudices were covered, we as a society are continuing to move forward to become more tolerant of others. I think this really should be one of the goals of society, to be able to try eliminate inequality in things such as gender, sexuality, and religion. For now though, lets count our successes and whilst reading Harper Lee's award winning novel, consider the differences in our society today.

Title: Schindler's List
Creator: Steven Spielberg (director)

Text type: Film

Date written: Term 4

Schindler's List

Schindler's list is an incredible movie based on the true events of Oskar Schindler and the 1,100 Jews lives he saved during the holocaust. The movie begins with Schindler as a greedy and extravagant German businessman and Schindler decides to use the war as a business opportunity exploiting the slave labour of Jews in work camps, but as the war progresses his attitude changes, and he ends up risking everything trying to save Jewish lives.

The most poignant part of the movie for me was when the girl in the red coat died. This upset me because she was innocent and she hadn't gotten a chance to do anything with her life yet. She looked so ordinary and happy and normal and yet the treatment she got was just the complete opposite of what she should have been. Due to her red coat the girl stands out and I think the director intentionally did this to make you connect with her. Even with the death of so many, it is the girl in the red coat we remember. She is symbolic of more than just one life, but the death of innocents. I think one of the reasons I connect with her is because she is like me. She was living an ordinary happy life and so when you see that taken away from her, and her lying dead at the end it is shocking. It goes to show that tragedy and awful things can happen to anyone and makes the viewer further sympathize with the story.

When I was watching the film I was also shocked by the German Nazi's actions. I don't understand how people can do that, be that awful to another human being. Yes, they have a prejudice against the Jews but they have taken it so much further than just a dislike or a nasty comment. They took the ultimate penalty from them and not only did the Nazi's kill the Jews but first they dehumanized them, taking their clothes and hair and even teeth. This made me feel sick and shocked. Even though I know that these things happened and have read about this time before it still shocks to see people actually doing that.

After watching Schindler's list I felt empowered. By thinking of others and using what I have I really could save someone's life. The main message the film Schindler's List gave to me is that people are more important than things. If you can keep this perspective then you can make sure not to waste opportunities where you can help others. When Schindler figured out that his money actually equated to lives, he realized he could do something to help.

"Itzhak Stern: Oskar, there are eleven hundred people who are alive because of you. Look at them.

Oskar Schindler: If I'd made more money... I threw away so much money. You have no idea. If I'd just.... This car. Goeth would have bought this car. Why did I keep the car? Ten people right there. Ten people. Ten more people."

When you think that you could buy a meal at a restaurant for \$30 or you could buy a pig which will give money to a family and even save a life of a child for the same price it seems crazy to go out and have a restaurant meal. Suddenly it seems a bit wasteful when you bought that box of donuts that you only ended up eating half of and then threw the rest away, when that money could have fed a child for another week. It really is amazing the power that we have to make a difference in someone's life. The problem is we don't realize what can be done with what we have. Schindler uses his time, money and persuasion to fight crimes fueled by prejudice and hatred, and although buying some child in another

country a pig, or putting that \$105 into a new bikini, you could instead use it to buy a gift of bed nets for 5 families which will help protect and possibly save the lives of all of the children of those families from getting malaria (which kills over 627,000 people a year). It really isn't that tough of a choice.

I think the main message for the world from this movie, is not only to use your talents and money for good, but also to be very careful about demonizing any race or religion of people across the world. For example Syrian refugees are coming across from Syria at the moment and in some places there is an anti Muslim feeling. You hear people interviewed on news saying that "The Syrians have messed up own country so why come mess up ours" or "We don't need any more Muslims!". These people really are missing the point not understanding that it is the IS terrorists and the president of Syria that have become corrupt. The refugees are really just ordinary people, who happen to be muslim. They are just like you or me, and so saying to send the Muslims back to there own country is quite a stupid statement really, because not one person not define an entire group of similar people.

In the world today we need to be especially vigilant not to let the fears of some Muslim people mean that we group all Muslim people as bad. As a world, we hear of anti Muslim sentiments coming out that we need to look at what happened in the Holocaust with Schindler's list and realize that being anti a whole race or religion would and does have awful consequences. Learning from history is one of the most important things and is why movie like Schindler's list are very important to society.