

Haya Saadeh (8th Grade: Olmsted Falls, Ohio)
Level II First Place Winner
Letter to R. J. Palacio concerning her book, *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio:

I have recently read your book, *Wonder*, and I have been different since. This book actually made me think of how I used to judge people. My friends would consider me a nice person, but I tend to be a little harsh to people I may not know. *Wonder* taught me not to judge people by the way they look. Rather, you should get to know them before forming an opinion.

Wonder made me rethink hard about myself. It made me realize that some people just need one friend, one person, that is nice to them and most times, that would make their day. I have students in my school that are “different” than you and me. Are they really “different” or do they just need one friend to get to know them? I, myself, wouldn’t be mean to kids that aren’t like you and me. But, I wouldn’t exactly talk to them either. Sometimes, I don’t talk to them because I just talk to my friends, but mostly, it’s because I’m terrified of what my friends would say. After reading your book, I’ve realized that they aren’t really my friends if they think I’m “weird” or give me “that look: for talking to kids like that. I honestly don’t care about what people say about me for talking to kids that are “different.”

I can relate to this book for one huge reason—my younger brother. My brother is nine-years-old and can’t talk because he has Autism. My brother doesn’t make eye contact with you; he covers his ears, and makes strange noises like, “Ah, ba ma.” If you had a brother like that, would you be embarrassed to go out in public with him? Don’t feel bad if the answer is yes; that’s how I felt before reading your book. I can’t believe I ever felt this way because I love my brother. I’ve realized I don’t care anymore. Because of *Wonder*, when people give him mean looks, point, laugh, ect., I just look at them and say, “He has Autism, knock it off.” Your book has taught me to treat everyone that way they want to be treated. My brother and everyone else in the world with diseases are just like you and me.

In *Wonder*, I got super attached to all the characters. My favorite character would have to be August because he is a strong kid dealing with his face. Even when Jack was a huge jerk to him, August stayed strong no matter what happened in his life. All kids pointing, laughing, and making weird faces at him, August dealt with it. The ending was so adorable; I definitely got teary eyed. Everyone accepting August for how he looked and being friends with him was just delightful.

Treating other the way they want to be treated is the big picture in your book, but more importantly, in life. This book taught me not to judge anyone by their looks, but by their hearts. I’m grateful that you wrote *Wonder* and I’m super lucky because I had the chance to read it. Thank you so much for writing *Wonder* and teaching me a lesson about life. I’m hoping to read more of your books.

Sincerely,

Haya Saadeh