

Level II

Honorable Finalist

Jacob Rintamaki

(Grade 7: Lee Burneson Middle School, Westlake. Sponsor: Deborah Schrembeck)

Letter to author Raquel Jaramillo Palacio (aka P. J. Palacio) concerning her book, *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio,

Yeah, I'm pretty sure that I know what you are thinking. Seriously, hasn't literally everyone used this book for Letters About Literature by now? I mean, come on people, choose something at a least a little different. Yes, I am talking about the book *Wonder*, by R. J. Palacio. You!

Now, how this book has influenced me is a little bit confusing, but stay with me for a little bit, and I'm sure that this will all work out in the end. It was about three years ago, when I was a little tiny fourth grader. My mom had sat both me and my brother (who was, at the time, about eight), and said to both of us, "Now, listen here, boys, Mrs. Robinson, our friend, recommended this book for our family, so what do you think about reading it together?" I agreed, and we started to read your book. At first, this seemed like the incredibly stereotypical bullying story. There was a weird misfit kid who went to a new school, and the rich popular kid and his posse would bully him for the entire year, basically becoming his enemies. He would make friends with them at the end, because of the "friendship is magic" cliché and stuff. Oh, and there would be a huge award at the end.

But as the book started to progress, I realized more and more that *Wonder* really wasn't about that. Sure, at the surface, it pretty much was what I described earlier. However, if you looked a little bit deeper, you'd start to see something that was a little bit more heartfelt. I have a friend, who I'm going to call Mr. P. Mostly this is because I didn't get permission to use his actual name, but it also sounds like a spin on the 80's TV show *Mr. T*. (let's see how many people get that reference). Mr. P has the same kind of facial disfigurement as Auggie, and he's had to have surgery multiple times in order to get his jaw fixed. Even after tons of surgery, his face looks different than a "normal" kid's face. When I was about in first grade, I saw Mr. P. getting a big Lego set for going into surgery. Now, when I was seven, I was so into Legos, and was jealous about the fact that he got toys while I didn't. Now, back then, I might not have realized it, but the reward of a couple plastic bricks probably would not be anything close to what Mr. P would have to go on for the rest of his life. People have teased him about being different, people haven't accepted him at times. Mr. P has a twin brother, about the same height and everything, and some people accept him more, just because his face is "normal."

Now, Mr. P and I are good friends, even if we go to different schools. But after reading your book, it gave me a whole new perspective on being physically different. I've been bullied before for being a "nerd" or a "geek," but no one has ever said "Hey, troll face, get out of our school!" I've never had anyone send me death threats, or having friends say that they would kill themselves if they were me. Sure, I've been hassled by my fair share of jerks, but Auggie and Mr. P haven't done anything in order to deserve it. Sure, at times I can be snappish and rude, but both Mr. P and Auggie are incredibly nice, funny, bright kids that don't really deserve to be put down because of their appearance;

Now, I've started to try and reach out to kids who seem a bit different. For example, my friend's brother has severe autism, and I know plenty of kids with ADHD. However, those are mental, generally, and Mr. P's is physical. Both physical and mental "abnormalities" can cause people to distance themselves from you, but more often than not, people will make fun of the kid who looks a little bit different than the slightly shy new kid. That's the way the world works, but not the way that it should work.

I hope that this letter changes a least one person's mind to think a little bit wider, and to accept someone that they've been teasing or ignoring lately. In *Wonder*, there's a quote that I think explains this letter: "Kinder than is necessary. Because it's not enough to be kind. One should be kinder than needed." That's what I hope that you'll think about the next time that you encounter someone who is socially awkward, or when someone who looks a little bit different needs help.

Sincerely,

Jacob Rínamakí, age 12