

Level I

Honorable Finalist

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

Dear R. J. Palacio,

Different, as Merriam Webster puts it, means: “unusual.” There are some people in life, like August from *Wonder*, who are different. In your book, I learned how it can feel to be different, bullied, and how to look from another’s perspective. To go back to the beginning, something that we often replace different with is unique, which means: “Being without a like or equal.” So, Mrs. Palacio, are those kids “different,” or are they unique?

After I read your book, I was able to look through the perspectives of other people. Hurtful things happen a lot at school, especially at recess. Even just a simple, “Oh, sorry, we can’t let anyone else play,” can seem harmless, but it can make you pretty unhappy if it happens frequently, even if you act like it’s not a big deal. For example, a few years ago in elementary school, my friends and I played a game at recess that only involved a certain number of players. Almost every day, the same two kids would come over and ask us if they could play, too. We told them that we already had the maximum amount of people, but looking back on that, I realize that maybe they felt like we were lying, and deliberately didn’t let them participate, even though we could have. Your book helped me to reexamine experiences like those and also to view what’s going on around me in a whole new way—looking from other people’s perspectives instead of mine.

Wonder helped me to understand what it is like to be different. It can be difficult to imagine what it is like to not look or think like everyone else, and how it can affect you. If you are always looked at as “that kid” or something like that by your peers, it can be extremely hard to make friends. Even if they are normal, some kids just have trouble socially. You never know what’s going on in someone’s life, and maybe they could use a friend, but are struggling to make one. Now that I’ve read *Wonder*, I try to look around and see if any kids are sitting alone at lunch or have no one to hang out with at recess. If I saw this happening, I would simply say to my friends, “Hey, let’s see what they’re doing.” When we went over, sometimes I could see their face light up with joy, even if they tried to hide it and act cool. In *Wonder*, Auggie could always use a friend, whether he had one at a time or not. This taught me that sometimes people just need to know that someone cares about them.

Bullying. It can seem trite to some kids, overused, like it’s something that used to happen, but now it doesn’t. This is completely untrue. Bullying can destroy kids, making them afraid to go to school or making them feel unhappy with themselves. I am lucky in the fact that I have never had to experience this, but *Wonder* helped me to understand what it can be like. August had to go through many episodes of bullying, with people insulting him, putting notes in his locker, and even physically hurting him. Not all kids are as lucky as me. Some kids have school experiences like August’s, but without the same happy ending. They go through their entire academic career without confidence or pride in themselves. Your book gave me a new perspective on this issue. I used to think of it as how I first put it at the beginning of this paragraph: overused. But now, I know it is something else: corrosive. It can eat away at someone unless it is stopped.

So, now that I see bullying in a new light, know how it feels to be different, and can see from other’s eyes, I feel empowered to make a difference, change how people think about this terrible issue. Let’s make a difference in someone’s life, whether it’s just a “Hey, want to hang out with us?,” or standing up for them.

Sincerely,

Colin Barberic, age 12