

The 2nd Runner Up of English Section

Junior Division

Name of Winner : Chan Ning Sum

Name of School : Heep Yunn School

Book Title : Wonder

Author : R.J. Palacio

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What makes humans rule the world? What allows us to become a dominant species?

Some may answer without hesitation: It's because we are smart. We have extraordinarily high intelligence and we should really thank God for giving us such gifts so that we can invent stuff and advance. While I do agree about us being relatively smarter than most animals and God(s) should be thanked, I must point out that in fact, we are not the only creations with brains on this planet. Animals like chimpanzees, gorillas, dolphins, squirrels and crows are all exceptionally witty, and some may even have a

higher intelligence level than average humans. And even if they are slightly less clever than us, God have a few more gifts for them – All the animals mentioned above are either born with wings or fins, or they have unfathomable strength and really long limbs. With everything considered, it seems to me that animals are way more equipped to be the ruler of our kingdom. However, somehow, we humans got that seat. How come?

To me, what makes human special is our ability to empathize and be kind. We are able to understand that not everything has to be a fight to death, unlike many other animals and beasts, which fight their own kind over little benefits. We know when to end a fight so that we will not hurt others, as we are able to empathize and understand how unbearable it is for others when they suffer. We have our own morals and rules as we are aware of the extent to which our actions could have an impact on others indispensably, and how empathy and

kindness could make a difference to our society. Hence, we can form societies, slowly stabilize and advance. In simpler words, kindness and empathy are basically the two key factors leading to world domination. Without kindness and empathy, our society would not exist and so wouldn't we.

Perhaps you would object, arguing that kindness and empathy do not have that much power. That was also what I thought before reading *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio.

Wonder encircles 10-year-old August Pullman's fifth grade life, which may at first glance seem like a typical schoolboy's story. Despite the fact that Auggie's face can scare kids to make ear-splitting screams and suffer from countless nights of nightmares, this kid is no different from other ordinary boys of his age. That is not what his schoolmates seem to think, though, as Auggie is forced to struggle with bullying and fitting in due to his facial features. Fortunate for him, he is not going to face this alone as his journey through his first year in school is

joined by friends and supporters.

There are lots that can be learnt from this story, but to me the lesson on the importance of kindness and empathy leaves the strongest impression. It is understandable if Auggie has no friends at all. In the eyes of a rather judgmental person, he is a deformed freak, if you put it bluntly and honestly. There is no doubt about why everyone is scared of him and avoids him at all costs. It is indeed not surprising if the kids in his school isolate him due to fear, as they are in fact ten-year-olds only. However, whilst some see Auggie with prejudiced lens, Summer and Jack choose to be Auggie's friend. They choose to be kind, empathetic, and remain nice and friendly to the kid who is rejected by his peers, even if it means giving up friendships which is deemed as 'socially appropriate' and stereotypically labelled as 'normal'. Their actions turn Auggie's life a hundred and eighty degrees around and unveil a bright side of society that Auggie never knew existed.

What if Summer hadn't invited Auggie to sit with her, or Jack hadn't stood up for him? He would definitely not be able to survive fifth grade. He would be teased and discriminated until he is completely consumed by the thought that his existence is nothing but a fault. He might even end up committing suicide when he is older, which is a common phenomenon in any modern societies where the establishment of self-esteem is largely formed and influenced by other's opinion of oneself. Lucky for him, even the young and naïve fifth graders understand the concept of kindness, and are willing to take a courageous step to help him.

Although Auggie has tons of praiseworthy traits for us to admire and learn, I find his friends' kindness and empathy more admirable and notable. Auggie is certainly brave and strong, but not everyone, not even adults, are willing to be as kind and empathetic as Summer or Jack when they encounter someone in need. Most people are reluctant to lend a helping hand when they come across

the needy, even if all it takes is to lift the corners of your lips to a smile or give a word of encouragement. Seldom do people realise that one smile, a few words of encouragement, and a tap on the shoulder may be all it needs to bring one out of distress, or maybe even prevent someone from ending his or her life. Somehow, most people are too greedy to show that they care and too quick in passing judgments. They are not able to step into other's shoes and look past their world to see how much their actions affect others.

Unlike most people, Summer and Jack are able to dismiss and challenge the prejudiced assumptions, and they muster up the courage to cross the borders of what others confine themselves in to achieve something more, something better. They take the lead to show others the right thing to do and help Auggie get accepted at school, thus improving his life and helping their school to become a more accepting and peaceful community. This demonstrates that a simple act of kindness, like inviting

someone to sit with you during lunch, may seem unimportant and trivial, but it can lead to a better world for someone else, and maybe even everyone. Through reading this book, you will be able to experience and see how much one simple act of kindness matters, and perhaps even be influenced to be a kinder and more empathetic person.

This is truly a remarkable read. I would recommend this book to not just my peers, but to adults and young kids as well. The morals that can be learnt from this story is universal regardless of your age, nationality and background. Written in different character's perspectives, the story, packed with events like betrayal and bullying and much more, is a roller coaster ride for your emotions. Be prepared to be moved and inspired by this beautifully woven page-turner!