

The Merit of English Section

Junior Division

Name of Winner : Ko Tsz Ching

Name of School : Po On Commercial Association

Wong Siu Ching Secondary School

Book Title : *Wonder*

Author : R. J. Palacio

Publisher : Penguin Random House Children's

Written by R. J. Palacio, *Wonder* is a riveting novel that not only makes you burst into tears but also has underlying morals that leaves you reflecting on yourself.

Seeing the title *Wonder*, I expected to read a story about an extraordinary person who can create a miraculous wonder. Eventually, what I find is a little boy who astonishes everyone in his seemingly ordinary life.

Wonder starts with a brutal beginning about a

10-year-old boy called Auggie. He is obsessed with Star Wars just like other kids, except that he has been homeschooled. Born with facial deformity, he has undergone numerous operations that have saved his life but not his face. Walking on the street, Auggie always shocks people with his face and therefore, he habitually puts on his astronaut helmet when hanging out. Later, this fifth-grade boy has to go to a public school and leave the shielding of his parents. Since then, Auggie is bullied and socially discriminated against for his difference. Criticism, rumors and humiliation are all screwed onto Auggie in an overwhelming way that he begins to feel depressed, alienated and hopeless. Eventually, to everyone's surprise, his courage and kindness gradually move his classmates.

As the plot develops, the author tries to convey a number of thought-provoking moral messages, where anti-bullying is of vital importance. We have been taught

the idea of anti-bullying over and over, however, only in theory. Wonder brings a vivid illustration about how a victim of bullying actually feels - not just misery but also loneliness and guilt. Moreover, Wonder is written from different perspectives like Auggie's and Summer's (one of Auggie's friend's), giving readers a glimpse of each party's stance and struggle. Some of them don't mean to hurt Auggie intentionally, while some bully Auggie simply because they want to fit in with the popular crowd. Nevertheless, all these inadvertent but malicious acts have left an indelible scar in Auggie's life.

Living in a modern international city, many Hong Kongers still suffer from different degrees of bullying. One of my friends who is a Youtuber has become a victim of cyberbullying and the physical and mental impacts are far-reaching. Being criticized about her chubby figure, she started to have anxiety and a sleeping disorder. Meanwhile, she constantly feels depressed,

leading to low self-esteem and even self-harming behavior such as suicide attempts. Despite all the obvious effects, her classmates just watched with folded arms.

Actually how can we help the bullied? A psychologist once made an analogy between school bullying in reality and the story in the famous animation Doraemon. If we want to reduce the power of the bullies like Goda Takeshi, we can be a middleman like Honekawa Suneo. The fewer the people who respond or cooperate with the bullies, the safer the victims like Nobi Nobita. We can also be the one like Minamoto Shizuka who empathizes the victim and help the victim to stand up again. Wonder exactly verifies this theory. Summer in the book acts like Minamoto Shizuka, while centrist classmates are copies of Honekawa Suneo. With their assistance and Auggie's braveness and sincerity, Auggie finally wins the support from the majority of classmates and no longer stays as

the poor Nobi Nobita in Doraemon. I sincerely wish to recommend Auggie's story to all victims and all of us who may become Summer or Minamoto Shizuka one day.

The principal in the story once said, "If every single person in this room made it a rule that wherever you are, whenever you can, you'll try to act a little kinder than is necessary—the world really would be a better place." Nobody could imagine what influence Auggie would bring with his hideous face, but the real power comes from neither one's face nor one's body, but one's heart. Kindness is settled in our hearts once we're born, and is realized through actions, not only making yourself warm but also making the world better. Auggie is exactly that single person who has melted everyone's heart with his kindness.

Lately, a Filipino student called Mark Napallacan

realized he was running out of cash on his way home on a ferry. A kind-hearted passenger Pia overheard his need and left a note with some money to him. Seeing the words "Pay It Forward" on the note, Mark was softened into tears and decided to spread such kindness around, which was exactly what Pia had encountered before helping Mark. What Auggie and Pia have done shows that little kindness can result in big influence. Nowadays, humans are constantly communicating with one another through interactions ranging from a conversation at dinner to a simple eye contact with a passer-by, all of which seem too trivial to be occasions to show kindness. In fact, a simple cheering note can already work wonders to a friend in despair and make her day. Sometimes it takes only a small act of benevolence to change a person's life and to change the world!

"You can't blend in when you were born to stand out" is my all-time favorite quote from the book. This reminds

me of my younger brother who has reading and writing disorder, making him guilty and inferior. His poor grades in academics have greatly reduced his self-confidence. In the past, he always kept saying "Me too!" to blend into his classmates and to narrow the differences with them. After reading this book, I've decided to share my feelings with him.

Everyone is born to be unique. Perhaps the difference may prevent us from integrating into a social circle, but what is our self-worth if everyone is the same like clones? It is exactly the differences which make cooperations worthy. You need my merits to fill up your shortcomings, and so do I. Everyone has a crucial niche in this world. Therefore, there's no point fretting about your differences. Through respecting and understanding, even if you have something unusual like Auggie, learn to realize its worthiness and embrace it. I sincerely hope my brother can speak up for himself and eventually discover

his non-academic talent like sports, put off his helmet and face others' views bravely!

What makes a good book? To me, neither a story with literary grace nor a story with exhortative lecturing, but a heart-moving plot. Wonder no doubt is a sorely touching story without bias. You may learn to judge black and white on your own, brewing your values which truly follow you forever.