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**Kindness is  
Wonderful...**

Sprinkle That Stuff  
Everywhere!

# Kindness is WONDERful... Sprinkle that Stuff Everywhere!



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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### Source of Idea:

During my 10 years of teaching, I've noticed numerous students of various grade levels have confessed they've felt bullied by a classmate(s). Countless parents have also expressed their concerns on bullying matters (both inside school and on social media). Students admitted to being "too depressed to function" which may affect their grades, attendance, motivation, concentration, and conduct. Bullying is a major issue because it may lead to feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, rejection, loss of friendships, low self-esteem, or feeling unsafe to the point of not wanting to go to school or even to the point of feeling suicidal! Bullying is a major issue in elementary, middle, and high schools whether it is in school or cyber bullying since social media is highly used. After reading multiple cases on bullying via social media, the news, and even in my own classroom or school, I've decided to implement character education, especially kindness, in order to educate my students on practicing kindness which may help decrease bullying incidents. Let's face it. Kids can be honest (too honest at times) and straight-up mean. There is a lack of filter and empathy. It may be from lack of discipline at home since "apples don't fall far from the trees." However, this is not always the case. Parents are actually very concerned with their child's well-being, especially when suspected that their child is being bullied. First of all, we must define bullying. What IS bullying? Sometimes it is used too loosely and other times, it is indeed bullying behavior. How do I know it when I see it? As an educator, this led me to explore the topic further. Then, I got an "A-ha" moment. I can incorporate character education through novels that meet Florida Standards. How can kindness be taught? How can students detect bullying when they see it? I decided to give it a try, especially during Kindness month (February). The students read *Wonder* as a class. It is about a 5th grade boy, Auggie, who has been homeschooled his whole life due to a rare disease that deforms his face. Entering 5th grade at a regular school, he faces many challenges including being bullied. It demonstrates firsthand how it feels to be bullied and how other students practice kindness by being his friend regardless of the peer pressure to hang out with the "cool kids." At the end, more students ended up liking Auggie because his heart was bigger than his illness. By reading this novel, students in my class were not only learning reading skills such as vocabulary development, figurative language, reading comprehension, and reflective writing, but they've also discovered the importance of character and integrity, including kindness. The changes in student attendance, motivation, student grades, and behavior were WONDERful!

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (CONTINUED)

THE RESULTS ARE IN! (WHEN THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN MET):

My morning ELA (English/Language Arts) class had an average score of 74% on their Reading assessment and my afternoon class had an average score of 60%. After implementing kindness to ELA, my morning class received an average score of 85% and my afternoon class earned a 73% on their reading assessments for the next unit. In other words, in a matter of 2 weeks, there was an 11% increase in the morning class and a 13% increase in my afternoon class! Furthermore, students started to act kinder to one another and actually wanted to do more collaborative work than individual work. Not only have students' academic scores increased, but also their motivation to attend class has increased; Attendance has increased! Their motivation to practice kindness and engage in collaborative projects have also increased. I've also received less bullying incident reports from students and parents. Students also appear to have a closer connection and a bond with each other which is important to a child's confidence, self-esteem, and social skills.



## LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

LAFS.5.RL.1.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

LAFS.5.RL.1.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

LAFS.5.RL.2.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

LAFS.5.RF.4.4 Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding

LAFS.5.SL.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

LAFS.5.L.3.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

## INTRODUCTION

### **BULLYING:**

According to the 2017 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice), did you know that approximately 20% of students ages 12-18 have experienced bullying nationwide? It may seem like a low number because it is only stating REPORTED incidents. According to statistics from the 2012 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, an adult was notified in less than half (40%) of bullying incidents. Children refuse to confess to adults for numerous reasons such as fear of appearing weak, fear of the bully, fear of peer rejection, and fear of misjudgment from adults. The first step to prevent bullying is to define it! What Is Bullying? According to StopBullying.gov, “Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.” Furthermore, in order for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be aggressive and include an imbalance of power and the behavior is repetitive. Bullying can be verbal, social, or physical. It can also occur online. Cyberbullying is “bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets {and} includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.” According to the 2017 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice), out of students between the ages of 12 to 18 who reported being bullied at school during the school year, “15% were bullied online or by text” (StopBullying.gov, 2018).

### **BULLYING AND DEPRESSION ARE CORRELATED:**

#### **Students Being Bullied:**

Approximately two-thirds of young individuals “who died by suicide experienced depressive symptoms at the time of their deaths” indicating “depression as a fundamental risk factor for suicidality among young people” (Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Dodd, 2009, para.4). Depression is a “state of mind that overwhelms and distorts the senses; the whole world looks and feels different” (Gold & Morris, 1986, p. 167). It is a negative mood that represents how one perceives the past, present, and future (Gold & Morris, 1986). Affective symptoms include sadness, anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, and crying spells without control (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). Other symptoms include openness to suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, a feeling of hopelessness, cognitive difficulty such as inability to think clearly and easily, lack of motivation, loneliness, lack of interest in others, and the value of life is lessened (Levitt & Lubin, 1975). Main factors connected to depression are detected in various stages among young people who commit suicide such as social support shortage, certain life events, physical illness, and a family history viewed as negative (Flynn & Cappeliez, 1993).

Children who are bullied are most likely to experience “depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy. These issues may persist into adulthood.” They also tend to have health complaints and “decreased academic achievement—GPA and standardized test scores—and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.” In fact, a very “small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied” (StopBullying.gov, 2018).

### **Students Who Bully Others:**

“Kids who bully others can also engage in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood. Kids who bully are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults, get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school, engage in early sexual activity, have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults, and be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults” (StopBullying.gov, 2018).

Warning signs, or red flags, must not be overlooked for suicidal prevention. According to the Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech* (2007), multiple red flags were missed in reference to the student, Seung Hui Cho, who shot to death 33 students at Virginia Tech campus including himself on April 16, 2007. He suffered from major depression which “typically interferes with social, occupational, and educational functioning” and connects to “suicidal disturbances and pervasive lack of pleasure” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p. 35).

In reference to the psychological aspect of the Virginia Tech Massacre, Cho’s mental health history consisted of early findings of physical illness and “inordinate” shyness (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p. 33). In 1999, a psychiatrist at the Center of Multicultural Human services diagnosed Cho with major depression. During high school, the depression led to “full blown depression and thoughts of suicide and homicide precipitated by the Columbine shooting [...] and medication was discontinued” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p.39).

Furthermore, there was early detection of “violent writings with threatening behavior” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p.41). Even though Cho was ordered by a judge to be treated for mental health issues, he never received treatment (Craig & Somashekhar, 2007). Cho was given a pre-appointment interview at the counseling center on campus, but no follow-up appointment took place. Plus, the interview records were missing, and “Mr. Cho’s parents were never informed by campus or local officials of his statements or brief commitment to a mental health facility” (Urbina, 2007, para. 3). This indicates that the Cook Counseling Center did not choose to follow up since the policy was for patients to choose whether to make a follow-up appointment. Despite of policy procedures, the center should be accountable for scheduling, reporting, and documenting follow-up visits. The center failed to perform their responsibilities of communicating information to other essential sources along with their own duty of following up with patients. The center should also follow up with the parents. In Cho’s case, his parents explained, ‘We would have taken him home and made him miss a semester to get this looked at...but we just did not know...about any being wrong’ (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p.49). This signifies that there was a lack of communication with the parents which may have assisted in prevention.

Furthermore, in reference to the Virginia Tech incident, even though the campus police knew about “Mr. Cho’s repeated instances of inappropriate behavior and his stay at a mental health facility, that information never reached campus workers who deal with troubled students” (Urbina, 2007, para. 14). The campus Care Team, a resource that works with troubled students, was unaware of certain incidents that may have been warning signs. These incidents include Cho’s detention order for stalking and numerous reports about his behavior in the dorms (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007).

Warning signs listed in the Virginia Tech report panel include isolation, anger, violence/cruelty, expressionless, and suicidal ideation (signs include depression, hopelessness, and “suicidal preparatory behavior”) (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, M-3). Other contributing factors include police contact/history, use of drugs/alcohol, and threat-related mental health history. A suggested recommendation listed in the panel includes “repeated incidents of aberrant, dangerous, or threatening behavior should be reported to the counseling center and parents” (Virginia Tech Review Panel, *Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech*, 2007, p.54). This recommendation will help school counselors and personnel detect possible red flags early that may potentially lead to suicide that may have been caused by depression and mental illness.

### **Bystanders:**

“Kids who witness bullying are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, and miss or skip school” (StopBullying.gov, 2018).

### **BULLYING AND SUICIDE ARE CORRELATED:**

Suicide is an ‘inability to cope with the myriad of life demands, problems, and hassles’ and may be viewed as a “process or series of events, rather than a single event, with different levels of suicidal behaviors” (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996, para.4). As an outcome of the connections between “cognitive rigidity, isolation or loneliness, depression and hopelessness, and negative life events,” suicidal behaviors are likely to occur (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996, para.4). Suicidal young people testify to an elevated amount of stressing events and losses such as the death of a parent (Flynn and Cappaliez, 1993). According to researchers, the various causes of suicide among students include “social problems, hopelessness, inadequate reasons for living, academic problems, and interactive factors” (Furr, Jenkins, McConnell, & Westefeld, 2001, p.97).

“Although kids who are bullied are at risk of suicide, bullying alone is not the cause. Many issues contribute to suicide risk, including depression, problems at home, and trauma history. Additionally, specific groups have an increased risk of suicide, including American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian American, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. This risk can be increased further when these kids are not supported by parents, peers, and schools. Bullying can make an unsupportive situation worse” (StopBullying.gov, 2018).

## COURSE OUTLINE/OVERVIEW

Since bullying has become a common issue in school, character education such as practicing kindness, can motivate students to demonstrate qualities of a kind friend. This may help decrease bullying incidents which may also prevent depression or suicidal thoughts caused by bullying. By implementing kindness through the use of novels such as *Wonder*, students have a chance to empathize with the characters being bullied and those who stand up to bullying. Students will have the chance to reflect on ways on how to treat others the way they want to be treated and the correct way to handle bullying.

Society tends to think of school as a place for solely academics. However, character education should also be implemented, especially kindness. In the real world, how a person treats others is just as important as passing a test. Students can cognitively improve their critical thinking skills by increasing awareness on the importance of kindness along with improving their affective skills such as empathy for others, increased moods (decreased depression/suicidal thoughts), and higher self-awareness through self-reflection writing.

### **Course Flexibility:**

CAN CHARACTER EDUCATION, SUCH AS KINDNESS OR BULLYING, BE TAUGHT THROUGH OTHER NOVELS OR JUST *WONDER*?

Other novels can be used. For example, for my 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, I also mentioned kindness among the animals and humans in the novel, *The One and Only Ivan*, which is based on a true story about the journey of a rescued gorilla.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SUBJECTS OR GRADE LEVELS?

The good news is that kindness education through novels can include not only ELA, but other areas such as Social studies or Science. This course can also be used in different grade levels depending on the book choice. For example, it can be used for Holocaust Education. *The Diary of Anne Frank* can be used for kindness education (how the people who hid the Jews showed kindness although their lives were at risk). As a graduate of the Holocaust Institute at the University of Miami in the summer of 2019, under Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff, I believe it is crucial to implement character education and how important kindness is through historical events as well.

## MATERIALS

**Low-End Estimate:** *Wonder* books: ~ \$180 (\$9 x # students)

**High-End Estimate:** *Wonder* books with audio book: ~\$375

**Materials needed are the following:**

- *Wonder* novel books; I have a class set of 25. I also play the audio version of *Wonder* (audio book). Reading *Wonder* can be used during whole group instruction or Differentiated Instruction (D.I), where I personally have a reading center with flexible seating furniture. The desks in the classroom are arranged in clusters in order to encourage student collaboration.
- Audio book: *Wonder*
- After novel, with parental consent, we watched the *Wonder* movie as a class (rated PG)
- *Wonder* Study Guide Activities: <https://wonderthebook.com/for-teachers>



## SAMPLE LESSON PLANS AT A GLANCE

### SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #1:

**WE DO:** As a class, read Mr. Browne's Precepts in *Wonder* on pp. 311-312

**I DO: Read the following precept:** Mr. Browne's Precepts: 'Kindness don't cost much, but they accomplish much'.- Blaise Pascal"

#### **YOU DO:**

##### **Sample Writing Reflection Activity:**

"Mr. Browne's Precepts: 'Kindness don't cost much, but they accomplish much'- Blaise Pascal"  
Have students write 2-3 sentence explaining what they think this precept means in their reflection journals. After about 5 minutes, have students share their writing and connect it to how they can be kinder to their peers.

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### SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #2:

**WE DO:** As a class, read Postcard Precepts in *Wonder* on pp. 312-313

**I DO:** Write my own precept on the board and explain it. I chose a postcard precept not in the book, "The only way to have a friend is to be one"- Ralph Waldo Emerson Quotes.

**YOU DO:** After, have students write their own postcard precept and share them.

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### SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #3:

**WE DO:** As a class, read Mr. Browne's Precepts in *Wonder* on pp. 311-312

**I DO:** I will pick a precept and display a sample of poster project that represents that precept. In this case, I'd chosen the following precept: "Don't judge a book by its cover."

#### **YOU DO:**

##### **Collaborative Student Poster Project:**

Each group (4 to 5 students each) will pick a precept and write the quote in a large poster. They will provide visuals (photos, drawings, magazine cutouts, etc.) that represent this precept. They will also share with the class how they can apply that precept to their lives. After presenting their projects in front of the class, the posters will be displayed around the classroom as daily reminders of simple acts of kindness. It will also increase their confidence when their work is displayed in the classrooms.



"Don't judge a person book by his/her appearance, its cover"

How they treat others and their personality is what counts!

NOT what clothes or shoes someone wears

NOT Auggie's face

The inside is what counts!



NOT their looks or body

## MR. BROWNE'S PRECEPTS

SEPTEMBER

**"When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind."** —*Dr. Wayne Dyer*

OCTOBER

**"Your deeds are your monuments."**—*Inscription on an Egyptian tomb*

NOVEMBER

**"Have no friends not equal to yourself."** —*Confucious*

DECEMBER

**"Fortune favors the bold."** —*Virgil*

JANUARY

**"No man is an island, entire of itself."** —*John Donne*

FEBRUARY

**"It is better to know some of the questions than al of the answers."** —*James Thurber*

MARCH

**"Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much."** —*Blaise Pascal*

APRIL

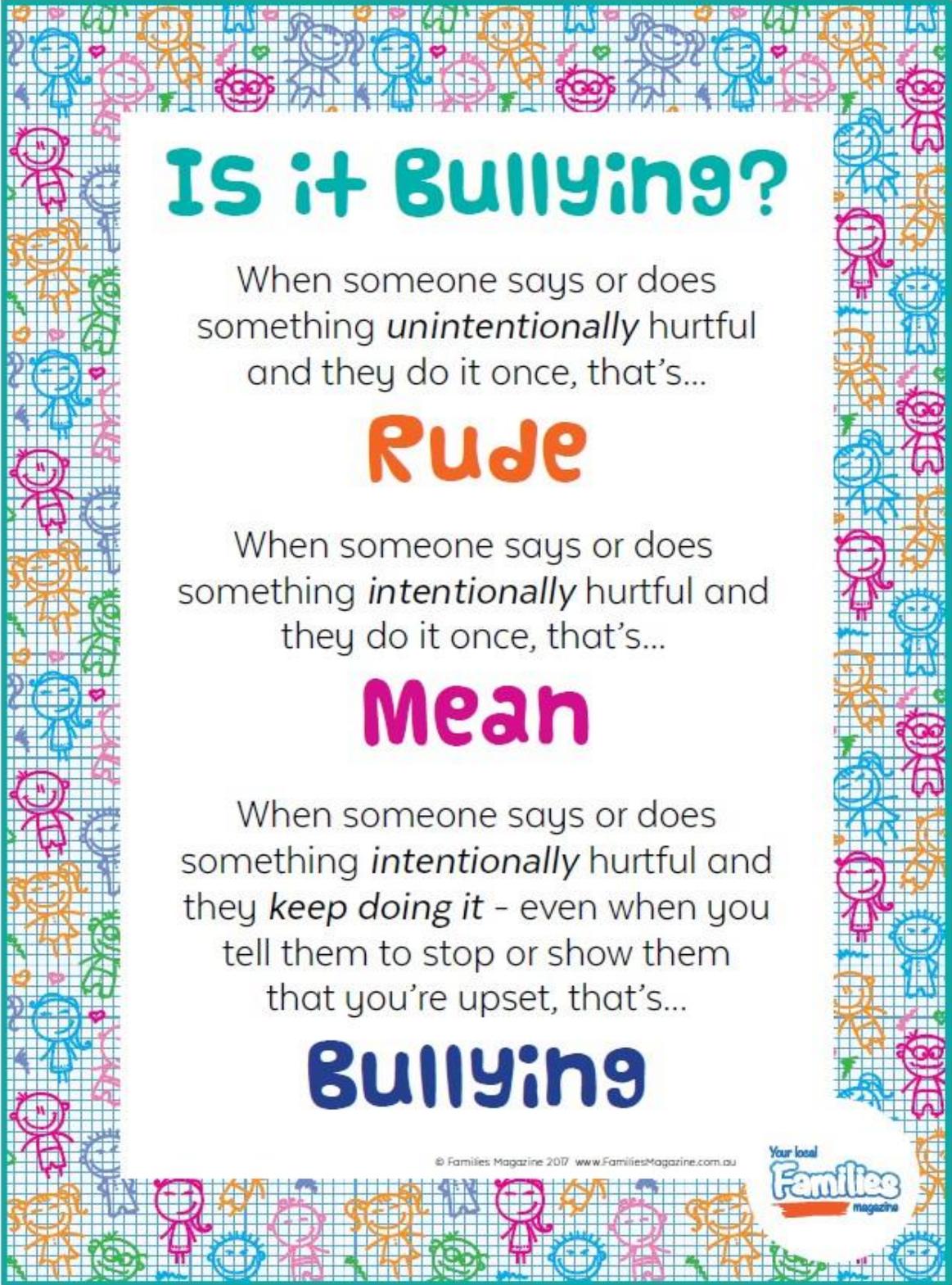
**"What is beautiful is good, and who is good will soon be beautiful."** —*Sappho*

MAY

**"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."** —*John Wesley's Rule*

JUNE

**"Just follow the day and reach for the sun!"** —*The Polyphonic Spree*



# Is it Bullying?

When someone says or does something *unintentionally* hurtful and they do it once, that's...

**Rude**

When someone says or does something *intentionally* hurtful and they do it once, that's...

**Mean**

When someone says or does something *intentionally* hurtful and they *keep doing it* - even when you tell them to stop or show them that you're upset, that's...

**Bullying**

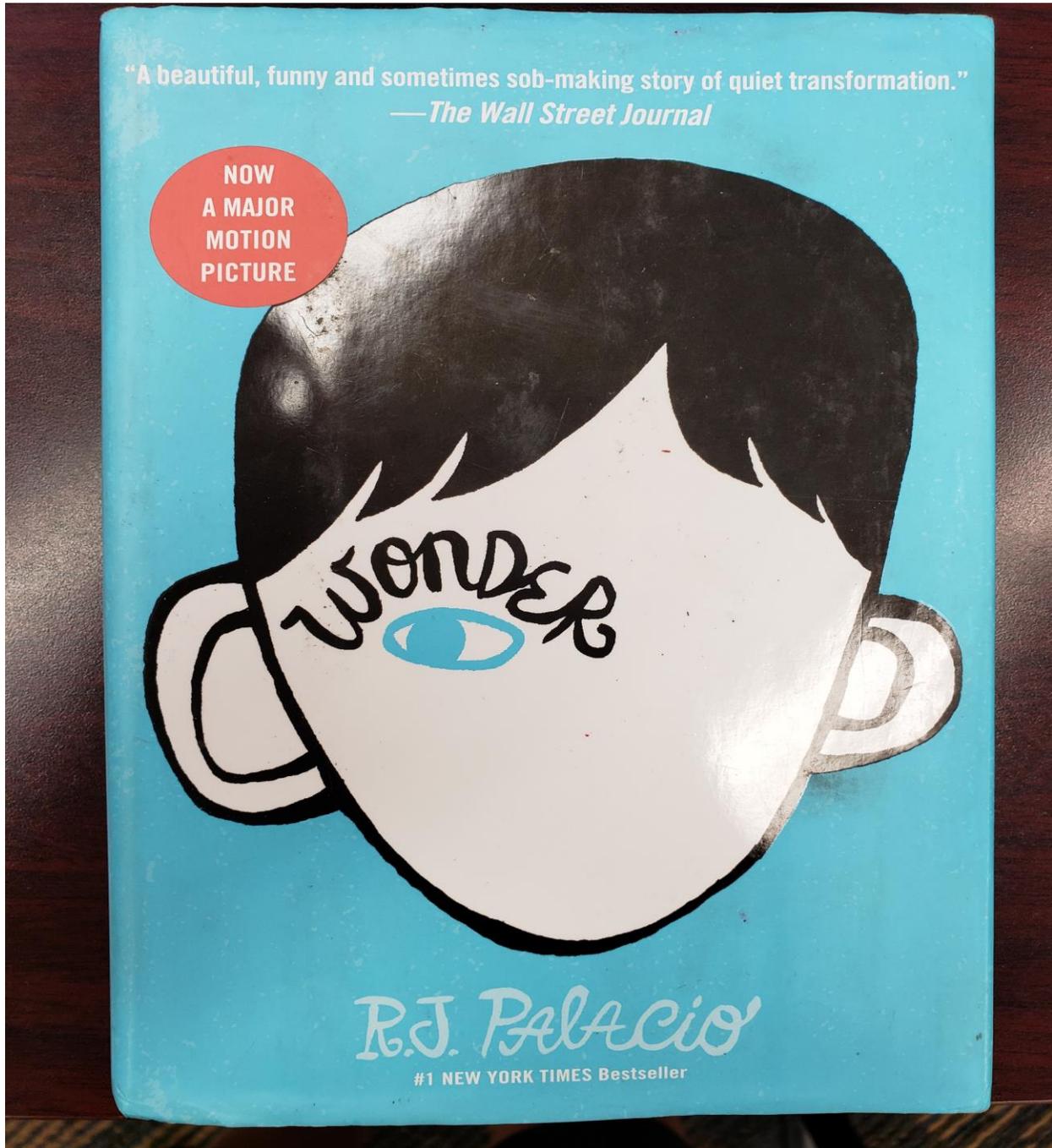
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Your local  
**Families**  
magazine

<https://www.familiesmagazine.com.au/download/is-it-bullying/> (click on link to download poster size for classroom)

## RESOURCES INTERNET SITES

<https://www.familiesmagazine.com.au/download/is-it-bullying/>  
<http://mrwreads.blogspot.com/2013/09/wonder-precepts-quotes.html>  
<https://wonderthebook.com/for-teachers>  
<https://www.stopbullying.gov>



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