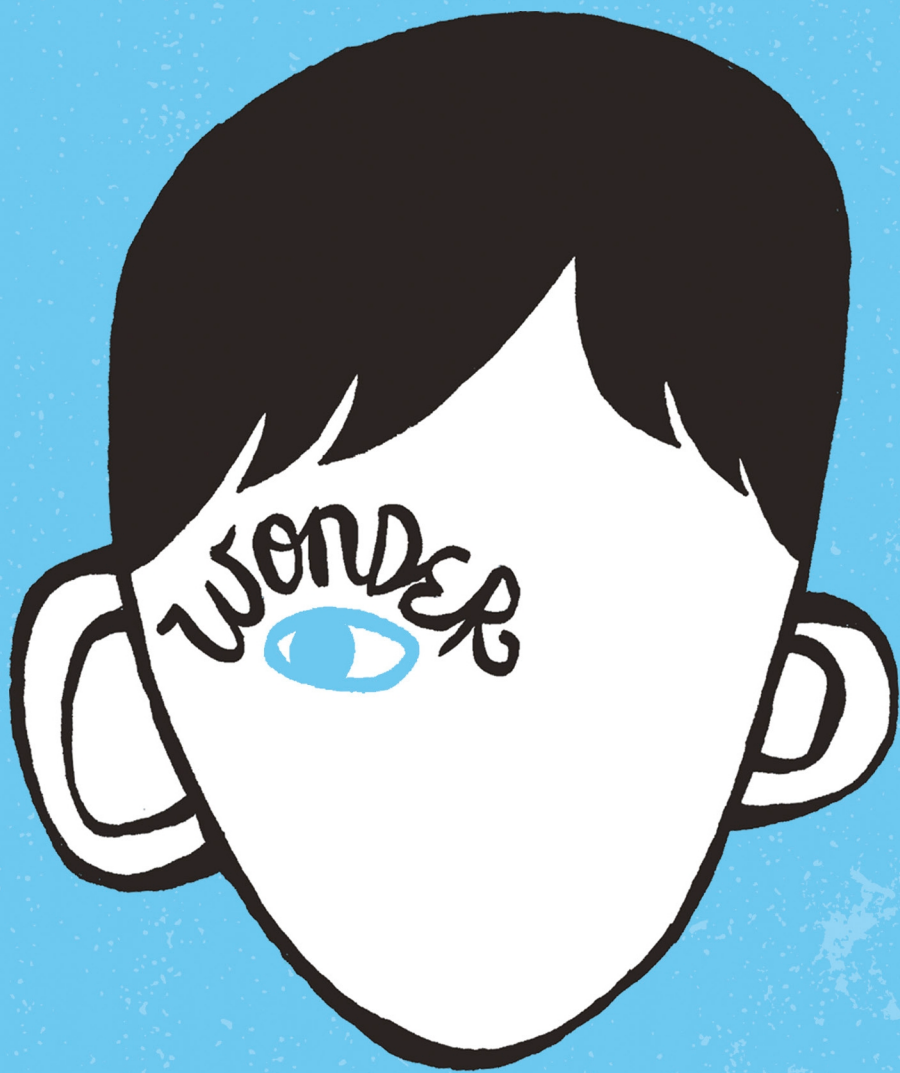


Penguin



Readers



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CHAPTER ONE

Why I didn't go to school

August

I know I'm not an **ordinary*** ten-year-old **kid**. I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I have an Xbox. And I feel ordinary inside. But ordinary children run away from me in the playground. And ordinary people **stare** at me in the street or at the supermarket.

I walk down the street and people look at me, and then they look away.

My older sister, *Via*, doesn't think I'm ordinary. She gets angry if people talk about me or if they stare at me. *She* shouts at them. She loves me, but she doesn't think I'm ordinary.

Mom and Dad don't think I'm ordinary, either. They think that I'm **extraordinary**.

I think I *am* ordinary, but nobody sees it.

Mom is beautiful, and so is *Via*. And Dad is handsome. My name is August. What do I look like? I'm not going to tell you. But it's worse than you think. Here's something not ordinary about me: I have never been to school. People think

I haven't been to school because of the way that I look. But it isn't that. It's because I've been in hospital a lot—twenty-seven times in ten years. I've had a lot of **plastic surgery** and other things. So, my parents didn't send me to school. Mom taught me at home.

My last visit to hospital was eight months ago, and I don't have to go back for two years.

One day this summer, I heard my parents talking about schools.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Do you think you're ready for school?" asked Mom.

"No," I said.

"I can't teach you much more," she said. "You know I am bad at **math**."

"What school?" I asked.

"Beecher Prep. Near our house."

"I really don't want to," I said.

"OK," said Mom. "We'll talk about it later."

I didn't want to go. But I knew Mom was right. And she is really bad at math.

In the summer vacation, we went to the school to see the school **principal**, Mr. Tushman.

“Hi, Mr. Tushman, nice to see you again,” said Mom. “This is my son, August.”

Mr. Tushman **shook** Mom’s hand, and then mine.

“Hi, August,” said Mr. Tushman. He looked at me. Not many people do that. “I’m very happy to meet you. Your mom and dad have told me a lot about you.”



“What have they told you?”

“That you like to read. That you’re a great artist. And that you really like **science**. Is that right?”

“Yes,” I said. “I do.”

“We have some great science teachers here,” said Mr. Tushman. “Now, you need to visit the school.”

I liked Mr. Tushman.

Outside the door of Mr. Tushman’s office I could hear children’s voices. Suddenly, I was frightened again. I’m OK with little children. Sometimes they say **cruel** things, but they don’t want to hurt you. But older children are more difficult. So, I have long hair because then I can’t see things if I don’t want to.

“August,” said Mr. Tushman, “I want you to meet some other **fifth-grade** students.”

“I don’t want to meet any kids,” I said to Mom.

Mr. Tushman looked into my eyes. “This is going to be OK, August,” he said. “These are nice people.” And he opened the door.

“Come in, children,” he said, and two boys and a girl walked in. They didn’t look at me or Mom. They stood near the door and looked at Mr. Tushman. They were frightened, too.

“Thank you for coming,” said Mr. Tushman.

“I want you to meet August, a new student. He’ll be in your **homeroom**. So, this is August. August, this is Jack.”

Jack looked at me and put out his hand. I shook it. He smiled, said “Hey,” and looked down quickly.

“This is Julian,” said Mr. Tushman.

Julian did the same as Jack. He shook my hand, smiled and looked down.

“And Charlotte.”

Charlotte had really blonde hair. She didn’t shake my hand, but she waved and smiled.

“Hi, August. Nice to meet you,” she said.



“Hi,” I said, looking down. She had green shoes.

“OK,” said Mr. Tushman. “Maybe you can show the school to August. Take him to your homeroom, and then show him the science room and the computer room. Don’t forget the **cafeteria**.”

The three children went out the room. I had to follow them.

Jack, Julian, Charlotte, and I walked across a hall and up some stairs. Nobody said a word. We stopped at a door with the number 301 on it.

“This is our homeroom,” said Julian. “We have Ms. Petosa. She’s OK.”

Julian walked down the hall. He stopped at another door and opened it a little. “This is the science room.” He stood in front of the door, and he didn’t look at me. “The best science teacher is Mr. Haller.”

“Open the door more so August can see inside,” said Jack, and he pushed the door some more. Julian moved out the way quickly because he didn’t want to touch me. But he pointed to some of the things in the room. “That big thing is the **board**. Those are desks, and those are chairs.”