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Every minute of every day, we make choices in how we treat those we encounter in life. We can choose to be kind or we can choose to be cruel. *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio poignantly shows readers of all ages how our own words and actions are capable of building up or breaking down the human spirit. Below are some talking points to use with *Wonder* to generate thoughtful discussions with youth about bullying and how we can help to prevent it.



Not all hurtful behavior is bullying. As with Jack and his little brother Jamie in this story, we’ve all had experiences when our words or actions have been unintentionally hurtful toward others.

Example 1: Jack recalls when Veronica, the babysitter, told them how mad and embarrassed she was when he and Jamie responded in hurtful ways when they first saw Auggie’s face:

“But we didn’t mean it,” Jack told Veronica.

“Jack, sometimes you don’t have to mean to hurt someone to hurt someone. You understand?” (p. 137)

Example 2: Auggie shares his thoughts on how kids react to him when they see his face:

What’s cool about really little kids is that they don’t say stuff to try to hurt your feelings. But they don’t actually know what they’re saying. Big kids, though: they know what they’re saying. (p. 20-21)



Bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Kids who bully say or do something intentionally hurtful to others and they keep doing it, with no sense of regret or remorse—even when targets of bullying show or express their hurt or tell the aggressors to stop. Bullying is a conscious choice to be cruel. Children who bully lack empathy—the ability to know what it feels like to be in someone else’s shoes and to have compassion for others’ pain and suffering.

Example 1: Julian physically bullies Auggie by deliberately tripping him in the stairway (p.30)

Example 2: Julian relationally bullies Auggie by encouraging other students to treat August as if he has the Plague (p.61, p.71, p.120)

Example 3: Julian verbally bullies August by leaving hurtful notes (i.e., “Freak!” “Get out of our school, orc!”) in Auggie’s locker (p. 208)



Some forms of bullying often go below the radar of parents, teachers and even some friends. Intentional exclusion, gossiping, the silent treatment, teasing, and the spreading of rumors are often dismissed as normal rites of passage, but research shows these forms of relational aggression (the use of relationships to intentionally manipulate and hurt others) are as harmful as physical bullying—with long-term negative effects.

Example 1: “Okay, so is he the kind of kid who’s one way in front of grown-ups and another way in front of kids?” (Auggie’s mom, p.34))

Example 2: Summer finds out about the Plague when she plays Four Square with Auggie (p.120)



No child is born a bully. Bullying is a learned behavior. Kids can learn it at home, at school, or in their neighborhood. We are all role models to others in some way in our lives. We can be good models--as in the case of Auggie’s parents, Mr. Tushman , and Summer--or we can be poor role models, like Julian’s mother:

Example 1: “His mom was the only person who didn’t RSVP at all. I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” (p. 67)

Example 2: “I heard that Julian’s mom actually Photoshopped August’s face out of the class picture when she got it. She gave a copy to a couple of the other moms.” (pp. 158-159)



Bullying can be addressed with the help and support of a caring community. Addressing and preventing peer aggression requires a community effort—one that involves the participation of educators, administrators, peers, and parents. Who are some primary caring members in Auggie’s community? There are many passages throughout the book that demonstrate the below characters’ support of Auggie. Have the kids cite some specific examples, like Auggie’s parents, sister Via, Mr. Tushman, Summer, Jack, Justin, and Miranda.

It’s also important to get kids to pay attention to those characters in *Wonder* who initially weren’t empathetic towards Auggie and later had a change of heart.

Example 1: Maya giving August an “Auggie Doll” (p. 210)

Example 2: Amos, Miles and Henry coming to Auggie’s and Jack’s rescue at the Nature Park (p. 265-272)



Bystanders—those who witness bullying—have more power than they think to stop it. Experts have found that some of the most helpful things bystanders can do to support targets of bullying are:

1. Listen to the target of bullying and take his/her problems seriously;
2. Comfort the target by acknowledging that what had happened is absolutely not okay and that no one deserves to be bullied;
3. Include the target in their group, game, or activity—there is safety in numbers;
4. Tell the bullying kid to stop—only if he/she feels safe; and
5. Find an adult ally—someone who will protect the confidentiality of the bystander and take action to protect the child who is being bullied and get help for the child doing the bullying to change their bullying behavior.

Example 1: Summer sees that August is alone at the lunch table in the cafeteria and chooses to sit with him. She also lets him know that they are not an exclusive pair: “But if someone doesn’t have a summer name and wants to sit with us, we’ll still let them if they’re nice, okay?” (p.53)

Example 2: Amos, Miles and Henry come to the rescue when Eddie is being hurtful to Auggie at the Nature Park (pp. 265-272)



Kindness does matter. Rather than focusing on our differences—whether subtle or obvious—we need to instead focus on what we do have in common with each other. The bottom line here is that we have more similarities with one another than differences. We are all capable of doing better and being better in how we treat one another. It’s simply a matter of choice as to how we proceed. **Choose kind.**

Example 1: “...we should be remembered for the things we do. They are more important than what we say or what we look like.” —Auggie’s comments about what the precept, *Your deeds are your monuments* means to him (p. 65)

Example 2: “We carry with us, as human beings, not just the capacity to be kind, but the very choice of kindness.”—Mr. Tushman’s speech at fifth grade graduation (p. 300)

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