

wonder

A WHOLE-SCHOOL READ PLANNING GUIDE

Why choose *Wonder* for a whole-school or whole-grade read? In short, because the book is a rare find: It is accessible to all sorts of readers and pulls in themes that are relatable to almost everyone. It is written for and about middle school students, yet it has captivated millions beyond that demographic. And it has been adapted as a major motion picture, which many students and parents will see and discuss together.

What is *Wonder* about? It's about appearances and being judged. It's about the need to belong and the fear of difference. It's one boy's story, yet it's told from many points of view. The world we live in is like that: Events are experienced not just from one point of view but from many. That's what makes this book, the characters in it, and the conversation it generates so powerful.

PLANNING GUIDE SECTIONS

- PLANNING YOUR WHOLE-SCHOOL READ
- ROLLING OUT YOUR WHOLE-SCHOOL READ
- PRECEPTS



FACING
HISTORY
AND
OURSELVES

DEFINE YOUR GOALS

- ▶ What are the goals of your read?
- ▶ Given your goals, pick one or more essential questions (or write your own) to focus on while reading *Wonder*:
 - What does it mean to be a friend?
 - How do we as a school community react to difference? How might we expand our definitions of normal or ordinary?
 - How can we build understanding and empathy for those who are different from us?
 - What are some mantras or precepts that we want to adopt for our school community?

STRUCTURE YOUR READ TO FIT YOUR SCHOOL

- ▶ **Given your goals, who do you want to read *Wonder* together?** Some schools focus on an individual grade level, some invite *all* students, and some want their entire school community to read it together, including parents, staff, and students.
 - How many books will you need?
 - Where will you borrow or purchase these copies?
 - How much will it cost?
- ▶ **When will students read the book?** Some schools have an obvious time—advisory, reading block—and others get creative to find the focused time for reading. Some schools change their schedule for the period of the whole-school read and ask everyone to stop and read at a designated time each week. If students are asked to read at home, be sure to give them a calendar so that they know when they should be ready to discuss the book as a community.

- How many weeks do you have for the read?
- When is your ideal time to start?

- ▶ **Will you bring the whole school together during the course of this read?** If so, when and where? Some schools have found it helpful to have one or more assemblies, perhaps with local speakers on the topic or with student leaders sharing their thoughts. This can deepen the connection between the book and the reading goals for your community.

PREPARE FOR DISCUSSION

- ▶ **When will the community discuss the book?** Similar to the reading schedule, schools will need to designate when and how often the community gathers to read the book. This can be done during class time, advisory blocks, or special community meetings. Be creative!
- ▶ **Will the discussions be adult-led, faculty-led, or student-led?** Some schools have enlisted every adult on campus to be part of the read, each leading a small group. Others have supported a student leadership club/class to step into the role of discussion leaders.
 - When will discussion leaders get and read the book?
 - Do discussion leaders understand the goals of the read?
 - Will discussions/activities be differentiated by grade level? If so, who will help in crafting this differentiation for your school?
 - How will discussion leaders be prepared for the reading activities and prompts?

PRE-READ KICK-OFF

Before you begin your whole-school read, consider organizing kick-off events *with faculty* (to create buy-in and shared goals for learning and community building) *and students* (to get students excited to read and to create momentum and a sense of coherence).

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Before having the students begin the book, do some pre-reading investigations.

- 1 Have them look at the cover of *Wonder*. What do they see? What questions do they have? What do they think the picture represents? Ask them to predict what this cover is saying about the story they are about to read.
- 2 Read and discuss the first chapter together as a school or a class. Discussion questions or journal prompts include:
 - Auggie describes himself as *ordinary*. Do you agree? What makes someone ordinary?
 - What is ordinary about you? What is *not* ordinary?
 - Why does Auggie want to be ordinary? What about you? In what circumstances do you want to just fit in with those around you?
 - Who or what determines the definition of “ordinary”? Can something be ordinary in one place or time and not ordinary in another? What are some examples?

DURING-READING ACTIVITIES

Over the course of the whole-school/grade read, periodically schedule check-ins with students to find out how it’s going. The goal is to keep students on track and guide discussions toward the themes and essential questions you are focusing on.

1 Explore the language of human behavior.

Once students have begun reading the book, explore vocabulary related to human behavior and choices. A great way to do this is to develop working definitions of the terms *upstander*, *bystander*, *perpetrator*, and *victim*, either as a class or in pairs. Once you have working definitions, engage in conversation to explore the definitions in more depth.

The definitions for each of these terms can be tricky. For example, does a person have to be aware of or witness an injustice to be a bystander? Is it possible to play multiple roles? Another option is to use the reading “[What Difference Can a Word Make?](#)”, which follows the efforts of two high school students to get the word *upstander* added to the dictionary. As an extension, you might also want to share the concept of [universe of obligation](#).

2 Discuss the story. Check-in discussion questions include:

- What choices did individuals make in the chapters you just read? What alternative choices could have been made? Given what you know about the individuals and situation, why do you think those choices were made?
- As more narrators are introduced, what new information do you learn about the situations Auggie faced? How do the new perspectives help us understand the situation, Auggie, and the new narrators' choices?
- Which character do you most relate to? Why? How would you characterize that character's choices?
- Based on their choices, how are different characters upstanders? How are some bystanders? Which characters are both? Do they play other roles?
- Which character do you think made the greatest positive difference in Auggie's experience during his first year at school? What did the character do to make that difference?
- When did different characters change their behavior to transition from being a bystander or perpetrator to being an upstander? What do you think led to those changes?
- Each month, Mr. Browne, the English teacher, highlights a precept. He teaches the class that precepts are "rules about really important things." What are some rules about "really important things" in your life?
- In October, Mr. Browne shares the precept, "Your deeds are your monuments." What do you think that precept means?
- What are you learning from the book about what it means to be a friend? When is it challenging? How do friends repair their relationship when things go wrong?

3 Hold a culminating discussion. Once students have finished reading the book, return to the essential question(s) you chose as a focus for your reading. Other culminating discussion questions include:

- In the book, Principal Tushman gives Auggie an award for "lifting others' hearts." He quotes Beecher, who wrote, "Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right using of strength . . . He is the greatest whose strength carries up the most hearts . . ." Do you agree with this quote? What does it mean to you?
- How does the novel help you add to or expand your definition of an upstander? What are some examples of different ways in which characters have stood up for others?
- How is *upstanding* different from friendship? How is it similar?
- Mr. Browne, the English teacher, highlights precepts as a way to think about who we want to be or become in this world. Which of his noted precepts most resonate with you?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Finish your whole-school read with a celebration and an activity to create a lasting visual to honor the community effort.

- 1 Organize a school-wide field trip to see the film at a local movie theater, or screen the film in the auditorium. Afterward, discuss how the film compares to the book.
- 2 Create precepts for your school. Using the template on the next page, assign groups of students to create new precepts to share at the final celebration.
- 3 Hold a final celebration to mark the end of the whole-school read. Share the new precepts and post them around the school.

BEYOND THE BOOK

Continue your school's exploration of identity, empathy, and multiple perspectives throughout the school year. Additional Facing History resources include:

- TEACHING STRATEGIES: [Identity Charts](#), [Iceberg Diagrams](#)
- READINGS: [The Danger of a Single Story](#), [Fear](#)
- LESSON: [The Complexity of Identity](#)
- UNIT: [My Part of the Story](#)

CHECK OUT our professional development calendar to find out about upcoming in-person and online events.



facinghistory.org

wonder

PRECEPTS = RULES ABOUT
REALLY IMPORTANT THINGS

MY PRECEPT IS:

MY RATIONALE IS:



FACING
HISTORY
AND
OURSELVES

People make choices. Choices make history.