

Wonder



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF R. J. PALACIO

Palacio was born in Queens, New York City to Colombian immigrant parents. Palacio is her mother's maiden name. She earned a degree in illustration from Parsons School of Design, and after traveling in Europe, returned to New York City. Her first successes came with illustrations published in *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times Book Review*. Eventually, Palacio became an art director for book publishing houses, and has designed covers for authors such as Salmon Rushdie and Sue Grafton. She also illustrated some of her own children's books and designed a baby toy during this time. *Wonder* is loosely based on an experience that Palacio had while out with her two young sons. They saw a young girl with a craniofacial anomaly similar to August's, and Palacio's sons both reacted poorly. This inspired Palacio to explore what life might be like for individuals like that young girl. Palacio has written several books about the characters from *Wonder* for kids of all ages, and also began the Choose Kind movement, which seeks primarily to promote kindness in schools. Palacio lives in Brooklyn with her husband, two sons, and two dogs.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

August has a condition known as Treacher Collins Syndrome, which affects the development of bones and other facial tissues. It's rare for children to be born with it, and in about 60% of cases, there's no family history or known cause. Despite the physical differences and the associated health risks (some people have complications like breathing difficulties or speech problems), TCS doesn't affect intelligence at all and doesn't alter life expectancy. Prior to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was initially passed under a different name in 1975, most students like August were often unable to receive public education. IDEA required that public schools serve all students and created protocols for attending to the needs of differently-abled children in a general classroom setting. Today, many public schools are still not considered to be full-fledged "inclusion" schools. Differently-abled children often spend time in special education classrooms, and there's disagreement as to whether full inclusion, partial inclusion, or separate schools altogether are better for students, differently-abled and "mainstream" kids alike. This debate is what Julian's mom refers to when she insists that Beecher Prep isn't an inclusion school.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Wonder makes a number of references to other works of literature throughout, both in the story itself and in some of the paratextual elements. August mentions Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* on several occasions, while Via spends the fall reading Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Novels such as Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* are on the fifth-grade English syllabus, and Jack's narration begins with a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Other books that share thematic similarities with *Wonder* in terms of promoting kindness, acceptance, and tolerance of difference include *Freak the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick, Sharon Draper's *Out of My Mind*, and Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Wonder*
- **When Written:** 2011
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** Upper Manhattan, late 2010s
- **Climax:** When Amos, Miles, and Henry stand up for Auggie during the class camping trip
- **Antagonist:** Julian Albans
- **Point of View:** First person, narrated by August, Via, Jack, Miranda, and Justin

EXTRA CREDIT

Cher. In the 1984 movie *Mask*, the singer Cher played the role of a mother of a child with a craniofacial condition similar to August's. Since then, she's remained active in the Children's Craniofacial Association and is currently their national spokesperson. She regularly calls children to check in before and after surgeries and often invites them to her concerts.

Raising Awareness. The Children's Craniofacial Association has embraced *Wonder* as an essential part of its mission to spread awareness for children with craniofacial anomalies. They facilitate a program that matches classrooms that read *Wonder* with a "buddy" with a craniofacial anomaly so that students can meet "real-life Auggies" and ask them questions.



PLOT SUMMARY

August introduces himself to the reader. He's ten years old, and though he feels normal, he wishes he had a "normal" face. He

declines to describe what his face looks like, insisting that it's probably worse than whatever the reader is imagining. August has been homeschooled his entire life because he's had so many surgeries. However, one day in the spring, August overhears Mom and Dad talking about sending August to middle school. August is upset and doesn't want to go, but he agrees to try. When August and Mom tour Beecher Prep, the principal, Mr. Tushman, introduces August to three students. August is terrified—he hates meeting kids his own age because they often are purposefully mean. Mr. Tushman introduces August to Jack, Charlotte, and Julian and then sends the kids to look around the school. Charlotte and Jack are nice, but Julian is rude and tries to make August feel bad and unwelcome. After August and Mom get home, August tells her about some of Julian's mean comments. She's horrified and doesn't want August to go to school, but August and Dad insist that he should still try.

Mom, Dad, and August's older sister, Via, walk him to school on his first day. Jack sits next to August in all their classes. Julian is still mean to August, though the teachers don't notice. At lunch, August sits alone until a girl named Summer sits down with him. After school, August tells Mom that his day was okay, which surprises her. August struggles in school all through September, especially when he realizes that kids are scared to touch him. However, he and Jack become good friends.

For Halloween, August decides to go as Boba Fett from *Star Wars*. Halloween is his favorite holiday because he gets to wear a mask and feel like a normal kid. On Halloween morning, however, he decides to wear last year's Bleeding Scream costume to school instead. August feels amazing in his costume until he gets to homeroom. There, he overhears Jack telling Julian that if he were August, he'd kill himself. Since August's classmates are still anticipating him arriving as Boba Fett, no one knows that he is the one in the Bleeding Scream costume, listening to every word of the mean conversation. August runs out crying, goes home, and skips school the next day.

Via takes over the narration and explains that in her family, August is the center of the universe. She doesn't ask for much from her parents because she knows that August needs the attention more. Via has always been protective of August, but she didn't realize how much she wants to be normal until a month-long visit with Grans a few years ago. On that visit, Grans told Via that she was looking out for her, since August has enough angels looking out for him. Grans died two months later.

Via says that she loved middle school because she had her two best friends, Miranda and Ella, and not many kids knew about August. Miranda was always nice to August and even bought him his space helmet that he wore constantly until it disappeared. Now that the girls are in high school, Miranda is very different. She's changed her hair and clothes and treats Via like she's not a real friend. On the first day of school, Via is

so hurt she takes the subway home alone rather than let Miranda's mom drive her. Via eventually makes some new friends and develops a crush on a boy named Justin.

Grans died the night before Halloween, so Via feels very sad on Halloween morning. Dad is in a bad mood and makes Via cry, so Mom suggests that she and Via stay home. However, their morning at home has barely begun when Mom gets a call from Beecher Prep that August is sick and needs to be picked up. Via is shocked later when August insists he's too sick to go trick-or-treating. Finally, he confides in her about what Jack said. Over the weekend, Via convinces August that he needs to go back to school.

Summer begins to narrate and says that she sat with August on the first day of school because she felt bad for him, but she discovered quickly that he's a lot of fun. He's still interested in playing games like foursquare instead of "hanging out" and talking about crushes. After a few weeks, a classmate tells Summer about a game the class is playing called **the Plague**, which states that kids have thirty seconds to wash their hands after touching August or they catch the Plague. This is why nobody will play with August and Summer.

Savanna, the most popular girl in school, invites Summer to a Halloween party. At the party, Summer understands immediately that Savanna invited her to intimidate her and try to get her to stop spending time with August, so Summer calls her mom to come pick her up. At lunch on Monday, August tells her what Jack said on Halloween but swears her to secrecy. Later that month, Jack approaches Summer and asks why August is ignoring him. Summer just tells him, "Bleeding Scream."

Jack jumps back to the month of August when his mom got a call from Mr. Tushman, asking if Jack would be willing to show August around the school. Jack refused, which made Jack's mom very mad. Jack recalls the first time he saw August—he jumped and made a surprised noise. His babysitter, Veronica, whisked Jack and his little brother, Jamie, away before they could make the situation worse. She told Jack that he doesn't need to be actively mean to hurt someone's feelings. When he hears Jamie being mean to August, Jack thinks about what Veronica told him and changes his mind about meeting August. After a few weeks of school, Jack realizes that August is actually really cool: he lets Jack cheat off his homework, and he's funny. He's perplexed when August starts icing him out after Halloween, and has no idea what Summer's "Bleeding Scream" comment means. Right before winter break, however, Jack realizes what she meant. He feels sick that August heard him saying such mean things, when he only wanted to impress Julian.

When Julian taunts Jack a little later, Jack punches him. Mr. Tushman suspends Jack. Julian's mom writes Mr. Tushman and asks that August not be allowed at school, as she thinks it's too much to ask to ask "regular" kids to be nice to him. Mr. Tushman

refutes this. Jack also apologizes to August over text, and August forgives him. They return to school in January to discover that none of their classmates will talk to them. Charlotte tells Jack that Julian has begun a war, which mostly entails ignoring Jack until he decides to drop August.

The narration switches to Justin, Via's boyfriend. He meets August the first time he goes over to Via's house, and he tries not to be shocked by August. Mr. Davenport, the theater director, casts Justin in the leading role of **Our Town**, the spring show, and Miranda gets the female lead. One afternoon, Mom asks Justin to walk Jack to the bus. Justin thinks that Jack is too small to be running around by himself, and vows to be more protective when he has kids one day. He watches Julian, Miles, and Henry bully Jack, and after Jack gets on the bus, he tells them to leave Jack alone. The next day at rehearsal, Justin learns that Miranda and Via used to be good friends. He's shocked, but when he brings it up to Via, she cries and admits that she hasn't told her parents about the play because she doesn't want them to bring August. She loves being at a school where nobody knows about him.

August resumes his narration in February, which is the worst month for the war. Julian leaves mean notes in August's locker, but August refuses to report them. By March, kids start to lose interest, and former bullies like Amos even start standing up to Julian. August gets hearing aids about this time, something that horrified him until he realized how well he could hear with them. After spring break, Mom and Via fight when Mom finds out that Via didn't tell her about [Our Town](#). At dinner, when August asks if they'll all go, Mom tries to tell him it won't be interesting. August realizes they're trying to exclude him and yells at her to not treat him like a baby. He runs to his room and hides until Via bursts in, yelling that he needs to come say goodbye to their dog, Daisy—she's very sick and has to be put down. That night, August watches his family members grieve and then puts himself to bed instead of waiting to be tucked in. A few days later, August sits with Mom and Dad in the audience to see [Our Town](#). They're all shocked when Via, who was cast as an understudy, performs as the female lead instead of Miranda.

Miranda explains that at summer camp, she started talking about August as though he was her own brother, which boosted her popularity immensely. She also got a makeover at camp and looked like a popular girl by the time school started. She and Via stopped being friends, but she signed up for theater to be in the same class with her. On the play's opening night, Miranda's parents don't show up, so she feigns illness and allows Via to perform since her whole family is there. Afterwards, she finds August and his parents, and they invite her to dinner. She feels happier than she has in a long time.

August explains that all the fifth graders go on a nature retreat for two nights at the end of the year. August loves the first two days of the nature retreat, especially because Julian decided not to attend. On the final night, Beecher Prep joins two other

schools at an outdoor movie. At one point, Jack and August run into a group of bullies from another school. The bullies taunt August and don't even seem deterred when Amos, Miles, and Henry try to stand up for August and Jack. After a brief but traumatizing fight, Amos, Miles, and Henry lead August and Jack far away to escape. August realizes that he lost his hearing aids in the tussle and cries, but the boys comfort him kindly and then walk him back to the movie.

The next day, after Mom picks August up, he asks her if he'll always have to deal with jerks. She insists that there are more good people than bad in the world. A few days before school gets out, Mr. Tushman calls August to the office to explain that he found the bullies, though August refuses to press charges.

The day of the fifth grade graduation ceremony. On the way there, Dad admits that he threw away August's space helmet. August is livid, but soon forgives his dad. At the ceremony, Mr. Tushman gives a speech about the importance of kindness and then presents awards. August receives the Henry Ward Beecher Medal for bravery and kindness and revels in his standing ovation. Afterwards, he lets his parents and his friends' parents take photos of him and all his classmates. On the walk home, August thanks Mom for making him go to school.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

August Pullman – August Pullman is the ten-year-old protagonist of the novel. He has rare craniofacial anomalies known as mandibulofacial dystosis and something similar to Treacher Collins Syndrome, which primarily affect the way that his face looks. His older sister, Via, later explains that August has no ears, cheekbones, or chin. He underwent more than twenty surgeries in his first few years of life, which is one of the major reasons that Mom and Dad decided to homeschool him. Throughout the novel, August fluctuates between wanting his parents to coddle him and wanting to be treated as an adult. August also recognizes that he feels normal on the inside, but nobody else is willing to look at him that way. When August attends school for the first time as a fifth grader, the experience is difficult, mostly because the class bully, Julian, turns the entire rest of the class against August. Julian invents a game called **the Plague**, in which kids become "infected" if they touch August. This makes school an isolating experience for August, though he makes friends with a boy named Jack and a girl named Summer. Although August gets in a big fight with Jack (August overhears Jack talking bad about him to Julian in an effort to fit in), the pair eventually salvage their friendship. August even gains more friends as Julian's popularity wanes, and on a class trip, Julian's sidekicks (Amos, Miles, and Henry) come to August's aid when a bully from another school tries to

beat him up. By the end of the novel, August has cut his hair short (thereby allowing his face to be visible) and even receives an award at graduation for courage and kindness. He revels in the standing ovation he receives and decides that everyone needs a standing ovation once in their lives.

Via Pullman – Via, whose real name is Olivia, is August's fifteen-year-old sister. When August starts school at Beecher Prep, Via starts high school at Faulkner High School, a selective and academically challenging private school. When school begins, she struggles to discover that her best friends, Miranda and Ella, have suddenly become popular, while she hasn't changed at all. Via often picks fights with Mom out of her frustration with what's going on in her social life. However, Via is also very private about things with her family. She learned at a very young age to not ask for help or attention from her parents so as to not distract from August, though she believes that August is old enough to not be coddled quite so much. Though Via and August bicker a lot, she is also one of August's biggest guiding forces in navigating the difficulties of middle school. Via begins dating a boy named Justin, and they both sign up for the theater elective together. Via initially doesn't tell her parents about the spring play, **Our Town**, because she loves being at a school where nobody knows that August is her brother, and she knows that if her parents come to the play, August will come too. This culminates in a huge fight on the night that their dog Daisy dies, after which Via does agree to purchase tickets for her family. On the night of the play, Miranda feigns illness and allows Via to perform the female lead, which allows Via to feel celebrated and appreciated by her family in a way the novel suggests she hadn't felt before. Via and Miranda make up after this and after the play, Via achieves a greater sense of acceptance of her family situation and feels more comfortable in her social standing at school.

Mom – Mom (Isabel Pullman) is Via and August's mom. Before she began homeschooling August she was a children's book illustrator, though August insists that her "boy" illustrations aren't that great. She's also not very good at teaching August about fractions. She's a worrier, which is balanced out some by Dad's joking nature. Though she spearheads August starting school, she becomes very worried after she and August attend the meeting with Mr. Tushman, Charlotte, Jack, and Julian. The mean things that Julian says to August make Mom rethink the entire thing. For the rest of the novel, she's unwilling to fully trust that August is actually enjoying school. She's the main recipient of August's angst, primarily because she's so protective and is home with him more than Dad is. Because Mom focuses much of her attention on August, Via feels as though Mom neglects her. Despite this, Mom and Via do share a special bond because they were both very close to Mom's mom, Grans. They both struggle around Halloween, which is when Grans died. When Mom encounters kids or adults who are mean or rude to August, she reacts quietly, calmly, and

often chooses to simply remove herself and August from the situation. Even as Mom tries to protect and shelter August, she also recognizes that she needs to allow him to grow up. She does things like buy him a plain duffel bag so he won't get teased for his *Star Wars* one on the class camping trip, and by the end of the novel, she's willing to allow August to lead conversations about things that happen to him and tries hard not to push him for information.

Dad – Dad (Nate Pullman) is August and Via's dad. He met Mom when they were students at Brown University, and they've been together ever since. August thinks his dad is a jokester and a comedian. Dad is initially unwilling to send August to school while Mom wants August to go, though the two flip sides after Mom attends the meeting with August and Mr. Tushman. Once August makes his decision, Dad does his best to impress upon him that he needs to speak up if he needs help, and that he'll support August to the best of his abilities. Dad seems slightly more easy-going than Mom, which helps Via in particular feel close to him. She's more willing to talk to Dad about the problems she has with her friends at school, which is mostly because Dad makes more of an effort to keep his smaller promises to Via. Right before August's graduation ceremony, Dad admits that he actually threw away August's beloved space helmet several years prior. He begs August to understand that he loves August's face and couldn't bear to see him continually covering it up. August forgives Dad and jokingly suggests that he'll use the information to blackmail Dad later, which Dad takes as a sign of August's growing maturity. To this end, Dad is very willing throughout the novel to treat August in a more adult way when August asks for it, as when August asks Dad not to call him "Auggie Doggie."

Mr. Tushman – Mr. Tushman is the principal of Beecher Prep, a private middle school in upper Manhattan. He's an older man with gray hair, and August describes him as perfectly normal-looking. Mr. Tushman also has a sense of humor about his name, which he uses to poke fun at himself and form relationships with his students. He's clearly able to see the nuance of his job, as when he bends the rules to allow Jack to not be expelled for punching Julian. With this, Mr. Tushman shows that he recognizes that it's important to encourage kids like Jack to stand up for their friends whenever possible. Mr. Tushman also stands up to Julian's mom when she raises concerns that August shouldn't be allowed at Beecher Prep. Though August observes that Mr. Tushman has a very minimal presence for much of the school year, Mr. Tushman admits at the end of the year that he was aware of Julian's bullying and could've done something about it had August confided in him. Mr. Tushman's final address at the graduation ceremony for the fifth and sixth graders is built around the idea that kindness is a choice, and it's not always an easy one to make. He encourages his students to choose kind whenever they can and to always be "kinder than necessary."

Jack Will – Jack is August’s best friend for much of the novel. He is one of the three kids that Mr. Tushman asks to lead August on a tour of Beecher Prep before the school year starts. Jack initially refuses, though he changes his mind when he observes his younger brother, Jamie, speaking cruelly about August. At the meeting, Jack stands up to Julian when Julian tries to intimidate August, and he also offers August some advice as to how to survive at school. Though Jack initially is only friends with August because Mr. Tushman asked him to be, he soon discovers that August is smart, funny, and very nice. Jack is caught between being popular and being unpopular solely because he's friends with August, which poses a number of problems for him. He participates in a cruel conversation with Julian about August with the hope of impressing Julian, unaware that August is listening in. When August is understandably cold and distant to him after this (though Jack is unaware of why), Jack marvels that he suddenly has what he always wanted—popularity—but he finds that he values his friendship with August far more than he actually wants to be popular. August forgives Jack after Jack punches Julian and gets suspended, which teaches Jack that though kindness and standing up for friends are always the right choices, they're not always easy. Jack is a good and admirable friend to August for the remainder of the novel and stands up for him against both bullies at Beecher Prep and the seventh-grade bullies at the class nature retreat. At their graduation ceremony, Jack expresses romantic interest in their friend Summer, suggesting that he's truly entering puberty by the end of the novel.

Julian Albans – Julian is the antagonist of the book and is August’s bully. Despite the fact that Julian is a known bully among the student body, teachers seem less aware of his bad behavior, as evidenced by Mr. Tushman inviting Julian to show August around the school before the school year starts. He's the most popular boy in school and works to create a social structure that encourages his classmates to put less popular kids down. For the most part, he's able to do this without attracting the notice or attention of adult authority figures, as a great deal of the bullying is directed at kids associated with August (like Jack) or uses cultural references that teachers don't understand, as when he asks August if he likes the *Star Wars* character Darth Sidious (whose face was burnt and deformed in one film). His best friends, Miles and Henry, help him in these endeavors. The novel suggests that Julian's bullying stems from the behavior that his parents, his mother in particular, model for him. Julian's mom exhibits ableist behavior and insists that kindness is too much to ask from the "regular kids" like Julian. Julian's downfall begins when his classmates begin to lose interest in excluding August, and it's complete when Julian decides to not attend the class camping trip. It seems his absence from the class camping trip is what allowed Miles and Henry to feel safe standing up for August, as they knew Julian wasn't there to bully them for it. Though he's absent for much of the end of the novel (and the social

structure seems less toxic in his absence), his "postcard precept" to Mr. Browne over the summer suggests that he did learn his lesson and will endeavor to do better and be kinder in the future.

Miranda – Miranda was one of Via's best friends before they began high school. They hung out often with Ella and went to school together through middle school. Growing up, they hung out at Via's house and played with August, and Miranda has a special affinity for him. She even bought him his space helmet, which he wore out in public for several years until it mysteriously disappeared. The summer before the novel starts, Miranda's parents undergo a nasty divorce and send Miranda to summer camp to remove her from it. Miranda hates camp but soon finds herself inexplicably speaking about August and the Pullmans as though they're her family, which boosts her popularity immensely. The popular girls at camp completely makeover Miranda's look, which means that she looks like a stereotypical popular girl by the time she returns to school. Though Miranda enjoys parts of her popularity and maintains her friendship with Ella, she and Ella begin to ostracize Via so they don't have to admit that they're changing. Miranda secretly wishes that she and Via were still friends and signs up for a theater elective to spend time with Via. There, Miranda has several opportunities to “choose kind.” First, she talks the theater director, Mr. Davenport, out of putting on a production of *The Elephant Man*, which deals with physical disability and she believes wouldn't be well-received by the Pullmans. Then, on opening night, she allows Via to take her place in the lead of **Our Town** and shine for her family. The Pullmans, including Via, accept Miranda's opening night kindnesses and embrace her as the good friend they know she still is, despite the changes she made to her appearance.

Justin – Justin is Via's boyfriend. He's shy, quiet, wears round glasses, and plays the fiddle in a zydeco band. Justin is an overwhelmingly kind individual; though his narration implies that he is initially somewhat uncomfortable meeting August, he also chooses to deal with his discomfort on his own rather than make it Via's problem. He also loves Via's parents and feels very safe with them, in part because his parents divorced when he was very young and pushed him from an early age to be independent. He believes that children need guidance, which is why he intimidates Julian, Miles, and Henry after watching them bully Jack—he recognizes that as a high schooler with a scary-looking fiddle case (it looks like a gun case), he has the power to scare them and can hopefully encourage them to change their behavior. Justin begins to come into himself after he's cast in the lead in the school's production of **Our Town**. When Justin mentions having "tics," it implies that he has Tourette's Syndrome, though he explains that he experiences fewer tics as a teen than he did as a child.

Summer – Summer is one of August's closest friends at school. She sits with him on the first day of school because she felt bad

seeing August eating alone, but she soon discovers that he's fun. She especially likes him because he still likes to play foursquare and other kid-appropriate games, rather than "hang out" and talk about dating and crushes like her other, more mature classmates. Though Summer treasures her friendship with August, she also experiences some desire to be popular. She's thrilled and nervous to get an invitation to Savanna's Halloween party, as Savanna is extremely popular. However, she soon realizes that the party is an attempt to pull her into the fold of popular kids and encourage her to drop August, something Summer refuses to do.

Julian's Mom – The novel implies that Julian is the way he is (rude, exclusionary, and mean) because his parents are that way—specifically his mom. After Jack punches Julian, Julian's mom is fine with Jack returning to school, but she demonstrates shocking closed-mindedness when she suggests that it's too much to ask for her son to be nice to August. She even tries to get August removed from Beecher Prep altogether, though she eventually ends up pulling Julian out of school instead. She also unabashedly edits the fifth grade class photo to get rid of August and distributes the photo to several other parents.

Grans – Grans is Mom's mom and Via and August's grandmother. She's from Brazil, and prior to her death several years before the start of the novel, she maintained a very close relationship with both Mom and Via. Grans often cared for Via while August underwent surgery. On one of those longer visits, Grans made it clear to Via that she's looking out for her in particular, since she recognizes that Via doesn't have the parental support she truly desires. Grans died the day before Halloween, which makes Halloween a difficult holiday for both Mom and Via.

Charlotte – Charlotte is one of the three students that Mr. Tushman asks to show August around the school before the school year starts. She tries her best to be nice to August and answer all of his questions, and she also stands up to Julian during this visit. However, once school starts, Charlotte becomes much colder towards August in an effort to preserve her own social standing. She only waves at him in class, and though she secretly passes information to Jack about "the war" that Julian wages, she's also unwilling to actively stand up for August, Jack, and Summer.

Ella – Prior to the start of high school, Ella was one of Via's best friends. She, Via, and Miranda attended school together through middle school and were thrilled to all get into the same private high school. However, Ella is excited to be popular, so she and Miranda begin to shut Via out. Miranda remains "friends" with Ella because Ella is an easy and low-maintenance person to be friends with, as she's not interested in asking hard questions. Though neither Via nor Miranda say outright, it's implied that their friendships with Ella don't survive past freshman year.

Mrs. Garcia (Mrs. G) – Mrs. G is Mr. Tushman's assistant at Beecher Prep. Mr. Tushman insists she runs the school, which primarily implies that she runs the administrative aspects of Beecher Prep—she's the one kids go to when they forget their locker combinations or need other assistance of that sort. Though she's nice to August at their first meeting, August isn't thrilled when he notices her "shiny" (fake) smile.

Eleanor – Eleanor is a "smart kid" who Via becomes friends with in her second week of high school. They knew each other in middle school, but Via didn't like her much then. Through Eleanor, Via gains access to the smart kid lunch table, which is where she meets her boyfriend, Justin.

Amos – Amos is one of the bigger boys in August's grade. Though he initially aligns himself with Julian and bullies August, he's also one of the first boys to actively stand up to Julian. At the class camping trip, Amos leads August's rescue from seventh-grade bullies from another school and even punches a boy named Eddie. When August cries afterwards, Amos proves himself kind and sensitive when he holds August and lets him cry.

Ms. Petosa – Ms. Petosa is August's homeroom teacher. She left her job on Wall Street to teach middle-school math, and students are divided on whether she's a hard teacher or a nice one. Though she's very kind to August, she's also woefully under-informed about *Star Wars*, which means that some of Julian's underhanded bullying gets by her undetected.

Mr. Browne – Mr. Browne is August's English teacher at Beecher Prep. Every month he designates a precept for the month and leads students in exercises to think about what the precepts mean. Most of them encourage students to be kind, good friends, and to be curious and willing to try their best. His first precept exercise—to "choose kind"—is what makes August believe he'll like school.

Henry – Henry is one of the most physically developed boys in August's grade; he's described several times as already looking like a teenager. He and Miles begin the school year as Julian's trusty sidekicks, so they're often either complicit or actively involved in Julian's bullying. When Julian doesn't attend the camping trip, Henry helps save August from the seventh grade bullies and accepts August as a member of the community afterwards.

Miles – Miles is a hulking boy who begins the school year as one of Julian's sidekicks. He bullies August or is complicit in Julian's bullying until the class camping trip, which Julian doesn't attend. There, Miles assists Henry and Amos in rescuing August from seventh-grade bullies from another school. He accepts August as a friend after that.

Daisy – Daisy is the Pullman's dog at the start of the novel. She loves everyone, especially August, and is extremely affectionate. Dad purchased her from a homeless man without consulting Mom, which becomes a favorite story of Dad's to

tell. In the spring, Daisy begins vomiting and becomes very ill. The Pullmans must euthanize her, which comes as a huge emotional blow to all of them.

Eddie – Eddie is one of the seventh-grade bullies from another school that August and Jack encounter at their camp's outdoor movie. He plays up his "fear" of August, rips August's sweatshirt, and even keeps August's hearing aids as a trophy of sorts. Though Eddie is later found out, August chooses to not press charges.

Jack's Mom – Jack's mom is a social worker. She and her husband, Jack's dad, do what they can to put Jack and Jamie through private school, though money is tight for them, and they live in a rough neighborhood. She encourages Jack to be kind to August and defends Jack's actions when Julian's mom makes a fuss about August being at school.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Savanna – Savanna is one of the most popular girls at Beecher Prep, as she already looks like a teenager. She leads her group of girls in actively excluding August, Summer, and Jack after Jack punches Julian.

Jamie – Jamie is Jack's little brother. Although he is usually nice and friendly, he is mean to August and runs whenever he sees him, though Jack suggests that Jamie doesn't understand how mean he's being when he does this. He's in second grade.

Jack's Dad – Jack's dad is a teacher at a different school. He tries to be present for Jack by taking him sledding on snow days, but both he and Jack's mom work long hours to put their boys through private school.

Veronica – Veronica is Jack and Jamie's babysitter. She tells Jack that he doesn't have to be actively mean to make someone feel bad, which is advice that Jack carries with him and tries to take to heart.

Christopher – Christopher was August's best friend when they were small children. They grew their "Padawan" braids together when they were around eight years old. He has since moved away.

Zachary – Zachary is one of August's friends from early childhood. He has since moved away, so August doesn't see him much anymore.

Alex – Alex is one of August's childhood friends. Like Christopher and Zachary, he has moved away, so August doesn't see him very often.

The Farting Nurse – The farting nurse helped with August's birth. Mom initially didn't like her because she never excused herself, but she ended up being one of Mom's greatest supporters in the hours and days after August's birth.

Summer's Mom – Summer's mom is nice, just like Summer is, and spends time with August's parents at school events. She

tries not to stare when she first meets August, even though Summer prepped her beforehand.

Maya – Maya is one of August's classmates at Beecher Prep. She's the one who tells Summer about **the Plague**. Though Maya finds it ridiculous, she participates anyway, probably to fit in and avoid bullying herself.

The Two Maxes – Two of August's classmates at Beecher Prep, Max G and Max W. They both love Dungeons and Dragons and are therefore extremely unpopular and disliked by many of their more popular classmates.

Bear – Bear is a fluffy puppy that the Pullmans adopt to replace Daisy after her death.

Lisa – Lisa is Christopher's mom.

Ximena – Ximena is one of the smart kids at Beecher Prep.

Mr. Davenport – The high school theater director. He's emotional and angry much of the time, and responds with particular fury when Miranda refuses to go on stage for **Our Town** and has Via go in her place.

Tristan – One of August's classmates at Beecher Prep. He's not very popular but is not as unpopular as the two Maxes.

Nino – One of August's classmates at Beecher Prep. He's not very popular.

Pablo – One of August's classmates at Beecher Prep. Like Tristan and Nino, Pablo is not very popular but is not as unpopular as the two Maxes.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE DIFFICULTY OF KINDNESS

Wonder tells the story of ten-year-old August Pullman's first year going to school. Because he was born with a rare craniofacial condition that necessitated multiple major surgeries, his parents felt it was best to homeschool him for much of his childhood—both to help him keep up with his studies, and to protect him from the bullying and stares he attracts that would likely intensify in a school setting. As August embarks on his journey of leaving homeschooling to start middle school, the novel interrogates what it means to be kind, and the sacrifices one must make for the sake of kindness. However, while the novel certainly positions kindness as always being the right choice, it also goes to great lengths to underscore the ways in which choosing to act kindly can sometimes be an extremely difficult choice.

Though August is described as being a kind character to the core, the lack of kindness shown to him by others often keeps him from actually behaving kindly on a regular basis. On the first day of school, Ms. Petosa forces a boy named Henry to sit in the empty seat next to August. Though Henry does as he's told, he's clearly unhappy to do so and even puts his backpack on the desk between himself and August to create a barrier. As August watches Henry struggle with his lock for his locker, he confides in the reader that had Henry not been rude to him, he would've absolutely helped him with his lock. This suggests that kindness isn't always something that can happen regardless of circumstances; people must not only be willing to receive kindness, but in many cases must also behave in such a way as to make it seem worth one's while to behave kindly in the first place.

A girl named Summer is the only person willing to sit with August on his first day of school. Though she explains to the reader that she sat with him on the first day just to be nice and because she felt bad for him, she finds within days that she actually enjoys hanging out with August. Especially when Jack says almost the exact same thing when he talks about his friendship with August, it shows that acting kindly doesn't have to be an act of martyrdom, as kids like the mean-spirited bully Julian would like to think. Rather, acting kindly towards someone can lead to positive social interactions and far more fulfilling friendships than the ones available via bullying and peer pressure. However, it's also important to keep in mind that the very real friendships that Summer and Jack form with August do come at a cost to their friendships with the rest of their classmates. Though Summer doesn't seem to care much that she's jeopardizing her chance at being popular by hanging out with August, Jack struggles deeply to reconcile his desire to be accepted by the popular crowd with his desire to be nice to August and maintain their friendship. When Jack finally takes a stand against Julian's bullying by punching him in the face, Jack discovers what some of the consequences of behaving kindly and standing up to mean people can be. He not only gets suspended from school, but upon his return, he and Summer are ostracized and bullied themselves, just like August is.

Despite the negative consequences, Jack remains firm in his belief that he did the right thing by standing up for August. He recognizes that by behaving kindly and prioritizing his friendship with August over his social standing, he will, in the long run, be a much happier and more fulfilled person—even if, in the short term, acting kindly has the potential to be lonely and alienating.



INDEPENDENCE AND GROWING UP

At ten years old, August is on the brink of adolescence. Because he's so young and because he has an usually close relationship with his parents due to his medical condition, he begins the novel relying heavily

on his parents for support and guidance. As August matures over the course of the novel and spends more time in the company of other kids his own age, however, he gradually begins to desire more independence. Though the novel is careful to show that children and teens absolutely do still need their parents, regardless of how much they may desire independence, *Wonder* also shows that this tension between need and independence inevitably leads to conflicts between children and their parents. The novel ultimately suggests that these conflicts usually abate as children grow, begin to realize their own complexity, and thereby become better able to see their parents and the adults around them as whole, interesting people, not just as parent figures.

Throughout the novel, August demonstrates an acute awareness of his liminal state between child and teenager. He notes several instances when he "acts like a baby" and is fully aware of doing so (sometimes on purpose with an agenda), while he also desires a degree of independence at times that's clearly at odds with his childish actions. Though Via is much older and far more independent than her younger brother, she too confides in the reader that she still desires love and attention from her parents, even as she also wants to be allowed to ride the subway by herself. When Mom allows her to stay home one day, Via admits that she's thrilled to get to spend a day alone with her mother—and she's extremely disappointed when Mom's attention is redirected to August before their day alone can even begin. Taken together, the mirrored thoughts of Via and August illustrate how teens are caught between desiring autonomy and independence and wanting to still be treated and cared for like children. This also reinforces that the process of growing up isn't necessarily a linear one—it's marked by steps forward and backward as teens experiment with how and where they fit into their families and communities.

At the beginning of the novel, August is terrified of being made to grow up and attend school—he sees growing up as entering into a world where he'll be left entirely on his own to navigate life, something that makes him cling even more tightly to his relationships with his parents. As the school year progresses, however, August begins to realize that growing up doesn't mean that he'll never be able to receive the care he initially conceptualized as childish. Though Mom and August initially decide that August should take Baboo, a beloved stuffed animal, on the class camping trip for comfort, August makes the mature decision to surreptitiously leave Baboo for Mom to snuggle in case she misses August. By doing this, August demonstrates an understanding that adults are just as desirous of comfort and care as children are—and further, that by behaving in a mature way, he even has the power to help Mom feel better, something that in turn makes *him* feel better.

The final indicator that August has come of age is his reaction when Dad finally confides in him that he actually threw away August's beloved space helmet in an effort to force August into

growing up. Though August is initially very angry at Dad for doing this, after a few minutes he reasons that it was probably the right thing to do. This admission does two things. First, it shows that being an adult does mean having to make difficult decisions and having to act alone—two things that August was deathly afraid of at the beginning of the novel—but it also shows that those adult moments and actions can in turn lead to positive outcomes. As a result of Dad's confidence, August is able to feel more adult, especially since Dad asks that August not share this information with Mom. This allows August to understand that while adulthood certainly comes with a great deal of responsibility, the more adult relationships he develops with his parents over the course of the novel can ultimately be more fulfilling than relationships in which he's treated only as a child in need of protection.



STATUS AND BULLYING

For August and the other kids at Beecher Prep, status and popularity are of the utmost importance. *Wonder* is peppered with kids' observations about

their social structure, how status and hierarchy function in their world at school, and what the consequences of being popular or unpopular are on the student body. In particular, *Wonder* suggests that as intoxicating as popularity might be for August and his classmates, the social structure that allows some students to be popular requires those students to bully their less popular classmates to maintain their position.

August was no stranger to bullying prior to starting at Beecher Prep. He and other students recount times when kids teased him at the park or in other public places, events that happened with unfortunate regularity. However, August recognizes immediately that being in school drastically changes the tenor of the bullying. Essentially, he recognizes that there's a major difference between bullying at the park (where the participants, and therefore the social structure, are constantly changing) and bullying at school, where the players remain constant and must defend their reputations daily against the same "threats." This results in a system where there's a great deal of pressure to constantly do the "right" thing in order to be perceived as more popular and climb the social ladder. Julian, for example, emerges early on as the leader of the popular kids, and he maintains his position by creating an environment where it's in his classmates' best interests to get as close to him as possible by ostracizing those he deems unpopular. This results in widespread bullying against August and anyone who associates with him, as well as against the two Maxes—whose only crime seems to be unashamed love of the game *Dungeons and Dragons*. In this way, August and the Maxes become stepping-stones for others to use to climb to the top.

On Halloween, August chooses to forego his carefully made Jango Fett costume in favor of going as the Bleeding Scream. In homeroom, when Jack gets roped into a mean-spirited

conversation with Julian about August, Jack feels safe saying horrible things about August in front of the Bleeding Scream, not knowing that August is behind the mask and can hear every mean word Jack says about him. Later, in Jack's narration, he explains that he only said what he said because he "felt stupid" in front of Julian after spending so much time with August. He insists he never would've knowingly said anything terrible in front of August, showing clearly that there's social currency to be had in putting others down in front of the right people.

The events that transpire on the class camping trip and in the months leading up to it suggest that there are two remedies for bullying that can dismantle a toxic social hierarchy from within. Though Julian persists in trying to make August's life miserable by turning most other boys in the fifth-grade class against him, this eventually proves untenable—after a few months, August and Jack observe that most of their classmates are no longer interested in participating in Julian's crusade. As a result, most of their classmates return to behaving civilly towards August and Jack. Then, when Julian and his parents decide that he won't attend the class camping trip, it effectively removes the ringleader and main proponent of the bullying from the social group—with amazingly positive results. Miles, Henry, and Amos, who once followed Julian blindly and bullied August, finally choose to stand up to others who try to bully August. This is something they can do only in Julian's absence, which illustrates just how toxic one individual can be to a group. It also shows that people are far more likely to stand up to bullying when they're not going to be bullied themselves for doing so.

Taken together, *Wonder's* exploration of bullying and social structure illustrates clearly how toxic a social structure can be when it's predicated on putting down others in order to elevate oneself. The camaraderie and joy that August and his classmates show at their graduation reception (where Julian is, again, notably absent) suggests that it is far more fulfilling for all involved to participate in a social structure based instead on kindness, community, and lifting up others.



IDENTITY

Wonder explores adolescence as a unique period of time in which teens and tweens have the ability to experiment with their identities with wild abandon.

By looking at the ways the adolescent characters attempt to define themselves, either by changing their appearance or by liking certain things, as well as examining the degree to which those characters are defined by others (as when some students are spoken of in terms of one defining characteristic, regardless of their other qualities), *Wonder* suggests that identity is something of a two-way street. People can certainly try to construct and project their preferred identities, but they're still beholden to the thoughts, feelings, and prejudices of others.

For August, identity is a tricky subject because he has very little power to dictate how others see him. He recognizes that other

people see him first and foremost as a kid with a scary-looking face, and plenty of people have little interest in getting to know him once that single superficial piece of his identity is established. This is reinforced time and again as August notices people of all ages looking momentarily surprised when they first lay eyes on him and then working very hard to paste on "shiny" smiles to cover up their discomfort during whatever conversation follows. With this, he recognizes that people struggle greatly to get past visual signifiers of identity. Because of this, August also struggles to get past surface level interactions with people. Essentially, because people focus so much on his visual identity, it's exceptionally hard for him to show people that he's also smart, kind, and funny.

Though August's experience of people seeing his face and only his face is an extreme example, this focus on outward and visual identity also applies to all characters, regardless of what they look like. Miranda, for example, allows the girls at summer camp to cut her hair and dye it pink. When she returns to school in the fall, this allows her to look like part of the popular in-crowd, an association denied to her when her hair was its natural color. In Miranda's case especially, it's important to note that like August, her hair color identifies her in a way entirely separate from how she'd like to be seen. Though Miranda experiences moments where she enjoys her popularity, she's also secretly unhappy and wishes that she were still friends with Via—though being close friends with Via isn't possible anymore, given that she outwardly looks like a member of the popular group and not like someone who should be friends with Via.

On the eve of the class camping trip, August explains to the reader that every kid in middle school becomes "known" for something: Ximena is known for being the best student in the class, while the two Maxes are known for their love of Dungeons and Dragons. Though August is known mostly for his appearance, he uses his observations about how others become known for certain things to try to steer attention towards anything that might set him apart. Early in the school year, August does this by cutting off his *Star Wars* "Padawan" braid, something that signified nerdiness and an embarrassing love of *Star Wars*. Then, prior to the camping trip, he asks Mom to buy him a plain duffel bag to replace his *Star Wars* one, reasoning that his *Star Wars* duffel bag is just one more thing that his classmates can tease him about. While the camping trip represents a major turning point in August's relationship with his peers (Amos, Miles, and Henry save him from seventh-grade bullies from another school and completely change their behavior towards him afterwards), it's also worth noting that Amos, Miles, and Henry's reasons for rescuing August are mostly a mystery to the reader—but they certainly don't choose to act in this way because of what August's duffel bag looks like. This reinforces the idea that identity is a combination of what a person presents to the world and what others *choose* to see. To this end, August is finally able to find a sense of

community and acceptance in his class because Amos, Miles, and Henry choose to look deeper into who August actually is (a classmate in need of help), rather than fixating on his outward appearance and superficial qualities. This in turn suggests that the project of identity is as much a community effort as an effort made by individuals—it takes a shift in the thoughts of the community for one's true identity to shine through prejudice.



PARENTING AND GUIDANCE

As August begins school, he comes into contact for the first time with professional teachers and with parents other than his own and those of his long-term childhood friends. Through August's observations of these adults, the novel interrogates both how adolescents view adult presences in their lives, as well as what role adults should play in the lives of their children and students. Ultimately, *Wonder* proposes that parents and teachers have a great deal of responsibility to guide children through life, while also suggesting that they have an enormous amount of power to affect how and how easily their children grow up.

August's vacillation between childishness and teenage angst certainly doesn't happen without anxiety or difficulty, but it's important to recognize that the support shown to him by his parents allows him to experiment with growing up or acting childish with relatively few consequences. In short, if August is feeling lonely and desires cuddles or affirmation from either parent, they're always there to give that to him—and they're similarly ready and willing to give him space and more adult treatment, as when Mom agrees to buy him a plain duffel bag to replace his "childish" *Star Wars* one for the camping trip. Other children, however, don't have nearly this degree of parental involvement or support. Most of August and Via's friends note feeling happier, safer, or more at home in the presence of August's mom and dad than they do with their own parents. This in turn corresponds with those characters not having such a safe space in their own homes in which to experiment with their emotions or their desires. This is particularly true in the case of Miranda, whose parents are in the middle of a nasty divorce. She even takes the opportunity at summer camp to pretend that August is her brother and to talk about August and Via's parents as though they're her own. She does this so that she can begin to invent the kind of care and support that she doesn't have in her actual life, reinforcing clearly that, even as adolescents naturally draw away from their parents, they overwhelmingly still need a stable, guiding, adult force in their lives.

While August's parents are written as being representative of good, supportive, and protective parents, *Wonder* also briefly explores the consequences of having "bad" parents, most notably in the case of Julian. Though August never meets Julian's parents, one chapter consisting of parents' emails with

Mr. Tushman exposes Julian's parents to be narrow-minded, self-important people: they insist that it's "too much to ask" to expect students at Beecher Prep to have to be in class with August, and they make the case that August shouldn't even be allowed to attend Beecher Prep, as "it's not an inclusion school." This demonstrates a shocking and horrific fear of difference, which then shows up in how Julian treats August. Julian is rude, cruel, and does whatever he can to make August feel unwelcome—behaviors the novel suggests he learned from his parents. Further, because Julian never seems to improve in this regard even as he attends school with teachers who are overwhelmingly kind and welcoming to August, it also indicates that teachers have comparatively less power to influence their students' core values, and even less power when those core values are espoused by their students' parents.

Especially because the novel overwhelmingly portrays children as being much like their parents, *Wonder* paints parents as having an immense amount of influence on what kind of people their children become. In this way, the novel stands as a testament to the power of what can happen when parents and teachers model kindness, tolerance, and community, as well as a cautionary tale against modeling selfishness and superiority to the impressionable children that look up to them.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



"OUR TOWN"

For their yearly musical, Via's school chooses to put on a production of *Our Town*. For all the adolescent individuals involved, *Our Town* represents a major shift in their growing independence and coming of age. For August, it's the first time he truly feels like he's seeing an adult piece of theatre, not a children's show. For Via, it ends up being one of the few times in her life that her parents unequivocally celebrate her and her accomplishments. Playing the lead unexpectedly also allows her to feel adult and independent. In the case of Miranda, who was originally cast as the lead, the play presents a number of opportunities for her to "choose kind," as she advocates for the theatre director to choose anything but the play *The Elephant Man* (which she felt wouldn't go over well with the Pullman family) and then feigns illness to give Via the opportunity to perform. In all cases, the play represents a major moment of growth and development for the book's characters.



THE PLAGUE

"The Plague" is a mean game that August's classmates start to play at the beginning of the

school year. The rules of the game state that if any kid touches August, they have 30 seconds to wash their hands or they're infected with the Plague. August thinks of it much like the "Cheese Touch" in the book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Especially in this sense, the Plague comes to represent the truly horrible elements of the Beecher Prep social structure. The structure thrives exactly because individuals can really only become popular by participating in unkind games and other exclusionary practices, reinforcing the novel's assertion that popularity is dependent primarily on putting others down. When the students eventually abandon the Plague, it suggests that the social structure is evolving for the better as students grow up and make conscious choices to behave more kindly.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Knopf edition of *Wonder* published in 2012.

August: Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte Quotes

☝☝ What's cool about really little kids is that they don't say stuff to try to hurt your feelings, even though sometimes they do say stuff that hurts your feelings. But they don't actually know what they're saying. Big kids, though: they know what they're saying.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Charlotte, Julian Albans, Jack Will

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 20



Explanation and Analysis

When August learns during his school tour that he's going to meet Jack, Julian, and Charlotte, he explains to the reader why he's nervous about meeting kids his own age. In August's explanation, he implies that kindness is something that comes naturally to kids (hence why the little kids don't actively try to be mean—they just happen to blurt things out sometimes), while active exclusion and intentional meanness is something kids learn. This falls into line with the way the novel handles the roles of parents and teachers. It overwhelmingly suggests that kids are very likely to grow up to be much like their parents and to share the same core values. This is especially apparent in Julian's case, as his mom exhibits some of the worst adult behavior towards August, while Julian is the meanest kid to August as well.

August: Locks Quotes

☝☝ Henry still couldn't get his lock to open [...] He got really annoyed when I was able to open mine on the first try. The funny thing is, if he hadn't put the backpack between us, I most definitely would have offered to help him.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Henry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In homeroom on the first day of school, August watches Henry struggle with his combination lock and chooses not to help him with it because Henry put his backpack between them so he wouldn't have to look at August. This shows, first of all, that August is at heart a very kind person—Henry very clearly didn't want to sit in the sole empty seat next to August (Ms. Petosa asked him to move from a seat he was sharing with another student), but August still would've been willing to help him. By making this clear, the novel suggests that kindness isn't always something that comes easily. Then, Henry's backpack wall shows how the other students try to shut themselves off from August. This is a form of bullying, as it very clearly tells August that he's unwanted and isn't even an acceptable deskmate, let alone a valued classmate. By putting August down, Henry is then able to help his own popularity by becoming closer with Julian, a friendship the novel explores later.

August: Lamb to the Slaughter Quotes

☝☝ Maybe no one got the Darth Sidious thing, and maybe Julian didn't mean anything at all. But in *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, Darth Sidious's face gets burned [...] His skin gets all shriveled up and his whole face just kind of melts.

I peeked at Julian and he was looking at me. Yeah, he knew what he was saying.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Ms. Petosa, Julian Albans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis



When Ms. Petosa tries to engage August in conversation about his favorite *Star Wars* character, Julian inserts himself into the conversation to ask if August likes Darth

Sidious—something that August recognizes as an intentional jab at him. This passage illustrates how students can effectively bully other kids right in front of their teachers, as they do it in such a way as to have it go unnoticed. Ms. Petosa's behavior throughout the chapter suggests that she definitely didn't get the reference or understand why it might've been offensive. Instead, she likely saw Julian's suggestion as an attempt to be nice and engage August in conversation about a shared interest. For Julian, this helps his reputation with his teachers, especially since the teachers already appear to think well of him (as evidenced by Mr. Tushman's invitation to have Julian show August around the school). For August, however, it makes him feel even more alone and less able to trust his teachers to care for and look out for him.

August: Wake Me Up When September Ends Quotes

☝☝ Hey, the truth is, if a Wookiee started going to the school all of a sudden, I'd be curious, I'd probably stare a bit! And if I was walking with Jack or Summer, I'd probably whisper to them: Hey, there's the Wookiee. And if the Wookiee caught me saying that, he'd know I wasn't trying to be mean.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Jack Will, Summer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, August explains that he understands his classmates aren't trying to be mean when they stare at him; they're just curious, and he'd do the same if someone else who looked significantly different began attending school. This again works to illustrate August's naturally kind demeanor, given that he doesn't think that all the kids are out to get him on purpose. He recognizes that he's different and interesting to them and would probably be willing to answer their questions were they willing to engage with him and ask him anything. However, because his classmates just whisper and avoid him, August recognizes that they're scared of him and will also never be able to learn anything meaningful about him. This suggests that while curiosity isn't a bad thing, it must be paired with genuine interest and kindness, which will then lead to a greater sense of understanding and community.

August: Costumes Quotes

☝ I wish every day could be Halloween. We could all wear masks all the time. Then we could walk around and get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 73



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, August tells the reader why Halloween is his favorite holiday: it's the one day of the year that he looks like every other kid, and it's therefore an equalizing experience for him. When August wishes that everyone could wear masks, it drives home how desperately he wants to be seen as the normal kid he feels like he is on the inside. While his face is the one thing that people see first and then fixate on, for August, it's just one small part of how he thinks about himself. What August would like is to give people a reason to get to know who he is on the inside before they get too caught up in his outward identity, as that would both encourage people to be nicer to him and make it easier to cultivate real, close friendships with others.

Via: A Tour of the Galaxy Quotes

☝ After you've seen someone else going through that, it feels kind of crazy to complain over not getting the toy you had asked for, or your mom missing a school play. I knew this even when I was six years old.

Related Characters: Via Pullman (speaker), Dad, Mom, August Pullman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Via tells the reader that after seeing August post-surgery, she didn't feel comfortable feeling bad for herself when her parents weren't there for her. While Via's view is certainly admirable, it's also notable as a defense mechanism against heartache. By simply telling herself that she'll never experience anything as awful as what August has experienced, Via tries to keep herself from feeling emotional or needing support from her parents. It's important to note that bad things do happen to Via; she's

certainly not immune just because she doesn't have the same painful medical experiences that August does.

Most importantly, Via's words show that as much as she refuses to admit it, she does need her parents to help her and guide her. She does feel neglected, which suggests that Mom and Dad have, in many ways, failed in caring for her. Even though Via doesn't share August's medical problems, it's not at all strange or unexpected for her to crave support and attention from her parents.

Via: Seeing August Quotes

☝ "I love Auggie very, very much," she said softly [...] "But he has many angels looking out for him already, Via. And I want you to know that you have me looking out for you."

Related Characters: Grans (speaker), August Pullman, Via Pullman

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

When Via spends a month with Grans during one of August's major surgeries, Grans makes it clear to Via that she's going to look after her to the best of her abilities. By saying this, Grans confirms Via's interpretation of her parents' actions: they don't necessarily give Via the love and parental guidance that she needs because their attention is so focused on August and his medical challenges. When Grans tells this to Via, it validates her experience, while also letting her know that the status quo isn't necessarily acceptable. Grans' words also let Via know that it's okay to need and want adult guidance in her life—and further, that she doesn't have to get that only from her parents. This opens up room for Via to look for support from people like Grans, as well as from teachers and other adults in her life.

Via: An Apparition at the Door Quotes

☝ I wonder how many nights she's stood outside his door. And I wonder if she's ever stood outside my door like that.

Related Characters: Via Pullman (speaker), August Pullman, Mom

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

One night, Via catches Mom standing outside August's bedroom door, listening to him sleep, and wonders if Mom has ever stood outside her own door. The fact that Via has to wonder and doesn't know for sure suggests again that Via feels neglected by Mom and may even wonder if Mom doesn't love her as much as August, given that her actions don't always show Via that she cares for her. Via's tone in particular shows that she desperately wants to be cared for and may even resent August for the attention, care, and affection their parents so clearly shower on him and don't shower on Via. This shows the reader that while Mom and Dad may be held up as model parents for much of the novel, they still fail in important and meaningful ways. Parents, in short, are people too and are just as prone to making mistakes as the adolescent characters are.

Via: Time to Think Quotes

☝☝ "Okay, that's fair," I said. "But it's not a contest about whose days suck the most, Auggie. The point is we all have to put up with the bad days. Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life, or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go."

Related Characters: Via Pullman (speaker), Jack Will, August Pullman

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 115



Explanation and Analysis


When Via tries to talk to August about going back to school after the Halloween debacle, she points out to August that he'll need to not think of himself as a victim if he wants to be taken seriously in the world. This shows Via stepping into a very adult and almost parental role with August, as her advice is first and foremost a roadmap for how to be mature. What she essentially suggests is that in order to be taken seriously, August will need to stop thinking only of himself and stop focusing only on what's going wrong. Instead, August needs to consider not just his own experiences, but the experiences of others in the world. This expansion of one's worldview is one that comes with maturity, and the fact that August doesn't currently appear to have that worldview makes it clear how young he still is.

Summer: The Plague Quotes

☝☝ How I found out about this is that Maya Markowitz told me that the reason she won't play Four Square with us at recess is that she doesn't want to catch the Plague. I was like, "What's the Plague?" And she told me. I told Maya I thought it was really dumb and she agreed, but she still wouldn't touch a ball that August just touched, not if she could help it.

Related Characters: Summer (speaker), Julian Albans, August Pullman, Maya

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Summer explains how she learned about the Plague, a mean game that other kids in the fifth grade play at August's expense. The Plague as a whole encapsulates the ills of the Beecher Prep social structure: in order for someone to become popular, it's necessary to put others down. This is why Summer wasn't initially in the know about the Plague; she's already on August's extremely low level of popularity because she's close friends with him. For the other, more popular kids, this shows how they can then use August to boost themselves higher in the pecking order by excluding him. This will in turn move them closer to Julian, who is the pinnacle of popularity.

Finally, it's telling that Maya agrees that the Plague is dumb, but chooses to play along anyway. This makes it clear that there's far more to gain by participating in such a mean game than there is by being kind, refusing to play, and in doing so, standing up to Julian. This shows how much power Julian has, as people are willing to follow him to try to curry his favor, even if they don't agree with his methods.

Jack: Carvel Quotes

☝☝ "Jack, sometimes you don't have to mean to hurt someone to hurt someone. You understand?"

Related Characters: Veronica (speaker), August Pullman, Jamie, Jack Will

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis



After Jack sees August for the first time in public as a six-year-old, his babysitter Veronica tells him that it's still possible to seriously hurt someone's feelings without the intent to do so. By bringing one's intent into the novel's exploration of kindness, *Wonder* is able to add more nuance to the idea of what constitutes kindness and what doesn't. While August's narration suggests that he's often able to separate intent from actions, Veronica's advice insists that doing so doesn't do anyone any favors. Rather, her suggestion positions kindness as something that someone must be thinking about at all times and in terms of all of their actions.


This becomes very important for Jack later when he learns that August heard him saying mean things about him to Julian. Per Veronica's advice, Jack never should've participated in the conversation in the first place, and August was right to be so hurt by it. It didn't matter that Jack didn't specifically intend to hurt August's feelings; the effect was the same as if he'd actively tried to do so.

Jack: Ex-Friends Quotes

☝☝ And the truth is, though nobody's that obvious about it: nobody wants to hang out with him. Everyone's way too hung up on being in the popular group, and he's just as far from the popular group as you can get. But now I can hang out with anyone I want. If I wanted to be in the popular group, I could totally be in the popular group.

Related Characters: Jack Will (speaker), Julian Albans, August Pullman

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

After August stops talking to Jack, Jack marvels at his newfound popularity and all the opportunities he has for social interactions. Jack is able to put into words what August only ever alluded to: that being friends with him actively brings a person down on the social ladder, while denying one's association with him raises a person up. This reinforces the assertion that the students at Beecher Prep are preoccupied with popularity—even to the detriment of real, valuable friendships. This then begins to show that focusing so heavily on popularity can actually inhibit kindness and keep people from forming meaningful


relationships with their peers, as the viewpoint that Julian promotes sees every student just as a stepping-stone to use to become more popular.

Jack: The War Quotes

☝☝ Before she went out, she looked left and right outside the door to make sure no one saw her leaving. I guess even though she was neutral, she didn't want to be seen with me.

Related Characters: Jack Will (speaker), August Pullman, Julian Albans, Charlotte

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jack watches Charlotte leave the room after she secretly tells him about the war going on between the fifth grade boys. Though she insisted she and most of the other girls are neutral in the war, Jack recognizes that her behavior demonstrates loud and clear that she is taking sides, even if her words say otherwise. This harkens back to Victoria's advice to Jack that one doesn't need to be actively mean to hurt someone's feelings. Throughout this chapter, Charlotte positions herself as a good person helping Jack navigate the difficult situation in front of him, though her actions suggest that she believes in what Julian is doing, at least on some level. At the very least, she recognizes that Julian has the power to also ostracize her, something that's clearly too much of a risk for her to take. Overall, Charlotte's actions show once again that social status is the most important goal for the Beecher Prep fifth graders, and participating in Julian's toxic system keeps students from forming real friendships or a more fulfilling social structure.

Justin: Olivia's Brother Quotes

☝☝ it's not even like they know they're being mean, she adds. they were just scared. i mean, let's face it, his face is a little scary, right?

Related Characters: Via Pullman (speaker), August Pullman, Justin

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, after Via introduces Justin to August, she explains that a lot of kids weren't aware of how mean they were being when they never came back to play at the Pullmans' house. Once again, this reinforces Veronica's insistence that intention doesn't necessarily matter so much when someone isn't being kind. Via understands that while these kids definitely didn't intend to be mean, their actions still hurt her and August.

Then, when Via suggests that August's face is a little scary, it points to the liminal space that Via occupies as both August's sister and as an outsider. After spending the month with Grans several years ago, Via is now able to view August more like she believes other people do and less like his overprotective big sister. Via doesn't occupy this space all that comfortably, especially since she doesn't seem particularly at ease here as she speaks to Justin. This reinforces that while Via may seem more adult (and is, in a lot of ways, very adult), she's still in the process of figuring out who she is and how she wants to identify herself for the world.

Justin: The Bus Stop Quotes

☝ he seems too small to be walking around by himself, somehow. then i think how i was that young when i was taking the subway by myself. way too young. i'm going to be an overprotective dad someday, i know it. my kids are going to know i care.

Related Characters: Justin (speaker), Jack Will

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

Here, in Justin's characteristic lowercase style, he reflects on the experience of walking Jack to the bus stop and watching him buy some gum across the street. Justin vows to be a more protective dad someday when he has kids of his own. Justin's reflection of his own experiences running around by himself suggests that gaining independence from one's parents too early has negative consequences for the children involved. The fact that Justin seems worried about Jack's safety reinforces this fact, especially given that Jack seems perfectly comfortable moving through the public world alone.

Justin's assessment also suggests that he believes parents have an important responsibility to actively guide and protect their children, more along the lines of what Mom and Dad do for August and Via than what Justin's own parents did. However, the way that Jack talks about his parents complicates this. While Justin sees that Jack is alone in the world, the few times the reader hears about Jack's parents makes it clear that Jack is absolutely loved and cared for—his parents are just struggling financially, so they're not around much because they're working long hours. Even if it escapes Justin's notice here, this shows that it's not always a choice on the part of a parent when a child gains independence too early. Sometimes, this happens for reasons beyond a parent's control.

Justin: Bird Quotes

☝ it's just been so nice being in a new school where nobody knows about him, you know? nobody's whispering about it behind my back [...] but if he comes to the play, then everyone will talk about it, everyone will know [...].

Related Characters: Via Pullman (speaker), August Pullman, Justin

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

After Via and Justin have a fight, Via begins crying and admits she's upset because she doesn't want her family to come to *Our Town*, specifically so that August won't come and then be associated with her. This begins to show that Via very much craves independence from her family so that she has the opportunity to experiment with her identity in a situation where they don't have as much control over it. Though this is a natural part of growing up and being a teenager, it's also telling that she specifically wants to distance herself from August. Though her desire to not have him come to the play is arguably unkind, it also begins to illustrate that kindness isn't easy. Being kind to August and including him in her life is a decision that Via has to make every day, and has had to make every day for the ten years that August has been in her life. Her emotional reaction here suggests that having to make those decisions constantly wasn't necessarily easy all the time.


August: My Cave Quotes

☞ "Auggie!" Mom yelled. "That's not true!"

"Stop lying to me, Mom!" I shrieked. "Stop treating me like a baby! I'm not retarded! I know what's going on!"

Related Characters: August Pullman, Mom (speaker), Via Pullman

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 218


Explanation and Analysis

As Mom tries to tell August that he won't be able to attend *Our Town*, Via's school's spring play, August loses his composure and screams for Mom to treat him more like an adult. It's important to note first that August's sudden change in demeanor is evidence that he's approaching puberty; quickly changing emotions are part of the process of growing up. However, August's word choice and his particular request illustrate what a liminal state he's in. He asks specifically not to be treated like a baby; this shows that he recognizes that he's not yet ready to be treated like a true adult. Instead, he desires to be treated more like Via, who's treated like a teen who still needs adults in her life, just not to the degree that "babies" need adult care. Then, when he insists that he knows what's going on and isn't "retarded," it's a way for him to show Mom and Via that even if they think of him as being a self-absorbed child, he's absolutely not a child anymore. He has the age-appropriate bandwidth to notice that people treat him differently because of his medical issues and more than anything, he just wants to be treated like any other normal kid.

☞ I don't even know how I got so mad. I wasn't really mad at the beginning of dinner. I wasn't even sad. But then all of a sudden it all kind of just exploded out of me. I knew Via didn't want me to go to her stupid play. And I knew why.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Mom, Via Pullman

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

After an emotional outburst at dinner, August reflects on what happened and why. Though his outburst was relatively immature, this ability to reflect in hindsight is distinctly adult. It shows that August has the capacity to think critically, both about his own thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as about the inner lives of others. This is evidenced when he insists he understands why Via doesn't want him to go to *Our Town*—he's able to put himself in her shoes and, in doing so, can better understand how she moves through the world. However, it's also worth noting that August's interpretation of what happened still centers his own experience as the most important element of the story. Essentially, though he is able to think about Via's thoughts and feelings, he still thinks his own experience is the most important and the worst of all. By still insisting on ranking everyone's respective experiences, August shows that he is still very young and has a long way to go towards maturity.

August: Daisy's Toys Quotes

☞ So I went to my bed and put on my pajamas without anyone telling me to and put the night-light on and turned the light off and crawled into the little mountain of stuffed animals I had left on my bed earlier.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Daisy, Via Pullman, Dad, Mom

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

On the night that August's dog, Daisy, dies, August walks through the house, notices that all of his family members are absorbed in their own grief, and then decides to put himself to bed. This shows that even though August absolutely still has the potential to behave immaturely at times, he also has the capacity to notice others' feelings and emotions and do what he can to allow those people to deal with their own emotions, rather than have to care for his instead. This is a very mature way of handling others' grief. The novel also suggests through the language August uses to describe putting himself to bed (specifically, noting that he went to bed without anyone telling him to) as a major turning point in his coming of age journey. It shows that he's becoming more independent and able to care for himself.


August: Understudy Quotes

☝ "Daddy, can you please not call me Auggie Doggie anymore?" I whispered in Dad's ear.

Dad smiled and nodded and gave me a thumbs-up.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Dad

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis


Right before *Our Town* begins, August asks Dad to not call him Auggie Doggie, a childhood nickname that Dad uses. By asking Dad to not use a nickname that August characterizes as childish, August is essentially asking to be treated more like an adult and less like a child. This shows just how far he's come from the beginning of the novel, when he was well aware of acting in ways he deemed "babyish" and had no interest in growing up.

In addition, Dad's agreement to follow August's lead shows just how much support August has from his parents. Though Dad's role in August's life will necessarily shift and change some as August matures, Dad shows here that he'll always be willing to support August in being the person he wants to be. He recognizes that August's identity is August's choice, and it's his job as a parent to help August feel as comfortable in his skin and in his identity as he possibly can. In this case, he can do this by calling August what he wants to be called.

☝ I knew right then and there that I was going to like the play. It wasn't like other school plays I've been to, like *The Wizard of Oz* or *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. No, this was grown-up seeming, and I felt smart sitting there watching it.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker), Via Pullman

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

As soon as *Our Town* starts, Via's school play, August

recognizes that it's very different in tenor from other theater productions he's seen in the past, and he characterizes it specifically as being more adult. It's important to note that while it's pretty normal for children to be able to identify things as being adult, this is a major turning point for August because he recognizes that he can fully engage with this grown-up play. Essentially, his ability to identify it as being adult and then enjoy it shows that he's coming of age and feels as though this is evidence of his own growing maturity.

Miranda: School Quotes

☝ We knew we were being mean, but it was easier to ice her out if we pretended she had done something to us. The truth is she hadn't changed at all: we had. We'd become these other people, and she was still the person she'd always been. That annoyed me so much and I didn't know why.

Related Characters: Miranda (speaker), Via Pullman, Ella

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 239



Explanation and Analysis

Miranda explains how and why she and Ella started being mean to Via once they all started high school. When Miranda cites their respective changing identities as the reason for this, it situates this conflict as being part of what happens as children grow up, change, and experiment with their identities. Though neither Miranda nor Via speak much about Ella on a deeper level, it's clear in this passage that she's very interested in making this change, a sentiment that Miranda and Via don't seem to share. Miranda's seeming discomfort with all of this suggests that she knows full well that she's not being kind and isn't doing a good thing by changing herself and being mean to Via—but the social currency she gains by changing herself far outweighs the satisfaction she got from her friendship with Via, at least in the short term.

August: Known For Quotes

☝ That's not exactly true: I do know what I'm really known for. But there's nothing I can do about that. A *Star Wars* duffel bag I could do something about.

Related Characters: August Pullman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 252



Explanation and Analysis

Here, August explains that he recognizes that there are differences between someone's outward-facing identity that's changeable, and the parts of one's identity that one cannot change. For August, he understands that he's known first and foremost for his unusual face. This isn't something that he can change, so he must simply learn to live with it and navigate the world because of and in spite of how people treat him because of his face. On the other hand, August absolutely has the power to tell people the kind of person he is: kind, funny, and in this case, not as interested in *Star Wars*. This suggests that August may be a little embarrassed about his love of *Star Wars*, though it may also be part of the natural process of growing up. Regardless, by recognizing that there are parts of his identity that he can change and parts that he cannot, August shows that the process of putting together one's identity isn't a straightforward or easy process.

August: A Simple Thing Quotes

☝☝ "Kinder than is necessary," he repeated. "What a marvelous line, isn't it? Kinder than is *necessary*. Because it's not enough to be kind. One should be kinder than needed. Why I love that line, that concept, is that it reminds me that we carry with us, as human beings, not just the capacity to be kind, but the very choice of kindness."

Related Characters: Mr. Tushman (speaker), Jack Will, August Pullman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 300

Explanation and Analysis

During his graduation ceremony address, Mr. Tushman cites a quote from J.M. Barrie about being "kinder than necessary," insisting that it's an important quote because it recognizes that kindness is a choice. This starts to turn the novel's overwhelming assertion that some people are fundamentally kind on its head, as it says clearly that kindness is a choice—and in the same vein, people are

capable of being both kind and mean. The important part is that it's a choice. By making this very clear, Mr. Tushman recognizes that it's not always easy to be kind. This points back to Jack's decision to punch Julian for bullying August. Doing so was a kindness to August, but it wasn't an easy decision for Jack, or one that came with no consequences. However, Mr. Tushman makes it abundantly clear that it's important to make those difficult choices in the name of being kind.

August: Home (2) Quotes

☝☝ "There are always going to be jerks in the world, Auggie," she said, looking at me. "But I really believe, and Daddy really believes, that there are more good people on this earth than bad people, and the good people watch out for each other and take care of each other. Just like Jack was there for you. And Amos. And those other kids."

Related Characters: Mom (speaker), Eddie, Amos, Jack Will, Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

When August and Mom debrief after August's class camping trip, she tells him that she truly believes there are good people in the world to look out for those in need. With this, Mom suggests that the existence of bullies like Eddie and like Julian is inevitable; what's not inevitable is that they're the ones with the most power all the time. By citing Amos and "those other kids" (Miles and Henry, Julian's former cronies), she presents evidence to support the idea that all people have within them the power to do good things and help people. She shows that even people who initially seem mean can still be capable of rising to the occasion to help others and choose to be good. This also offers more evidence to the novel's assertion that identity is complex, especially since the novel implies too that Miles and Henry behaved the way they did on the trip in part because Julian wasn't there to bully them into being bullies themselves. This shows that people's identities are constantly changing, and suggests that it's worth the effort to recognize and celebrate when people make the choice to "choose kind."



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

AUGUST: ORDINARY

August explains that he's aware that he's not an ordinary kid. He does normal things like eat ice cream and play his Xbox, but he knows that normal kids don't make other kids run away screaming. He says that if he had one wish, he'd wish for a normal face. August thinks that the only reason he isn't truly ordinary is because nobody else sees him as ordinary.

However, August says that he's used to the stares, as are Mom and Dad. His big sister, Via, isn't good at pretending—she often gets really mad and even yells at kids. Mom, Dad, and Via don't see August as ordinary, as they see him as both extraordinary and in need of protection. August insists he's the only one who believes he's ordinary. He formally introduces himself to the reader and declines to describe what he looks like. He says that whatever the reader thinks he looks like, the truth is probably worse.

The way that August talks about his identity, even at this early point, shows that there are two facets to his sense of self: his inner identity (feeling normal) and his outward-facing identity (his face, which is all other people see).



Via's reaction to those who tease August suggests that even though she's also just a kid (the novel later reveals that she's about fifteen), in a lot of ways she takes on an almost parental role for August. This shows that Via has grown up much faster than other kids and possibly hasn't had the opportunity to truly be a child, something that she'll confirm later.



AUGUST: WHY I DIDN'T GO TO SCHOOL

August explains that he'll be going to school to start fifth grade next week. He's terrified as he's never been to school before. This is just because he's had 27 surgeries since he was born, not because of the way he looks. Up to this point, Mom has homeschooled him. He explains that he's always kind of wanted to go to school, but only if he could be just like every other kid there. August says he has a few good friends now. His best friend is Christopher, and he has two others, Zachary and Alex. They've all known each other since they were babies, which means that Christopher, Zachary, and Alex are used to the way that August looks. Now, however, they've all moved away, and none of August's other friends invite him to birthday parties.

Despite August's insistence that being homeschooled has nothing to do with the way he looks, it's worth considering that this actually is the reason he's kept at home, given how protective August's parents are of him. With this reading, it shows how young children like August aren't always privy to their parents' decision-making processes, and it also reinforces that August's parents want to do what's best for him and protect him however they can.



AUGUST: HOW I CAME TO LIFE

August tells the reader the story of his birth, prefacing it by saying that he and Via always laugh when Mom tells the story, even though the story itself isn't particularly funny. When Mom was pregnant, nobody knew what August looked like. Via had been an easy and perfect baby, so Mom and Dad declined any special testing. Two months before August was born, the doctors discovered what they thought was a cleft palate, but nothing serious.

The timeline of discovering August's conditions is in line with what's common for babies born with conditions like his—the only way to know for sure if a fetus has these conditions is to specifically test for them. Given how rare these conditions are, many parents choose not to go through with the testing. In this way, the condition isn't apparent until after birth, much like other identity markers.



On the night of his birth, Mom had two nurses in the delivery room. One was nice, while the other one didn't seem nice at all—and she kept farting. Mom's regular doctor wasn't on duty, so she was assigned a cranky doctor. When August was finally born, the nice nurse whisked him away before Mom could see him. Dad followed, and in his hurry, dropped the video camera. The farting nurse held Mom down so she couldn't follow, and both of them began yelling for the doctor. The farting nurse then discovered that the doctor fainted right there on the floor, and she began scolding him for fainting. Finally, she farted loudly, which woke up the doctor.

The farting nurse turned out to be very nice. She stayed with Mom for hours and was there when the doctors explained that August was very sick. The farting nurse even told Mom that all of God's children will overcome their circumstances. The next day, she held Mom's hand when they walked to meet August. Mom was struck by how beautiful August's eyes were.

As funny as August clearly seems to find the fact that his mom's doctor fainted, it's telling that the first person to see August couldn't stomach how he looked. These first looks are an important and major way that August watches others grapple with his outward identity, and he recognizes that while those first looks usually don't have such dramatic consequences as in the case of this doctor, they seriously inform how people perceive him going forward.



Mom's changing perception of the farting nurse shows that getting to know someone on a deeper level can be far more fulfilling than fixating on easy-to-identify markers, especially since this woman seems to provide some of the best comfort to Mom during this time.



AUGUST: CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE

Early in the spring, August's family visits Christopher and his family. When August and Christopher come inside for snacks, August overhears Mom and Lisa, Christopher's mom, talking about August going to school in the fall. Mom seems as though she didn't mean for August to hear, but she asks August if he's ready to go to school. August and Dad both say no, and August sits in Mom's lap. Mom reminds him that she's struggling to teach him fractions, but Dad insists that August doesn't have to go to school. August thinks that his parents will surely fight about this later, and he hopes that Dad will win, but he also secretly agrees that Mom is terrible at fractions.

August's actions and thought processes in this chapter illustrate that he's hovering between childhood and adulthood. He sits in his mom's lap like he's a child (with the goal of encouraging her to continue seeing him this way), while his admission that Mom is actually bad at fractions shows that he's capable of thinking about things from a more mature standpoint.



AUGUST: DRIVING

In the car on the way home, August and Via fall asleep. August wakes up after dark to hear Mom and Dad whispering about sending him to school. Dad is angry and says that sending August to middle school is like sending a lamb to slaughter, but he stops when he notices that August is awake. August immediately begins crying that everyone will stare at him, and Mom assures him that they won't force him to go. She does say that the principal at Beecher Prep is excited to meet him, and he's seen pictures of August. August is hurt to discover that both Mom and Dad attended a meeting with the principal.

August's tears suggest that the bullying problem was one of the reasons he was homeschooled, even if nobody's been willing to voice it until now. The discovery that both Mom and Dad have been talking about August attending school suggests that this isn't an easy process for them either. It's clear that Dad has some mixed emotions about all of this, showing that adults don't simply stop feeling emotions just because they're supposed to be grown up and rational.



Mom explains that she and Dad met the principal last year, and August is even more hurt that his parents have been talking about sending him to school for a whole year without his knowledge. He learns that the lady who came to give him the "IQ test" a while ago actually administered an admissions test, and he refuses to accept Mom's apology for lying about it. Dad explains that he and Mom love their son and want to protect him, but they sometimes differ on how to best do that. Mom insists that going to school this year, for fifth grade, will be best because everyone else is also just starting middle school. She talks about how nice the science lab is, but August won't have it.

Though August doesn't seem to recognize it, Mom's admission that she did something wrong and her apology for lying is a way for her to treat August more like an autonomous adult. Even though August rejects this treatment, it seems that his parents are willing to give him opportunities to behave in more grown-up ways. This shows in turn that parents have a responsibility to push their kids towards making these more adult choices.



Mom asks if August will at least meet Mr. Tushman, the principal, and August is aghast at Mr. Tushman's name. Dad jokes about Mr. Tushman's name and explains that in college, he and Mom had a professor named Miss Butt. August laughs, even though he doesn't want to find any of this funny. Via wakes up and groggily asks who Mr. Tushman is, and August explains that he's the principal of his new school.

Dad and August's joking about Mr. Tushman and Miss Butt's names isn't exactly kind, but joking and teasing like this is a way to build community through making fun of others. Though the novel positions this moment as being relatively benign, this is August's first introduction to an idea that will later be used to exclude him.



AUGUST: PAGING MR. TUSHMAN

August explains that he wasn't nervous about meeting Mr. Tushman because he didn't know that he'd also be meeting other kids. He and Mom arrive at Beecher Prep a few weeks before school starts, and August immediately starts giggling at the sight of Mr. Tushman. He looks perfectly normal and greets August kindly. Mom reminds August not to mumble, and Mr. Tushman suggests a tour of the school. August again feels betrayed at this unexpected turn of events, but he takes Mom's hand and follows her into the school.

August's sense of betrayal suggests that Mom may have intentionally withheld details of what this meeting might hold in the hopes that August would go along with it in the moment. Essentially, Mom is encouraging August to behave maturely by putting him in a situation where it would be extremely obvious if he doesn't do what she wants him to do.



AUGUST: NICE MRS. GARCIA

Mom and August follow Mr. Tushman through the school. August hides behind Mom and feels "babyish" doing so, but he explains that he doesn't feel brave. They enter the office of the middle school director, and Mr. Tushman introduces them to Mrs. Garcia. When August looks at her, he notices that she does what everyone else does: she quickly looks down and then smiles a "shiny" smile. August refuses to look at her. Mr. Tushman explains that "Mrs. G" runs the school, and she's the one to ask if he needs anything. Mom compliments Mrs. G on a photo of her grandson, and then Mrs. G turns seriously to Mom and promises to take care of August. August notices that Mom looks just as nervous as he feels.

The exchanges between the adults reinforces that August's success at school isn't something that he alone controls— the teachers are partially responsible for guiding August's experience. This shows August that teachers are also going to help and guide him alongside his parents. Further, though August feels "babyish," he recognizes that Mom is also extremely nervous. This is proof that he's beginning to look outside of himself and his own experience to see adults as real people as well.



AUGUST: JACK WILL, JULIAN, AND CHARLOTTE

Mr. Tushman leads Mom and August into his office. August looks at the interesting items on Mr. Tushman's desk and the framed student artwork on the walls. He then asks why Mr. Tushman has his own office when Mrs. G doesn't. Mr. Tushman amends his explanation of Mrs. G's duties and says that she's his assistant; he's the real director. Mr. Tushman makes a joke about his name, which makes August laugh, and August asks Mr. Tushman about a picture of a pumpkin on his wall. Mr. Tushman explains that it's a portrait of him, and August breaks out into laughter again.

August stops short when he hears kids' voices outside the office. He tells the reader that he never minded meeting kids when he was little, because little kids don't try to hurt people's feelings. Big kids, however, know what they're saying. This is why August grew his hair long—so he wouldn't have to look at mean kids. Mrs. G pokes her head in and explains that "they" are here, and Mr. Tushman explains that he's brought in a few kids from homeroom to show him around. August refuses to meet them, so both Mr. Tushman and Mom assure August it'll be okay.

With that, Mr. Tushman shows two boys and a girl into his office. They don't look at August or Mom. Mr. Tushman introduces them as Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte. Jack Will and Julian shake August's hand, but Charlotte only waves. They all look down afterwards. Mr. Tushman suggests that they show August around the school. August won't answer when Mr. Tushman asks if that's okay, but when August notices Mom's scared expression and her high-pitched voice, he nods and follows his classmates.

AUGUST: THE GRAND TOUR

Nobody speaks as Jack Will, Charlotte, and Julian lead August up to the third floor of the school. Julian shows him room 301, which is where they will have homeroom with Ms. Petosa. Julian and Charlotte argue over whether Ms. Petosa is nice, and then they head for the science labs. Julian just stands in the door and talks, but Jack Will insists that August go in and look around. As August passes Julian, Julian moves out of the way quickly. Julian points out stuff in the classroom, including the chalkboard and erasers. When Jack Will says that August surely knows what an eraser is, Julian indignantly says that August has never been to school before.

Mr. Tushman clearly knows that his name can incite giggles from students. By engaging in this self-deprecating humor, Mr. Tushman sets an example encouraging students to not take themselves so seriously. This also shows Mr. Tushman's students that in some ways, he's one of them and not just a stodgy adult. Through these small moments of lighthearted humor, Mr. Tushman also humanizes adults as a whole.



August's decision to grow out his hair to cover his face and shield him from having to look at others illustrates one way that August has control over his outward identity. His fear makes it clear that he knows he's a bullying target, and his descriptions of meeting big kids versus little kids suggests that he believes that little kids are naturally kinder. This reveals that with age comes more of a choice as to how to act.



Notice that Jack Will and Julian are, at this point, willing to shake August's hand. Later, this becomes an issue for Julian, so this event shows that these boys are more willing to behave kindly under close adult supervision. This reinforces that adults have a huge amount of power to dictate and shape children's behavior.



It's telling that Julian is already beginning to bully August after only knowing him for a few minutes. His condescending explanation of something as simple as the chalkboard and erasers is a ploy to make August feel dumb and show him that Julian thinks very little of him. However, it's also important to note that adults cannot possibly supervise these kids at all times; therefore, the only thing adults can do is set a good example and hope that the children will follow suit.



August is so nervous, he mostly stares at his shoes. He finally asks what homeroom is, and Charlotte explains that it's just a class where the teacher takes attendance. As Jack Will walks away, August asks if his name is Jack or Jack Will. Jack explains that Will is his last name, and he doesn't know why some people insist on using his first and last name. Charlotte leads them all to the performance space.

Though it's relatively benign, the fact that people insist on calling Jack by his full name even though he seems to not like it suggests that August won't be the only target of bullying at Beecher Prep. Refusing to call Jack what he wants to be called is a way for other kids to make him feel small and insignificant.



AUGUST: THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

Charlotte chatters about playing Oliver in the production of *Oliver* last year as she leads August, Jack, and Julian into the auditorium. As Charlotte talks, August notices Julian slyly staring at him. He also notices Jack standing in the back, looking bored. When Charlotte explains that the school puts on a play every year, Julian sarcastically says that August certainly won't want to be in the school play. He and Charlotte discuss the other electives, and August says he's going to take the science elective. Julian looks August in the eye, says that it's "supposably" the hardest elective of all, and asks why August thinks he's smart enough to take it when he's never been to school before.

Julian's specific bullying tactic here suggests that he's willing to defend his social status by ostracizing August and refusing to treat him like a real person. Julian also attempts to defend his own academic prowess by intimidating August into not pushing himself to his full potential. Julian's behavior begins to show that bullying is multifaceted and can be overt and underhanded at the same time.



Charlotte insists that August was just homeschooled, and Julian doubts that someone who isn't a real teacher like August's mom can effectively teach science. Jack suggests they go to the library, but Julian asks August why his hair is so long. August doesn't answer, so Julian asks what "the deal" is with August's face and if he got burned in a fire. Charlotte exclaims to Julian that he's being rude, and reminds him that Mr. Tushman explained that August was born that way. Jack yells for Julian to shut up and calls for August to come with him to the library.

It's admirable that Jack and Charlotte stand up for August here, but it's also telling that they're not surrounded by any of their other classmates or friends right now. This means that standing up for August is a much lower stakes confrontation for them. Notice too that Charlotte speaks well of the adults in her life (Mr. Tushman, August's mom). This implies that Charlotte respects and values adults, unlike Julian.



As August passes Jack, Jack looks August right in the eye. August looks back at him and smiles, though he feels almost ready to cry. He explains to the reader that people who don't know him often can't tell that he's smiling, but Jack seems to understand that August smiled. He whispers to August that Julian is a jerk, but insists that August also needs to talk. Charlotte and Julian catch up, and August tells Julian that earlier, he should've used the word "supposedly" instead of "supposably." Charlotte backs August up, and the group heads off down the stairs. Julian cuts August off and apologizes, but August can tell he did it on purpose and isn't sorry.

By correcting Julian's mispronunciation, August begins to quietly stand up for himself by threatening Julian's academic prowess and know-it-all attitude. The very underhanded ways in which August and Julian begin to fight suggests that this conflict is far from over and will likely proceed quietly and under the radar. In turn, this opens up the possibility that the adults in charge may not be fully aware of what's going on once school starts.



AUGUST: THE DEAL

When August, Jack, Julian, and Charlotte get back to the office, Mrs. G asks if August liked the school. Mom asks August if he saw baby chicks in the science lab, and August wishes Mom wouldn't talk to him like he's a baby in front of people. He asks Mom if they need to pick up Via, which is the signal that he's ready to leave. Mom pretends to check her watch and explains to Mr. Tushman that Via is going to Faulkner High School this fall. Mom and August leave quickly, and August doesn't look up until they're outside the school.

August's wish that Mom wouldn't talk to him like a baby shows again that he's torn between being a child and adult—earlier, August sat on his mother's lap like a child and longed to stay home with her, but now he feels “babyish” when she coddles him. This particular turn suggests that August may be feeling braver and more capable after standing up for himself to Julian.



AUGUST: HOME

After a half block, Mom asks how the tour of the school was. August refuses to talk until they get home. When they arrive, he races to his room and throws himself on his bed. He feels both sad and happy and snuggles his dog, Daisy, when she comes to join him. Mom nudges Daisy over and asks if the kids were nice. August says they were fine.

August's conflicting emotions here point to his budding adolescence. August's dog, Daisy, is a significant character because she is always kind to him. By emphasizing Daisy's sweet and loving disposition, the novel reinforces that kindness doesn't come as easily for humans—it takes a lot of work and concentrated effort to always be kind and loving to other people.



When Mom says that Julian seemed especially nice, August corrects her and says that Julian was the least nice. He tells Mom how Julian asked what “the deal” was with his face and asked if August was in a fire. Mom looks shocked. August tells her that both Jack and Charlotte stood up for him, but Mom apologizes and tells August that he doesn't have to go to school. August tells her that he wants to go.

Mom's belief that Julian was extra nice reinforces the idea that parents and teachers often don't know the entire story. Similarly, Mr. Tushman presumably asked Julian to be a part of the welcoming committee because he thought highly of him. In contrast, Jack explicitly told August that Julian is a jerk, suggesting that Julian isn't particularly warm or kind among his peers but can appear that way for adults.



AUGUST: FIRST-DAY JITTERS

On the first day of school, August is very nervous. Mom and Dad take pictures of him and Via, and they all decide to walk August to school. August explains that Beecher Prep is really close to his house, but he's barely been on that block. He prefers streets where there aren't as many kids. When the family turns the corner and sees students and parents outside the school, Via reminds August that everyone is nervous, just like him. August hugs Via, Dad, and Mom quickly so Mom won't embarrass him by crying, and then races inside the school.

The fact that August isn't particularly happy or comfortable being around kids his own age suggests that adolescence is scary and different for him—his own adolescence is confusing, and other kids are threatening. This continues to depict the developmental period as a confusing, tumultuous time in one's life.



AUGUST: LOCKS

August is very glad he took a tour of the school, as he's able to find his way to room 301 without ever looking up. He pretends not to notice when kids stare at him. He chooses a desk near the back of the room and watches people's feet as they walk in. Nobody sits next to him, but Charlotte waves. Julian completely ignores August. Jack, however, sits right next to August and greets him warmly. Ms. Petosa waves the last few students into their seats and seems to hesitate for a second as she notices August. She explains that she'll take attendance and then distribute combination locks, and says that the students aren't to try to open them yet.

When Ms. Petosa gets to a boy named Henry, she notices that he's sitting in a seat with another boy. She tells him to take the empty seat next to August, which Henry does grudgingly. He puts his backpack up on the desk to shield his view from August. Finally, Ms. Petosa calls August's name. He feels his classmates staring at him when he goes up to get his folder and then resists spinning his lock. He watches Henry try and fail to open his lock as Ms. Petosa calls the last few names. She smiles at everyone, and August is somewhat shocked to see that she looks normal and not like a teacher from a movie. Henry is still struggling with his lock, and August confides in the reader that he would've helped Henry if he hadn't put his backpack between them.

AUGUST: AROUND THE ROOM

Ms. Petosa tells the class "boring" stuff about how she left her job on Wall Street to pursue teaching, and then she asks the students to each think of two things they want their classmates to know about them. Julian makes a show of having to think about what he wants to tell people, but tells the class he got a Wii game and a Ping-Pong table over the summer. Charlotte is next and talks about her new puppy and her sisters.

At this point, August has long hair to protect him both from other people's stares and to give him an excuse to not look at his peers. This shows him trying to hide his identity from others, mostly because he doesn't feel comfortable trusting other kids his age with his real identity. When Jack decides to sit with August, it shows that he's opening himself up to possibly get past August's outward identity to form a real friendship.



August will say on several occasions throughout the novel that a lot of the time, kids aren't actively trying to be mean when they react negatively to him; they're just scared. In the case of Henry, however, this clearly isn't what's going on. The fact that Henry isn't reprimanded for his rude behavior reminds the reader that in a school setting, there simply aren't enough teachers to have eyes on all student interactions at all times—small but hurtful moments like this will inevitably go unnoticed.



When August deems Ms. Petosa's short biography boring (even though her transition from working on Wall Street to teaching middle school is remarkable and interesting), it shows that he doesn't yet think of adults as being particularly interesting—and doesn't consider them to be real people. This is indicative of his mostly childlike state, as part of growing up is learning to recognize that adults also have rich inner lives just like children.



AUGUST: LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

August tells the reader that the night before, he Googled what "like a lamb to the slaughter" meant. He feels exactly like that when Ms. Petosa calls on him and asks him to speak up. When he introduces himself to the class, he talks about Via and Daisy as his interesting facts, and then Julian asks him if the little braid in his hair is a Padawan braid. Julian takes it upon himself to explain that a Padawan is a Jedi apprentice from *Star Wars*, and Ms. Petosa kindly asks August if he likes *Star Wars*. August wants to disappear under his desk when Julian asks if he likes the character Darth Sidious—a character whose face gets burned and melts in one movie. Mrs. Petosa doesn't get the reference, but August sneaks a peek at Julian and can tell that he meant to be hurtful.

It's clear to August that Julian is trying to bully him by bringing up Darth Sidious, and it's telling that Julian is successful. As a teacher, Ms. Petosa would be required to shut down that kind of bullying if she knew it was happening, but she is oblivious to it. This illustrates how bullying can happen anywhere—even under the nose of kind, engaged, and well-meaning teachers. This begins to show August that he'll have to fend for himself at school, which in turn indicates that the bullying battle will be a strictly among kids and carefully concealed from the adults.



AUGUST: CHOOSE KIND

When the bell rings, August races to his English class and sits down in the back. He doesn't look up as groups of kids come in, but he does notice that Jack sits next to him again. The teacher introduces himself as Mr. Browne and begins going over the syllabus. Then, he writes the word "PRECEPT" on the board and leads the class in a discussion of what a precept is. He defines it as any saying that helps guide a person when making important decisions. Mr. Browne asks the class for some things that are important to them and writes down things like family, the environment, and homework.

By introducing the idea of precepts to his class, Mr. Browne introduces his students to things that can guide them through life other than their parents. Essentially, the precepts are intended to fill in for adult presences to encourage students to make good, grown-up decisions. When August appears to still feel alone in this class, it shows that he'll have to be willing to trust classmates like Jack before he'll be able to truly find a sense of belonging and independence at school.



After a few minutes, Mr. Browne writes that the most important thing for the students to learn is who they are. He asks the students to create a section in their notebooks for precepts and to write down his precept for September: to "choose kind" when given the choice between being kind or right. As August writes the precept in his notebook, he realizes that he's going to like school.

The September precept and Mr. Browne's assertion that students need to learn who they are suggests that he's going to be a major motivating force in his students' coming of age. August's affinity for Mr. Browne's class at this point is likely related to the precept's command to "choose kind," something that will directly help August.



AUGUST: LUNCH

Lunch is a struggle for August, though he thinks he should've known better since Via warned him. Some kids tell August he can't sit with them, so he chooses an empty table and sits by himself. He can't find Jack anywhere and can sense that people are staring at him. He's especially cognizant of a group of girls watching and whispering. August explains that he hates the way he eats. Though he had surgery to correct his cleft palate and another to align his jaw, he still has a hole in the roof of his mouth and can only chew in the front of his mouth. One night, he watched himself eat in a mirror and realized that he eats like a tortoise.

It's important to keep in mind that at lunch, the student to teacher ratio is much higher—there are likely only a couple teachers supervising what appears to be the entire fifth-grade class, and possibly more grades. This means that it'll be easier for others to bully August or simply ignore him, given that their supervisors are spread very thin.



AUGUST: THE SUMMER TABLE

August looks up when he hears a girl ask if she can sit across from him. She sits down, takes a bite of her unappetizing mac and cheese, and introduces herself as Summer. When one of Summer's friends invites her back to their table, she insists that their table was too crowded. Summer notes that her name matches August's, because they're both summery names.

August and Summer decide that their table is the "summer table," and they go through all of their classmates to see who could sit at their table. Summer even pulls out a notebook to make a list. Some of their additions are not obviously summery—they decide Reid could sit there because his name reminds them of a reed of grass, and they think that Jack could sit there because they could use his name in a summery sentence, like "Jack will go to the beach." When they're done, Summer says seriously that they still need to let other kids sit with them even if they don't have summer-themed names, assuming they're nice.

Though Summer is doing a noble thing here by choosing to sit with August, she's also possibly damaging her friendships with her other friends by refusing to sit with them. This begins to show that there are social consequences for befriending someone that most kids don't like.



Though the initial list-making of summery names is technically an exclusionary practice, it's telling that Summer amends their plan at the end to insist that all nice people should be able to sit with them. This reinforces that Summer is a kindhearted person and primarily judges people based on how nice they are.



AUGUST: ONE TO TEN

August explains that after his jaw surgery, when his jaw was wired shut, Mom started asking him to rate pain on a scale of one to ten, since he could do that without talking. She continues to ask him to rate things on a scale to this day. After school, August meets her outside and tells her that his day was a five. Mom is surprised, but she tries to carry August's heavy backpack for him. August yanks his backpack away from her and leads her through the crowd. He waves at Summer when she yells goodbye, but he avoids Mom's questions about her.

Mom tries to ask other questions about August's day, but August gives cursory answers. He chooses to not tell Mom about Julian's Darth Sidious comment and can't quite figure out why he feels mad at Mom. She asks about Summer again, and August responds that they met at lunch. He says they're like Beauty and the Beast and runs away before Mom can say anything.

Mom's surprise and desire to carry August's backpack suggests that she wants to do what she can to keep him safe, even if she can't be present during the school day. When August rejects her attempts, it shows that he's feeling far more independent than he did only a few weeks before. Then, when he rates his day a five despite Julian's bullying and Henry's rudeness, it shows that August is relatively optimistic and is willing to focus on the good, like his new friend Summer and his teacher Mr. Browne.



August's answers here suggest he may be trying to punish Mom a little bit and make her feel bad for sending him to school, even if school was relatively a good experience. This continues to show that growing up isn't a linear or easy experience; even as August thinks he might enjoy the experience, he can still resent the person making him do it.



AUGUST: PADAWAN

August cuts off his Padawan braid that night. Dad is thrilled, but Via seems angry and demands to know if someone made fun of it. August cuddles with Daisy until Dad comes in later to tuck him in. He tells Dad that he had a good day, but confirms that he can stop going to school if he wants to. Dad reminds August that he does have to talk to him and Mom if bad things are happening, and August promises he will.

Dad asks August if he's mad at Mom, and August insists that she's the most to blame for sending him to school. Mom peeks her head around the door to say goodnight, and Dad suggests that she tuck August in. August tells the reader that he's aware that it's kind of babyish for Mom and Dad to still tuck him in, but he likes it anyway. Mom lies down next to August, pulls out [The Hobbit](#), and begins to read. Suddenly, August starts to cry. He apologizes and asks her why he has to be so ugly, and Mom holds and kisses him. Mom tells Auggie "soft words," but he thinks that they can't change his face.

The Padawan braid and the love of Star Wars that it connotes is one thing that August can control about his outward identity. By cutting off the braid, August bends to Julian's teasing.



August's quickly shifting emotions here again point to his budding adolescence, though his tears and desire to be tucked in and read with his mom underscores that he's still a child in need of love, care, and affection. This begins to show that parents have a responsibility to offer their children both a push towards maturity as well as more tender affection, as the combination of the two will make children feel safe and secure as they grow and gain more independence.



AUGUST: WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS

August struggles through most of September. He's never had to get up so early or do homework, and being at school is pretty awful. Kids stare all the time and avoid bumping into him in the hallways. Multiple times per day, he inevitably surprises some unsuspecting kid who hasn't seen him before. Other kids whisper about August as he walks by, and August tries not to imagine what they're saying. He doesn't believe they're trying to be mean; he recognizes that he's "weird-looking" and if, for example, a Wookiee started going to school, he'd probably stare and talk with Summer and Jack about it. Regardless, kids gradually get used to August, and by the end of the month, everyone seems used to him.

By recognizing that the other kids at school probably aren't actively trying to be mean, August demonstrates a commendable capacity for humanizing his fellow students. This is an extremely mature perspective, which again shows that August is in an in-between place in his maturity given that he can hold this viewpoint while also requiring a great deal of parental comfort. The widespread reactions of other students suggest that acting this way towards August is the easy and accepted way to engage with him.



AUGUST: JACK WILL

August spends most of his classes with Jack. He's not sure if the teachers put them next to each other or if it's just coincidence, but they sit next to each other in all of their classes. Once, in the hallway, an eighth grader accidentally knocks into August, helps him up, and only then notices August's face. The eighth grader says, "woah," and then runs off with his friends. August and Jack laugh about it all the way to class.

The fact that August and Jack can laugh after this experience suggests that friendship can make bullying easier to deal with, given that at times when August has dealt with this sort of thing alone, this is far from his normal reaction.



Later, as they read in their textbooks, Jack asks August if he wants to beat up kids like that eighth grader. He suggests that August get a secret squirt gun attached to his eyes to squirt people when they stare. A minute later, Jack asks if August can get plastic surgery, and August jokingly points to his face and says that his face looks the way it does *after* plastic surgery. Jack suggests that August sue his doctor, and their teacher separates them for laughing loudly.

In this conversation, Jack's curiosity doesn't come across with any ill intent. By establishing a friendship and a sense of trust, Jack and August are both able to be more open and share more of themselves with each other.



AUGUST: MR. BROWNE'S OCTOBER PRECEPT

Mr. Browne's October precept is "your deeds are your monuments." He explains that the saying originally appeared on an Egyptian tombstone and asks the students to write about what they think the precept means. August writes that it means that people should be remembered by the things they do, as actions are more important than anything else and will last longer than anything else.

This precept begins to lay the groundwork and the reasoning for August's kindness: he understands already the power of behaving kindly and helping others. Those are the kinds of things that people will remember.



AUGUST: APPLES

August's birthday is the tenth of October, and he asks Mom if he can have a big party. He wants to invite his entire homeroom class plus Summer—even Julian, so that nobody gets their feelings hurt. A few weeks later, Mom tells August who agreed to come. Jack is coming, along with Summer, Reid, the two Maxes, and maybe Charlotte. August wants to know what people's reasons are for not coming, especially Julian's. Julian's mom was the only person who didn't respond at all, and Mom jokes that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. August doesn't get it, but he does have a great time at his birthday party.

When August decides to invite Julian, it again shows that he's taking Mr. Browne's October precept to heart. This also has the effect of making any bad or rude behavior from Julian look even worse, as August hasn't done anything to warrant Julian's rudeness. Mom's comment alludes to the novel's assertion that children grow up to be a lot like the people that raise and guide them towards adulthood, which allows the reader to infer that Julian's parents are just as rude as he is.



AUGUST: HALLOWEEN

The day after August's birthday party, Summer asks what he's going to be for Halloween. She explains that they can wear costumes to school. August is thrilled that he can be Boba Fett from *Star Wars*, but is upset when Summer explains that they can't bring guns or blasters. She explains that she's afraid her preferred costume might be too dorky. She says that Savanna's group isn't even wearing costumes because they think it's stupid and immature. Regardless, Summer really wants to be a unicorn. August agrees that a unicorn would be dorky but says she should do it anyway. Summer decides she'll just go as a Goth girl.

Summer's struggle to decide on a costume is indicative of the social landscape at school. Even though Summer is clearly eschewing any hopes of being popular by eating lunch with August in the first place, it's also telling that she feels the need to preserve some of her social standing by choosing a socially acceptable costume. Her mixed feelings about the unicorn costume also shows that she's torn between wanting to be a child (who likes unicorns and wants to dress up as one) and wanting to be more of an adult (who thinks unicorns are "dorky"). Her choice to go as a Goth girl feels like a sharp contrast from her original desire to be unicorn, showing that she's bending to what other people think and perhaps acting in a way that's not true to her.



AUGUST: SCHOOL PICTURES

At the end of the month, Mom allows August to not have his school photo taken. However, August isn't able to get out of being part of the class picture. The photographer looks shocked when he sees August, and August doesn't smile for the photo.

By not forcing the school picture issue, Mom shows August that she's still someone that he can trust and rely on to protect him, even if she does insist he go to school in the first place.



AUGUST: THE CHEESE TOUCH

Before long, August picks up on the fact that nobody wants to touch him. He explains that in dance class, Ximena had a panic attack when the teacher tried to pair her up with August. Then, yesterday in science, August was conducting his experiment with seven other boys. All seven of the others were crowded on the other side of the lab table, but Tristan and Nino moved over to August's side when their teacher asked. All was fine until Tristan's mystery powder started to melt at the same time that August's did. They moved their powders off the hot plate at the same time, bumped hands, and Tristan dumped everyone's powders onto the floor in his hurry to wash his hands. August thinks it's like the Cheese Touch in [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#), but he's the moldy cheese everyone refuses to go near.

By relating what's going on with his classmates to the Cheese Touch in [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#), August suggests that associating with him can completely ruin other kids' social standing (in [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#), touching the old, moldy piece of cheese on the playground is a fast track to being socially ostracized). It's also telling that none of the teachers August mentions here do anything about the situation, which is clearly bullying. Although teachers have a great deal of power and responsibility, their ability to actually do anything about bullying rests on their ability to notice it and fully understand what's going on.



AUGUST: COSTUMES

August explains that Halloween is his favorite holiday. For one day, he gets to look like every other kid in a mask. He wishes that every day could be Halloween so that kids could get to know each other while wearing masks before they have to show their real faces. August also explains that he used to wear an astronaut helmet everywhere he went until he was around seven. After he had eye surgery, it went missing.

For August, Halloween masks level the playing field dramatically and provide him with a sense of normalcy. His mention of the astronaut helmet shows that as a kid, he achieved this by simply covering his face, even though the helmet perhaps makes him stand out even more.



Last year, August was the Bleeding Scream. This year, he's going to be Boba Fett from *Star Wars*. Mom has been working hard on the costume. August explains that he chatted with his classmates about costumes the other day, and everyone knows what everyone else is going as.

Mom's hard work on August's costume shows that one of the ways she demonstrates her love for him is by making this holiday as great as she possibly can.



On Halloween morning, Via has a meltdown. Dad is late and is uncharacteristically not patient with her, so Mom and Dad finally decide that Dad will take August to school and Mom will drive Via. Dad gives August five minutes to put his Boba Fett costume on, but he suddenly doesn't want to wear it. He throws on the Bleeding Scream costume and quickly joins Dad.

Dad's strange lack of patience shows the reader that adults can be just as emotional and tumultuous as kids, though neither August nor Via seem tuned into that fact.



AUGUST: THE BLEEDING SCREAM

August feels awesome walking down the hallway at school. Another kid dressed as the Bleeding Scream gives him a high five when they pass, and August wonders if the kid would've done that had he known that it was August behind the mask. When August gets to homeroom, he recognizes Julian dressed as Darth Sidious, whose mask is very realistic. Julian is deep in conversation with two mummies that August figures are Miles and Henry. They're all looking like they're waiting for August to arrive as Boba Fett.

August decides to sit where he can hear them rather than at his regular desk. Julian motions to the parts of his mask that look like "him"—presumably August—and the mummies suggest that August looks like an orc or a shrunken head. One mummy with Jack's voice says seriously that he'd kill himself if he looked like August, and Julian asks why he even hangs out with August. Jack explains that Mr. Tushman asked him to, and now August just follows him everywhere. August doesn't hear anything else because he walks out of class and begins crying inside his mask.

Again, Julian's choice to go as Darth Sidious is clearly a jab at August given that both boys are aware of the baggage surrounding Star Wars and the character (Darth Sidious' face burns and melts in one of the movies). Once again, the reference to Darth Sidious appears to go right over the heads of the teachers. This illustrates how bullying and intimidation can be very underhanded and difficult for adults to pinpoint.



As horrible as Julian and Jack's conversation is, none of the boys realize that it's taking place in front of August. This reinforces the fact that Julian is rude and awful, but it also begs the question of why Jack is engaging in this conversation in the first place, since his affection for August seems genuine otherwise. This suggests that he may be trying to impress Julian when he thinks August is not around.



AUGUST: NAMES

August tells the reader some of the names that kids call him: rat boy, E.T., lizard face. He runs to the bathroom, cries for a while, and then goes to the nurse's office and tells her that he has a stomachache. She calls Mom and fifteen minutes later, Mom arrives to pick August up. August just tells her that he feels sick; he doesn't want to tell her the truth at school. The nurse helpfully offers that there's a stomach bug going around. Mom and August walk home with their arms around each other and later, August says he's too sick to go trick-or-treating. He doesn't go to school the next day either, and thinks he won't go back at all.

August's reaction shows that Jack had earned August's trust by being one of the only kids to treat him kindly—and it's that broken trust that makes this situation so painful, since August is clearly aware that other kids regularly call him names. The fact that August doesn't want to go back to school after this incident shows how just one person, whether they know it or not, has the power to deeply impact a classmate's life.



VIA: A TOUR OF THE GALAXY

Via tells the reader that August is the sun, while she, Mom, and Dad are just planets orbiting around him. Daisy the dog is the only being in the Pullman house who doesn't orbit August, and that's because she's a dog. Via says that she's used to it; she's always understood that August has special needs, and she shouldn't expect extra or special attention. She insists she never saw the use of complaining, especially since she's seen August in so much pain after surgery. She's used to taking care of herself and not asking Mom or Dad for help, and insists that this habit isn't noble—it's just the way things are. However, she senses that the galaxy is starting to shift.

For Via, early independence is inevitable, as she believes she's simply unable to rely on her parents like other kids do. However, Via seems to conceptualize care and kindness as something finite—essentially, because her parents devote so much attention to August, there's just not enough left for Via. This viewpoint is relatively immature and sets Via up for growth.



VIA: BEFORE AUGUST

Via doesn't remember life before August, but she's seen pictures of herself and her parents before he arrived. She can tell from the pictures that the entire family doted on her. She also doesn't remember when August came home from the hospital, but family members say she was confused that he didn't look like the baby doll Grans had given her to practice being a big sister. After a little while, Via warmed up to August and never mentioned her doll again.

Even before August's birth, Via's family set her up to be a caretaker for her little brother by having her practice caring for a baby doll. This suggests that her family places a great deal of value in caring for others—so much so that they're willing to push their four-year-old into being a caretaker as well.



VIA: SEEING AUGUST

Via explains that she always knew August didn't look normal, but she never used to see him the way that others see him. However, when she was eleven, she went to stay with Grans for four weeks while August had his jaw surgery. It was the first time that Via had been away from August for so long, and it was amazing to suddenly not be stared at in public.

Via's experience at Grans' house illustrates how bound up Via is in August's identity. The month at Grans' house also seems to be the first time that Via is cared for like a child since August's birth, which presumably showed her that she does need care.



Via says that Grans was the kind of grandma who did everything with her grandkids. That month with Grans was possibly the best time of Via's life, and returning home was hard. Via remembers seeing August running downstairs to meet her and seeing for just a second what other people see when they look at August. It was over in a second, but after that point, Via always saw two Augusts: one she sees blindly, and one that other people see. Via never told anyone about it, even though she planned to tell Grans about it at Thanksgiving. However, Grans died suddenly two months later of a heart attack.

When Via says that the time with Grans was the best time of her life, it emphasizes that children need true guardians in their lives, even if said children already seem mature and independent. Her return represents an unfortunate coming of age moment for Via, as she has a very adult realization about how August appears to others. Widening her understanding will allow her to better empathize with other people.



On Via and Grans' last day together, they watched the sunset together. Grans had told Via a secret: she loved Via more than anyone else, even August. She explained that August had enough angels looking out for him, but nobody was looking out for Via. Now, Via hangs onto Grans' secret and feels that it's like a blanket.

Grans' words show that she's aware of the lopsided dynamic at work in Via's house, and she also understands that Via needs to be cared for just like any other child. Grans also implies that August has a huge support network, which will in turn help him get through life even when it's difficult.



VIA: AUGUST THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

August's eyes are almost halfway down his cheeks and slant at an extreme angle. They bulge and his eyelids droop, and he doesn't have eyebrows or eyelashes. His nose is fleshy and seems too big, and his head looks like it's been pinched at ear level. August has no cheekbones but deep creases on either side of his mouth. He's had a few surgeries to correct his mouth, but his teeth still splay out and he has a severe overbite. He only has a chin because of a surgery to put part of his hipbone where his chin should be, and now he can keep his tongue in his mouth, talk, and eat. He can hear too, which is unusual for kids with birth defects like this.

Eventually, August will need hearing aids, which he hates the idea of. Via wonders if August knows that wearing hearing aids will be the least of his problems. She wonders if he understands how others see him, or if he's just so good at pretending that he doesn't notice his face anymore. Via wishes she could ask him these questions. She explains that she could read his face better before his surgeries, but now, it's gotten more difficult. Mom and Dad can still read him, but Via can't. She thinks that he's ten years old and can use his words like anyone else; it's time to stop treating him like the sun and make him grow up.

VIA: HIGH SCHOOL

Via explains that she loved middle school because she could be Olivia Pullman there, not Via. In elementary school, everyone knew about August because he came to all the school functions with Mom and Dad. In middle school, however, not as many people knew about August. It was nice to not be known just as the girl with a "deformed" little brother.

In high school, it seems as though only Miranda and Ella know about August, and they don't talk about it with other people. They've all been friends since first grade and loved playing with August when he was little. In middle school, they were solidly in the middle of the social structure, and they were all thrilled to get into the same high school. Now, Via isn't sure what's going on in high school, as it's nothing like what she expected.

By telling the reader what August's face looks like, Via challenges the reader to "choose kind" and continue to see August as a child worthy of love, care, and respect. August made sure the reader sympathized with him by focusing on his inner world, while Via presents more of a challenge by putting the reader in a position closer to the strangers that are afraid of him.



If August were to rely less heavily on his parents for care and affection, it would perhaps allow Via to receive more attention (given her belief that there's a finite amount of love to go around). Regardless, she is clearly aware that August is in a difficult spot developmentally and is in between child and adult. The fact that Via struggles to read August's face suggests that she's also starting to pull away from her role as a caregiver for him.



Via's relief at getting to be Olivia and not having people know about August points to the novel's assertion that adolescence naturally includes attempts to define oneself in one's own terms.



Even as Via enjoys being able to separate her identity from August's in high school, the suggestion that the social structure is difficult and shifting shows again that the process of growing up isn't linear or easy.



VIA: MAJOR TOM

Via explains that Miranda was always the sweetest to August. She bought him his space helmet, and they'd sing "Space Oddity" by David Bowie together. Miranda has always been good about calling when she gets home from summer camp every year, so it was strange when Via didn't hear from her this year. Eventually, Via noticed on Facebook that Miranda had been home for weeks and hadn't said anything. The two girls didn't see each other until the first day of school, and it was a major shock. Miranda cut her hair, dyed it pink, and wore a tube top that was completely out of character. She also acted as though Via was a casual friend. Via realized at lunch that Miranda and Ella had seen each other several times over the summer, and Via felt excluded.

As jarring as Miranda's changes were for Via, it's also worth considering that Miranda is going through much the same process as an adolescent. She's trying to find the identity that works for her, just as Via is. However, the fact that Via finds all of this painful reinforces once again that growing up isn't an easy process. Further, not all of the changes Via experiences will be on her own terms—when Miranda's changes are wholly unexpected and also unwelcome.

**VIA: AFTER SCHOOL**

During eighth period on the first day of school, Via tells Miranda that she doesn't need a ride home. It's a lie, but Via can't stomach sitting in the car with Miranda. Via takes the bus and the subway home by herself and lies to Mom that she's late because Miranda's mom bought them pizza. She gives Mom a little bit of information about her day and then asks about August's, which leads to a strange and dramatic fight when Mom acts as though she doesn't believe August had a good day.

In this situation, August makes a convenient cover for Via's pain and confusion—she can hide what's going on because she can easily shift the attention off of her and onto August. Mom's disbelief in August's assessment of his day suggests that she still thinks of him as being a child who wants to appease his parent, even though there's clear evidence to the contrary that August actually did have a decent day.



Via storms to August's room, moves Daisy over, and tries to ask him about school while he plays video games. He doesn't answer Via's question if kids were mean until Via pulls his controller away, and then he sarcastically asks why people would be mean to him. Via is shocked; she's never heard him be sarcastic before.

Via's shock at August's sarcasm suggests that as much as she'd like him to grow up and be more mature, it's still strange for her to see that process underway.

**VIA: THE PADAWAN BITES THE DUST**

That night, August cuts off his Padawan braid. It makes Via surprisingly angry. She remembers how proud August had been of his braid, and she's angry that he cut it off without talking to her or calling Christopher, who also grew a braid at the same time. After dinner, Mom knocks on Via's door and Via recognizes that Mom is drained. Via declines to tell her about Miranda, but asks if she'd bring in Daisy to sleep in her room. Mom agrees, but she doesn't come back. Dad does, and Via tells him that Miranda and Ella are being jerks. He teases her about reading *War and Peace*, even though she knows he's proud of her, and later brings Daisy in.

This passage makes it clear that the story is jumping back in time to when August cut off his braid. Meanwhile, the respective actions of Mom and Dad suggest that Dad has more emotional bandwidth to attend to his children's needs. He also seems to recognize that Via needs parenting just like August, which may explain why Via feels so betrayed by Mom in particular. Via's anger at August's decision to cut off his braid shows that Via still feels some control over August's identity. This shows that she'll have to let go of August, just as Mom and Dad will.



VIA: AN APPARITION AT THE DOOR

Once, Via woke up in the middle of the night and saw Mom standing outside August's room, listening to him sleep. Via thought she looked like a ghost or an angel. She tried to sneak back into her room without attracting Mom's notice, but she failed. Mom explained that August was fine, walked Via back to bed, and kissed her goodnight. Via wonders how many nights Mom has stood outside August's door, and wonders if Mom has ever stood outside her door.

Again, Via's wondering if Mom has ever watched her sleep shows that Via desperately wants to feel as though Mom loves and cares for her as much as Mom cares for August. This in turn suggests that Via's insistence that she's already independent is a way for her to cover up her longing for attention and care.



VIA: BREAKFAST

The morning of the second day of school, Via asks Mom to pick her up after school. Mom insists that Miranda's mom can drive Via as she supposedly did the day before, while Dad insists that Via is old enough to take the subway by herself. Mom is perplexed both at Via's request and Dad's answer, so she asks if something is going on. Via spitefully reminds Mom that she never came back to check on her last night like she said she would, and Mom is distraught when she realizes her mistake. Her apology makes Via feel bad for making Mom feel bad.

Via's guilt trip is an unkind thing to do, though Mom's reaction makes it clear that she's spread thin trying to care for her children. Dad appears to recognize that Via is more independent than Mom wants to think, though this is likely at the root of the problem Mom and Via are having: Mom simultaneously forces Via to be independent while not actually believing that Via is old enough to be that independent.



Mom asks if there's something going on with Miranda, and Via explains that Miranda is acting like a jerk. August pipes up that Miranda isn't a jerk, but Mom quickly tries to defuse the brewing argument by agreeing to pick Via up from school. Dad impatiently says that if Via is old enough to read *War and Peace*, she's old enough to take the subway alone. He rushes Via out the door, and Via waves at Mom when Mom yells for her to call before she gets on the subway. Dad turns around, smiles, and yells "*War and Peace!*" at Mom.

War and Peace is a difficult novel that's more than a thousand pages long. Though it's clearly a major undertaking, it's important to recognize that simply being able to get through such a novel doesn't mean that someone is fully mature or able to handle potentially dangerous situations like taking the subway alone.



VIA: GENETICS 101

Via explains that Dad's family is Jewish, while Mom's family is Brazilian. Except for Grans and Grans' husband, who lived in the U.S., everyone else still lives in Brazil. Mom and Dad met at Brown University and have been together ever since. They moved to North River Heights in upper Manhattan when Via was a year old. Until August was born, nobody knew that they were carriers for his genetic mutation. Though sometimes his condition can be caused by mutations during pregnancy, in August's case, he is the way he is because both Mom and Dad are carriers for the gene. Via explains that she's also a carrier for the gene.

By introducing basic ideas of inheritability and biology, Via begins to show how parts of a person's identity are solidified long before they're even born. Especially since the most identifiable part of August's outward identity came from mutations in his parents' genes, this also shows how one's parents have the power to pass on not just hair color or height, but to pass on traits that can make a child more susceptible to bullying.



VIA: THE PUNNETT SQUARE

Via explains that if she has children, there's a 50-50 chance that she'll pass the gene on to them, but only a one in four chance that they'll look like August. August is guaranteed to pass the gene onto his children, but if he marries someone who isn't a carrier, their children won't look like him. Via says that over the years, doctors have drawn hundreds of Punnett squares for Mom and Dad to explain August's genetics. She says that she likes how doctors talk, using words that she doesn't understand to explain things she can't understand. Those words explain babies that won't be born, just like Via's.

At the end of this chapter, Via takes the stance that she doesn't feel comfortable having children when there's a possibility that they'd look like August. This probably has to do with the way that Via sees August move through the world with difficulty and be punished for his looks. However, it may also have something to do with the fact that Via has been somewhat of a caregiver for August since his birth, which is a burden she may not want to pass on.



VIA: OUT WITH THE OLD

After a week of excruciatingly awkward lunches, Miranda and Ella attach themselves to a popular group. Via finishes *War and Peace* in the library during lunch so she has an excuse to not see them, and in October, she starts hanging out with a girl named Eleanor. Eleanor is funny and smart kid, and so Via begins having lunch with her at the smart kids' table. Via meets a boy named Justin at the table and has an instant crush on him. When Via runs into Miranda and Ella, they say hi, and Miranda asks after August, but Via never tells August hi for Miranda.

The way that Via talks about eating lunch at the "smart kids' table" shows that there's the same kind of social stratification at play in her high school as there is at Beecher Prep. This begins to show that the status struggles and the bullying that August experiences aren't necessarily unique to him; they're a part of adolescence, figuring out one's identity, and going to school.



VIA: OCTOBER 31

Grans died the night before Halloween, so it's always a sad time of year for Via and Mom. Mom copes by going all out on August's Halloween costume. This year, she spends all her time on the Boba Fett costume. Via explains that Mom spent two weeks working on it and adds that Mom has never made her a costume.

The fact that August left out this very important detail about why Via may have been having a hard time illustrates his immaturity—he sees no reason for anyone to not have a good time on Halloween, just because he likes it.



Via wakes up on Halloween thinking about Grans, and she feels sad and weepy. Dad is in a bad mood and ends up making Via cry, so he takes August to school, and Via and Mom stay home. Via thinks that Mom must miss Grans a lot, as Grans was always there during August's trips to the hospital. Mom suggests that they watch their favorite movie, and Via thinks this will be a good opportunity to tell Mom about Miranda and Ella. Just as they sit down, Mom gets a call that August is sick and needs to go home. When he gets home, he throws up and goes to bed. Mom reassumes her role as August's caretaker, and neither Mom nor Via ask why he didn't wear the Boba Fett costume. Via notes that if Mom is annoyed, she doesn't show it.

Via shows her maturity when she reflects on Mom's relationship with Grans, as well as how Mom might be feeling now. She also shows her maturity by not protesting when Mom turns her attention to August. Though it's certainly not easy, she's grown up enough to consider worldviews and experiences other than her own and can even bring herself to wonder if someone else's experience might be more profound than her own. This shows up again when Via notes her mom's lack of reaction to August not wearing his costume.



VIA: TRICK OR TREAT

August insists he's not well enough to go trick-or-treating, which Via finds shocking and sad. She thinks that Halloween must be the best for August, since he looks like any other kid. She goes to his room in the evening to check on him and make sure he doesn't want to go to the Halloween parade. He still doesn't want to go, and Via can't figure out how August can be so brave for other serious medical stuff but be sidelined now by some nausea.

Via asks if there's something more going on, and August, close to tears, finally tells Via what he overheard Jack saying. Via soothingly says that Jack probably didn't mean it, but August won't be comforted. He becomes suddenly angry, punches his pillow, and yells that he hates school. Via lets him cry for a minute and then suggests he put on his Boba Fett costume so they can go to the parade. Finally, he agrees. Via helps him with his straps and belts.

VIA: TIME TO THINK

Via feels bad for Mom the next day, as Mom has no idea that August's stomach is perfectly fine. By Sunday evening, August still doesn't want to go back to school, even as Via tries to convince him otherwise. August is happy at the thought that if the truth gets out, Jack would get in trouble, but he still insists he doesn't want to go back. Via insists that August is being crazy, and tells him that everyone hates school. He asks if people go out of their way to not touch her and insists his days are worse than hers. Via reminds him that if he wants to be treated normally, he can't make life into a contest of whose day was worse.

Via tells August that it's actually great that the kids don't know that August heard them saying mean things, because he can now ignore them and they won't know why. August asks if that's how Via is with Miranda, which annoys Via. August admits that Miranda called the other day to talk to him, and she hadn't heard that he was going to a real school. She told him that she'd always love him like a big sister. Via is aghast that he didn't tell her about the call.

Angry, Via threatens to tell Mom and Dad about Jack if August stops going to school, saying that if Mr. Tushman finds out, he'll make Jack apologize in front of the whole school and everyone will think that August needs to go to a school for kids with special needs. August finally agrees to go to school. Casually, Via asks if Miranda said anything about her. August says that Miranda mentioned that she misses Via, and Via is embarrassed at how happy she is to hear that.

In this situation, Via steps into a parental role. Even though she insists she struggles to read August after his surgeries, it's telling that she can still ascertain that something must be wrong other than nausea.



One of the reasons August feels comfortable telling Via what happened is because Via is still a kid, not an adult. This begins to illustrate how part of coming of age means learning to trust the adults in August's life with stuff like this; he tells Via because he's not there yet, though his ability to voice what's bothering him is a step in the right direction.



Via is right when she tells August that there are no prizes for having the worst day—in the same vein, part of growing up is recognizing that everyone does indeed have bad days, and the relative "badness" of people's days isn't necessarily worth comparing. The fact that August remains stubborn in his decision shows how these extremely emotional moments can, for a time, inhibit growth and maturity. However, it also seems that Via lacks some empathy and sensitivity in failing to acknowledge August's deep feelings of pain and betrayal.



Via's suggestion encourages August to use the overwhelmingly negative social structure for some minimal gain. This again illustrates that these social games aren't unique to either high school or middle school.



The joy that Via feels at the revelation about Miranda shows that deep down, Via does still want to be friends with her. However, Miranda isn't making an effort to show Via she wants to be friends too, which seems to be why Via makes unkind suggestions to August about how to handle his own problems.



SUMMER: WEIRD KIDS

Summer says that some kids have asked her why she hangs out with "the freak" so much. She tells them that August is nice, and deflects when people call her a saint or suggest that Mr. Tushman asked her to be nice. Summer thinks that kids are weird. She explains that she sat with August on the first day of school because she felt sorry for him, but he is just a kid.

Summer's conceptualization of her friendship with August and her reasons behind cultivating it rely on the fact that she's much less interested in being popular than her friends appear to be. Essentially, being friends with August is less of a risk for her because she doesn't care as much about the "consequences."



SUMMER: THE PLAGUE

Summer admits that August's face does take some time to get used to. However, she doesn't feel bad for him anymore; she keeps sitting with him because he's fun and nice. Summer is annoyed that a lot of kids are acting too grown up to play. They're all interested in "hanging out" and only talk about who's cute and who likes who. August still likes to play foursquare.

Summer's assessment of her classmates' different rates of growing up begins to illustrate that even though all of her classmates are ten years old, they're still all experiencing this period differently.



While playing foursquare one day, Summer learns about **the Plague**. Supposedly, anyone who touches August has thirty seconds to wash their hands before they catch the Plague. Nobody has touched August because of this. Summer only finds out because Maya confides that she won't play foursquare because of it. Maya agrees that it's a stupid reason, but insists on avoiding August anyway.

Remember that Jack and Julian shook August's hand when they showed him around school the first time. When comparing that moment to this one, Maya's agreement that the Plague is stupid shows that this sort of exclusionary action can only function in a larger group when all members of the group buy into it.



SUMMER: THE HALLOWEEN PARTY

Summer is thrilled to get an invitation to Savanna's Halloween party because Savanna is the most popular girl in school. She already has a boyfriend and looks like a teenager. After Summer accepts the invitation, Savanna starts acting nicely towards Summer. Savanna tells Summer to not wear a costume or brag to others that she got invited. Summer is so thrilled, she even feels okay about missing the Halloween parade.

Summer's happiness at being invited shows that she is actually interested in being a part of the upper crust of Beecher Prep, though her comment that Savanna "looks like a teenager" suggests that this may be because Summer is interested in appearing more grown up through association more than anything else.



When Summer knocks on Savanna's door, Savanna asks outright where Summer's boyfriend is. Summer has no idea what she's talking about until she realizes Savanna is referring to August. Savanna leads her to the basement, where Summer learns that Ximena is dating Miles, and Ellie also has a boyfriend, even though she's just as flat as Summer is. Within five minutes, Savanna and Henry tell Summer that if she stopped hanging out with August, she could be popular. They tell her that Julian likes her and offer to send him over to talk, but Summer excuses herself to the bathroom. While upstairs she calls her mom and asks to be picked up. Summer leaves the party early enough to go to the Halloween parade.

Savanna's initial comment is clearly an attempt to shame Summer for spending time with August. This is reinforced when Savanna and Henry try to tell Summer how she could be popular, though their insistence that Summer only has to do one thing is possibly not true. The romantic relationship dynamics at play at the party suggest that Summer would need to agree to date Julian and by doing so, would also need to be on board with Julian's bullying.



SUMMER: NOVEMBER

At school the next day, Summer tells Savanna that she had to leave the party because she ate bad Halloween candy, and also mentions that she has a crush on someone other than Julian. August is absent, but finally returns to school on Monday. Summer can tell that something is up, but he doesn't want to talk. She tries to engage him in conversation about their Egyptian Museum projects, but August seems disinterested.

Finally, August looks Summer in the eye and tells her that she doesn't have to be friends with him. He says that he knows Mr. Tushman talked to her and told her to be friends with him. Aghast and angry, Summer assures August that Mr. Tushman never talked to her. Summer admits that she would've stayed mad about August's accusation longer, but he tells her what Jack said on Halloween and swears her to secrecy.

SUMMER: WARNING: THIS KID IS RATED R

Summer warns her mom about August's face, but Summer's mom still looks surprised when August walks through the front door. August and Summer work on their Egyptian projects for a while and then hang out in the living room. August finds a photo of Summer with her dad, and is surprised to see that he's black and was in the military. Summer explains that he died a few years ago. She wonders what happens when people die, and suggests that maybe people don't go to heaven. She thinks that people might be born again and get a chance at a do-over.

August thinks for a moment and confirms that a person would be born as an entirely new person. He's thrilled that in his next life, he'll get a new face. Awkwardly, Summer asks August what exactly is wrong with his face. August shrugs and explains that he has mandibulofacial dysostosis and another unpronounceable syndrome. The combination is so rare that there's no name for it, but he says that he's a medical wonder.

Though removing herself from the uncomfortable situation was the right thing for Summer to do (and an underhanded way of standing up for August), it's telling that she doesn't feel comfortable calling Savanna out or telling her the truth about her dislike of Julian's behavior as a bully. This shows that she's just as caught up in the social structure as anyone else, even if she wishes it weren't so.



August's leveling with Summer shows that he fully understands the social structure around him and recognizes how powerful that structure is. This implies that he's possibly aware that Jack said those mean things in order to curry favor with Julian.



When Summer suggests that people get a chance to do life over again, it shows that she understands that actions are some of the most important ways to define a person's identity. She recognizes that she could be a number of different people simply by making different choices.



When August can barely pronounce even half of his syndromes, it shows that part of his identity is still something he cannot fully understand—as Via said, he has to use words he doesn't understand to describe something he doesn't fully understand.



SUMMER: THE EGYPTIAN TOMB

For the next month, August and Summer hang out often after school. On the day of the Egyptian Museum exhibit, the students at Beecher Prep turn the gym into a giant museum and arrange their "artifacts" on tables. Summer makes a sculpture of Anubis, and August makes a pyramid out of sugar cubes. Everyone dresses up in Egyptian costumes and then get to take their parents on a flashlight tour of the darkened gym. August and Summer take their moms around together and have a fantastic time. At one point, Summer runs into Jack. Jack asks why August is mad at him, and all Summer says is "Bleeding Scream."

The fact that Jack clearly doesn't know why August is mad at him shows that for him, what he said to Julian was nothing more than a blip in his day. This begins to illustrate how part of growing up is recognizing that other people experience things differently; if Jack is able to recognize that his own inconsequential moment was monumental for August, it'll be a step towards maturity and recognizing the rich inner lives of others.



JACK: THE CALL

Jack begins his narration in August, when his mom gets a call from Mr. Tushman. Mr. Tushman asks Jack's mom if Jack would be willing to come in before school starts to show around a nice kid who has something wrong with his face. Jack is suspicious of why Mr. Tushman wants him to do it and doesn't want to. His mom promises that she won't force him, but she reprimands him when he calls the new kid deformed. Jack tells the reader he knew immediately that the new kid was August.

Jack's unwillingness to participate shows that being kind isn't always an easy or simple decision. Jack is certainly aware that associating with August will hurt his reputation, though it's telling that at this point he's willing to take his mom's scolding rather than help August. This gives Jack a starting point from which to mature.



JACK: CARVEL

Jack explains that he saw August for the first time when he was six. He was with his babysitter, Veronica, and his baby brother, Jamie, eating ice cream. Jack turned, saw August, and was scared. In his surprise he said "uhhh," even though he knew it was mean. Veronica immediately got up and led Jack away, while Jamie stared from the stroller. Jack whispered and asked what was wrong with "that kid," and Veronica was so angry she wouldn't answer. She spat that leaving the way they did was very bad. Veronica explained that she made them leave because she didn't want Jamie to say anything rude. She told Jack that they don't have to try to be mean to hurt someone. Jack saw August around after that and always tried to remember what Veronica said.

Veronica's decision to remove Jack and Jamie from August's vicinity shows that it's not always a clear-cut decision to be kind or not—she wants to protect August from Jack and Jamie's poor reactions, but she had no way to reprimand the kids in the moment and salvage the situation. This begins to add some nuance to the idea of kindness, as Veronica clearly thinks that though she could've done better, she did the best she could. With this, the novel makes it very apparent that there's no one right way to be kind.



JACK: WHY I CHANGED MY MIND

Later that night, Jack asks Jack's mom who else Mr. Tushman called. She says that he called Julian and Charlotte, and Jack insists that Julian is a phony and Charlotte is a goody two shoes. Jack tries to tell his mom what August looks like just as Jamie walks into the kitchen. Jamie immediately joins in and says that August gave him a nightmare. Jamie says he screamed and ran away from August at the park. Jack's mom becomes angry and then serious. She sends Jamie away and seems ready to give Jack a lecture, but Jack agrees to meet August. Jack tells the reader that there will always be jerks like Julian, but if normally nice kids like Jamie can be so mean, then August won't stand a chance.

When Jack decides to help August, he begins to recognize that it's not enough to rely on others to be kind, especially since those others in this case include a known jerk like Julian. Jamie's behavior here reinforces Veronica's earlier point that one doesn't have to be actively mean to hurt someone's feelings, especially since Jack implies that Jamie doesn't fully understand how awful he's being. This shows clearly that kindness is something that people can learn.



JACK: FOUR THINGS

Jack says that you do eventually get used to August's face, and that August is very funny and nice. He's also smart and lets Jack cheat off his homework. August even lied to a teacher to protect Jack when a teacher called them out for having the exact same answers on an assignment. Jack says now that he knows August, he truly wants to be friends with him. He was only nice to him at first because Mr. Tushman asked him to be but now, he'd want to hang out with August over anyone else in the fifth grade.

In Jack's anecdote about August lying, the boys' teacher would surely say that the kind thing would be to allow Jack to learn on his own rather than protecting him from making mistakes. This again illustrates how one's conception of what's kind or not changes and evolves as one matures and gains a more nuanced understanding of the world.



JACK: EX-FRIENDS

Jack has no idea what Summer's "Bleeding Scream" comment means. He explains that one day, he and August were friends and the next, August wouldn't talk to him. Jack doesn't believe he did anything to make August mad. He says he has plenty of other friends and tries to ignore August, but people keep asking Jack what's going on. Jack isn't sure if people are still playing **the Plague** and thinks that it's August's loss if he doesn't want to be friends, since August doesn't really have any other friends but Summer. Jack thinks it's good because now he's part of the in-crowd, but bad because he doesn't even like the popular kids. He thinks it's all August's fault.

Jack's tone throughout this chapter shows that Jack is truly hurt by August's treatment of him, though he's trying hard to deal with his emotions and make the best of it. He also conceptualizes popularity as a consolation prize here, which suggests that as popular as Jack seems to August, Jack doesn't actually enjoy or prioritize being popular.



JACK: SNOW

It snows right before Thanksgiving, which means that Beecher Prep is closed for an extra day. Jack is bummed that August is ignoring him, so he's thrilled to have an extra day off. Jack's dad also has the day off, so he takes Jack and Jamie sledding on Skeleton Hill. On the way home, Jack finds an old broken sled and his dad lets him take it home. Jack fixes it up, paints it, and names it *Lightning*. The next day, Jack goes back to Skeleton Hill and discovers that *Lightning* is the fastest sled he's ever ridden. By Monday, all the snow has turned to slush. Jack wants to tell August about *Lightning*, but he doesn't.

Although the novel clearly shows that school is important, it also champions the power of staying home for a day to recharge and rejuvenate. This is another way that the novel shows that growing up means taking steps forward and back, as it casts these days at home as recovery days and preparation for one's return to school.

**JACK: FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD**

Mr. Browne's December precept is that "fortune favors the bold." He asks the class to write about a time they were brave. Jack thinks hard about the assignment and thinks that the bravest thing he did was become friends with August, but he doesn't write about that because he's afraid Mr. Browne will make them read theirs out loud. He wonders what August will write about and thinks that August probably has lots of things to write about.

When Jack focuses more on August's bravery than his own, it shows him beginning to expand his recognition of others' lives and experiences. In doing so, Jack shows clearly that he's coming of age. The fact that he thinks about this because of a precept shows too the power that teachers have to push their students towards maturity.

**JACK: PRIVATE SCHOOL**

Jack explains that his parents aren't rich, even though he goes to private school. Jack's dad is a teacher and Jack's mom is a social worker. They sold their car when Jamie started kindergarten at Beecher Prep, and they live in an apartment in a rough neighborhood in town. Jack listens to his parents talk about going without air conditioning or working two jobs. One day after Thanksgiving, Jack hangs out with Julian, Henry, and Miles at recess. Julian, whose family is wealthy, complains about having to go to Paris for Christmas. Jack begins to tell the boys about *Lightning*, but Miles cuts in and talks about his new state of the art, very expensive sled.

Though it remains little more than an undercurrent, the novel begins to attribute some of Julian's meanness to his wealth and privilege here—it's clear that he hasn't considered that for someone like Jack, going to Paris would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. When Miles cuts Jack off to talk about his own financial fortune, it also shows that financial power can translate to social power. The boys surely know they're far wealthier than Jack, and they use that information to make him feel small.



Julian throws out that Skeleton Hill is lame, and won't listen when Jack insists a kid broke their neck there. Julian says it's an Indian burial ground, and Miles mentions that he left his old sled there and a hobo apparently took it. Julian offers to have his dad drive them all to a golf course with steep hills, but Jack hurries away. He doesn't want them to know that he's the "hobo" who took Miles's sled.

For Jack, the realization that he took Miles' cast-off sled is something that drives home for him that he doesn't want to be friends with these people. Miles' use of "hobo" is horribly classist and suggests that someone who might find joy in his old things isn't worth consideration as a full person.



JACK: IN SCIENCE

Jack admits that he's not a great student. School isn't his favorite, and he especially hates science. When Jack and August were friends, Jack was doing okay because August let Jack copy his notes. Now, Jack is struggling. One day in science class, Jack is struggling as usual, but is especially taken aback when his teacher starts talking about the science fair. Jack's mind wanders and as it does, he suddenly realizes what Summer meant by "Bleeding Scream"—it was August in the costume that day. August heard him talking to Julian. Jack admits he never would've said anything in front of August, and now he feels ready to vomit.

Jack's realization recalls Mr. Browne's precept that one's words are their monuments, as he now realizes that his words weren't just words—they have a concrete effect on other people. This begins to show Jack that it's not enough to just be kind to someone's face; he must also be kind to people when they're not around. In this way, Jack continues his realization that he cannot rely on others to be kind; he has to do the work himself.



JACK: PARTNERS

Jack checks out for the rest of science class and barely hears his teacher pair him with August for the science fair project. When Jack finally comes back to earth after the bell rings, August is halfway out the door. Julian approaches Jack, smirks, and teases him about getting to work with his "best bud." Jack thinks he hates Julian and tells him to shut up. Julian asks their teacher if he and Jack can be partners. Their teacher starts to say that it's okay, but Jack tells her he's fine working with August and runs away. Julian races after him and reminds Jack that he doesn't have to be friends with "that freak." Jack punches Julian squarely in the mouth.

Though punching Julian is clearly an unkind thing to do, this also further complicates the novel's exploration of the nuance and difficulty of defining what is and isn't kind. Jack is trying to defend August, and given the social hierarchy that Julian fosters, nobody else is willing to challenge him. This shows that Jack is now in a unique spot where he can take on Julian, but he's only able to get to that point because he realizes he no longer cares about his own status.



JACK: DETENTION

In Mr. Tushman's office, Jack sits and listens to Mr. Tushman talk about expulsion. Jack's mom is there too, looking surprised and angry. Jack refuses to explain what happened, saying that doing so would make things worse. Jack thinks he doesn't want to involve Julian, as Julian will reveal that Jack badmouthed August. Jack apologizes and starts to cry. Mr. Tushman takes a deep breath and says that instead of expelling Jack, he'll simply suspend Jack for the few days before winter break, ask him to write an apology letter to Julian, and allow him to start fresh in January.

Here, Jack learns the hard lesson that being kind and standing up for others isn't without consequences. This continues the novel's project of encouraging readers to think of kindness as necessary and every person's responsibility to carry out, but also to remind readers that being kind is sometimes extremely difficult. Mr. Tushman's leniency suggests he's somewhat aware of what's going on, which offers some hope for adult intervention in Julian's bullying.



JACK: SEASON'S GREETINGS

When Jack's mom and Jack get home, they find holiday cards from Julian's family and August's family in their mail. Jack thinks that August's card, which has a picture of Daisy on it, is cute. He tells his mom that he heard that Julian's mom edited August's face out of the class picture. Then, Jack tells her why he punched Julian and what happened on Halloween.

The revelation that Julian's mom edited August out of the class photo shows that this kind of nastiness and bullying isn't even confined to school-age kids, since clearly adults engage in the same kind of behavior. In this way, the novel suggests that some people never truly learn how to be kind.



JACK: LETTERS, EMAILS, FACEBOOK, TEXTS

Jack writes a letter to Mr. Tushman telling him that he knows that what he did was wrong, but he'd rather not get Julian into trouble. He also writes an apology letter to Julian. Mr. Tushman writes Jack and says that he has some idea of what happened, and while he doesn't condone violence, he knows that good friends are worth defending.

Julian's mom writes an email to Mr. Tushman that's CC'd to Jack's parents. It explains that she supports Jack's return to school, but she wonders if Jack "snapped" because of the pressure of being forced to be friends with "the new child with special needs" (August). She explains that she told Julian he didn't have to be friends with August and suggests that August shouldn't be allowed at school at all, since Beecher Prep isn't an inclusion school. Mr. Tushman emails her back and explains that August isn't disabled in the least, completed the entrance application like every other student, and insists that asking kids to be kind to a new student is a great way to teach empathy, friendship, and loyalty.

Jack's mom emails Julian's mom offering to pay for Julian's dental bills, but she also explains that Jack didn't feel it was a burden to be friends with August. She says that Jack genuinely enjoys August's company.

Jack sends August a friend request on Facebook and also sends him an email apologizing for what he said. Over text, Jack explains to August that Summer told him "Bleeding Scream." Jack confirms that he did indeed punch Julian and assures August that he wouldn't actually want to kill himself if he were August—he'd want to kill himself if he were Julian. August agrees that they can be friends.

JACK: BACK FROM WINTER BREAK

When Jack returns to school in January, all the boys ignore him. Even kids like Amos and Tristan are short with him, and Jack realizes he has some form of **the Plague**. The girls all talk to Jack, and the two Maxes say hi, which makes Jack feel bad for never talking to them. At lunch, Jack sits down at his normal table, but all his tablemates get their lunches and move tables to sit closer to Julian. Jack feels awful sitting by himself, so he goes and reads in the library.

Though Mr. Tushman is certainly obligated to punish violence in his school, he shows here that part of being a positive role model is being willing to understand the gray area in life. This will hopefully impart this lesson to Jack, in turn guiding him towards maturity.



Julian's mom's insistence that Beecher Prep isn't an inclusion school shows that she believes that August isn't physically or intellectually on par with his classmates, which in turn shows that she's unable or unwilling to understand that August is truly just another kid. Just as he did in his letter to Jack, Mr. Tushman diplomatically sets an example of kindness for those willing to take it. This reaffirms that Mr. Tushman is an exceptional educator, as he's willing to stand up to parents for the sake of his students.



Jack's mom does the same thing as Mr. Tushman by making it clear to Julian's mom whose side she's on. This foreshadows the coming "war" at Beecher Prep.



Though Jack's assertion that he'd want to kill himself if he were Julian is still distasteful, it shows that Jack has learned the value of kindness and standing up for real, loyal friends.



Now that Jack seems to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, he's better able to evaluate his own past behavior and figure out where he could've done better. This shows again how the toxic social structure can keep people from being as kind and as friendly as they could be.



JACK: THE WAR

At the end of the day, Jack finds a note from Charlotte in his locker asking him to come alone to room 301 after school. There, she swears Jack to secrecy and explains that at Julian's holiday party, everyone but Jack and August were there. Julian told everyone that Jack has emotional problems, that Jack's parents begged the school to not expel him, and that this all happened because Mr. Tushman forced Jack to be friends with August. Charlotte says too that Julian's mom is pushing the school to review August's application, since some assignments have changed a bit to accommodate him.

Charlotte says that it's dumb, but Julian's trying to "help" Jack by cutting him off and making him feel lonely. He thinks that it'll make Jack drop August if all the boys refuse to talk to Jack. She explains that the girls except for Savanna's group are neutral. Jack lies and says he doesn't care if nobody talks to him. They agree that Julian's mom editing the class photo was gross. When Charlotte leaves the room, Jack can tell that she doesn't want to be seen talking to him.

Though Charlotte is doing a noble thing by clueing Jack into what's going on, she clearly cares more about her own social standing than being kind given that she shares this information secretly and doesn't want her name attached to it. This again shows that even those who don't really want to participate in the social structure are often forced to participate anyway, if only because they fear being ostracized.



Julian's logic rests on the belief that others share his prioritization of social standing over real friendship. The fact that Jack clearly doesn't agree sets Julian up to hopefully begin to reevaluate his thinking and come to a kinder outlook on life and social interactions.



JACK: SWITCHING TABLES

At lunch the next day, Jack sits with Tristan, Nino, and Pablo, all of whom aren't popular but also don't play Dungeons and Dragons like the two Maxes. They greet Jack but ditch him after they get their food. Mrs. G tries to send them back to their original table, but Jack gets up and accepts Summer's invitation to sit with her and August.

When Jack talks about the two Maxes in terms of their affinity for Dungeons and Dragons, it begins to illustrate the idea that one thing can unfairly dictate a kid's identity. Just as the Maxes' passion for Dungeons and Dragons defines their outward identities, so too does August's condition define his.



JACK: WHY I DIDN'T SIT WITH AUGUST THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Jack admits that he's a hypocrite and didn't sit with August on the first day of school because he just wanted to be normal for a little while. He was surprised when Summer sat with August and figured that she was just doing it to be nice. Now, Jack tells them what Charlotte shared about Julian's vendetta, though he leaves out stuff about the holiday party, Julian's mom saying that August has special needs, and the rumor that he snapped because of pressure to be August's friend. Jack muses that it's weird to have people ignore him, and August sarcastically says, "welcome to my world."

Remember that Via conceptualized August's sarcasm as new and different; this suggests that August is beginning to come into himself and take on this sarcastic persona as a part of his new, more mature identity. When Jack leaves out information that would hurt August's feelings even more, it shows that he too is coming of age and learning more about how to be kind and take care of his friends.



JACK: SIDES

The next day at lunch, Summer pulls out a piece of paper with a list of who's on Jack's side, who's on Julian's side, and who's neutral. She explains that Charlotte made it for her. She's happy that the two Maxes are on Jack's side and mentions that Charlotte likes Jack. Jack says that he can't even ask Charlotte out now that people are acting like he has **the Plague**. When Jack looks ashamed for bringing up the Plague, August says he already knew about it but didn't know what kids were calling it.

Summer declares that they're too young to be dating anyway. August agrees but jokes that it's a shame with all the "babes" throwing themselves at him. Jack sprays milk out of his nose laughing.

Making the lists for Summer was another nice thing of Charlotte to do, but it once again shows that she's not willing to stand up to Julian's bullying herself. The list also creates even more rigid divisions between kids of different popularity levels, which reinforces the status quo and doesn't offer anyone opportunities to come up with a better system.



August's ability to joke about the situation shows that he's at least making attempts to not take it too seriously or let it affect him too much—a more mature standpoint.



JACK: AUGUST'S HOUSE

In the middle of January, August insists that he and Jack need to work on their science fair project. They go to August's house, even though Jack is nervous in case August told his parents about the Halloween incident. Jack is shocked to see all the *Star Wars* things in August's room and thinks that Daisy is an awesome dog. As August suggests projects, Jack tries to steer the conversation to anything else but science. August decides that they'll make a potato battery.

Via knocks on August's door and lets herself in. She's clearly not expecting to see Jack and when August introduces him, Jack can tell that Via heard about the Halloween incident and also remembers his reaction at seeing August the first time. She explains that she has a friend coming over and kicks August's chair when he teases her about having a boyfriend. After Via leaves, Jack says that she's hot and asks if she hates him. August confirms she does.

*August's concern about the science fair project reinforces that he is, first and foremost, a normal kid with homework and obligations. Jack's shock at seeing all the *Star Wars* stuff suggests that August is trying hard to tone down his outward expression of his love of *Star Wars* to somewhat control how others see him.*



Via's obvious distaste for Jack makes it clear to Jack that just because he's one of August's friends now, he'll never escape the fact that he was once unspeakably cruel. This shows that Jack will have to continue to make good and kind choices going forward and that can make him a better person in the long run, but his past is still relevant.



JACK: THE BOYFRIEND

A few minutes later, Via returns with a boy named Justin. He wears round glasses, carries a long case with a sharp end, and seems nervous. August mischievously asks if Justin is Via's boyfriend, and Jack asks if there's a gun in his case. Justin nervously explains that he plays the fiddle in a zydeco band. August suggests that Justin tell people that he has a gun so people wouldn't mess with him. Justin tries to explain that zydeco is a kind of music from Louisiana, but Jack struggles to not laugh when Justin says he's from Brooklyn, not Louisiana. Via pulls Justin out, closes the door, and August and Jack start laughing hysterically.

Though the age difference between Justin and August complicates things somewhat, Jack and August's teasing shows them engaging in a power play over someone who has relatively less power (he is romantically involved with Via and this is his first time visiting the house, meaning he probably feels very vulnerable). This shows that even as nice as Jack and August are most of the time, they're not above this low-grade teasing when it suits them.



JUSTIN: OLIVIA'S BROTHER

When Justin meets August for the first time, he's surprised. He thinks that he shouldn't be, given how much Via has talked about him. Justin shakes August's hand and tells him about zydeco for a minute before Via leads him out of August's room. Justin explains that he and Via have been dating for two months now, and he liked her from the first second he saw her. Via told Justin about August on their third date, and he noticed that she never used the word "deformity" to describe him.

After Justin and Via get to Via's room, she asks what he thought of August. He assures Via that he's not shocked, and Via explains that when she was a kid, lots of kids never came back for a second playdate. She says that they weren't even being mean; they were just scared. Justin assures Via he's not scared, but isn't sure she believes him.

JUSTIN: VALENTINE'S DAY

Justin gives Olivia a heart necklace for Valentine's day, and she gives him a bag made out of floppy discs. They make plans for Justin to meet Mom and Dad, so they all go out to a Mexican restaurant. Justin's nerves bring out his tics, which used to be bad but now come out only when he's nervous. Via's parents put Justin at ease immediately. He notices that their waiter is shocked by August, but he pretends not to notice. Justin knows that Via noticed. When Via's parents ask Justin about his music, he thinks that he's not used to this kind of attention. His parents never ask him about his life.

After dinner, they go back to Via's house for ice cream. Daisy greets them at the door, and Mom and Dad discover that she threw up. Mom cleans it up while Dad tells the story of how he adopted Daisy. He picks Daisy up, holds her like a baby, and says that a homeless man asked if he wanted to buy his dog. Dad paid the man \$20 and took Daisy home, not thinking to ask Mom about it. Justin thinks that Daisy knows how lucky she is to have this family. He thinks of his own family—his parents got divorced when he was four, and they've been pushing him to be independent for a long time. Justin can't remember the last time a family member expressed affection. When he gets home, he finds that his tics have stopped.

It's telling that Via strongly rejects the word "deformity" when referring to August. By rejecting that word, Via tells the world that she believes there's nothing wrong with the way that August is—although he's different, he's not different in a bad way. This allows her to both stand up for him, as well as recognize a part of August's identity that he doesn't like as something good and worth celebrating.



Via is clearly trying to test Justin here; her implication is that if he can't handle August, he will no longer have access to her either. By doing this, she insists to Justin that their relationship is contingent on his genuine kindness—which also offers another incentive to being kind.



When Justin mentions having tics, it implies that he lives with Tourette's Syndrome. This begins to add layers to the way that the novel looks at internal identity (like August's face). In Justin's case, those tics are just as much a part of him as August's face is a part of August, which shows that some of those extremely important identity markers that affect how people move through the world aren't always visible.



When the love and affection that Justin observes between Mom and Dad seems to be the direct cause of his stopped tics, it suggests several things: first, that even older kids still need some parental guidance, and second, that a stable and loving home environment can lessen the impact of differences that could, in the hands of less involved or less caring parents, make life very difficult for the child involved. Daisy's vomiting will be important later, but it's important to notice now that none of the kids seem to take much notice.



JUSTIN: OUR TOWN

Justin explains that at school, they're doing the play **Our Town** for the spring show. Via dared him to try out for the lead role and somehow, he got it. Miranda got the female lead, while Via was cast as the understudy. Justin is nervous about having only six weeks to memorize his lines and keep up with the rest of his life. He also heard that Mr. Davenport, the drama teacher, originally planned on putting on *The Elephant Man* but changed at the last minute.

For Justin, **Our Town** is an opportunity for him to come into himself and become more comfortable in his own skin. The fact that Justin can make this transformation by acting reinforces the novel's assertion that empathy and understanding (which actors need to properly portray their characters) are necessary to grow up.



JUSTIN: LADYBUG

One warm evening in March, Via and Justin sit on Via's front stoop and run Justin's lines. Justin forgets the very end of a monologue, and Via prompts him with the rest. She assures him he'll be fine as she catches a ladybug, which she explains is good luck. As the ladybug crawls up her hand, Via suggests that Justin make a wish on the ladybug and he complies. After the ladybug flies away, Justin kisses her.

Though it's much less pronounced with Justin, it's worth noticing that Via also takes on a comforting, guiding role in their relationship, just as she does with August. This begins to show how early childhood examples like this can go on to influence how someone engages with relationships in adulthood.



JUSTIN: THE BUS STOP

As Justin and Via are kissing goodbye, Mom, August, and Jack come down the stairs. Mom pretends not to notice, but August and Jack giggle. Mom asks Justin to walk Jack to the bus stop and wait with him. As Justin and Jack walk, Jack insists he doesn't need supervision, but Justin decides to wait with him anyway. He gives Jack money to buy some gum and watches him cross the street to the store. Justin thinks that Jack seems too small to be out by himself, and thinks that someday, he'll be an overprotective dad so his kids know he cares.

When Justin uses what he sees in front of him to reflect on the parent he wants to be in the future, it shows that individuals do have the power to break out of the roles that others modeled for them as children (which offers some hope for Julian's fate). However, this also recalls Via's earlier assertion that she doesn't want to have children.



After a minute, Justin watches three kids, two of whom look much older, tease Jack as Jack walks out of the store. Jack seems upset when he gets back to the bus stop and explains that the kids were Julian, Henry, and Miles. He says they don't tease him during school but explains that there's a war going on. He hands Justin a piece of paper with three lists of names on it and says that Julian turned the whole grade against him.

Jack's willingness to confide in Justin suggests that he does wish he had more support. Like August confiding in Via, Jack is essentially asking Justin for help here, which suggests he doesn't trust the teachers and adults with real power to do much for him at school.



After a few minutes, Justin realizes that the war is going on because Jack is friends with August. Justin tells Jack that middle school is awful, but it gets better. He waves Jack onto the bus and then heads for the subway, where he sees the three boys laughing near the entrance. Angry, Justin tucks his fiddle case under his arm, looks mean, and approaches the boys. He tells them not to mess with Jack and taps his case for effect.

It's important to recognize that Justin is doing the work here that parents and teachers either can't or won't do by telling Julian, Henry, and Miles to knock it off, showing again that adults or even older kids have a responsibility to guide the younger kids towards good, kind behavior.



JUSTIN: REHEARSAL

As opening night gets closer, Justin spends more and more time rehearsing. He's thrilled when Via suggests he have his fiddle onstage, as he can play a bit when he forgets his lines. He's also happy to discover that Miranda isn't as stuck up as he thought she'd be, given that she's one of the popular girls. One day while Justin and Miranda wait backstage, she asks him about Via and if he's met August. Justin is surprised that Miranda knows about August, but pretends he already knew when she explains that she and Via were good friends and she's known August since he was a baby. Miranda pulls out her wallet and shows Justin pictures of August wearing a space helmet, which she gave him. Miranda asks Justin if he's "okay with it," and when he feigns ignorance, she says simply that the universe wasn't kind to August.

Justin's assessment of Miranda's social standing shows how successful Miranda's new look is in marking her as popular (and therefore, someone who wouldn't know Via). Miranda does much the same thing to Justin here as Via did after he met August for the first time by testing him to make sure he's actually planning on being kind, showing that August's support network is far-reaching. As Grans said, August has many "angels" looking out for him. This also has the effect of showing the reader that Miranda's inner life might not align with Via's perception of her.



JUSTIN: BIRD

The next day, Justin asks Via why she never mentioned that she and Miranda used to be friends. He's annoyed she never shared; she seems defensive. As they argue over whether it's a big deal, Via begins crying. Justin thinks she's crying about him and asks her what's wrong. As the sobs take over, Via manages to choke out that she hasn't told her parents about **Our Town**. She'd rather they don't come so that August doesn't come. Via says she's an awful person, but she loves being at a school where nobody knows about August and nobody whispers about her behind her back. Justin soothes Via and holds her close.

For Via, [Our Town](#) provides a moral dilemma that will test her willingness to act kindly. This continues to situate [Our Town](#) as a coming of age moment for all the characters, as it's clearly going to test Via's maturity and compassion. Via's sadness also alludes to the neglect she feels from her parents, as it suggests that if they were more open with her, they'd possibly understand better what she's going through and be able to help her through it.



JUSTIN: THE UNIVERSE

Justin can't sleep that night. His lines swirl through his head, as well as Miranda's assertion that the universe wasn't kind to August. Justin thinks that August didn't do anything to deserve his rare combination of syndromes. As he thinks, Justin reasons that the universe isn't entirely random—if it were, nobody would be cared for. He thinks that August's adoring parents, Jack's loyalty, and Miranda's adoration of August are proof that the universe cares for everyone.

Justin recognizes that even as August grows up and becomes more independent, he will still have people who love him and will care for him as needed. This suggests that in general, moving towards adulthood doesn't mean that one is totally alone, as August seems to fear. Rather, he'll always have people to lean on.



AUGUST: NORTH POLE

August and Jack's potato lamp receives an A and is a hit at the science fair. Beecher Prep invites parents to come view all the projects at the gym, and August thinks he hates events like this. All the parents stare at him. The only event he liked was the Egyptian Museum because he got to dress up like a mummy. August explains that he's used to people staring at him, but it's a lot to handle when he has several hundred pairs of eyes staring. At the science fair, Mom, Dad, and Jack's parents hang around Jack and August's table. August notices that his classmates' parents seem to form groups that mirror their kids' groups.

August's observation about his classmates' parents is one of the ways that the novel suggests that children are, in many ways, much like their parents. Though this is good news for Jack and August, it doesn't offer a lot of hope for kids like Julian, Henry, and Miles. Essentially, for any of those three to start behaving in a genuinely kind way, their parents must change their behavior too.



AUGUST: THE AUGGIE DOLL

February is the worst month for "the war." Julian leaves notes in August's locker that call him a freak and an orc, but August refuses to report the notes. Summer, August, and Jack leave notes in Julian's locker, but theirs aren't mean. They make up a character named Beulah and leave love notes from her. Julian, Miles, and Henry also do things like steal Jack's gym shorts.

By refusing to report the notes from Julian, August starts taking his adolescent independence too far—it is Mr. Tushman's job to shut down bullying like this. The fact that Mr. Tushman isn't trying other means of helping August suggests he's unaware of what's going on.



All the girls but Savanna's group are neutral, but by March, people start to get sick of it. Amos even stops Julian from pouring pencil shavings into Jack's backpack. Finally, Julian starts spreading rumors that Jack hired a hit man to "get" him, Miles, and Henry. Nobody believes him and they even start making fun of him. By the end of March, everyone stops playing **the Plague** and lots of people will even accept pencils from August. One day, August sees Maya writing a note on Uglydoll stationery and he jokes that Uglydolls are based on him. The girls laugh and the next day, August finds an Uglydoll keychain from Maya on his chair. People are also pretty nice about August's new hearing aids.

The "hit man" is surely Justin, which shows that Justin's act of kindness is indeed having a real effect on August and Jack's experiences at school. When the other students don't believe Julian's rumors and they start abandoning the war, it suggests that it's exhausting and boring to maintain that kind of behavior long-term. This offers some hope that the social structure may be able to change for the better, as this does suggest that Julian's reign as top dog will soon be over.



AUGUST: LOBOT

August has known since he was little that he'd need hearing aids someday, but he desperately doesn't want to wear them. He tries to keep his worsening hearing from people but in October, he failed his audiology test at his annual checkup. At the appointment to get fitted with the hearing aids, August refuses to wear them, insisting he'll look like Lobot from *Star Wars*. Mom has no idea what August is talking about, but the audiologist engages August in upbeat conversation about *Star Wars* as he fits the hearing aids on August's ears with the help of a headband. When August sees himself in the mirror, he starts to cry—it looks like he has antennae coming out of his ears. The audiologist tells August to wait until he turns them on before getting too upset.

Here, the audiologist is able to use a fundamental and treasured part of August's identity (his love of Star Wars) to make him feel better about his ears, which are a part of his identity that he likes much less. The audiologist's clear affinity for Star Wars also shows August that adults can be just as invested in Star Wars as kids can be, which shows him that not everything will have to change as he grows up.



AUGUST: HEARING BRIGHTLY

August can barely describe how he hears when the audiologist turns on his hearing aids. He no longer hears an "ocean" in his head, and words sound bright. When Mom asks how he's hearing, he tells her she doesn't need to yell. The audiologist shows August how to adjust his volume, and the next day, nobody at school makes a big deal about them. August can't figure out now why he was so stressed about the hearing aids.

By forcing August to wear the hearing aids until he recognizes that they're actually good for him, Mom is able to push August towards maturity. This teaches him that things that may initially seem unpleasant can be positive in the end, which is a thought process that individuals learn as they become more mature.



AUGUST: VIA'S SECRET

A couple days after spring break ends, Mom finds out that Via never shared anything about her school's spring play. Mom is uncharacteristically angry with Via about it, and they get in a huge fight. Via screams that she doesn't want them to go, and then things get very quiet. Listening from his bedroom, August can't even hear with his hearing aids.

By keeping this secret, Via's independence has very negative consequences. It's unclear why exactly Mom is so angry about this, but the fact that this situation escalates so much suggests that these arguments are a natural consequence of teens' growing independence.



AUGUST: MY CAVE

Things seem better by dinner. Dad is out, and Daisy is asleep after vomiting again, so Mom makes her an appointment to see the vet the next day. Mom, August, and Via sit down for dinner, and August asks if they're going to see Justin in the play. Mom quietly explains that the play won't be interesting for August, and Via insists that August would get bored. When Mom explains that Dad will go while she'll stay home with August, Via gets mad. August isn't sure what's going on, and neither Mom nor Via will tell him what their argument is really about.

August can probably pick up on the fact that Mom and Via are basically trying to convince him that he's not mature enough to sit through the play. However, it's also important to recognize that Mom and Via are trying to protect August from something that might hurt his feelings.



Mom makes an excuse that their argument has nothing to do with August and is shocked when August accuses her of lying. Suddenly angry, August jumps up and accuses Via of not wanting her friends to know that he's a "freak." He screams at Mom to stop treating him like he's a baby and runs to his room. He slams the door and buries himself in blankets, pillows, and stuffed animals. He can't quite figure out how he got so mad. He figures that Mom will follow soon, but she doesn't come. August pictures how guilty Mom and Via must feel and notices that a half hour has passed since he left the table. Finally, Via bursts in.

August demonstrates an awareness of others' internal thoughts that points clearly to his own growing independence. However, this passage also makes it clear that August may be becoming more mature, but he's still in a liminal state: while he yells at Mom to not treat him like a baby, he still covers himself in stuffed animals and clearly wants Mom to come in and comfort him.



AUGUST: GOODBYE

Via tells August to come quick and yells that it's not about him when he refuses to apologize. She says that Daisy is sick, and Mom needs to take her to the vet, so August needs to say goodbye. August allows Via to lead him to the kitchen, where Daisy is panting on the floor. Mom is crying and admits she's not sure if the vet will be able to fix Daisy. When the taxi arrives, August tries to stop Mom from carrying Daisy out. Mom explains that Dad will meet her at the vet, and August needs to say goodbye. August does as he's told and watches Mom get into the taxi. When the taxi pulls away, Via and August hold each other and cry.

August's initial reaction here shows that he's still self-absorbed, especially during times of heightened emotion. This is a mark of immaturity that's thrown into even sharper relief as August is confronted with the possibility of Daisy's death. Though Mom is clearly doing the right and kind thing by seeking help for Daisy, even if it means euthanizing her, August's unwillingness to let this happen shows that he still has a long way to go to understand that this is actually the right thing to do.



AUGUST: DAISY'S TOYS

Justin arrives a half hour later. He sits with August and Via in the living room quietly and they all look at Daisy's toys, which Via arranged on the coffee table. Via explains to August what happened: Mom was about to go comfort August when Daisy started whimpering and panting. When Mom tried to approach her, Daisy bit Mom. Via says that they never should've let Daisy get so bad, and August is confused. He hadn't noticed that Daisy had been to the vet multiple times recently and had been throwing up a lot. Via assures August that Mom's hand is fine where Daisy bit her, and apologizes for their fight.

The fact that August was entirely unaware that Daisy was ill and in pain is another indicator of his childishness and self-absorption. However, this means that this experience has the potential to teach August to be a better observer of people close to him so that he'll be able to notice things like this in the future. August's fixation on Mom's hurt hand shows that he does understand that adults require care, just like kids do.



Two hours later, Mom and Dad come home without Daisy. August knows that Daisy is gone. They all sit in the living room, and Dad explains that the vet found a huge mass in Daisy's stomach. Dad held her while the vet put her to sleep, and he said she died very peacefully. Later, August goes into his parents' room to ask Mom to put him to bed and sees Dad sitting on the edge of the bed. Dad doesn't notice August and is crying quietly. August leaves the room and peeks into Via's room, where Mom and Via are lying together. August goes to his room, changes into pajamas, and puts himself to bed all by himself. He imagines Daisy snuggling with him.

This moment represents a major turning point in August's maturation. Seeing his parents openly grieving helps August to realize that they require just as much time to process Daisy's death as he does. When he decides to not ask them for comfort, August makes a mature choice to try to handle his emotions on his own. Putting himself to bed also reinforces that August is growing up, as he recognizes that he doesn't have to need his parents right now.



AUGUST: HEAVEN

Very early in the morning, August wakes up and crawls into bed next to Mom. He asks about her hand and if Via is ashamed of him, and he apologizes for his words at dinner. Mom seems tired and tells August to go to sleep, but August asks if Daisy is with Grans in heaven. He wants to know if people look the same in heaven and if not, how people recognize each other. Mom explains that nobody forgets who they love, and you don't need to see to love. August wonders how it'd feel to not have his face matter when he's in heaven and thinks it never mattered to Daisy.

Even though August may have behaved maturely last night by handling his grief on his own and putting himself to bed, getting in bed with his parents makes it clear that August is still a child in need of parental guidance. By reminding the reader that looks didn't matter at all to Daisy, the novel holds her up as one character who was unconditionally kind to all and saw August how he wanted to be seen—as just a normal kid.



AUGUST: UNDERSTUDY

A few days later, Via brings home three tickets to **Our Town**. On opening night, August is nervous at how big Via's school is. He wishes he could wear a baseball cap in the crowd, but caps don't work with his hearing aids. August keeps his head down and follows Mom and Dad to the auditorium and they flip through the program. August asks why Via's role is called being an understudy as Mom and Dad discuss that Miranda's dad is getting remarried and has a baby on the way. August persists in his own line of questioning, and Dad calls August "Auggie Doggie" when he answers. August whispers to Dad and asks him not to call him that anymore. When the play starts, August knows right away he's going to like it because it seems grown up. He, Mom, and Dad are shocked when Via walks out instead of Miranda.

Though August is uncomfortable about it now, not being able to wear a baseball cap in public will mean that he'll have to get used to being more open about his identity in public. This is one way that he's forced into changing the identity he presents to the outside world. Then, when August asks Dad not to call him "Auggie Doggie," it shows that he's at the point where he's ready to ask for more mature treatment from his parents. This indicates that he'd like to be seen as more adult, and not like the little kid he wanted to be at the beginning.



AUGUST: THE ENDING

August tells the reader that the play was amazing, and the ending made everyone cry. Via was even crying at the end. August stood up with the audience to applaud, and Dad explained that this is called a standing ovation. August thinks that Via and Justin must feel so happy, and thinks that everyone should get a standing ovation once in their lives. Finally, the lights go up and the audience makes its way out. Mom, August, and Dad spot Via and Justin and they all congratulate them. Via explains that Miranda got sick right before the show started. Nobody hears August ask if Miranda's okay.

It's telling that August decides everyone (presumably, this includes him) should get a standing ovation—it suggests that August is becoming more comfortable being in front of people in public if he implies that he'd like to receive one someday. August also demonstrates how kind he is when he asks to make sure Miranda is okay and is the only one to do so.



Mr. Davenport comes over, and Via introduces him to Mom, Dad, and August. Justin pulls Mr. Davenport away before he can look too embarrassed at his reaction to August. August finds himself in a crowd of people and isn't sure where his parents went. He starts to feel dizzy and the noise hurts his ears. He yells for Mom and tries to push his way through the crowd. Suddenly, a familiar voice greets August and picks him up from behind. It belongs to Miranda.

When Justin leads Mr. Davenport away, it suggests that Justin is ready to join Via in taking care of August and rescuing him from possibly uncomfortable situations. This continues to illustrate Justin's kindness and how strongly he believes in caring for others who are younger and less powerful than he is.



MIRANDA: CAMP LIES

Miranda explains that her parents got divorced the summer before ninth grade. Now, Miranda sees her dad very little, and her mom doesn't talk to her much. Miranda didn't want to go to camp over the summer, but her mom insisted she go. For the most part, it was awful. Miranda didn't know anyone and to cope, she started making things up about her family. She even said her little brother was deformed. This prompted a dramatic reaction and Miranda felt terrible—she knew that Via would be upset, but she also felt somewhat entitled since August feels like her little brother.

Like Justin, Miranda also feels isolated and unsupported in her nuclear family. When she starts talking about the Pullmans as though they're her own family, it suggests that she recognizes that the Pullmans are infinitely more supportive than her true family—and in turn, that she recognizes that she absolutely needs that kind of support and intimacy with her family.



The lies turned out to be good for Miranda's popularity. Suddenly, everyone wanted to hang out with her. The popular girls cut and dyed her hair, helped her with makeup, and told her how to dress. They smoked and hung out with boys. When Miranda got back from camp, she contacted Ella and not Via because Ella didn't ask hard questions.

By changing Miranda's outward-facing identity, the popular girls were able to make Miranda look like someone who belongs in the popular group. Miranda's unwillingness to contact Via suggests she's not entirely on board with these changes.



MIRANDA: SCHOOL

When school started, Miranda felt awkward every time she saw Via. She knew that Via didn't like her new look or her new friends, so she and Ella badmouthed Via. Miranda knows that she and Ella changed and Via didn't, but it was easier to pretend that Via had done something wrong. Miranda noticed Justin about halfway through the school year and then noticed he was dating Via. She wasn't sure why she was surprised given how pretty Via is. Miranda explains that she has a boyfriend too, but he kind of made fun of her when she signed up for theater.

Miranda's discomfort proves that she's not entirely happy with her new look. The fact that she sticks with it, however, suggests that she does value the popularity that her new look affords her, even if it does deprive her of close and supportive friendships. The way that she talks about her boyfriend suggests too that he's more of a for-show boyfriend to signal her popularity than a real, intimate romantic partner.



Miranda decided to sign up for theater when she saw Via's name on the sign-up sheet, though she and Via avoided each other. One day, Mr. Davenport asked Miranda to copy the spring play, *The Elephant Man*. Miranda flipped through it while she made copies and discovered it was about a terribly deformed man. She told Mr. Davenport that they couldn't do it because of her little brother's deformed face. He finally switched to **Our Town**, and Miranda was surprised to land the leading role.

Though Miranda's methods are questionable, it's commendable that she confronts Mr. Davenport about his original choice of a play in the name of standing up for August. This shows that she still cares deeply for August, even if she doesn't see him at all anymore, and she wants him to feel safe and supported as much as he can be in public.



MIRANDA: WHAT I MISS MOST

Miranda admits that she misses Via's parents the most. She thinks it's pathetic that she felt safer with them than she did with her own parents. Miranda says she also loved August and once called the Pullmans just to say hi to him. He told her all about school, and she reminded him that he can always call her. Miranda asked him to tell Via hi for her.

Again, Miranda's comment about loving Via's parents shows that she thrived on the affection and guidance they were able to show her even in a limited capacity, suggesting again that teens absolutely need parental guidance to thrive and grow.



MIRANDA: EXTRAORDINARY, BUT NO ONE THERE TO SEE

Neither of Miranda's parents can come to opening night of **Our Town**. Her boyfriend can't come either, and Miranda is upset that nobody will be there to see her. Despite this, she knows that she's good at acting and loves her part. However, when Miranda peeks at the audience from backstage and sees August, Mom, and Dad, she suddenly mumbles to Mr. Davenport that she feels sick and can't go on. He looks ready to explode, but Miranda insists. Finally, he yells for the students to find Via and get her ready. Miranda pulls off her dress in the dressing room and gives it to a confused Via while another girl does Via's hair and makeup. Via asks Miranda why she's doing this, but Mr. Davenport calls her onstage before Miranda can answer. She doesn't know what the answer is anyway.

Though Miranda is surely not aware of how alone, isolated, and unsupported Via feels in her family right now, letting Via perform the role allows Via to be celebrated for her accomplishments in a way that her narration thus far suggests she's never experienced. This situates Miranda's choice as a way for her to "choose kind" and prioritize another's happiness over her own. Mr. Davenports anger here, especially coupled with his proposal of The Elephant Man, suggests that he's not a great role model for his students.



MIRANDA: THE PERFORMANCE

Miranda watches from the wings. The performance is amazing. Miranda only feels a tiny twinge of regret when the cast goes out for their curtain calls, but she feels better when she sees Mom, Dad, and August backstage. She notices August looking lost, rushes up behind him, and greets him.

Here, Miranda is able to be the "adult" presence in August's life by saving him from the rushing crowd. This suggests that when given the opportunity, Miranda takes the same kind of parental role that Via does.



MIRANDA: AFTER THE SHOW

Miranda can't believe how big August is now as they chat about the play. Mom finds them minutes later, greets Miranda, and reprimands August for disappearing. Miranda explains that her parents weren't able to make it, and Mom and Dad invite her to join them for a celebratory dinner. August pleads and Via walks up, puts her arm around Miranda, and insists she come. Miranda feels happy for the first time in a long time.

When Miranda accepts the invitation and Via insists she come, it suggests that these two will be able to come to an understanding about the state and the future of their friendship. This shows that kindnesses like Miranda showed Via can have concrete and positive effects on people's relationships.



AUGUST: THE FIFTH-GRADE NATURE RETREAT

August explains that in the spring, the Beecher Prep fifth graders go away to a nature retreat for two nights. Everyone is excited about it, but he's not super excited because he's never slept away from home before. When he was about eight he and Christopher almost had a sleepover but at about midnight, August panicked. Lisa called Mom and Dad and they came and got him. August says that this is all he's worried about; he's actually really excited.

The balance between feeling nervous and excited suggests that while this is a new and scary rite of passage for August, he's ready to face it now in a way that he wasn't when he was eight. This makes it clear that he's growing, developing, and becoming more independent as he moves towards adulthood.



AUGUST: KNOWN FOR

August asks Mom to buy him a new plain duffel bag to replace his *Star Wars* one for the nature retreat. He doesn't want to be known for liking *Star Wars* and knows that he needs to be careful with his reputation. He mentions that the two Maxes will never live down their love of *Dungeons and Dragons*. August explains that he's trying to ease out of the "*Star Wars* thing" in general because unlike his face, it's one part of his identity he can do something about.

*The fact that August never says anything about whether the Maxes are nice, mean, smart, or funny shows that as much as August tries to reject the social structure, he buys into it when it says that kids will be known for one thing only. August also contradicts himself when he insists he can control how he's associated with *Star Wars*, as the Maxes clearly can't control their association with *Dungeons and Dragons*.*



AUGUST: PACKING

The day before the trip, Mom helps August pack. She folds all his clothes and puts them in the duffel bag and suggests he take a book in case he can't sleep. August decides to take Baboo, a favorite stuffed animal, in case he needs help sleeping. Mom tucks him deep into the duffel bag, zips it up, and notices that August took down his *Empire Strikes Back* poster. August explains he's trying to change his image, and Mom seems to understand.

Mom's level of involvement in the packing process and the items that August mentions perfectly encapsulate his in-between state: he still requires assistance and a stuffed animal, but he's attempting to seem more mature by eliminating some of the childish items in his bedroom.



Mom reminds August to wear sunscreen and bug spray and tells him not to get his hearing aids wet. She then comments on how much August has grown up in the last few months. She kisses him on the forehead and decides it's time for him to go to bed. Though she tries to lie down with August, he insists that he can put himself to bed. He promises to write her letters and then reads until he falls asleep.

When Mom makes no protest to August putting himself to bed, it shows that she recognizes that August is starting to pull away from her and needs this space to figure out what kind of person he wants to be. When August asks for this independence, it tells Mom that she did a good job giving him the confidence to want it.



AUGUST: DAYBREAK

August wakes up very early the next day and is immediately wide awake. He rolls over and sees Daisy's ghost sitting by his bed. He reasons that it was just a dream, but it makes him feel nice anyway. August puts on his hearing aids and listens to the house wake up. He gets up, pulls Baboo out of his duffel bag, and tucks him into his bed with a note for Mom. It says that Mom can snuggle Baboo if she misses August.

Seeing Daisy's "ghost" makes August feel as though there are people looking out for him, just as Grans and Justin observed. When August chooses to leave Baboo, it shows that he recognizes that adults need love and care just like kids do. He also understands that he's capable of providing that love and care.



AUGUST: DAY ONE

Everyone on the bus is very excited. August is especially thrilled when he hears that Julian decided the trip was too dorky, so he isn't coming. They get to the nature reserve around noon, get their cabin assignments, and then have lunch. Afterwards, the students go for a hike in the massive trees. August is thankful for his hearing aids, as he's often the first person to hear bird calls. It starts raining in the afternoon, so the kids play in the rec room and have a campfire later. August thinks the campfire looks and sounds awesome, and he's in awe of all the stars he can see. He doesn't even need to read to fall asleep.

Given the fact that August implied that Julian's power has been waning at school, it's possible that Julian simply didn't want to be in a situation where he might be the victim of bullying rather than the perpetrator. If this is true, this illustrates the idea that all kids are hurt by the social structure that Julian himself perpetuated, as it's simply impossible for him to remain at the top of it forever.



AUGUST: THE FAIRGROUNDS

The second day is fantastic: August gets to ride horses, climb trees, and the class is scheduled to see an outdoor movie that night. During some downtime, August writes a letter to Mom, Dad, and Via. When the class arrives at the fairgrounds where they'll see the movie, the sun is starting to set. Beecher Prep is the first school to arrive, so they get the best seats in the field. They purchase snacks and play carnival games until the teachers call them to sit down.

Camp is an important experience for August because it allows him to feel like a normal kid, just like his classmates. He never mentions that activities need to be modified at all for him, which suggests that he's capable of participating in all of this without having to feel different.



AUGUST: BE KIND TO NATURE

An announcement booms over huge speakers welcoming the three schools to the outdoor movie. The voice asks that the students not leave litter behind and says that they should also stay out of the cornfield and the surrounding woods. When the announcements are finished, the voice says that the movie will be *The Sound of Music*. August is surprised when kids from other schools boo and throw things at the screen.

At this movie, the adult-to-student ratio isn't at all in August's favor. This means that kids will be more likely to get away with poor behavior like booing and throwing things, as there simply as many adults around to shut that behavior down.



AUGUST: THE WOODS ARE ALIVE

During the "boring part," Jack needs to go to the bathroom and takes August with him. They see a massive line for the bathrooms, so Jack decides to relieve himself in the woods. He ignores August's protest and wades into the dark trees, August in tow. They forgot their flashlights but soon notice Amos, Henry, and Miles in the woods as well. August reasons that they didn't want to wait in line for the bathrooms either. Amos even nods to August as he passes. As August stands and waits for Jack, he hears strange popping noises and smells something like firecrackers. He decides he needs to go to the bathroom too and when he's done, the boys head back towards the field.

Amos's nod suggests that the social structure is absolutely starting to change; such an acknowledgement never would've been allowed if Julian were around. This suggests that Julian's absence is actually allowing the former bullies the freedom and the room to be nicer, as they no longer fear retaliation from Julian for going against his wishes.



AUGUST: ALIEN

August and Jack walk right into a group of strange kids. August realizes the group has firecrackers and cigarettes. As someone in the group points a flashlight at Jack and August and asks what school they're from, another kid shrieks. The rest of the group starts laughing, cursing, and asking "what is that?" August realizes they're talking about him. Jack and August try to walk away, but a big guy named Eddie cuts them off. He laughs at August and calls him Gollum. Jack tries to stand up to Eddie, but Eddie won't let them leave. Eddie starts shoving Jack and though August knows he should run, he doesn't want to leave Jack.

Suddenly, August hears Amos, Miles, and Henry come up behind them and ask what's going on. Amos calmly says that Mr. Tushman is waiting for them, so August helps Jack up and walks towards Amos. Eddie reaches out, grabs August's sweatshirt, and yanks August backwards. Amos rams into Eddie and things get crazy. Someone pulls August up and yells to run, and August's sweatshirt gets ripped.

AUGUST: VOICES IN THE DARK

After what seems like forever, a voice yells that they lost the bullies. Amos, Jack, Henry, Miles, and August find each other in the dark, and August realizes that Henry had been hanging onto his sweatshirt and leading him on. The boys listen for Eddie's group but hear nothing. They realize they lost their flashlight but are too giddy to feel scared. They laugh and go over the highlights of their escape, and then realize they have no idea where they are. However, Amos seems to know how to get back. Jack thanks Amos, Miles, and Henry for saving them and gives them all high fives, and then they all high five August as well.

Amos, Miles, and Henry congratulate August on his bravery. August starts to become aware that his elbow is hurt and bleeding, and he tries not to cry. Jack notices that August's hearing aids are gone and suddenly, August starts crying uncontrollably. The guys comfort him, and Amos even hugs August and lets him cry.

The cigarettes here function as a symbol for these kids' maturity, though Eddie's behavior clearly shows that maturity doesn't always equal kindness. Though this situation is much more akin to what August mentioned experiencing on the playground as a little kid, it's important to note that the lack of supervision and the older ages of the kids here make this encounter far more dangerous than anything August has experienced.



When Amos brings up Mr. Tushman, it shows that he trusts Mr. Tushman and recognizes that invoking a teacher will indicate to the other boys that there are adults around who won't condone their actions.



The actions of Amos, Henry, and Miles show clearly that all kids have the capacity for kindness—and that it truly is a choice to be kind. Without Julian around, Amos, Henry, and Miles are able to make that choice to be kind and change their identities from bullies to kind and supportive friends. When they high five August, it shows that they've also fully abandoned the Plague, making it abundantly clear that they're through with Julian.



While the other boys see what happened as a chance for heroism, it's worth noting that August was in very real danger and will suffer from this for a long time—at least as long as it takes to either relocate his hearing aids or get new ones.



AUGUST: THE EMPEROR'S GUARD

August, Jack, Amos, Miles, and Henry look for the hearing aids for ten minutes, but they have no luck. They head back towards the screen and discuss that Eddie and his group are probably back at the concession stands, waiting to be reported. August insists he doesn't want to report them, but Amos says that if August needs to go somewhere, he'll go with him. August feels kind of lost without his hearing aids, but he's happy to notice that his new friends are surrounding him like they're an emperor's guard.

August's unwillingness to report Eddie's group shows that wants to be independent and deal with this on his own, which suggests that he doesn't trust his teachers to not make a huge, embarrassing deal out of all of this. This shows that August has a long way to go, as part of growing up is learning to ask for help when he needs it.



AUGUST: SLEEP

August reads in his cabin until two in the morning. He explains that nobody noticed that he'd even been gone when he got back to the movie screen, and he marvels that nobody knew that something bad almost happened to him. To everyone else, it was an ordinary night, and he thinks that there are probably people who had a fantastic night.

August's recognition that other people in the world had a great evening shows that he's beginning to truly think about other people's experiences and recognize them as just as important as his own, evidence that he's growing up.



Amos, Miles, and Henry told their friends what happened and the story spread, all the way to the teachers. Mr. Tushman talked to Amos, Jack, Henry, and Miles about the boys that tried to attack them, but when he spoke to August, August lied about not remembering Eddie's face. Lying in bed, August thinks that Eddie's face is what he sees every time he tries to close his eyes. He thinks back to Dad's mention of August being "a lamb to the slaughter," and thinks he finally knows exactly what it means.

As August comes to a deeper and more personal understanding of what "like a lamb to the slaughter" means, it shows that part of growing up is reevaluating things he thought he already knew time and again as he experiences things that change his understanding and perception. It's possible that August will continue to mull over this saying for the rest of his life.



AUGUST: AFTERMATH

When the class gets back to Beecher Prep, August sees Mom waiting for him with the other parents. Mr. Tushman already told her about what happened and mentioned that the camp plans to pay for August's new hearing aids. August wonders if Eddie kept them as a souvenir. He doesn't shake off Mom's hug and even lets her carry his duffel bag. Mr. Tushman gives August a quick hug before August and Mom leave.

Mr. Tushman's hug shows that he deeply cares for his students and wants to make sure that what happened to August doesn't happen again. When August accepts Mom's hug, it shows that he's ready to go back to being a kid again for a little while as he recovers from this very adult experience.



AUGUST: HOME (2)

Mom and August walk home in near silence. When they get home, Mom wraps her arms around August, kisses him, and holds him close. August assures her he's fine and asks for a grilled cheese. While Mom makes it, she explains that Dad and Via are almost home. She allows August to lead the conversation about his camping trip, and he assures her that he had a great time but the kids at the movie ruined it for him. Mom assures August that she and Dad aren't mad about the hearing aids as August tells her about how big the seventh graders were. He also tells Mom about how Jack and Amos stood up for him.

August asks for chocolate milk and while Mom whisks chocolate powder into milk, he tells her that he and Jack were in the woods because Jack had to use the bathroom and didn't want to wait in line. Mom agrees to not push him when August says he'd rather tell the entire story later after Dad and Via are home. When August is done eating, he asks Mom if he'll always have to worry about jerks. Mom thinks for a moment before saying that there will always be jerks, but she and Dad believe that there are more good people like Jack and Amos around than jerks, and the good people look out for each other.

August is satisfied with this and decides to go take a nap. Mom thanks him for leaving Baboo, but is interrupted by her ringing cell phone before she can say anything else. She beams during the short conversation and then tells August to wait to nap. Minutes later, Dad and Via get home. Dad has a box with a puppy inside.

AUGUST: BEAR

August's family decides to name the puppy Bear because Mom thinks he looks like a bear cub. She lets August and Via stay home the next day so they can play with Bear. August and Via have a great time together hanging out, which they haven't done much of since August started school.

When Mom allows August to dictate the course of their conversation, it shows that she recognizes that August is the keeper of his story and because of that, it's his to do with what he wants. This is, essentially, Mom starting to give up some of her parental power over him, something that naturally happens as kids enter puberty and grow up.



Mom's answer to August's question reinforces the idea that kindness is a choice that anyone is capable of making, as evidenced by the fact that Amos, Miles, and Henry turned their behavior around, "chose kind," and protected August. However, Mom also implies that as August grows, it'll also become his responsibility to look out for other nice people and return the kindnesses that others have shown him throughout his life.



The puppy represents a turning point for the entire Pullman family, as it suggests that they're moving on from Daisy's death and are entering a new chapter where August is more adult, Via is more supported, and this puppy can continue Daisy's project of showing unfettered kindness.



When August and Via have fun together staying home, it shows that they'll also need to reevaluate their relationship with each other as they grow and develop. Bear helps this along by giving them something common to relate to.



AUGUST: THE SHIFT

The next day at school, August notices that things are very different. The story of what happened at the camping trip has made its way around the school and has gotten far more fantastical than the truth. For August, the best part is that Amos, Henry, and Miles treat him like he's one of them. Julian's popularity suffers because he wasn't there, and Miles and Henry now choose to hang out with Amos. Julian's behavior towards August, however, doesn't change.

Julian's behavior shows clearly that he's far more interested in trying to regain his popularity by putting August down than he is in changing his behavior and choosing to be kind, as Henry and Miles are. However, now that August is in the more popular group, Julian's bullying has less of an effect. This shows that Julian was far more powerful when he had a group.



AUGUST: DUCKS

On the day before the last day of school, Mr. Tushman calls August to his office. He found out the names of the seventh graders from the camping trip, and teachers at Eddie's school discovered August's mangled hearing aids in his locker. August declines to press charges, insisting he's getting new hearing aids and joking that Eddie won't learn any lessons.

When August insists that Eddie wouldn't learn any lessons, it suggests that he doesn't yet believe the novel's guiding thesis that kindness is a choice—one that even Eddie could choose to make if he wanted to.



Mr. Tushman asks August to sit down and remarks that it's amazing that the school year is almost over. He mentions that August made the Honor Roll and also mentions that August has had hard times as well. August says that what happened on the camping trip wasn't *all* bad, as Amos, Henry, and Miles stood up for him. Mr. Tushman admits he knows about all the Julian stuff and tells August he wishes that he'd said something about the notes in his locker. He also confides in August that Julian won't be returning to Beecher Prep. August is shocked.

August demonstrates his optimism when he chooses to focus on the fact that Amos, Henry, and Miles stood up for him, rather than on the terrifying event that precipitated their kindness. This shows that this part of August's identity isn't likely to change, as it's withstood major tests over the course of the very challenging school year.



August notices that the pumpkin portrait that used to be behind Mr. Tushman's desk has since been replaced by August's self-portrait as a duck. Mr. Tushman explains that he loves it and asks why August chose to draw himself as a duck. August says simply he thinks he looks like a duck, surprising Mr. Tushman. Mr. Tushman shakes August's hand and sends him off.

When August refuses to assign any symbolism to his choice to represent himself as a duck, it suggests that he's learning to show himself as he sees himself.



AUGUST: THE LAST PRECEPT

Mr. Browne's final precept is to "follow the day and reach for the sun." He includes a note on the board asking students to send him a postcard with their personal precept on it.

The final precept makes it clear that the kids aren't at the end of their journeys of growing up; they'll need to keep reaching as they continue to mature.



AUGUST: THE DROP-OFF

Dad drives August to the graduation ceremony at the auditorium. They arrive early, so they sit in the car and listen to music. August messes with his hair and Dad comments on how short it is. August says he thinks the shorter hair makes him look more grown up. Dad can barely believe that August is graduating fifth grade, and August reminds him that he started the year with the Padawan braid. Dad admits that while he didn't hate the Padawan braid, he *did* hate the astronaut helmet. August offhandedly says that he was upset when it went missing, and Dad casually admits that he threw it out.

August is livid. Dad clumsily explains that he couldn't handle August covering his face anymore. He was sad that August was sad when it went missing, but he didn't think it was good for August. Dad takes August's chin in his hand and says that he loves August's face and it broke his heart to never see it. August is quiet for a minute and then asks if Mom knows. Dad quickly says she doesn't, which makes August start laughing uncontrollably. Dad swears August to secrecy and August jokes about using this information as leverage to get a new Xbox and a car.

August and Dad see Jack approaching, so August starts to get out of the car. Dad confirms that he's forgiven before he lets August out. Before Dad can leave, August runs back and quietly asks Dad to not kiss him after graduation as to not embarrass him. Dad says he'll try his best, but says that Mom probably will kiss him anyway.

AUGUST: TAKE YOUR SEATS, EVERYONE

At the auditorium, Mrs. G directs August and Jack to their staging area. Another teacher gets them in seats and soon, Summer arrives. She's wearing a bit of makeup, and August compliments her. Jack offhandedly says that Summer looks okay, and August realizes that Jack has a crush on her. They flip through the program and Jack explains that their headmaster is long-winded. He also explains that they'll give medals to the "brainiacs" like Charlotte and Ximena. A teacher calls the kids to attention as Summer heads for her seat, and August invites Summer and Jack to his house afterward. After Summer is gone, Jack wonders when Summer got so hot.

The fact that August's hair is short right now highlights just how much he's grown up and become more comfortable with himself over the course of the novel. Though he can't wear baseball caps anymore to cover his face, he now also chooses to not cover his face with his hair. When August also says that he thinks the short hair makes him look more grown up, it shows too that he no longer fears being mature and actively wants to be seen that way.



When August proves willing to put aside his anger and forgive Dad for throwing out the helmet, it shows that he understands that Dad was only trying to help him and push him towards being more comfortable with who he really is. By insisting that it's a secret from Mom, Dad makes August feel more adult by making him privy to adult secrets.



Again, Dad's agreement to August's requests shows that he's perfectly willing to do what he can to help August feel adult and mature, even if it means not showing affection to his son like he clearly would like to.



When Jack expresses romantic interest in Summer, it shows that he's definitely approaching puberty and sexual maturity. This reinforces that the age of Jack, Summer, and August is a major time of change for all of them, given that August is described as still looking like a child, Summer has referred to herself as "flat" (meaning flat-chested), and kids like Miles and Henry already look like teens.



AUGUST: A SIMPLE THING

An hour later, August and his classmates listen to Mr. Tushman's address. Mr. Tushman jokes about how long-winded he is before saying that fifth and sixth graders are a special group, as they're between being kids and being adults. He lists the ways in which the students have hopefully improved, and says that the best marker of success is how kind they've been. He reads a J.M. Barrie quote about being "kinder than necessary," and explains that he loves it because "kinder than necessary" isn't exactly measurable.

Mr. Tushman reads a quote from Christopher Nolan, also about kindness, and then leans forward. He tells the students that he wants them to understand the value of being kind. He wants them to know that if they were all just a little kinder than necessary, the world would be a better place.

The fact that Beecher Prep gives awards for academic achievement shows that the school certainly values academics, but Mr. Tushman's address suggests that the real project of adolescence is learning how to be a good and kind person in the world. Adolescence is a time when kids can experiment with their identities, but Mr. Tushman insists that it's best to be kind.



Here, Mr. Tushman positions kindness as being one way for his students to combat the social system and the bullying that plagued Beecher Prep this year. This sentiment is supported by Amos, Henry, and Miles's actions and the subsequent changes that took place.



AUGUST: AWARDS

August zones out for most of the speeches but perks up when a teacher calls Honor Roll, which he made. Then, Mr. Tushman presents medals for academic excellence. Finally, he introduces the Henry Ward Beecher medal, which has traditionally honored students who volunteered a lot. Mr. Tushman explains that while he was researching the award, he discovered that Mr. Beecher was a firm proponent of kindness, courage, and friendship. He chokes up a little bit as he calls August up to receive the award.

By honoring August with this award, Mr. Tushman shows August just how much he supports him and believes in everything August has done to get through the school year. It's also a way for Mr. Tushman to tell the other students and parents in attendance (like Julian and his mom) that August is a valued member of the community.



AUGUST: FLOATING

August can barely understand what's happening. His classmates push him up and towards Mr. Tushman, high fiving him along the way. August feels like he's floating as everyone stands up and keeps clapping and whooping. He marvels that he's getting an unexpected standing ovation as Mr. Tushman puts the medal over his head. August feels like he's a victorious *Star Wars* character. He thinks he's not sure why he got the medal, but then decides this isn't true: to others, he's an inspiration, even though he feels perfectly normal. He also survived fifth grade.

*August's comment about feeling like he's a victorious *Star Wars* character shows that his love of *Star Wars* is still an essential part of him, even if it's not a part he chooses to share as openly with the world. This reinforces the idea that identity is partly what people choose to show others and partly what they feel on the inside—August now recognizes that he can accept both factions of his identity.*



AUGUST: PICTURES

Beecher Prep holds a reception after the ceremony. August allows his parents and other relatives to hug him. They start taking pictures, and Dad calls Summer and Jack over to take a group picture. August doesn't even think about his face as more kids join the group photo. By the end, most of August's classmates are huddled together, laughing as their parents take picture after picture. Nobody seemed to care about being next to August, and he even thinks that people wanted to get close to him.

The photo session shows just how much August has changed over the course of the novel: he's now way more comfortable in his skin and having his face appear in pictures. He's also now a valued part of the school community, as evidenced by his classmates joining him in the photos and wanting to be near him.



AUGUST: THE WALK HOME

Everyone walks to August's house for cake after the reception. August hears the *Star Wars* hero music in his head and feels ridiculously happy. He watches Dad telling other adults a funny story and then notices that Mom is hanging back from the group. She looks happy, but August steps back and puts an arm around her. August thanks her for making him go to school, and Mom thanks August for coming into their lives. She calls him a wonder.

When August steps back to make sure his mom is okay, it suggests that he truly understands now that adults need love and comfort, just like kids. By offering this to his mom, he shows her that he's not going to abandon her just because he's growing up and becoming more independent.



APPENDIX

The appendix includes Mr. Browne's precepts for the year. They overwhelmingly encourage students to be good friends, be kind, to immerse themselves in their community, and to be curious. It then includes "postcard precepts" from students that Mr. Browne receives over the summer. Henry's mentions not being friends with jerks, Summer's talks about not hurting people's feelings, and Julian's says that it's good to start over. August's precept is his newfound belief that everyone should get a standing ovation once in their lives.

When Julian writes that it's good to start over, it offers hope that even he will start choosing to act kindly in his new school. Further, because Julian is changing schools and will therefore be thrown into an entirely new social structure, it'll give him the opportunity to form a better, less toxic social structure, as well as make decisions uninhibited by his past poor choices at Beecher Prep.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "Wonder." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 31 Aug 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "Wonder." LitCharts LLC, August 31, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/wonder>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Wonder* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Palacio, R. J.. *Wonder*. Knopf. 2012.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Palacio, R. J.. *Wonder*. New York: Knopf. 2012.