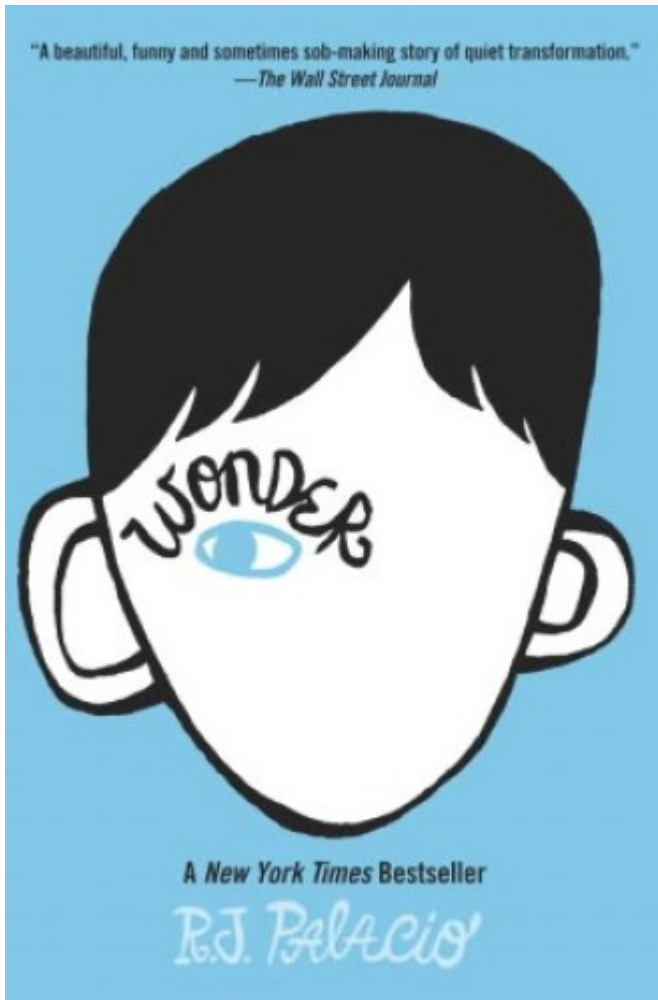


World of wonders

By [David Heim](#)

November 22, 2013

In Review



Wonder

By R. J. Palacio

Knopf

The other day on St. Peter's Square, [Pope Francis embraced a man](#) suffering from a disfiguring disease called neurofibromatosis, which causes tumors to grow all over

the skin. The pope's action had a stunning, parable-like clarity, evoking Gospel stories of Jesus reaching out to the sick and marginalized.

A similar clarity marks R. J. Palacio's [best-selling children's novel *Wonder*](#), which is about a perceptive fifth-grader named Auggie who has a rare cranio-facial deformity. "I won't describe what I look like," he tells the reader. "Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse."

[Palacio told NPR that the idea](#) for her novel emerged after she reflected on her own discomfort in encountering a severely deformed child at an ice cream shop. She had quickly gathered up her children and fled. Ashamed of herself and the bad example she set for her children, Palacio decided to explore what it might be like to be a middle-schooler with a face that makes people gasp—and how Auggie's classmates might, eventually, learn to get beyond appearances.

"Heaven," says Auggie, "is where no one notices your ugly face."