

WHITE BIRD



★ "A MUST-READ GRAPHIC NOVEL

THAT IS BOTH HEART-RENDING AND BEAUTIFULLY HOPEFUL."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS, starred review



choosekind.tumblr.com

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



"IN THESE DARK TIMES,
IT'S THOSE SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS
THAT KEEP US ALIVE."

ABOUT THE BOOK

In R. J. Palacio's bestselling collection of stories *Auggie & Me*, which expands on characters found in *Wonder*, readers were introduced to Julian's grandmother, Grandmère, whose given name is Sara. Palacio makes her graphic-novel debut with Sara's heartrending story: how she, a young Jewish girl, was hidden by a family in a Nazi-occupied French village during World War II, and how the boy she and her classmates once shunned became her savior and best friend.

Sara's harrowing experience movingly demonstrates the power of kindness to change hearts, build bridges, and even save lives. As Grandmère tells Julian, "It always takes courage to be kind, but in those days, such kindness could cost you everything." With poignant symbolism and gorgeous artwork that brings Sara's story out of the past and cements it firmly in this moment in history, *White Bird* is sure to captivate anyone who was moved by the book *Wonder* or the blockbuster movie adaptation and its message.



Grades 3-7

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Photograph by Heike Bogenberger

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. J. Palacio lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., with her husband, two sons, and two dogs (Bear and Beau). Her debut novel, *Wonder*, has been on the *New York Times* bestseller list since March 2012, and has sold over five million copies worldwide. The book's message of kindness has inspired the Choose Kind movement, and has been embraced by readers, young and old, around the world.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

This guide correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details R.L. 7.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 7.1., S.L. 8.1., S.L. 9-10.1., S.L. 7.2., S.L. 8.2., S.L. 9-10.2., S.L. 7.3., S.L. 8.3., S.L. 9-10.3. Correlates to Common Core Standard literacy in History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details R.H. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, R.H. 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, R.H. 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3. Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 7.7, W. 8.7, W. 9-10.7.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

BRAINSTORMING

Moderate a brainstorming session about the following questions:

- How important are interpersonal relationships in helping us to overcome adversity?
- What character traits most help us to overcome challenges?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Break into groups and discuss your first impressions of the book.

- What do you glean from the title and the cover art?
- What can you learn about the story from the book description?
- Read the author's dedication. Can any conclusions be drawn from it?
- Review the prologue and the pages that follow the author's dedication. Why have these been included? How do you think they will relate to the story?
- Based on all of this, what is the book going to be about? How do you know?

FREWRITE

Students should use the following prompt to write an essay on living through significant events in history.

- How do people overcome adversity?
- To what extent are our lives a product of the times we live in?

FIRST CHAPTERS

Give students the opportunity to read the first two chapters of *White Bird*. Break students into small groups and have them discuss the unfolding events. Discuss prior knowledge of the setting. Based on what they already know, what do they expect the characters to be confronted with? What themes do they anticipate?



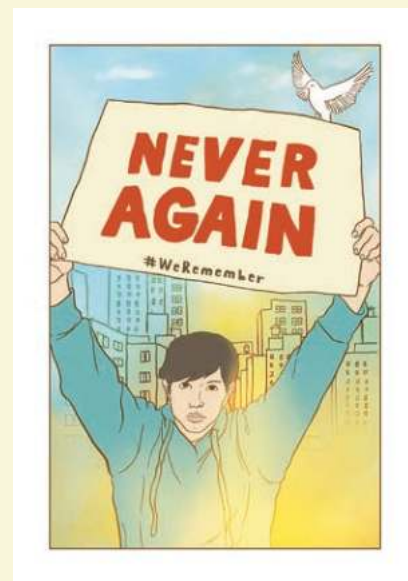
WHILE READING: WRITING PROMPTS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions below can be used as writing prompts or as targeted questions for discussion and reflection.

- As the graphic novel begins, readers witness Julian, a character introduced in *Wonder*, FaceTiming his Grandmère for a school project. In answer to her inquiry about how things are going at his new school, Julian tells her that he wishes he could go back in time and have a do-over. His Grandmère responds by telling him, "We are not defined by our mistakes . . . but by what we do after we've learned from them." Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Think about a mistake you've made. Have you learned from it? How does this early conversation about school and Julian's past choices set the stage for the story Grandmère is about to share?
- Grandmère tells Julian, "Those were dark times, yes . . . but what has stayed with me the most is not the darkness but the light. That is what I have held on to all these years." Why do you think Grandmère is ultimately willing to revisit her painful past, though she is initially hesitant to do so? What does she hope sharing her story and focusing on the light will accomplish?
- Part one of *White Bird* opens with the following quote: "The birds know mountains that we have not dreamed." What does this statement mean to you? How are birds symbolic of the human condition?
- Grandmère opens her story with "Once upon a time . . .," a traditional beginning for fairy tales. How was her early life like a fairy tale? Are there any ways Sara's family is like yours? How are they different? Does her early life seem privileged? Do you think a life of privilege can make oppression and hardship more challenging?
- Though she has been seated next to him in class for years, Sara's first real interaction with Julien is after he returns her forgotten sketchbook. What can you learn about their characters from this initial exchange?
- Consider the nickname Julien is given by his peers. How does being called "Tourteau" impact him? Why is this name particularly cruel? Why do his classmates behave like this?
- A boy at school tells Sara, "You're a pretty good artist . . . for a Jew." When she tells her parents, they resume their debate about fleeing France due to the worsening conditions. Her mother does not want to leave; her father thinks they are no longer safe, saying, "There IS no Free Zone anymore." What can you glean about each of her parents based on these reactions?
- After asking why people hate them for being Jewish, Sara's father reminds her that not all people hate them. She asks if the people who do are bad. He tells her that rather than seeing people as good or bad, he believes that people have a light inside them, but some have lost that light. "They have darkness inside them, so that is all they see in others: darkness." He continues, "Why do they hate us? Because they cannot see our light. Nor can they extinguish it. As long as we shine our light, we win." Think about his explanation. Do you agree? Do you see ways this also applies in your life? Do you believe people who live in darkness can once again find their light? How? Can you help?

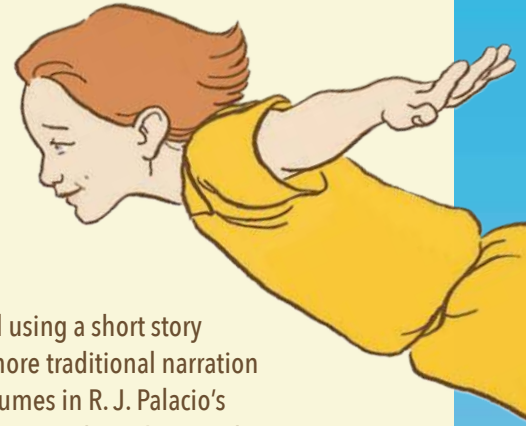


- Reflect on the favor Sara's father asks of her. Does his request that she continue wearing her winter boots seem unusual? What do you believe his motivation is? What does the fact that Sara chooses not to honor her promise indicate about her at this time? Can you think of an experience where you chose not to follow the advice of a parent or an important adult in your life? What were the consequences of your decision? If you could change your decision, would you? Why?
- Take a moment to think about Sara's life in the barn. What are the biggest challenges of living in this space? Consider the actions of the Beaumiers. What makes their choice to protect Sara so profound? Given that they understand the risk they are taking, why do you believe they choose to do so anyway? Why is this decision a perfect example of the power of kindness to change hearts and save lives?
- When Julien tells Sara that he believes she will see her father again someday, he explains his feeling by offering that "there are some things we know in our hearts." Have you ever felt certain of something, even when you couldn't prove it?
- In describing her relationship with Julien, Sara states, "The best friendships are the ones in which words are not needed." Do you agree with that sentiment? How do you and your closest friends find ways to support each other without having to talk?
- Compare and contrast Sara and Julien. How does each react to their circumstances? How does their time together make life in the barn bearable for her? What is it about Julien that Sara clings to so desperately? How does that change over time?
- Keeping in mind what you've learned from reading *White Bird*, how do you think children are affected by war? Research childhood trauma specifically related to war, and discuss its impacts extending after the conflict has ended.
- What would you identify or describe as being part of Sara's "survival mode"? What brings out people's ability to endure extreme hardships and to overcome them?
- Resistance is not always overt, particularly in a situation where resistance can be deadly. Describe some of the subtle ways characters in *White Bird* resist the Nazis.
- Describe the adult/child relationships in *White Bird*. To what extent are these relationships shaped by the world around them? To what extent do the relationships shape the character's worlds? How are the Beaumiers able to protect and preserve Sara and Julien's innocence? For Sara and the other characters, how does the loss of family impact those who survive?
- After Julien is attacked by Vincent, Vivienne, Julien's mother, tells the pastor and administrator of the school, "Evil will only be stopped when good people decide to put an end to it. It is our fight, not God's." What is Vivienne reminding us to do?
- One of the most important takeaways from *White Bird* is captured in the following statement: "In these dark times, it's those small acts of kindness that keep us alive, after all. They remind us of our humanity." Why is actively choosing kindness so essential? Can you connect this message to events happening today?
- Considering what you've learned from your reading of *White Bird*, what might cause people to deem other groups in society to be "undesirable" or "inferior"? Why is this type of mindset so dangerous? What can be done to counter it?



- Given the current climate in the U.S. and throughout the world, why is remembering the Holocaust and examining current parallels more important than ever? Consider the final illustration of Julian holding the Never Again sign with #WeRemember along the bottom. What can readers infer from this closing imagery?

AFTER READING: EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



ART AS HEALER

Throughout *White Bird*, Palacio details the role that drawing and creating art has in Sara's life. Examine and explore how her drawings are used. To what degree does her art connect Sara to those she loves and to the world at large? Create a piece of artwork that is reflective of Sara's life, including an explanation.

ART AS STORYTELLER

The illustrations in *White Bird* offer readers deep insight into the events of Palacio's novel. Consider the following questions:

- In your opinion, what does Palacio's art add to the story?
- What do you believe would be lost if the book had no illustrations?
- What are ways the art tells the story in which the narrative doesn't?
- Are there any scenes that weren't illustrated that you wish were?

Upon completion of the novel, have students discuss how Palacio's art impacts the story, write an essay evaluating the role that the art plays in the storytelling, and then complete one of the following prompts.

- Discuss how the graphic-novel format (as opposed to a more typical approach using first-person narration without the visual storytelling) affects the reader's understanding of the story and its events. Palacio also chooses to write from Sara's perspective, using first-person narration; imagine if Sara's story was offered by another character or a third-person narrator. What is the effect of this first-person narration on the reader? How would it be different if another character—or an omniscient narrator—told the story?

- Working in groups and using a short story or another work with more traditional narration (consider the other volumes in R. J. Palacio's *Wonder* stories), create original graphic-novel adaptations by rewriting portions of the story in first person and adding a visual storytelling element. Come together to share the stories and discuss how manipulating the narration altered them. Alternatively, provide multiple first-person narratives of a day in class, the lunch period, or some other social event, highlighting how changing perspectives alters the story.

ART AS CREATOR

The illustrations in graphic novels are often used to help readers understand complex vocabulary and concepts. Return to the book and create a log of new vocabulary you encounter. Look up the definition for each word. Did you understand it correctly from context clues? How did the illustrations aid your comprehension?

The careful selection and use of color in *White Bird* is significant; look closely at Palacio's choices. How does her palette help develop mood and tone? How is it used to enhance descriptions of the characters?

Graphic novels can be a springboard for many creative writing projects. After reading *White Bird*, write an account of what happened before or after the story, or tell the story of a secondary character. You could also fill in a portion of the story that is not delineated or is only depicted visually.

CHOOSE KIND PSA

White Bird and the other *Wonder* stories offer readers an opportunity to examine individuals actively embracing and exhibiting kindness. Make a brief study of the Choose Kind movement and watch existing PSAs of similar campaigns. Then work with a team to develop an original PSA about actively choosing kindness.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

In *White Bird*, despite Sara's feeling at times that all is lost, she is driven by hope. Develop a virtual hope chest for various characters in the novel, including symbols or embodiments of their hopes and dreams, as well as the obstacles they face. Write a journal entry in which you identify objects or symbols that serve as sources of hope for you or help you to overcome obstacles.

Throughout *White Bird*, Palacio questions the human tendency to misjudge and fear those who are different or that which we do not understand. Nazism is an extreme example of an ideology that does not allow differences. What can happen when differences are accepted and valued?



Early in the novel, Sara and Julien struggle to recognize their own unique strengths. Write a letter of support to either Sara, Julien, or the Beaumiers praising them for their choices and offering an example of someone you admire for their willingness to stand up for others (this may be someone with whom you have a personal connection or someone from history). Be sure to include specific examples of why you are inspired by this individual and to share any similarities you have seen between this individual and your chosen character.

OVERCOMING THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST

Palacio's graphic novel takes place at a poignant period in history, and the characters must overcome many challenges. In discussion or in writing, reflect on and analyze how the characters manage to navigate and overcome obstacles. Think about how adversity affects their relationships, how it causes them to change and adapt as the story unfolds, and how their relationships would have developed in other circumstances. Would Sara and Julien have become friends if the Nazis hadn't come to Aubervilliers-aux-Bois? Sara talks about her heart skipping a beat when she sees Julien, and then says, "Given our situation, it would not have been right." What does she mean by this?

YOUTH AND HISTORY

Palacio gives us the opportunity to consider the experiences of young people during a major historical event. Research more about the roles that young people have played in the course of these events:

- Youth in Nazi-occupied France or Germany
- Youth in occupied territories in times of war
- Youth in the midst of political turmoil
- Youth resistance today

CHARACTER STUDY

White Bird has a riveting narrative, and as we read, we use Palacio's art—and our own minds—to picture the events as they unfold. Imagine that the novel is being made into a movie. Use poster board, a website, or a video trailer to assign actors the key roles, but do it with a twist! The actors should not be actual performers but characters from other books, movies, or TV shows. For example, Mrs. Weasley from the Harry Potter series might make a great Vivienne Beaumier. For each character pair, provide a rationale for linking the characters.

INTERNET RESOURCES

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Resources for Educators

ushmm.org/education/foreducators

The Alliance Against Genocide

againstgenocide.org

Florida Center for Instructional Technology Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust

fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust

University of Minnesota Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies Educational Resources

chgs.umn.edu/educational

Simon Wiesenthal Center Library and Archives

wiesenthal.com/about/library-and-archives/

Yad Vashem Holocaust Resource Center

yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/index.asp

Southern Poverty Law Center Teaching Tolerance Classroom Resources

tolerance.org/classroom-resources/lessons?keyword=holocaust

Primary sources documenting events of the Holocaust can be found online at the sites mentioned and at:

University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Education Programs

sfi.usc.edu/teach_and_learn

US National Archives Holocaust-Era Assets

archives.gov/research/holocaust/index.html

Fordham University Modern History Sourcebook–Holocaust

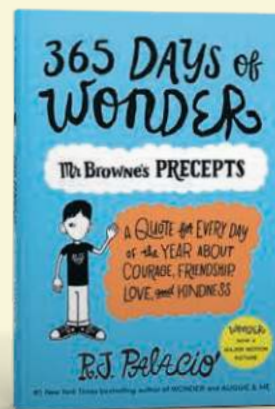
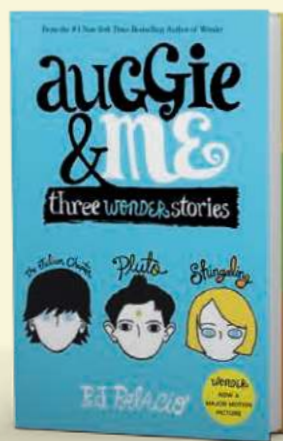
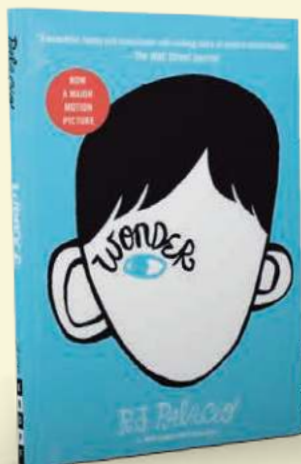
fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook44.html

Fordham University Jewish History Sourcebook– Jewish History since the Enlightenment

fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishsbok.html



DISCOVER THE WORLD OF **WONDER**



This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an assistant professor of library science at Sam Houston State University, where she specializes in children's and young adult literature. Dr. Brock was selected by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a National Teaching Fellow and is a member of a national corps of educators who serve as the core of the museum's efforts to ensure quality Holocaust education in secondary schools.

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