

Grade 6 Literacy  
Week of November 2 – November 6

**Lesson 1: Positive Personal and Cultural Identity**

**Introduction and Wonder**

## Introduction

Since the beginning of time, why have we told stories?

Stories help us understand ourselves, our culture, and the cultures of others. Perhaps more importantly, stories that are shared with others bring us all closer together as we realize three important facts:

- **We all have common experiences that make us the same**
- **We tell stories from different viewpoints and experiences, and until we all have the whole picture, we will never understand each other.**
- **Understanding each other leads to more positive understandings, more empathy, and kindness.**

As you explore the personal and cultural identity of characters in stories, you will also think about your own personal and cultural identity. How does your family history, heritage, and life experiences impact your identity? Your stories?

## Preview

**Get ready to learn by thinking about this:**

One shared experience that we all have is learning about ourselves. Our stories have many elements in common and help to teach important life lessons. Through stories, we can understand our own personal identity and cultural identities.

What is important to you? What makes your heart sing? How do you show the kind of person you are? What stories does your family or cultural heritage pass down?

**So how does personal and cultural identity impact actions and how people see and treat others?**

**What has shaped your personal and cultural identity?**



## Wonder – Personal Identity

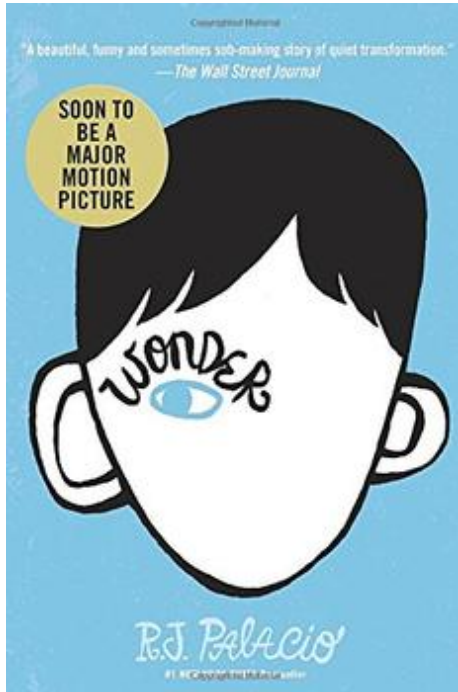
Your **personal identity** is who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world, and the characteristics that **define** you. Are you ordinary? What is not "ordinary" about you? **What makes you unique?** What do you like about yourself? If you could change one thing, what would it be?

Personal identities are often explored through narrative text - better known as stories.

As you explore the first story (or excerpt from a story) in this unit, think about:

- How the character's identity is revealed?
- How does the main character see himself?
- How does his sister, Via, see him?
- What is ordinary about him?
- What is not ordinary?

**Read the following text, and then complete the activity.**



Excerpt from

Wonder

By R.J. Palacio

*Wonder* is a warm, uplifting story that will have readers laughing one minute and wiping away tears the next.

Winner of the Book Browse 2012 Best Book for Younger Readers Award

## Ordinary

I know I'm not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go.

If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look-away thing. Here's what I think: the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way.

But I'm kind of used to how I look by now. I know how to pretend I don't see the faces people make. We've all gotten pretty good at that sort of thing: me, Mom and Dad, Via. Actually, I take that back: Via's not so good at it. She can get really annoyed when people do something rude.

Like, for instance, one time in the playground some older kids made some noises. I don't even know what the noises were exactly because I didn't hear them myself, but Via heard and she just started yelling at the kids. That's the way she is. I'm not that way.

Via doesn't see me as ordinary. She says she does, but if I were ordinary, she wouldn't feel like she needs to protect me as much. And Mom and Dad don't see me as ordinary, either. They see me as extraordinary. I think the only person in the world who realizes how ordinary I am is me.

My name is August, by the way. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse.

### **Why I Didn't Go to School**

Next week I start fifth grade. Since I've never been to a real school before, I am pretty much totally and completely petrified. People think I haven't gone to school because of the way I look, but it's not that. It's because of all the surgeries I've had. Twenty-seven since I was born. The bigger ones happened before I was even four years old, so I don't remember those. But I've had two or three surgeries every year since then (some big, some small), and because I'm little for my age, and I have some other medical mysteries that doctors never really figured out, I used to get sick a lot. That's why my parents decided it was better if I didn't go to school. I'm much stronger now, though. The last surgery I had was eight months ago, and I probably won't have to have any more for another couple of years.

Mom homeschools me. She used to be a children's-book illustrator. She draws really great fairies and mermaids. Her boy stuff isn't so hot, though. She once tried to draw me a Darth Vader, but it ended up looking like some weird mushroom-shaped robot. I haven't seen her draw anything in a long time. I think she's too busy taking care of me and Via.

I can't say I always wanted to go to school because that wouldn't be exactly true. What I wanted was to go to school, but only if I could be like every other kid going to school. Have lots of friends and hang out after school and stuff like that.

I have a few really good friends now. Christopher is my best friend, followed by Zachary and Alex. We've known each other since we were babies. And since they've always known me the way I am, they're used to me. When we were little, we used to have playdates all the time, but then Christopher moved to Bridgeport in Connecticut. That's more than an hour away from where I live in North River Heights, which is at the top tip of Manhattan. And Zachary and Alex started going to school. It's funny: even though Christopher's the one who moved far away, I still see him more than I see Zachary and Alex. They have all these new friends now. If we bump into each other on the street, they're still nice to me, though. They always say hello.

I have other friends, too, but not as good as Christopher and Zack and Alex were. For instance, Zack and Alex always invited me to their birthday parties when we were little, but Joel and Eamonn and Gabe never did. Emma invited me once, but I haven't seen her in a long time. And, of course, I always go to Christopher's birthday. Maybe I'm making too big a deal about birthday parties.

### **How I Came to Life**

I like when Mom tells this story because it makes me laugh so much. It's not funny in the way a joke is funny, but when Mom tells it, Via and I just start cracking up.

So when I was in my mom's stomach, no one had any idea I would come out looking the way I look. Mom had had Via four years before, and that had

been such a "walk in the park" (Mom's expression) that there was no reason to run any special tests. About two months before I was born, the doctors realized there was something wrong with my face, but they didn't think it was going to be bad. They told Mom and Dad I had a cleft palate and some other stuff going on. They called it "small anomalies."

There were two nurses in the delivery room the night I was born. One was very nice and sweet. The other one, Mom said, did not seem at all nice or sweet. She had very big arms and (here comes the funny part), she kept farting. Like, she'd bring Mom some ice chips, and then fart. She'd check Mom's blood pressure, and fart. Mom says it was unbelievable because the nurse never even said excuse me! Meanwhile, Mom's regular doctor wasn't on duty that night, so Mom got stuck with this cranky kid doctor she and Dad nicknamed Doogie after some old TV show or something (they didn't actually call him that to his face). But Mom says that even though everyone in the room was kind of grumpy, Dad kept making her laugh all night long.

When I came out of Mom's stomach, she said the whole room got very quiet. Mom didn't even get a chance to look at me because the nice nurse immediately rushed me out of the room. Dad was in such a hurry to follow her that he dropped the video camera, which broke into a million pieces. And then Mom got very upset and tried to get out of bed to see where they were going, but the farting nurse put her very big arms on Mom to keep her down in the bed. They were practically fighting, because Mom was hysterical and the farting nurse was yelling at her to stay calm, and then they both started screaming for the doctor. But guess what? He had fainted! Right on the floor! So when the farting nurse saw that he had fainted, she started pushing him with her foot to get him to wake up, yelling at him the whole time: "What kind of doctor are you? What kind of doctor are you? Get up!"

Get up!” And then all of a sudden she let out the biggest, loudest, smelliest fart in the history of farts. Mom thinks it was actually the fart that finally woke the doctor up. Anyway, when Mom tells this story, she acts out all the parts - including the farting noises - and it is so, so, so, so funny!

Mom says the farting nurse turned out to be a very nice woman. She stayed with Mom the whole time. Didn't leave her side even after Dad came back and the doctors told them how sick I was. And the next day, after I had lived through the night, it was that nurse who held Mom's hand when they brought her to meet me for the first time.

Mom says by then they had told her all about me. She had been preparing herself for the seeing of me. But she says that when she looked down into my tiny mushed-up face for the first time, all she could see was how pretty my eyes were.

Mom is beautiful, by the way. And Dad is handsome. Via is pretty. In case you were wondering.

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## 2.1A – Wonder



Directions: Respond to the following questions in complete sentences.

In some stories, you learn a lot about some of the characters. You learn about personal identity – how people think about themselves, what characteristics define them, and what makes them unique. What do you learn about the main character in the excerpt from the beginning of the novel, *Wonder*?

1. Why do people look quickly away when they first see August?
2. Do you think August should go to school? Why or why not?
3. How does August's family feel about him? How do you know?

Using the style of writing in the excerpt from *Wonder*, in questions 4 and 5, tell about yourself. If this book was about you, what we learn about your personal identity. What are your personal characteristics? What are you like? What do you like?

4. I know I am not an ordinary \_\_\_\_\_ year old. I mean, sure I do ordinary things. I \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ like I do.

5. If I had one wish, I would wish that I \_\_\_\_\_:

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