



DIFFERENT IN AN INDIFFERENT WORLD

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PARTWAY THROUGH *WONDER*, FIFTH-GRADER AUGGIE Pullman finds himself seated across from a new friend in the school cafeteria. “Have you ever thought about having plastic surgery?” the friend asks.

“Dude, this is *after* plastic surgery. It takes a lot of work to look this good,” Auggie says, running a hand through his hair.

In other words, what could be painfully depressing turns out to hold lurking reserves of humor, which is pretty much the story of *Wonder*.

Auggie, played by Jacob Tremblay, was born with a facial difference (the current preferred term), and even after multiple surgeries, his looks startle his classmates. As he adapts from homeschooling to a new school community, he encounters far worse than that lunchtime scene—one nasty bully says he’d kill himself if he looked like Auggie—but he never fully loses heart.

The movie is an adaptation of the 2012 novel by R.J. Palacio, which has sold 6 million copies in North America and launched an antibullying campaign, Choose Kind. Palacio has said she got the idea for the story when her young son began crying at the sight of a girl with a facial difference in an ice cream shop. She took her kids out of the shop, but later regretted her reaction, telling NPR, “What I should have done is simply turned to the little girl and started up a conversation and shown my kids that there was nothing to be afraid of.”

Tremblay, 11, who broke out opposite Brie Larson in the 2015 drama *Room*, has more than a few things in common

In Wonder, a mother (Roberts) helps her son (Tremblay) to recognize his self-worth

with Auggie. “We both love *Star Wars*, we have awesome families, and we love our dogs.” But Tremblay thinks we all can find something in common with the boy. “Everyone’s like Auggie in one very important way: we want to be accepted and treated equally and with kindness.”

Julia Roberts, who plays Auggie’s mother, became interested in the part because of her own children. “I read it with my kids and fell so in love with it,” she says of the novel. “This book is such a beautiful and gentle introduction into all kinds of topics, including bullying and intolerance and fear, and what fear makes young people do sometimes.”

Both actors have some familiarity with the subject. “I was picked on quite a bit as a young person,” Roberts says, though she won’t say what for. “Even as a 50-year-old mother of three, it’s not a path I like to go up and down.” Tremblay reveals a bit more. “I have been picked on,” he says, “because I’m kind of short for my age. I told my parents, and that’s one of the best things you can do, because my mom said she would never want me to carry negative thoughts on my shoulders alone.”

The most challenging parts of filming, says Tremblay, were moments in which he had to cry. Tenderhearted audience members will likely shed tears of their own—especially during scenes between Auggie and his mom, who repeatedly reassures her son that he is worthy of love. But the movie also has its fair share of hijinks: for every tear-filled moment, there is a lightsaber battle or silly science project to lighten the mood. This blend of pathos and humor, says Roberts, “was intrinsic in the writing in the novel.” But she credits writer-director Stephen Chbosky with translating that balance into visual terms.

As much as the movie instills the viewer with compassion for the underdogs, it also finds a way to sympathize with the bullies. “I would say to try to take a moment to be conscious of why a person that is bullying somebody is behaving that way,” says Roberts. After all, she adds, “There’s no child that’s born a bully.” —SARAH BEGLEY

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‘EVERYONE’S LIKE AUGGIE IN ONE VERY IMPORTANT WAY: WE WANT TO BE ACCEPTED.’

JACOB TREMBLAY,
star of *Wonder*