

**Film Title:** Wonder

**Year of Release:** 2017

**Director:** Stephen Chbosky

**Certificate:** PG

**Running time:** 1 hours, 48 minutes

### ***Summary:***

Based on the New York Times best-selling novel, Wonder follows the inspiring story of the Pullman family, whose youngest child, August “Auggie” Pullman, is a boy born with facial differences. When Auggie enters mainstream school for the first time, his extraordinary journey unites his family, his school, and his community, and proves that you can’t blend in when you were born to stand out!

### ***BBFC certification insight:***

“WONDER is a US drama in which a boy with facial disfigurements struggles to fit in at a mainstream school. Mild bad language includes uses of 'crap', 'jerk', 'buttface' and 'God'. Altercations between youngsters contain undetailed kicks and punches. A boy sustains a minor head wound after being pushed over. There are several scenes depicting characters in distress, including the central character crying about being bullied, falling out with a friend and the death of his dog. Members of his family provide reassurance, and the narrative is ultimately uplifting.”

### ***Part 1: What you felt about the film:***

Sometimes young people find it hard to contribute to a group discussion. They may feel shy or that their contribution might appear silly. The first part of the session is therefore a chance for young people to think about the film and begin to develop a reaction to what they have seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute. These are some simple, quick exercises to get everyone thinking about their reaction to the film.

### ***Being Different***

In the film, we meet and follow the story and the themes mainly through the lived experiences of Auggie, a boy with facial differences. Ask the young people about their experiences and understanding of additional/special needs.

### ***Being each of the characters***

We also journey through the film through the eyes of various other characters, including Auggie. We also see his parents Nate and Isabel, his older sister Olivia “Via”, his friends Jack and Summer, a bully called Julian, Via’s boyfriend Justin, and her on/off friend Miranda, as well as the teaching staff including Headteacher Mr. Tushman.

- Which character do the young people feel closest to?
- Is there one they like most?
- Or dislike most?
- Why?

## ***Part 2: Key themes in the film:***

Starting at a new school is hard for everyone; leaving home behind with all of its innocence, fun, freedom, and adventure. This is even more the case when a child has additional needs, especially visible ones like Auggie. Visible differences can make the uncertainty and challenge of all that is ahead, daunting and scary. For the first time he is confronted by the expected reactions of others as he has been closeted from the world and protected by his parents. The ways that he overcomes these fears, and makes a success of somewhere new takes enormous courage. Looking different isn't always understood by others, leading to bullying and rejection, but it is also possible to find ways to connect with people and to make friends, to be accepted. This section gives the young people a chance to explore these issues in more depth.

### ***Being different***

Auggie, the main character in this film, has Treacher Collins Syndrome. You can find more information about that here: <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/conditions-we-treat/treacher-collins-syndrome>

The syndrome resulted in him having facial deformities since birth. This condition is very rare, occurring in only 1 in 50,000 births. In the opening scenes of the film we see Auggie's birth and a brief synopsis of his experience of additional needs up to the time of the main period of the film:

### **Watch the clip: 00:00 – 04:20**

Give some more opportunities for the young people to share some more of their understanding of additional needs, following on from what they shared in Part 1.

- Having seen the clip, does it make them more, or less, sympathetic towards Auggie?

Be sensitive to members of the group who may have additional needs themselves, but see if they are willing to share something of their own lived experience.

Now watch the next clip showing Auggie's introduction to three other children who are asked to show him around the school, and their reactions to him:

### **Watch the clip: 05:19 – 06:50**

- How would the group describe the reactions of the three children to Auggie?
- What do they think the three of them are thinking?
- Why do you think they thought that?
- Is there anything we can do to change this type of reaction?

Now watch this clip of Auggie as he arrives at school for his first day:

**Watch the clip: 13:39 – 14:20**

- Why do they think the pupils react to Auggie in the way they do?
- How do they think all of this makes Auggie feel?

**Key question: Does having additional/special needs or a disability always have to be negative?**

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

2 Samuel 9

Micah 4:6-7

Luke 14:13-14

***BUT HE SAID TO ME, “MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.” THEREFORE I WILL BOAST ALL THE MORE GLADLY ABOUT MY WEAKNESSES, SO THAT CHRIST’S POWER MAY REST ON ME. THAT IS WHY, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE, I DELIGHT IN WEAKNESSES, IN INSULTS, IN HARDSHIPS, IN PERSECUTIONS, IN DIFFICULTIES. FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG.***

**2 CORINTHIANS 12:9**

**PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY**

Throughout the film we see Auggie struggling with how he looks, hiding his face within his space helmet at first, but slowly finding a way to accept who he is. A strong theme through the film is Auggie coming to terms with the reactions of others to his disability, but at the beginning really struggling to do so. After his first day at school, he is distraught and is comforted by his mother after fleeing to his room during the family meal when asked about his day.

**Watch this clip: 23:00 – 24:45**

His mother responds to his heartfelt longing not to look the way he does, not to “be ugly”, by telling him “You are not ugly.... We all have marks on our faces... They show us where we have been.”

Do any of the children have scars? If they are willing, let them tell the story of how they got their scars, of what it felt like at the time, and whether they notice their scar now. Be careful with this part of the discussion if you are aware of a young person who may have scars due to self-harming, for example, or if someone has a scar or birthmark that they are upset or embarrassed about.

Discuss with the group that some scars aren't visible, but are "invisible scars" inside us due to sad things that have happened or experiences that we have had. Again, sensitively, see if anyone in the group would be willing to share their stories of, for example, when a much-loved relative died, or a pet, and how this made them feel then, and now. A leader or two might like to start this discussion with their examples.

**Key question: Many of us have scars, either visible or invisible. We can all experience painful situations. How do we cope with having these scars, or with the situations that caused them?**

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

**Bible verses:**

Isaiah 53:3

Matthew 5:10-12

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

***"HE WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES. THERE WILL BE NO MORE DEATH'OR MOURNING OR CRYING OR PAIN, FOR THE OLD ORDER OF THINGS HAS PASSED AWAY."***

**REVELATION 21:4**

***Bullying***

At least 60% of all young people with additional needs are bullied, three times the average for young people generally (and that figure is bad enough!)

- Ask the young people what their experience of bullying is, either personally if they are willing to share it, or what they have witnessed.
- Have they seen bullying of young people with additional needs?
- Are they willing to admit that they have been a bully in the past?
- Why did they do that?
- How can bullying affect young people's self-esteem?
- How do they feel that the world views them?

**Watch the clip: 1:22:45 – 1:26:53**

Julian bullies Auggie in several ways during the movie, including saying mean things and by giving him unkind notes or pictures. Having watched the clip, where do the young people think Julian might have got his tendency to bully from? Does the end of the clip change their view of Julian at all? Why?

The Headteacher, Mr. Tushman, challenges Julian's parents, saying "Auggie can't change the way he looks, so maybe we can change the way we see." What do the young people think he meant by that?

**Key question: How should we respond to bullies? Where can we look for support?**

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

Bible verses:

[Deuteronomy 31:6](#)

[Psalm 18:3](#)

[Psalm 27:1](#)

[Proverbs 12:18](#)

[Matthew 5:43-48](#)

***FOR THE SPIRIT GOD GAVE US DOES NOT MAKE US TIMID, BUT GIVES US POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE.***

***1 TIMOTHY 2: 7***

***Friendship***

Children with additional needs can often find making and keeping friends difficult. Auggie struggles at first to make any friends at school, being seen sitting alone in the school cafeteria for example, but he makes friends with Jack after he helps Jack in a test in class:

Watch the clip: 34:25 – 38:25

Ask the group how Auggie's kindness to Jack was responded to by Jack? Did one good turn lead to another? How did their friendship develop from there?

Not long afterwards, there is a crisis in their friendship caused by an unfortunate comment made by Jack, who didn't realise that Auggie was there and heard what was said:

Watch the clip: 43:30 – 43:55

Why do the group think Jack said what he did? Do they think he meant it? Have they sometimes said or done unkind things due to peer pressure? Did they regret it and wish they hadn't done it?

Later, Jack shares his thoughts about Auggie, and he says four important things about his friend:

Watch the clip: 50:55 – 51:50

What are the important things that Jack says about Auggie?

- You get used to his face (looks don't matter)
- He's really smart (this matters more)
- He's actually pretty funny (this matters more too)
- I want to be friends with him (this matters most)

Ask the group what do these thoughts tell us about Jack? What kind of a person is he? Does this change their views about what happened in the previous clip when Jack was unkind? Later again, Jack has the opportunity to say sorry to Auggie:

**Watch the clip: 1:12:10 – 1:13:35**

- How does Jack find a way to apologise to Auggie?
- Is it easier to communicate online than in person? Why?
- How does Auggie react to Jack's apology?
- Would the group have reacted like that, or differently?

**Key question: How does Jack's part in the story help us to think about our own friendships?**

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

**Bible verses:**

[Job 2:11](#)

[Proverbs 17:17](#)

[Ecclesiastes 4:9-10](#)

[Colossians 3:12-14](#)

[John 15:12-15](#)

***Siblings***

Auggie has a sister, Via (Olivia), and her story, including her relationships with Auggie and with others, is an important part of the whole narrative of the film:

**Watch the clip: 25:19 – 27:40**

So often, brothers or sisters of a child with additional needs can end up feeling neglected, left out, with the focus always seeming to be on their disabled sibling. In

the film Via quotes a line, saying “Home is like the Earth, it revolves around the Sun (sic) and not the daughter.”

### **Key Question: Is Via right to feel left out?**

Are there any siblings of children with additional needs in the group? If so, give them the opportunity to share their story. There may be some pastoral issues raised here, so sensitivity is important. There is a great article about caring for the 'other' child [here](#).

### To my other child - an open letter

As well as the relationships with her other family members, Via has two key relationships in the film that are outside of her family, with her boyfriend Justin, and with her childhood friend Miranda. We see Via and Miranda’s friendship in trouble, virtually non-existent, due to a crisis in Miranda’s home life and her struggles as she tries to respond to it.

Miranda regrets the loss of her friendship with Via, and the mistakes she has made, and makes an extraordinary sacrifice in an attempt to regain her relationship with Via and her family:

### **Watch the clip: 58:58 – 1:10:30**

Ask the group what similarities there are between the sacrifices that Via has had to make through her life because of Auggie, and the sacrifice Miranda makes for Via? What have they both given up?

### **Key question: How sacrificial are we in our friendships? Do we always put our friends before ourselves?**

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

#### **Bible verses:**

[Matthew 5:23-24](#)

[Matthew 20:28](#)

[Ephesians 4:32](#)

[Hebrews 13:16](#)

***THIS IS HOW WE KNOW WHO THE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE AND WHO THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL ARE: ANYONE WHO DOES NOT DO WHAT IS RIGHT IS NOT GOD’S CHILD, NOR IS ANYONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE THEIR BROTHER AND SISTER.***

**1 JOHN 3:10**

1 John 4:20-21

### **Acceptance**

Towards the end of the film, we see two examples of Auggie finally being accepted by many of his peers and by his new school overall:

Watch the clip: 1:32:28 – 1:33:47

- Ask the group why did the boys finally accept Auggie?
- How did their acceptance of him make him feel?
- Have the group ever experienced a situation like this themselves?

### **Watch the clip: 1:37:40 – 1:41:25**

At the end-of-year school assembly, Mr. Tushman gives a special award to Auggie for being “notable or exemplary”. He says that “Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right use of strength.”

How do the young people think that Auggie showed strength? Do they think that for Auggie, getting through the school year, doing well academically, but also making friends and being accepted took strength? Why? Look back at the comments at the beginning of part 2 about courage.

- How does this challenge the young people’s views generally of children with additional needs?
- How do they feel that children with additional needs show courage and strength?

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

### **Bible verses:**

John 13:34

Romans 15:7

Hebrews 10:24-25

1 Peter 3:8

### **Part 3: Comparing the story**

The third part of the session is a chance to compare the story of the film with a story in the Bible. What are the similarities and differences, and what does this tell us about God’s Kingdom?

Young people may not grasp all the theological points that could be made, but it's important for them to begin to get used to the idea of critiquing what they see and holding it against the values and beliefs of the Christian faith.

Some of this reflection may come from an open discussion and as seen above, there are many themes and directions that this could take.

There are many Bible stories that the young people might be aware of around the themes that emerge from the film 'Wonder': "Being different", "Perceptions of beauty", "Bullying", "Friendship", "Siblings" and "Acceptance".

Joseph is a good comparison here, as he experienced many of these situations, yet held firm to his convictions, his faith, his calling. Esau is another young person to compare this story with, again having experienced many of these themes. Think also of Daniel, or Esther.

- What other Bible characters do the young people know that might be relevant to Auggie's story?
- How do the young people compare themselves to these Bible characters?
- What can they learn from them?