

White Bird: A Wonder Story by R.J. Palacio. Knopf Books for Young Readers (2019)

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It can be more effective to portray evil and suffering in pictures; complex emotions can be powerfully depicted through a single glance or look. And so it is in *White Bird*. The bully from *Wonder*, Julian, finds a story of his own to tell and it, too, is a story of marginalisation and not being accepted for who you are. His grandmother, Sara, gives Julian a recount of the story of her Holocaust survival.

Sara lives in France and when Hitler's German army invade, the life she enjoyed gradually erodes. Sara questions why people hate the Jewish people and her Papa explains that, "all people have a light that shines inside of them ...some people, though, have lost this light ... all they see in others [is] darkness."

The discriminatory laws and decrees make life difficult for Sara and all the Jews in her town. Finally, arrests and forced deportations mean that she is forced to hide away, barely seeing daylight and relying on others to bring her food. Her concealment from the hate and horror around her leads to a revelation about her own past maliciousness and a recognition of the danger she is exposing those helping her to.

Sara is not perfect, and a message behind the story is that no-one is, but if you can begin to realise the impact of your actions and change, then you can help make the world a better place.

This book would be an excellent way to explore discrimination and empathy and also, of course, WWII and the Holocaust. I could see it being used in classrooms alongside other popular books in the genre; it could be a great tool for reluctant readers and those with reading difficulties who are put off by an excess of text. The illustrations are very accessible, powerful and emotive, and the text is also evocative and effective.

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