

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

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*White Bird*, R.J. Palacio's debut graphic novel is connected to its *Wonder* predecessors through the character of Julian. His grandmother, Sara, lives in France and in response to Julian's request for information about her life, she recounts her experiences of growing up there during WWII. Although it has some historical basis, ultimately, the graphic novel is a fictional account of Sara's experiences as a Jewish girl who goes into hiding.

*White Bird* adds to the developing tapestry of contemporary Holocaust fiction for today's children. It offers to extend the child reader's knowledge of where the Holocaust took place and considers the wide range of people who actively helped Jewish people and resisted the occupation, through the lesser-used format of the graphic novel. Palacio believes *White Bird* is 'her act of resistance for these times'. As Ruth Franklin acknowledges in the book's afterword, whilst not everyone would choose to make such a direct connection between the Holocaust and current times, Palacio is also writing for her child audience about the contemporary world they live in.

However, despite being aimed at younger readers, and with care taken over the use of age-appropriate images along with the inclusion of fable and folklore elements, there is a slight tension in the juxtaposition with the language and narrative style. It's hard to completely forget that it is an adult character with life experience looking back at the past and therefore the reader cannot completely immerse themselves in the experience of the child at the time. This may have been deliberate, as Palacio's message is partly about recognising when we have failed to act to support or protect others and ensuring we do so in the future. Both Sara and Julian have carried this very burden of guilt and the lesson may resonate with young readers. *Wonder* has sold over 16 million copies worldwide and there's great potential for its fans to follow it up with *White Bird*. Indeed, for some, it might be their first exposure to a story about the Holocaust.

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