

## **Wonder.**

How we can engage children more deeply in a shared novel, using drama strategies to empathise with the characters, reflect on their own values and relationships? Engaging drama strategies are discussed in the context of two novels, *Wonder*, RJ Palacio, suitable for older primary and intermediate children, and *Abel's Island*, by William Steig, for Year 3 - 5. Both stories engage children's natural sense of wonder, and their values.

*Wonder* is ideal for drama as it's rich in messages and challenges the readers. Children need to think about how accepting, compassionate, empathetic they would be when faced with someone who is so very different from themselves. *Abel's Island* invites students into an animated world where they can help out a relatable character, or not, as one of a cast of animal friends and foes. Children have the opportunity to invent roles, contribute to the story and engage with a character who shows poise, resilience, and resourcefulness.

### **Drama strategies explored in this podcast:**

**Symbol:** Auggie's Spaceman's helmet, used to represent Auggie's desire to shield himself from the world. This object stimulates curiosity and allows students to make predictions.

**Freeze Frames:** Creating a sequence of images of children doing ordinary things. Then repeating images but introducing Auggie into the picture, in his spaceman's helmet, to create two contrasting versions.

**Performance Carousel:** A technique for sharing, for example the freeze frames above. Each group, one at a time presents, the rest of the class observes, out of role. The teacher can ask questions to stimulate discussion based on their observations.

**Thought Tapping:** Students could thought tap Auggie, or the ordinary children, or Abel, or his friends and foes, to reveal inner thoughts and tension within the scene.

**Collective Conversations:** A collective conversation could be created when Auggie's parents are deciding whether he begins school. Students could represent Auggie, mum, dad, and Mr Tushman, to explore the multiple perspectives in this situation. Or a meeting of the Island inhabitants

**Hot seating:** A number of characters could be put in the 'hot seat', to probe choices they have made, e.g Jack's decision to badmouth Auggie, Via deterring her family from coming to her school performance.

**Teacher in role:** Enter into the story in different places, and in roles from high to low status, to push the action forward, provide information, provide new perspectives, promote critical thinking. As a teacher appealing to students for help when Auggie is being bullied. In *Abel's Island*, as an animal to offer support to Abel or, as a friendly crocodile, a positive conclusion to his predicament.