

By the author of the
New York Times bestseller

WONDER

PONY



**R. J.
PALACIO**

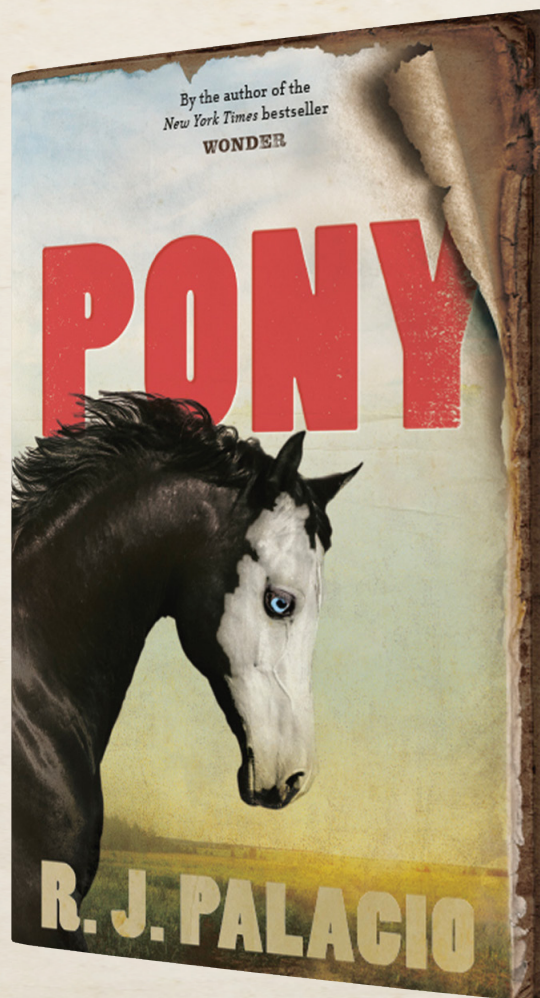
DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Wonder* comes a new American classic about a boy on a quest to find his father, guided by a ghost and a mysterious pony. Part *True Grit*, part *War Horse*, *Pony* is an enthralling story of adventure, friendship, and the invisible bonds that connect us.

Twelve-year-old Silas is awoken in the dead of night by three horsemen who arrive unannounced to take his father away. Silas is left shaken, scared, and alone, except for the presence of his companion, Mittenwool . . . who happens to be a ghost. But when a pony shows up at his door, Silas knows what he has to do. He will set out on a perilous journey across a vast American landscape to find his father—a journey that will ultimately connect him to his past and future and the unfathomable mysteries of the world around him.

R. J. Palacio spins a harrowing yet distinctly beautiful tale about the power of love and the connections that bind us across the expanses of distance and time. For young readers who love the poignant depth of *The Yearling* or *Because of Winn-Dixie* and for adult fans of *True Grit* or the lean, searing prose of Cormac McCarthy, this is one of those rare books for readers of all ages with the makings of a modern classic.



Grades 5 & Up

HC: 978-0-553-50811-6

GLB: 978-0-553-50812-3

EL: 978-0-553-50813-0

CD: 978-0-593-50541-0

DN: 978-0-593-50118-4

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. J. PALACIO is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Wonder*, which has sold over 13 million copies worldwide. *Wonder*'s message inspired the Choose Kind movement and has been embraced by readers around the world, with the book published in over 50 languages. *Wonder* was made into a blockbuster movie starring Julia Roberts, Owen Wilson, and Jacob Tremblay. Palacio's other bestselling books include *365 Days of Wonder: Mr. Browne's Book of Precepts*, *Auggie & Me: Three Wonder Stories*, the picture book *We're All Wonders*, and the graphic novel *White Bird*, which is currently being filmed as a major motion picture starring Gillian Anderson and Helen Mirren. Palacio lives in Brooklyn with her husband, two sons, and two dogs.



PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. For those of you who have either read one of the books in the Wonder collection or seen the movie, what are you expecting from *Pony*? How do you think this book may be similar to or different from other books by R. J. Palacio?
2. *Pony* is set in the mid-1800s. What do you know about that time period? What are you curious about? What questions do you have? How might life be different for a kid than life today?
3. The book opens with what appear to be very old photographs. How do these photographs make you feel? What mood do they set? Why do you think Palacio chose to include them?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PART ONE

1. In chapter 1, Silas shares how his getting struck by lightning led to his father's obsession with photography. What is something that has happened in your life that sparked your interest?
2. Why do you think the group of men wanted Pa to go with them? What would you do in this situation if you were Pa?
3. Rufe Jones keeps calling Pa (Martin Bird) Mac Boat. Do you think he is doing this on purpose? Why? Who do you think Mac Boat is?
4. If you were Silas, and you were alone because your pa was basically taken prisoner for a week, what would you do?
5. Silas believes that the pony was sent to him as a sign that he should go and look for Pa. Do you believe in signs? Why or why not? Have you ever had a sign that made you think you should do something?

PART TWO

1. Silas can remember the day he was born. What is your earliest memory? What is something that happened before your earliest memory that you wish you could remember?
2. Silas shares that Mama left behind a lot of things to come live with Pa. What do you think she left behind?
3. Silas is terrified of the Woods. Is there a place that scares you? What makes that place scary? What would make it less scary?
4. Silas realizes that he might not have Mittenwool by his side forever. What do we know about Mittenwool so far? What might losing him mean to Silas?
5. When Silas is sharing what happened to Pa, he mentions the name Mac Boat. Marshal Farmer shares what he knows about Mac Boat. What does this new information make you think about what Rufe Jones and the men are up to?

PART THREE

1. Silas is able to hear things in the Woods that others can't. He believes this is related to why he can see Mittenwool. The things he hears in the Woods terrify him. Would you want this ability? Why or why not?
2. Marshal Farmer and Mittenwool are both trying to convince Silas to go home and wait for Pa. Can you think of a time when you struggled with whether to do something?
3. Why do you think Silas told Marshal Farmer that Mittenwool is a ghost?
4. Why do you think Marshal Farmer changed his mind and decided to let Silas stay with him?
5. Silas's brief school experience did not go well. How would the kids in your class respond if Silas joined your classroom?

PART FOUR

1. We learned a little more about Silas and Pa's relationship in this chapter. Why do you think Palacio includes these flashbacks?
2. Marshal Farmer always seems annoyed with Silas. Do you think Marshal Farmer is really annoyed at Silas or is he pretending to be?
3. How are the ghosts in the bog both similar to and different from Mittenwool?
4. What do you think Marshal Farmer meant when he said, "But you're not like any other kid I've met before, I'll tell you that much"? (p. 91)
5. After Silas broke the glass plate, Pa told him that the process of taking the picture of the moon was more important than the photo or the prize money. Have you ever been in a situation where the process of figuring out something was more important than what you were trying to do?

PART FIVE

1. Do you think Silas is lucky? What makes someone lucky? Do you believe in luck in your own life?
2. Marshal Farmer is curious why the people who took Pa mentioned Mac Boat. Why do you think he is telling Silas about Mac Boat?
3. Why do you think Mittenwool is connected to Silas?
4. Mittenwool was motioning for Silas to look in the cave. What do you think he will find if he goes in?
5. Silas has changed so much in the first five chapters of the book. How is he different now from when we met him?

PART SIX

1. Marshal Farmer took a pretty bad fall and was bleeding from the mouth, but he said that he couldn't feel much of anything. Why do you think he wasn't in more pain?
2. If you were the sheriff, what would your first impression of Silas be?

3. Why do you think Sheriff Chalfont chose to listen to Silas's story?
4. Deputy Beautyman doesn't seem to believe Silas. What would you do if you were Silas and you wanted to get Deputy Beautyman in your corner?
5. What might have happened to Marshal Farmer?

PART SEVEN

1. What is a story you hold near in times of darkness? Why is it important to have these stories when times are tough?
2. Do you believe that Silas sees a ghost when he looks at Mittenwool, or do you think that Mittenwool is his imagination? What makes you think that?
3. What do you think will happen when the officers and Silas get to the cave? What would you do if you were Sheriff Chalfont?
4. As Silas gets to know Officer Beautyman better, his opinion of him changes. Share a time when your opinion of someone changed.
5. Do you think Silas's father is Mac Boat? What evidence do we have?

PART EIGHT

1. The chapter begins with Silas sharing some of the rules that Mittenwool lives by as a ghost. What do we know that Mittenwool can and cannot do? What questions about Mittenwool do you have?
2. Do you think Sheriff Chalfont and Deputy Beautyman's plan to ambush the men in the cave will work?
3. In this chapter, Silas talks about how he has seen more of the real world in the last four days than he has seen in all twelve years of his life. What do you think Silas means when he uses the term "real world"?
4. Silas is curious about why some spirits stay as ghosts and some move on. What are your thoughts on this?
5. Why do you think Mittenwool is afraid of water?

PART NINE

1. If Silas's Pa is in fact Mac Boat, do you think he would tell Ollerenshaw where the \$20,000 worth of gold is?
2. Where do you think Marshal Farmer has been? What do you think he is planning to do?
3. What did you learn about Mittenwool in this chapter? Why do you think Pa's soul did not linger?
4. With no family and no friends, what do you think will happen to Silas?

PART TEN

1. Do you think Sheriff Chalfont made the right choice in letting the Morton brothers go free?
2. Why do you think Roscoe was able to hear but not see Mittenwool?
3. Mittenwool seems to like Sheriff Chalfont. What is it about the officer that would make Mittenwool approve of him?
4. Thinking back to Enoch Farmer, can you think of any clues that he was a ghost?
5. What are some of the challenges Silas might face living with the Chalfonts?

PART ELEVEN

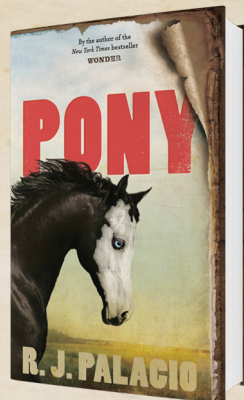
1. Why do you think Silas believes he has found "home"?
2. What do you think about Silas spending less time with Mittenwool as he grows older?
3. Why do you think Jack insisted on Silas taking his hat?

4. Knowing what we do about the way Silas's mother was treated by her family, would you have gone to the childhood home of your mother if you were in Silas's shoes?
5. Why do you think Mittenwool spent so much time with Silas? What makes this the right time to move on?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Silas and Pa spent a lot of time exploring the world through books. Make a list of topics that you would like to learn more about. Pick one, and find some books to help you learn more about that topic. Share what you learned with a friend, family member, or classmate.
2. Silas knew a lot about his mother because of the stories Pa told him. Ask a family member to tell you a story about your family before you were born. Be sure to either record the conversation or take notes.

Imagine Pony showed up at your home to take you on your very own journey to find something important. Who or what would you look for? Where would Pony take you? Share your own adventure with Pony below!

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PRAISE FOR *PONY*

**"A MAGICAL STORY—
PONY IS PURE DELIGHT."**

—REBECCA STEAD,
Newbery Medal-winning author of *When You Reach Me*

"A mystery, a frontier adventure, a ghost story:
Pony tells the tale of a child 'with fire in
his mind,' and it will light a fire in yours.
R. J. Palacio's most ambitious book yet,
**IT IS AS COMPELLING AS IT
IS SATISFYING.**"

—ADAM GIDWITZ,
Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Inquisitor's Tale*

"Once you open *Pony*, R. J. Palacio's astonishing
new novel, your life will no longer be your own.
From the first pages, I fell under the thrall of the
remarkable Silas, a boy as wise as he is brave. . . .

**AN UTTERLY ABSORBING,
BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN BOOK."**

—MARGOT LIVESEY,
author of *Eva Moves the Furniture* and *The Boy in the Field*

"THIS BOOK BLEW ME AWAY.

It is one of the best 2021 books that I have read.
I can't stop thinking about it."

—COLBY SHARP,
fifth-grade teacher, founder of *Nerdy Book Club*,
and cohost of *The Yarn*

**"I FEEL LIKE I JUST READ
A SYMPHONY, A MELODY I'D NEVER
HEARD BEFORE, BUT MY HEART
SOMEHOW REMEMBERED.**

R. J. Palacio, you are a Wonder."

—ERIN O'LEARY,
reading specialist

"Once I started reading, I could NOT stop.
This may have become my
**NEW FAVORITE MIDDLE-GRADE
STORY OF ALL-TIME!"**

—PATRICK ANDRUS,
fourth-grade teacher

"R. J. Palacio, author of a modern classic children's book of our era,
has somehow crafted what feels like an entirely different breed of classic:
PAGE-TURNING AND HEART EXPANDING, ELEGIAC AND ADVENTUROUS,
reminiscent of Jack London, with meditations on love and faith that feel
TIMELESS AND UTTERLY NECESSARY TO OUR CURRENT MOMENT."

—GAYLE FORMAN, author of *If I Stay* and *Frankie & Bug*

