



A Reading Group Guide to
Out of My Mind
by Sharon M. Draper

Discussion Topics

1. The novel opens with a powerful discussion of the power of words and language. How does this help capture the reader's attention? What predictions can the reader make about the narrator of the story? What inferences can be made about the thought processes of the narrator's mind?
2. In a world that does not work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody?
3. Describe Melody's parents. How do they learn to communicate with Melody and help her to overcome everyday problems? Why are those efforts sometimes a complete failure?
4. How does Melody feel about school? How does she fit in with her classmates and what makes her different from the rest of the children in H-5? What would be Melody's ideal school situation?
5. Discuss Melody's teachers since she began going to school. What does this say about her school system, or about attitudes at her school about teaching children with special needs?
6. Describe Mrs. V. What role does she play in Melody's development? Why is she a necessary addition to Melody's life?
7. What is significant about the story of Ollie the fish? How does Ollie's life mirror Melody's? Describe Melody's feelings when she is unable to tell her mother what really happened.
8. Describe how the introduction of Penny as a character changes the family dynamics. Analyze Melody's complicated feelings about her little sister.
9. How does the inclusion program change Melody's school experiences? Describe both positive and negative results of the program. Describe Melody's deep, unrealized need for a friend.
10. What does Melody learn about friendship during the trip to the aquarium? Make a comparison between Ollie's life, the life of the fish in the aquarium, and Melody's life.
11. How does Melody's computer change her life, her outlook on life, and her potential? Why does she name it Elvira?
12. Why does Melody decide to enter the quiz team competition? What obstacles must she face and overcome just to get on the team?

13. What does Melody learn about friendship and the relationships of children working together as she practices and competes with the quiz team? What does she learn about herself?
14. What is ironic about the events at the restaurant after the competition? How does this scene foreshadow the events that led up to the airport fiasco?
15. Describe Melody's feelings before the trip to the airport, while she is there, and after she gets home. How would you have coped with the same situation?
16. Describe Melody's extreme range of emotions as she tries to tell her mother that Penny is behind the car. How did the scene make you feel?
17. Discuss the scene in which Melody confronts the kids on the quiz team. What is satisfying about how she handles the situation? What else might Melody have done?
18. Why is the first page repeated at the end of the book? How has Melody changed, both personally and socially, from the beginning of the book to the end?
19. How would this story have been different if it had been written from a third-person point of view; from the point of view of her parents, for example, or simply from the viewpoint of an outside observer?
20. Explain the title of the novel. Give several possible interpretations.

Activities and Research

1. Put yourself in Melody's chair. Write a paper that tells what it would be like to be Melody for one day. Write about your feelings and frustrations.
2. Investigate the problems of children with cerebral palsy, especially those that are of school age. How does it affect the child socially, academically, and personally?
3. Investigate the possible causes of cerebral palsy, and what preventative measures, if any, can be taken by the mother.
4. Research current laws for inclusion of children with disabilities into classrooms. What effect, if any, do such things have on a school community?
5. Research current treatment options or communication devices for young people like Melody.
6. Write a letter to one of the characters in the book explaining your feelings about the events in the story. What advice would you give Melody, Rose, Mr. D, or Mrs. V?
7. Describe the relationship between the able-bodied children and Melody. Would you describe it as a

true friendship? When situations become monumental and overwhelming to young people, what is likely to happen? Explain.

8. Imagine it is the last day of fifth grade. Write a letter or create a conversation between one of the following pairs of characters:

- Rose and Melody
- Melody and Mrs. V
- Melody and Catherine
- Mr. D and Melody
- Melody and Claire

9. Trace the story of one of the following characters. Imagine you are a reporter doing a story on one of their lives. Write everything you know, as well as whatever you can infer about the character in order to write your magazine article.

- Claire
- Mrs. V
- Mr. Dimming
- Rose
- Penny

10. You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.

- Student with Disabilities makes Quiz Team
- Child Struck by Family Car
- Big Storm Grounds Air Traffic
- Local Quiz Team Wins Big

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