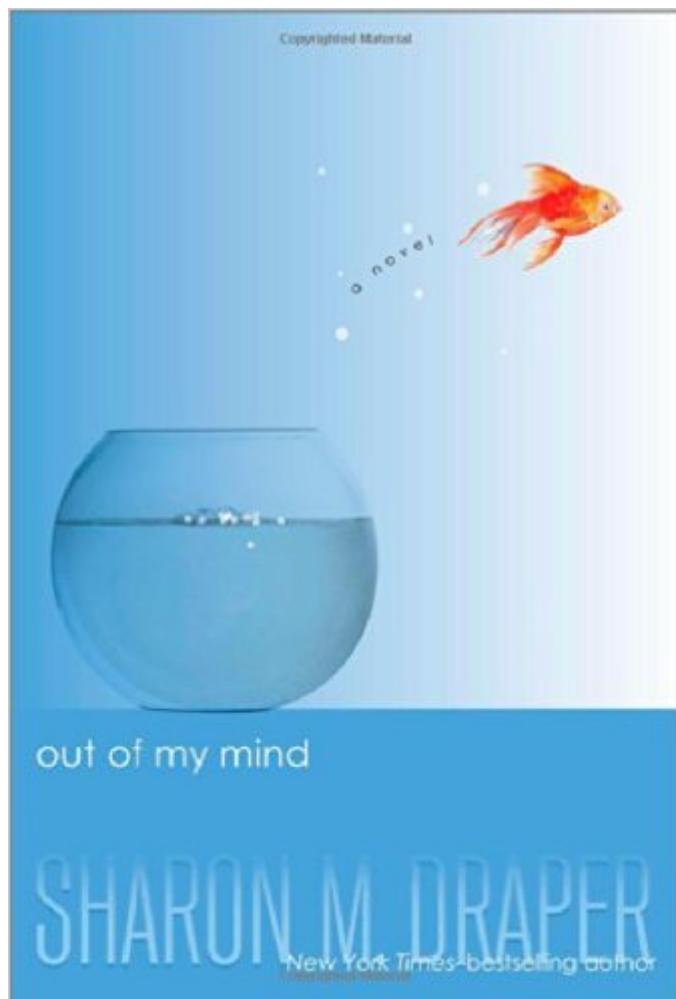


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Out Of My Mind



Synopsis

From award-winning author Sharon Draper comes *Out of My Mind*, the story of a brilliant girl who cannot speak or write. âœlf there is one book teens and parents (and everyone else) should read this year, *Out of My Mind* should be itâ• (Denver Post). Melody is not like most people. She cannot walk or talk, but she has a photographic memory; she can remember every detail of everything she has ever experienced. She is smarter than most of the adults who try to diagnose her and smarter than her classmates in her integrated classroomâ "the very same classmates who dismiss her as mentally challenged, because she cannot tell them otherwise. But Melody refuses to be defined by cerebral palsy. And sheâ™s determined to let everyone know itâ |somehow. In this breakthrough storyâ "reminiscent of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*â "from multiple Coretta Scott King Award-winner Sharon Draper, readers will come to know a brilliant mind and a brave spirit who will change forever how they look at anyone with a disability.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

A few weeks ago, Kelly wasn't feeling well so I took off work to fill in for her at the kids' Valentine's Day parties at school. First I went to Chloe's second grade class. Chloe is non-verbal and has some physical limitations and development delays due to an unidentified genetic disorder. Prior to this year, she has been in special ed classes, with part of her day spent in regular ed classes. Now she

is in a regular ed class all day with a full-time assistant and is the only child in her class with special needs. As I sat and watched her interact with the other kids at her table, the other kids' interactions with her impressed me. Without fail, they were sweet, helpful, friendly, and even conversational. Chloe will nod in response, but does not speak, and does not make a lot of eye contact. Yet these kids spoke and interacted with her as if nothing was different about her. One of the little girls asked me if I was Chloe's daddy. I told her I was. She said, "Chloe and I are best friends!" I'm telling you I almost lost it there; I had to exercise lots of self-restraint not to cry in front of her. I loved seeing Chloe, who is content to play alone in her room for hours on end, in this setting, with such great support from her peers. Then I went to help set up for Elliot's 6th grade party and was intercepted by one of his teachers. Almost breathlessly, she said, "I read a book you have to read. It's called *Out of My Mind*, and I thought of Chloe the whole time I was reading it!" She had told Elliot the same thing, so he read it and told Kelly about it so she read it, and since they liked it so much, I picked it up yesterday. I hardly put it down and finished it in a day. Not only did I think of Chloe as I read, but I thought of Kelly, me, and Chloe's teachers and assistants. In *Out of My Mind*, Melody, the 11-year-old protagonist, has cerebral palsy. Though confined to a wheelchair and unable to speak, her mind is active, brilliant, and capable of remembering anything she reads, sees, or hears. Much of her school years have been spent in boring, humiliating special ed classes. When she can read thousands of words, of course she gets upset when the teacher is teaching the alphabet. Finally, through her own initiative and the persistence of her assistant and her family, she gets an assistive communication device, giving her a voice for the first time in her life. Finally she can communicate verbally and participate more in school, even helping the school's quiz team qualify for the national finals. Throughout the story, my heart broke for this precious girl, bringing me to tears on several occasions. How frustrating not to be able to make oneself understood. How isolating not to be able to interact with people around you. I, of course, kept thinking of Chloe, my smart little girl who has such a hard time communicating. I don't know that she has a photographic memory like Melody, but I know she's always been smarter than we know. What's going on in her mind that we can't see or hear? How many inane, boring lessons has she sat through, thinking "I know all this! Stop with the baby lessons!" And when Chloe watches the other kids run and talk and laugh and play, does she long, like Melody, to be a part? Does Chloe get embarrassed by her difficulty in feeding herself, that she wears diapers at age 9, that she rides the handicapped bus? I thought of Kelly as much as I thought of Chloe. Melody is a lucky girl in that her mom never gives up believing in her. She has to come to bat for Melody time and again, sometimes in a militant way. In the same way, Kelly has been Chloe's biggest advocate, her momma bear instincts pushing and pushing to

make sure Chloe gets services she needs and is in the best placement for her growth. And the link between Melody and her mom could just as well describe Chloe and Kelly. Kelly knows what Chloe's every little gesture means, and usually knows what Chloe's thinking. She can tell by looks if Chloe feels bad, and can smell when she's thirsty. Weird. Melody's dad plays a smaller role, like me; he's not as clued in to his daughter as the mom, but does all he can do to help. Draper is a long-time teacher--honored as National Teacher of the Year in 1997--and the parent of a child with "developmental difficulties" (her description) so it's no surprise that her classroom scenes and dispatches from the special ed classroom seem so real. And her appreciation for the special ed assistants should be noted; I agree with Draper--those folks do wonderful work for way too little money. I for one am so thankful for the faithful ladies who have fed Chloe, changed her diapers, and invested in her learning and development during her school years. *Out of My Mind* gives the reader a believable window into the mind of a disabled individual. But Draper's real target audience is the rest of us. As Draper says on .com, *Out of My Mind* is "written for people who look away, who pretend they don't see, or who don't know what to say when they encounter someone who faces life with obvious differences. Just smile and say hello!" I may be too honest in this admission, but this book has reminded me to take more time with Chloe, to remember that even when she acts like she's in her own world she is hearing and seeing and taking it all in, and that it's up to me, Kelly, and all of Chloe's support team, to work together to help Chloe take part in her world and to overcome the challenges in her life.-----Update, October 2013 On a recent rainy morning, my wife pulled up to drop off Chloe at school. One of Chloe's 5th grade classmates got out of the car behind Kelly's. Kelly recognized her as one of Chloe's friends from class. As Kelly was unloading the wheelchair and getting Chloe into it, the little girl offered to help. Kelly thanked her and they walked into the school together. Chloe's friend said, "Chloe reminds me of a girl in a book I read. Her name was Melody." As if I needed further convincing, this comment reminded me of what a powerful story *Out of My Mind* is. This little girl's perception has forever changed, and she has been a friend to Chloe in a way that perhaps she never would have been without the example Draper presents. Thank you Ms. Draper for shaping the attitudes and perceptions of Chloe's friends and so many others. I'm ordering two more copies now to pass along!

I'm writing this review after consulting with my 11-year-old daughter Laurel, who has severe cerebral palsy and can't walk, talk, or do activities of daily living for herself. In other words, she's a lot like Melody, the protagonist of this book. In Laurel's case, she communicates by using eye gaze to indicate yes/no or one of two choices (Laurel very badly wants a communication system similar to

Melody's that would work with eye gaze, and we're looking into it now). We read this book together (like Melody, although Laurel can read, her eyes jump around and it's hard for her to follow lines). Laurel gives *Out of My Mind* five stars. She indicates that she feels that the book is realistic, both in terms of the character of Melody (except for the perfect memory; although perfect memory does exist, it's very, very rare, and Laurel forgets things like the rest of us) and the way people treat Melody. Although Laurel has never been wholly isolated from her peers, she relates to the experiences of being taught the same thing over and over again (in Laurel's case, it was shapes) and of spending large amounts of time in the special education room. Contrary to some comments, she does not feel that having therapists included in the narrative would have significantly changed the arc of the story. Laurel feels that this is an excellent book for people to read if they want to have a better understanding of people like her.

Melody is trapped in her own body. Born with cerebral palsey, she is unable to perform most of the basic physical functions that the rest of us take for granted. But her mind is completely normal - actually, it's significantly above normal. However, almost no one realizes that she has any intellectual capabilities. She attends school as part of the special education program, being partially integrated into the regular classroom, where kids are outright mean or awkwardly nice. When she gets a device that enables her to "speak" for the first time in her 11 years, people are shocked that she is like anyone else. And not ready to accept it. Melody is a delightful, observant girl. Her physical challenges and pure intellect enhance her other senses - she sees, smells, and hears things that the rest of us don't notice. She also has a real gift for reading people, enhanced unfortunately by people's negative interactions with her. She finds enjoyment in life but also is, understandably, incredibly frustrated. I can almost physically feel Melody's frustration, her "tornadoes", with her. The difficulties of not being able to express yourself are unimaginable. I think every child should read this book. Preferably with a parent or teacher to discuss as the book goes along. Draper does not sugarcoat Melody's life. She is blessed with parents, a neighbor, and some teachers who love her dearly, understand her, and fight for her. Her mother is a true hero. But she also experiences hate and ignorance that no child should have to go through - from other kids, from doctors, and from teachers. The story is often heartbreakingly sad as Melody is let down repeatedly. But her innate sense of self and her loving family also keeps her strong. This book changed the way I think of disabled children (forgive me if I don't use the most politically correct terms; I'm trying the best I can). We get to know Melody and her classmates, who have Down's Syndrome, autism, and other physical and mental disabilities, as people, not just as labels. We realize how they feel and how frustrated they get at

cruelty and inadequate education. We see their joy when they have fun and are accepted. In my head I know that differently-abled children have emotions just like everyone else, but it's so much more powerful when reading Draper's book. I really feel what they're feeling. It makes me want to get involved in the special education system, to advocate for disabled children, and to just be a kinder person. I hope everyone will feel this way as they read this book.

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