

# *Out of My Mind*

## Study Guide

The following questions could be used for small group discussions, whole class discussions, or short answer written questions.	Common Core Standard(s)
1. The novel opens with a powerful discussion of the power of words and language. How does this textual choice help capture the reader's attention?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.5
2. What predictions can the reader make about the narrator of the story based on details in the text? What inferences can be made about the thought processes of the narrator's mind?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.6
3. In a world that does not work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody? Support your answer with specific details from the text.	RL.6-12.3
4. 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? Support your answer with evidence from the text.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
5. Based on details in the text, 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?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
6. Discuss Melody's teachers since she began going to school using specific details from the text. What does this say about her school system, or about attitudes at her school about teaching children with special needs?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.9
7. Describe Mrs. V. What role does she play in Melody's development? Why is she a necessary addition to Melody's life? Support your answer.	RL.6-12.3
8. 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.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.3
9. Describe how the introduction of Penny as a character changes the family dynamics. Analyze Melody's complicated feelings about her little sister.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
10. 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 using specific details from the text.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
11. 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, supporting your answer with specific details from the text.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1
12. How does Melody's computer change her life, her outlook on life, and her potential? Why does she name it Elvira?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
13. Why does Melody decide to enter the quiz team competition? What obstacles must she face and overcome just to get on the team?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
14. Use details from the text to explain what Melody learns about friendship and the relationships of children working together as she practices and competes with the quiz team. What does she learn about herself?	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1
15. What is ironic about the events at the restaurant after the competition? How	RL.6-12.4

does this scene foreshadow the events that led up to the airport fiasco?	RL.6-12.5
16. 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?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1
17. 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?	RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1
18. 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?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
19. 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?	RL.6-12.3 RL.6-12.5
20. 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?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.4 RL.6-12.6
21. Explain the title of the novel. Give several possible interpretations.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.1
The following questions are designed to be individual writing projects or small group writing projects depending upon the needs of your classroom.	Common Core Standard(s)
<b>Narrative</b> <i>Out of My Mind</i> is full of very vivid descriptions of key moments in Melody's life. Write your own personal essay that describes a special memory or event, or a particular loss in your life. Explain why it is meaningful to you. Be sure to include sensory imagery--sights, smells, touches, tastes, and sounds.	RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4
<b>Newspaper Article</b> 1. Trace the story of one of the following characters: Claire, Mrs. V, Mr. Dimming, Rose or Penny. 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 newspaper/magazine article. 2. You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Student with Disabilities makes Quiz Team</li> <li>o Child Struck by Family Car</li> <li>o Big Storm Grounds Air Traffic</li> <li>o Local Quiz Team Wins Big</li> </ul>	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4
<b>Letters</b> 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?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4
<b>Point of View Paper</b> 1. Put yourself in Melody's chair. Write a paper from Melody's point of view that tells what it would be like to be Melody for one day. Write about your feelings and frustrations. 2. Reread the portion of the novel where Melody is trying to warn her mom	RL.6-12.6 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4 W.6-12.9

<p>about Penny being behind the car. Explain how the point of view of the character that makes the observation influences the description. Discuss the scene through Melody’s eyes, and then tell how it looks from her mother’s point of view.</p> <p>3. Reread the portion of the novel where Mrs. Valencia gets Melody to roll over on her own for the first time. Write a narrative paper from the point of view of Mrs. V. Tell what kind of life she must have lived to become the person that she is. Discuss her hidden strengths and her attitude toward Melody. What made her push Melody so hard?</p>	
<p><b>Descriptive Paper</b></p> <p>Sharon Draper uses very specific sensory images in her descriptions that help the reader feel like they are living the scene. Here is one example: "I began to recognize noises and smells and tastes. The whump and whoosh of the furnace coming alive each morning. The tangy odor of heated dust as the house warmed up. The feel of a sneeze in the back of my throat. And music. Songs floated through me and stayed. Lullabies, mixed with the soft smells of bedtime, slept with me. Harmonies made me smile. It’s like I’ve always had a painted musical soundtrack playing background to my life. I can almost hear colors and smell images when music is played. Mom loves classical. Big, booming Beethoven symphonies blast from her CD player all day long. Those pieces always seem to be bright blue as I listen, and they smell like fresh paint. Dad is partial to jazz, and every chance he gets he winks at me, takes out Mom’s Mozart disc, then pops in a CD of Miles Davis or Woody Herman. Jazz to me sounds brown and tan and it smells like wet dirt." Use Draper’s paragraph as a model to write your own descriptive paper that uses sensory imagery. Describe a specific scene and bring it to life with your words. Use vivid verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs as you write. Use as many of the senses as you can (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).</p>	<p>RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Research Topics</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 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? Find at least 3-4 current, relevant, authoritative, accurate, and credible sources that talk about the issue. Be sure to cite your sources used.</li> <li>2. Investigate the possible causes of cerebral palsy, and what preventative measures, if any, can be taken by the mother. Find at least 3-4 current, relevant, authoritative, accurate, and credible sources that talk about the issue. Be sure to cite your sources used.</li> <li>3. Research current laws for inclusion of children with disabilities into classrooms. What effect, if any, do such things have on a school community? Find at least 3-4 current, relevant, authoritative, accurate, and credible sources that talk about the issue. Be sure to cite your sources used.</li> <li>4. Research current treatment options or communication devices for young people like Melody. Find at least 3-4 current, relevant, authoritative, accurate, and credible sources that talk about the issue. Be sure to cite your sources used.</li> <li>5. Think about how a child learns language, learns to understand words, and learns how to speak. Write a paper that traces language development in</li> </ol>	<p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.2 W.6-12.4 W.6-12.7 W.6-12.8 W.6-12.9 RI.6-12.1 RI.6-12.2 RI.6-12.4 RI.6-12.8</p>

<p>humans. Then analyze Melody’s abilities to do interpret language without the means of a voice. Find at least 3-4 current, relevant, authoritative, accurate, and credible sources that talk about the issue in addition to using the novel. Be sure to cite your sources used.</p>	
<p><b>Persuasive Paper</b> Write a persuasive paper that discusses one of the following options: (a) “Melody is just like every other fifth grader.” (b) “Melody is very different from the rest of the world.” (c) Melody is unique in that she is very much like other children, yet not like them at all.” Be sure to use specific details from the text to support your answer.</p>	<p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Comparison</b> Compare and/or contrast the characters of the two teachers, Mrs. Shannon and Mrs. Billups. Discuss their effectiveness at teaching their subjects, as well as how they relate to students. Use specific examples from the book to support your statements.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Expository Essay</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Write an expository (explanatory) paper that describes a room at your school, a building, or any other specialized room such as a computer lab. Tell what is unusual or unexpected about the place. Use as many specifics as possible.</li> </ol>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Character Sketch</b> “But Penny! Penny really was a perfect kid. After just a few months she was sleeping through the night and smiling through each day. She sat up exactly when babies are supposed to do that, rolled over right on schedule, and crawled on cue. Amazing. And it seemed so easy! Sure, she fell on her face a few times, but once she got it, she was off! Penny zoomed like a little wind-up toy. She learned the toilet was fun to splash in, and that lamps will fall if you grab the cord. She learned that Golden Retrievers are not ponies, peas taste funny, dead flies on the floor are a no-no, but candy is really good. She laughed all the time. She learned her sister Melody couldn't do what she could do, but she didn't seem to care. So I tried not to care either.”</p> <p>Sharon Draper provides the reader with details about each character that make the reader feel like the character is real. Using Draper’s style as a model, write a character sketch of a family member, a friend, or a relative. Use strong verbs and adjectives, lots of specifics, as well as sensory imagery.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Conversation/Dialogue</b> Imagine it is the last day of fifth grade. 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, or Melody and Claire. Be sure to mimic Draper’s voices for the characters so that your dialogue feels like it could be a part of the novel.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Poetry</b> Write a poem about one of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Girl on the Inside</li> <li>When Friends Betray Us</li> </ul>	<p>RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.3</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A Fish out of Water</li> <li>○ Sisters</li> <li>○ The Power of Words</li> <li>○ Courage</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Literary Analysis</b></p> <p>Think of all of the books, short stories and poems you have read and movies and TV shows you have watched. Many of them have at least one character who has had a difficult time being heard or understood. Use what you have learned from reading <i>Out of My Mind</i> by Sharon Draper and one other text to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Draper transforms Melody over the course of the novel. Think about what is emphasized in each text. Think about what is different about each text. Be sure to provide evidence to support your argument from both texts.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1          RL.6-12.2          RL.6-12.4          RL.6-12.5          RL.6-12.7          W.6-12.1          W.6-12.4          W.6-12.9</p>

## Out of My Mind

By Sharon Draper  
 New York: Atheneum 2012

Recommended by: Dr. Rose Reissman, Literacy Specialist, Ditmas IS 62 Director of the Writing Institute

Suitable for Grades 5 and beyond-including most especially special needs learners, students in inclusionary/CTTI, students in community service programs, newcomers and ELL learners- also recommended for teachers on the middle school level who teach Law and Community. In addition, this book can be used by guidance counselor for small group support in terms of modeling how special needs physically and otherwise challenged students deserve to be actually “included” not only academically but socially as well in regular school life.

This immediately accessible and emotionally gripping work tells through interior monologue the story of an 11 year old girl named Melody Brooks. While her interior monologue story details how she is “surrounded by thousands of words. Maybe millions. . . Pomegranate. . . Iridescent,” her reality is that she is seated in a wheelchair because she has cerebral palsy. She drools, has to be fed, and taken to the toilet by a school aide. Despite all the word in her head and all the knowledge she has absorbed from online research, videos, the Internet, classroom teaching and audio books, Melody can not utter a word. During her fifth grade school year with the support of her loving parents, insurance subsidies and her home attendant, Melody finally after years of longing to speak becomes a elementary Stephen Hawking as she gets the Medi- Talker computer. Like Mr. Hawking, the computer technology finally accesses Melody to an electronic voice that allows her to participate in inclusion ELA and Social Studies classes. Although Melody has theoretically found a way to voice her intelligence, entering the regular education with the physical challenges of cerebral palsy in tow and confronting the social reactions of the so-called “regular/normal” majority students set her up for torment, conflict and new pain. She suddenly does get beyond her supportive family circle to the world she wanted to reach, only to find that the intelligence she voices is discredited not only by her peers, but also by some teachers. In addition, she

reaches out to make friends with members of a Whiz Kids team, only to find that however she excels as a team member, she does not get accepted as friend or social equal.

The book offers students who are classified as special needs for whatever condition or are part of CTT –Collaborate Team Teaching special education and regular education classes a chance to see themselves and their issues portrayed realistically in a powerful young adult novel . Beyond special education readers, using this book as part of a young adult book study can allow the students examine a finely honed, well plotted , first person narrative novel reading experience. In addition to the rich infusion of informational data offered because a key part of the plot involves Melody’s being accepted and competing in a national Whiz kids competition; the work nicely touches on upper elementary, middle school and beyond issues of cliques, bullying, teacher favoritism, and younger sibling complicated family relationships. Draper who has personally coped with raising a challenged child, did extensive research at several special schools and also interviewed a broad spectrum of caregivers beyond immediate family members and teacher. This research helps this fictional narrative depict a most realistic snapshot of the life, emotions, challenges and issues that confront special needs students. The book also shows how having a special needs family member affects family dynamics, caregivers, peers who are not special needs and educators teaching special needs students.

How this book can be used by educators: Of course this book is a natural for special needs, inclusion and CTT classes. But beyond that teachers can use this book to realistically immerse students in exploring the range of coping mechanisms, Melody, her parents and her dedicated caregivers use to mediate the multiple crises her condition precipitates. Beyond Melody’s very real cerebral palsy, her involuntary jerky movements and concern over how she appears as she drools mirror and magnify pre-adolescent and adolescent self consciousness. She wants desperately to “fit in” as do all pre and current adolescents. In asking students to rewrite the story from the perspectives of peers who torment Melody or the unsympathetic teacher Mr. Dimming who does not actually want to have her on his team, the students can reenact and confront their own true feelings about special needs and other “outsider” students. Perhaps in light of the insights offered by Melody’s interior monologue, they can revisit and remediate these feelings.

Many states now who have embraced the Common Core ELA standards can make excellent use of a fiction young adult (but grounded in non fiction realities text) as the basis for promote text complexity comprehending contemporary complex texts to build knowledge across a broad range of subject matter. Teachers can direct students to research cerebral palsy, inclusion classes, and special education regulations in their districts and states to complement the legal framework behind the plot. The divergent student and adult responses to Melody’s condition and desire to belong, allow the teacher an opportunity to offer students high quality reading, speaking, listening and discussing text dependent questions and tasks. They can cite text based=evidence when offering an interpretation. The novel is replete with academic social studies, special needs, technology, and relationship vocabulary. Melody is metacognitively proud of her words and ultimately wants to share them with peers and adults. The book does not close with a conventional

happy ending. The questions about the possibility of inclusion beyond legal in a classroom and social acceptance of special needs individuals by the community are left open. These questions can be used by students to develop their own perspective from investigation of multiple media sources and to support their own viewpoints using this perspective.

Ultimately, while reading *OUT OF MY MIND* does get at the COMMON CORE ELA standards, it more importantly offers teachers and students a chance to investigate the common core of community, citizenship and character values as they live in an increasing world in which numerous persons with diverse conditions and capacities need to be respected and accepted.

About the Author:

Sharon Draper was a high school English teacher for 25 years. She is a Coretta Scott King Award winner for *Copper Sun*. *Out of My Mind* was the Winner of the 2011 Bank Street College of Education Josette Frank award and included among 2011 Notable Children's Books in Language Arts.