



Out of My Mind: Book Discussion Guide



Lesson title: Out of my Mind - Book Discussion Guide

Subject and topic: ELA

Grade level:

5 - 8

Duration:

45 minutes or can be used for an essay assignment (after all students have read the book)

Lesson summary:

Out of My Mind is narrated by a girl with cerebral palsy who's very intelligent but unable to express herself by speaking or physically. When Melody is integrated into some general classes at school, many kids are purposely mean; others, including teachers, are cruel through their assumptions that Melody is incapable of understanding them. With the help of her parents and some supportive friends and teachers, Melody acquires a machine that allows her to communicate better than she ever has before (Common Sense Media). At last Melody has a voice... but not everyone around her is ready to hear it (Draper, 2010). This book discussion guide can also be adapted into a full assignment if that is more applicable for your student group.

Standards:

- CC.1.3.6.F Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level reading and content, including interpretation of figurative language in context.
- CC.1.3.5.C Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.
- CC.1.3.6.K Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.



Objectives:

- SWBAT utilize perspective taking skills as they engage in reading and writing.
- SWBAT discuss disability and combat stigma through conversations.

Essential Questions:

- EQ1: How do different people communicate?
- EQ2: How can I help combat stigmas?

Vocabulary:

- Communication
- Communication devices
- Disability
- Cerebral Palsy

Materials:

- Multiple copies of Out of My Mind by Sharon Draper

Procedure:

1. Make note that this book was published in 2010 and some of the words used in the book aren't acceptable, even though they are said in the book. Note that the words were considered wrong when the book was written, but today, we avoid even saying the r word. Learn more and discuss how language evolves with your students with support from [this article about why the R word is the R slur](#).
2. After all students have read the book ask these questions:
 - a. Who is Melody?
 - b. Who is Penny?
 - c. Who is Mrs. V?
 - d. What does inclusion mean? Do you think what was described as inclusion class



- e. What can you tell us about Melody's teachers since she began school?
 - f. What are her frustrations before she gets the communicator device?
 - g. What are her frustrations after getting the communicator?
 - h. Have you ever thought about accessibility before? What does it mean to be wheelchair accessible? What other accessibility barriers come up in the book?
 - i. Were there times in your life when you felt excluded? How did it make you feel? Was it similar to what Melody described?
 - j. How did Melody change from the beginning of the book to the end?
 - k. How did the reporters tell the story of the winning quiz team? How might you have felt if you were Melody? If you were one of the other members of the team?
 - l. Towards the end of the book there was a really intense scene in the car where Melody is trying to alert her mom that Penny is behind the car. Melody's mother slaps her leg. How did that scene make you feel?
 - m. 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? If you were Melody? If you were one of her teammates? If you were her teacher?
 - n. In this story, Melody was very intelligent. How might her story have been different if she had been of more average intelligence?
 - o. Did this book change your perceptions/views on disabled people/people with disabilities?
3. The questions below are from the Reading Group Guide for *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper.
- a. 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?



- b. In a world that does not work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody?
- c. 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?
- d. 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?
- e. 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?
- f. Describe Mrs. V. What role does she play in Melody's development? Why is she a necessary addition to Melody's life?
- g. 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.
- h. Describe how the introduction of Penny as a character changes the family dynamics. Analyze Melody's complicated feelings about her little sister.
- i. 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.
- j. 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.
- k. How does Melody's computer change her life, her outlook on life, and her potential? Why does she name it Elvira?
- l. Why does Melody decide to enter the quiz team competition? What obstacles must she face and overcome just to get on the team?
- m. 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?



- n. 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?
- o. 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?
- p. 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?
- q. 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?
- r. 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?
- s. 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?
- t. Explain the title of the novel. Give several possible interpretations.

Related materials:

- none

Evaluation:

Ask your students this question related to this lesson to gauge how much they learned.

How has your perception/views on people with disabilities changed because of this book and our class discussions?

Thank you for bringing the conversation about disability into your classroom.

Help us evaluate this lesson plan by visiting [our evaluation page to assess this lesson](#). You will find an evaluation both for you and your students to complete there.





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