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Major themes

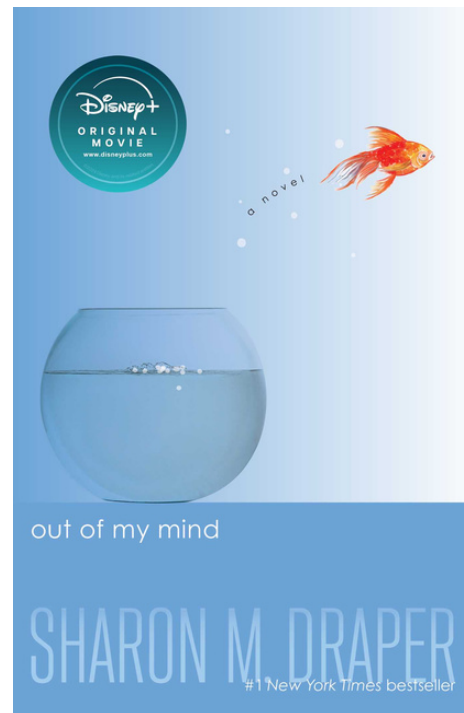
Communication and voice
Disability
Identity and belonging
Inclusion and exclusion
Accessibility
Resilience
Empathy and understanding
Family

About the Author

Sharon M. Draper is the New York Times bestselling author of *Out of My Mind*, *Blended*, and *Out of My Heart*. She's won Coretta Scott King Awards for *Copper Sun* and *Forged by Fire* and multiple honors. She's also the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award honoring her significant and lasting contribution to writing for teens. Sharon taught high school English for twenty-five years and was named National Teacher of the Year. She lives in Florida. Visit her at SharonDraper.com.

Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper

Educational Resource



Eleven-year-old Melody has a photographic memory. Her head is like a video camera that is always recording. Always. And there's no delete button. She's the smartest kid in her whole school – but NO ONE knows it. Most people – her teachers and doctors included – don't think she's capable of learning, and up until recently her school days consisted of listening to the same preschool-level alphabet lessons again and again and again.

If only she could speak up, if only she could tell people what she thinks and knows ... but she can't, because Melody can't talk. She can't walk. She can't write. Being stuck inside her head is making Melody go out of her mind – that is, until she discovers something that will allow her to speak for the first time ever. At last Melody has a voice ... but not everyone around her is ready to hear it.

Pre-reading:

What if you couldn't speak?

Ask students: What would your day look like if you couldn't talk or use your hands to write or type?

- How would you express your needs or feelings?
- What might be frustrating or surprising?

This helps students build empathy and understand the communication theme before meeting Melody, the main character in *Out of My Mind*.

Visual inference

Show students the book cover of *Out of My Mind* without any background information.

- What do you notice?
- What do you think the story might be about?
- What could "out of my mind" mean?

Students can make predictions in pairs or with a sticky-note wall.

Discussion questions:

1. Melody says, "Thoughts need words. Words need a voice." (pg. 8) What does this quote tell us about communication and identity?
2. Why do people underestimate Melody? Can you think of a time when someone underestimated you or someone you know?
3. What role does Melody's family play in her life? How do her mum and dad support her differently?
4. What does Melody mean when she says, "I had a million thoughts in my head, but I couldn't share them with anybody."? (pg. 45) How does this image help us understand her world?
5. Melody finally finds a way to communicate using a computer. How does this change her life? How would you feel if you couldn't speak for a day?
6. Why do you think some classmates and teachers struggle to include Melody? What could they do better?
7. What do you think of the way Melody is treated by the quiz team before and after the competition? Was it fair?
8. What are some things the book teaches us about disability that we might not have thought about before?
9. How does Sharon Draper use humour, music, and food in the book to build character and emotion?
10. Consider Melody's perspective as a narrator. How might the story be different if told from the viewpoint of her classmates or teachers?

Activities:

A day in Melody's mind

Ask students to write a first-person journal entry as if they are Melody, describing one full day from her point of view—before she gets the Medi-Talker or after, depending on where you're up to in the novel.

Encourage them to include:

- What she sees, hears, feels, and thinks
- Her emotional responses to other characters
- Her frustrations and joys

Provide sentence starters or scaffolding ("This morning started like every other one: silently.") for students who need it.

Extension: Create a diary entry from the same day, but from a different character's point of view (Melody's mum, Rose, or a teacher).

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LE05](#), [AC9E5LA03](#), [AC9E5LY06](#), [AC9E6LE03](#), [AC9E6LY07](#), [AC9E6LA08](#)

Symbol spotting

Students should identify objects or recurring images in the book that might symbolise Melody's experience (the fish in the bowl, the snowman, the Medi-Talker, the quiz team trophy).

Have them:

- Draw the symbol
- Write a short explanation of its meaning
- Provide a quote or scene that supports their thinking

Model the fishbowl as an example—how Melody feels trapped like the fish

Extension: Students could invent a new symbol that could represent Melody and write a paragraph explaining why they chose it.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LE05](#), [AC9E5LE03](#), [AC9E6LE03](#), [AC9E6LY01](#)

Activities:

Design a communication board

In pairs or individually, ask students to design a communication board for someone who is non-verbal, like Melody before the Medi-Talker. They should consider:

- The most important words/phrases for daily life
- Emotions and social phrases ("I'm frustrated" and "Tell me more")
- Customisation (names, likes, routines)

Use paper templates or digital tools (like Canva or Google Slides) and have students present how their board works.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LY07](#), [AC9E5LA04](#), [AC9E6LY07](#), [AC9E6LA01](#)

Create a character mind map

Students should pick a character (Melody, Rose, Mrs V., Claire, Penny, etc.) and create a mind map that includes:

- Key traits (with evidence from the text)
- How the character changes or stays the same
- Relationships with other characters
- Challenges they face and how they respond

Provide prompts or a partially completed example ("Melody: intelligent – proves this by...").

Extension: Students should compare two characters' maps to explore contrast.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LE05](#), [AC9E5LE02](#), [AC9E6LE03](#), [AC9E6LY01](#)

Activities:

Compare & contrast poster

Students should create a poster (or a digital version) comparing:

- Melody's experience in the special education classroom
- Melody's experience in the general education classroom (with the Whiz Kids, etc.)

Use a Venn diagram or side-by-side chart. Categories might include:

- Physical space
- Teacher support
- Friendships
- Expectations
- Emotional experiences

Display posters around the room for a gallery walk activity.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LY07](#), [AC9E5LE02](#), [AC9E6LY01](#), [AC9E6LY03](#)

Make a soundtrack

Students should choose 3–5 songs that represent:

- Melody's emotions at different parts of the novel
- Important moments (e.g. getting the Medi-Talker, quiz team decisions)
- Themes like resilience, voice, identity, and exclusion

For each song, students write a short explanation of:

- Why they chose it
- What scene it connects to
- What emotions it expresses

Let students share their soundtracks in small groups or as a class playlist.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LE05](#), [AC9E5LY07](#), [AC9E6LE03](#), [AC9E6LY07](#)

Activities:

Book snapshots

Get students to choose 5 key scenes from the novel and:

- Draw or storyboard each moment (stick figures are fine!)
- Add a caption from Melody's POV for each panel
- Include a quote from the text

Use butcher paper or create a digital slideshow. Encourage use of colour and symbolism (i.e. a broken fishbowl or school bell).

Extension: Students could present their snapshot journey to the class in a short oral presentation.

Year 5-6 Australian Curriculum links: [AC9E5LY02](#), [AC9E5LY07](#), [AC9E5LE05](#), [AC9E6LY04](#), [AC9E6LY07](#), [AC9E6LA01](#)

Note: Many of these tasks can also be linked to the General Capabilities, especially [Personal and Social Capability](#) and [Critical and Creative Thinking](#), in terms of:

- Empathising with others
- Expressing emotions appropriately
- Reflecting on different perspectives

Final reflections:

What would you change?

Ask students:

- What moment in the story made you the angriest or most upset?
- If you could rewrite one part of the story or change one character's action, what would it be—and why?

Interview scenario

Students should imagine Melody visiting their class. In pairs or groups, ask them to write 5 thoughtful questions to ask her—and write or roleplay her responses based on what they've learned. This activity deepens comprehension and empathy, and it would be an engaging way to end the unit.