

Out of My Mind



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHARON DRAPER

Sharon M. Draper was born Sharon Mills in Ohio, where many of her novels are now set. She grew up in Cleveland, went to college in California, and then returned to Ohio for graduate school, settling in Cincinnati where she now lives. Draper was a teacher for many years (winning the National Teacher of the Year award in 1997), and started writing books because she wanted to write novels her students would be excited to read. She published her first book, *Tears of a Tiger* in 1994, while still a high school English teacher. Eventually, she switched over to writing full time. She has written over 25 books for children and young adults, and has won many awards and honors, including the Coretta Scott King Award for outstanding African American authors and illustrators (which she has received five times).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On a personal level, *Out of My Mind* was inspired by Sharon Draper's daughter, Wendy, who has cerebral palsy. Draper has said in interviews that she was interested in writing about a smart child, like Wendy, who is trapped in a body that she can barely control. On a national level, the book exists in a world after the 1990 American's with Disabilities Act was signed into law. The ADA makes it illegal to discriminate against anyone with a disability, and gives people with disabilities equal access to transportation, public spaces, and other resources. In *Out of My Mind*, much of Melody's life is made easier because the world must legally accommodate her, but the law does not extend to cover her teachers who underestimate her or the students who bully her.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Out of My Mind is one of many contemporary books for young adults that provides a realistic look at the lives of children with disabilities and developmental disorders. It is similar to [Wonder](#), by R.J. Palacio, which follows a year in the life of a young boy with a facial deformity. *Out of My Mind* also shares subject matter with *Rules* by Cynthia Lord and *Mockingbird* by Catherine Erskine, which both feature main characters with Autism and Asperger's. These books all stress the importance of acceptance and empathy. They are written both for children with disabilities who rarely see themselves represented in fiction, and for able-bodied children who can gain a sense of understanding through the stories.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Out of My Mind
- **When Written:** Late 2000s
- **Where Written:** USA
- **When Published:** 2010
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Fiction
- **Genre:** Coming-of-Age Novel
- **Setting:** Present day Ohio
- **Climax:** When Melody's Whiz Kids team leaves her behind, and when her sister, Penny, is hit by a car.
- **Antagonist:** Unsympathetic Classmates, Mr. Dimming, Dr. Hugely
- **Point of View:** First person, Melody narrates

EXTRA CREDIT

Widely Read. *Out of My Mind* has been given literary awards by eighteen states, and is on the state reading list for thirty-two states.

Productive. Since becoming a published author in 1994, Sharon Draper has published 26 books over the past 24 years. That's more than one book per year!



PLOT SUMMARY

Melody Brooks is bright a ten-year old with a photographic memory who loves country music, books on tape, and her family. Melody also loves words and language, but she's unable to speak. She has cerebral palsy, which for her means that her body is very stiff, and she has difficulty controlling it. Most of the novel takes place during Melody's fifth grade school year, but she also gives a history of her life, and what it has been like to grow up with her disability.

Out of My Mind begins when Melody is a baby, and her Mom and Dad notice she can't hold toys on her own, or sit up without falling over. But while Melody's body isn't developing the way it was supposed to, her mind is growing quickly. Even though she can't respond to her parents, she understands them and she is sometimes frustrated when they can't understand her. Still, Melody's family and her next-door neighbor, Mrs. V, believe she is bright, and when Melody is five her mother enrolls her at Spaulding Street Elementary School. Melody is placed in a "special learning community" with other children who have disabilities. The students have remained in the same classroom (room H-5) for the past five years, and every year a new teacher rotates in. Some of these teachers, like Mrs. Tracy who

teaches second grade, care about the students in H-5 and make sure they are learning. Others, like Mrs. Billups, take the job because they think it will be easy, and don't seem to understand that the children in H-5 are students who want to learn.

When she enters the fifth grade, Melody and some of her classmates from room H-5 are allowed to take classes with the rest of the fifth graders. Although a few students make fun of the students with disabilities, Melody does make one friend, a girl named Rose who, like Melody, is also smart and hardworking. During the fall, as she is integrating into her classes, Melody receives a personal Medi-Talker, a computer that can speak for her. This suddenly allows her to communicate with the world in a brand new way, giving her access to tens of thousands of words and phrases instead of a few dozen, and allowing her to participate in class for the first time. The Medi-Talker also allows Melody to take tests without assistance, and with it she gets a perfect score on the practice test for her school's Whiz Kids academic team. Unfortunately, even though Melody deserves her score, her fellow students and her teacher, Mr. Dimming, are suspicious of her results. Melody goes home upset at being laughed at and underestimated, but Mrs. V convinces her to try even harder in school to prove her intelligence. Melody studies for weeks and earns a spot on the Whiz Kids team, leading them to victory at the Southwest Ohio Regional Competition.

However, in spite of proving herself a valuable member of the team, Melody never feels truly accepted. The day that the team and Melody are supposed to fly to Washington D.C. for the national competition, Mr. Dimming and all the other students get to the airport early and have breakfast without her. When a snowstorm cancels the team's flight, everyone who is already at the airport takes an earlier plane, and they collectively decide not to call Melody, leaving her behind. Melody is devastated by this betrayal, but insists on going to school the next day, even though she is upset. Sitting in the car, Melody sees her little sister, Penny run out behind the wheels of the van. Melody tries to warn her mother not to back up, but she doesn't have her Medi-Talker, and is unable to explain why she's so agitated. Melody's mother, unable to understand Melody, ignores her and accidentally hits Penny with the car. Penny is rushed to the hospital. She breaks her leg but she survives, and Melody returns to school where she confronts her teammates. They admit that they left her behind on purpose and they apologize, giving her their ninth-place trophy. Melody doesn't want it and she accidentally breaks it, then she leaves the classroom laughing. Melody gains a new respect for the other children in her learning community, and a better sense of what is most important to her — the wellbeing of her family, and the health of those who genuinely care about her. She ends the novel the same way she begins it, writing an autobiography for her language arts class about her love of language and words.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Melody Brooks – Melody is the narrator and protagonist. She is almost eleven years old and in the fifth grade at Spaulding Street Elementary School. She was born with cerebral palsy, which means that she cannot control her body very well and cannot speak at all. She is in a wheelchair and communicates with the world through a board with words on it, and later through a personal speaking computer. Melody is incredibly intelligent and loves language. One of her major frustrations is that she feels trapped in her body, unable to say all the things she is thinking. Although she begins the book in a special leaning community at her school, she's eventually integrated into the general-education classes where she begins to make friends and joins the academic Whiz Kids team, demonstrating that even though she needs a machine to speak, she has a lot to contribute. She is thoughtful and empathetic, and her closest relationships are with adults: her neighbor Mrs. V, her aide Catherine, her parents Diane and Chuck, who love her and believe in her, and her younger sister Penny.

Diane Brooks – Melody's mother. A nurse who knows deep down how special and intelligent Melody is, she will not give up her fight to get Melody the education and resources she deserves. Many opportunities Melody receives through her school are the result of her mother advocating for her. She sometimes worries that it is her fault that Melody has a disability.

Mrs. Violet Valencia (Mrs. V) – Mrs. V is Melody's next-door neighbor, and a former nurse who worked with Melody's mother, Diane, at the hospital. She watches Melody after school and while her parents are at work. Mrs. V is one of the first people, aside from Melody's mother and father, to see her intelligence and potential. She pushes Melody in every aspect of her life, teaching her how to roll over if she falls out of her wheelchair, and how to read. Mrs. V is responsible for "giving [Melody] language," since she redesigns Melody's communication board to fit more words, and convinces Melody's parents to get her a Medi-Talker. Mrs. V also pushes Melody academically, and is the one to convince her that she can and should try out for the Whiz Kids team.

Penny Brooks – Melody's little sister who is eight years younger. Penny is a sweet and healthy child, and everyone in Melody's family loves her a lot. Watching Penny develop normally (she can talk, hold her own bottle, and feed herself) brings up complicated feelings for Melody. On the one hand, Melody is happy that her little sister is strong and healthy, but on the other it reminds Melody of all the things she cannot do.

Rose Spencer – Rose is a fifth-grade general education student at Melody's elementary school. She is a good student and very organized. Rose is one of the first students in Melody's

integrated classes to accept Melody, and she volunteers to be Melody's partner in music. Rose is kind to Melody, talking to her as though she understands, saying "hi" to her during lunch, and sharing secrets. Even though Rose is nicer to Melody than many of the other children, she is not always a good friend. She seems embarrassed to be seen with Melody when they take a trip to the aquarium together, and is shocked when Melody makes it on the Whiz Kids team. Worst of all, when the Whiz Kids team takes an early flight to Washington DC for the national competition, Rose is supposed to call Melody and let her know, but she decides not to, leaving Melody behind.

Mr. Dimming – Also known as Mr. D, he teaches history and is the coach for the Whiz Kids team. He is an enthusiastic teacher and loves his job, but he doesn't initially believe that Melody can participate in class, much less score highly on his tests. He allows Melody onto the Whiz Kids team and makes accommodations for her, but in the end he allows the Whiz Kids team to leave for DC without her, demonstrating that he never truly accepted her as an important member of his team.

Catherine – A college student who is Melody's personal aide or "mobility assistant." She helps Melody move around the school, eat lunch, go to the bathroom, and participate in class. She has a quirky sense of style and good sense of humor, and cares deeply about Melody, sometimes defending her when other students don't believe in her abilities.

Molly North – A fifth-grader in many of Melody's general-education classes and a member of the Whiz Kids team. She is best friends with Claire Wilson, and together the two of them frequently make fun of Melody and the other students from her program. She doesn't believe Melody should be on the Whiz Kids team.

Claire Wilson – A fifth-grader in many of Melody's general-education classes and a member of the Whiz Kids team. She is best friends with Molly North, and together the two of them frequently make fun of Melody and the other students from her program. She doesn't believe Melody should be on the Whiz Kids team.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Chuck Brooks – Melody's father. Even when she was a baby, he spoke to her like she was an adult who could understand (which she could!). He likes jazz music and recording her with his camcorder.

Ollie – Melody's goldfish. He jumps out of his bowl when Melody is seven. She feels guilty because she was unable to save him.

Butterscotch – Melody's golden retriever. Although he isn't a service dog, Butterscotch takes care of Melody and alerts her mother when Melody is in trouble.

Dr. Hugely – Melody's doctor who does not believe she is

intelligent.

Connor Bates – A popular fifth-grader in many of Melody's general-education classes and a member of the Whiz Kids team.

Rodney Mosul – A fifth-grader in many of Melody's general-education classes and a member of the Whiz Kids team.

Ashley – A student in room H-5. She is very pretty but small for her age. Her body is stiff and so she has difficulty participating in physical activities. She only communicates with a talking board that says "yes" and "no."

Carl – A student in room H-5 who loves food. He's large for his age and is in an extra-large wheelchair. He can talk, but only in short sentences.

Maria – A student in room H-5. She loves holidays and her fellow students. She has Down's syndrome.

Gloria – A student in room H-5 who loves music. She is autistic and spends much of her day rocking in the corner. She can walk and talk.

Willy Williams – A student in room H-5 who loves baseball. He can't sit still or stay quiet, but he knows a ton of baseball facts and will happily recite them.

Jill – A student in room H-5. She was in a car accident as a baby and now uses a walker.

Freddy – A student in room H-5 who loves zooming around in his electric wheelchair.

Mrs. Hyatt – Melody's kindergarten teacher.

Mrs. Gross – Melody's first grade teacher.

Mrs. Tracy – Melody's second grade teacher who figured out Melody liked to read, and gave her audiobooks to listen to in class.

Mrs. Billups – Melody's third grade teacher, who underestimates the intelligence and the ability of the students in her classroom.

Mrs. Shannon – Melody's fifth grade teacher. She genuinely cares about Melody and the other students in her special learning community. She is the one who gets Melody into general education classes and makes sure she has a personal aide, Catherine.

Mrs. Lovelace – A general education music teacher who teaches Melody's integrated music class.

Mrs. Gordon – A general education teacher who teaches Melody's fifth-grade language arts class.

Elena Rodriguez – A sixth grader on the Whiz Kids team.

Amanda Firestone – A sixth grader on the Whiz Kids team.

Elizabeth – A fifth grade student in Melody's music class.

Jessica – A fifth grade student in Melody's music class.

Paul – A stage manager at the studio where the Whiz Kids team

competes. He sets up a way for Melody to communicate her answers. He reveals that he knew how to accommodate Melody because his own son is in a wheelchair.

Charles Kingsley – The announcer at the Whiz Kids Southwest Ohio Regional Competition.

Elizabeth Ochoa – A reporter from Channel Six News who interviews Melody and her Whiz Kids teammates.

TERMS

Cerebral Palsy – Cerebral palsy is a disorder that affects the body’s ability to control its movements. The name comes from *cerebral*, which means something related to the brain, and *palsy*, a loss of motion. Cerebral palsy is caused when part of an infant’s brain develops abnormally during pregnancy, or when an infant is injured before, during, or right after birth. The disorder cannot be cured, but it does not get worse over a person’s lifetime. Everyone with cerebral palsy has a slightly different set of symptoms, from weakness in their arms, to tremors, to a complete loss of movement. **Melody Brooks**, the protagonist of *Out of My Mind* was born with cerebral palsy, and as a result her body is very stiff, which makes it difficult for her control her motions, and makes it impossible for her to speak.

Synesthesia – Synesthesia is a condition in which one sense (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) makes a person experience another sense. In *Out of My Mind*, for example, **Melody** is synesthetic; when she hears music she can see colors and smell scents related to the song. The most common form of synesthesia involves associating specific letters of the alphabet, words, and numbers with colors. However, everyone experiences synesthesia differently and has a different mixture of related senses.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



DISABILITY AND ABILITY

Melody, the protagonist of *Out of My Mind*, is a bright, driven, hard-working young woman with cerebral palsy, a neurological disorder that affects her muscles and movement. Melody spends her life navigating a world largely inaccessible to her, both because her own body is hard to control, and because people in her life underestimate and bully her. Sharon Draper portrays Melody’s anger and frustration that nobody can acknowledge her abilities, but she

also makes clear that this prejudice doesn’t only harm Melody. Melody’s classmates’ exclusion of her from the quiz bowl competition hurts the team—their prejudice causes them to dismiss a person who could have made important contributions.

In the novel, physical disability often masks mental ability. Able-bodied adults and children assume that Melody and other students with disabilities have no thoughts, preferences, personality, or potential. For example, Melody’s physician, Dr. Hugely, assumes Melody is not smart because she has difficulty answering his test questions. Although Melody knows the answers, she cannot physically perform the tasks he asks her to do. Dr. Hugely mistakenly believes that Melody is “severely brain-damaged,” and suggests sending her away from home to a residential facility or a “special school for the developmentally disabled.” Additionally, The students in Melody’s program are often subjected to frustratingly simple lessons. One year, although Melody is in the third grade, the teacher begins each morning by playing “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” and going over the alphabet. This eventually leads the students to revolt, as they’re bored by the repetitive lessons that are far below their ability level.

The book emphasizes that people with disabilities have talents in addition to, and in spite of, their limitations. Melody has a photographic memory and a passion for language. She eventually uses this ability to join her school’s Whiz Kid quiz team and win the regional competition. Melody observes the talents of the other students in her program for students with disabilities. She notices that unlike the “regular” kids at her school, not one of the other boys and girls in her program “knows how to be mean,” and each has something special about him or her. Willy, for example is “the basketball expert,” Gloria “the music lover,” and Maria “has no enemies.”

Additionally, *Out of My Mind* is interested in the way that everyone is somehow disabled, whether physically or mentally. The book argues that deficits like a lack of empathy can be limiting in the same way as a medically-diagnosed disability. Melody’s mother points out that, although Dr. Hugely has a medical degree, he’s no better than she or her daughter, “You’ve got it easy—you have all your physical functions working properly. You never have to struggle just to be understood. You think you’re smart because you have a medical degree?...You’re not so intelligent, sir you’re just lucky!” Melody programs her Medi-Talker (a personal computer that speaks for her), to answer questions about her condition. She has two default answers, one that is straightforward, and explains the ways in which she is and is not disabled: “I have spastic bilateral quadriplegia, also known as cerebral palsy. It limits my body but not my mind.” The other, while more playful, is still true: “We all have disabilities. What’s yours?” Melody’s aide, Catherine, also defends Melody against fellow students who question her perfect score on a quiz. Catherine argues, “What your body

looks like has nothing to do with how well your brain works! You ought to know that by looking in the mirror!" Throughout the novel, Draper argues that disability occurs on a spectrum, and can coexist with extraordinary ability. She cautions against writing off those with visible disabilities, as Melody has insights and talents to offer to her wider, able-bodied community.



LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION, AND IDENTITY

Out of My Mind is a book about the power of language, and it explores in depth the ability of language to forge mutual understanding and shape personal identity. Melody, although she cannot speak, has a rich inner life constructed through her own internal monologue. Who she sees herself to be is based on her language ability, but other people—who assume that her inability to speak means that she has no language ability—perceive her much differently than she perceives herself. Melody's journey from nonverbal to communicating through her personal computer radically changes the way she interacts with the world and how she is treated by others. As Melody's ability to communicate shifts throughout the text, her satisfaction with the wider world grows.

Language represents freedom to Melody. Before she can communicate, her thoughts and imagination allow her to transcend the limitations of her body. Once she finally can communicate Melody is able to better participate in the world. She can have conversations, make jokes, ask questions, and speak up in class. Initially, Melody has a Plexiglas tray attached to her wheelchair, which allows her to "say" a few basic words. She describes being trapped by this limited vocabulary as living "in a cage with no door and no key. And I have no way to tell someone how to get me out." The book is framed by the same passage repeated twice, in which Melody praises the power of words. Although she cannot actually speak, words give her a sense of agency because of their potential for self-expression. Since she cannot speak, words become even more precious: she observes, "Everybody uses words to express themselves. Except me. And I bet most people don't realize the real power of words. But I do."

Public perception of Melody is entirely based on her ability to communicate her thoughts and emotions. Her Medi-Talker, the personal computer that speaks for her, allows Melody to better connect with her parents and classmates, although it does not allow her to fit in completely. After receiving the Medi-Talker (named Elvira), Melody is the center of attention for the first time. She cracks jokes in class, answers questions, and even asks another student to be her friend. Although Melody's parents understand her to some extent and believe that she understands them, one of the novel's most moving moments is when Melody first speaks to her parents through Elvira and tells them that she loves them.

Although communication is most often liberating in the novel, when it fails or breaks down, it leads to heartache and tragedy. Even with Elvira, Melody is sometimes unable to make herself understood. As a young child, Melody's **goldfish** jumps out of his bowl. Unable to call for her mother, Melody has to watch her fish die. She carries this guilt with her throughout the novel. Similarly, in the novel's climax, Melody sees her little sister Penny run out behind her mother's car. Although Melody tries her best to alert her mother, without words her mother doesn't understand her message, and backs the car into Penny. Melody blames herself for being unable to help her sister, but Mrs. V tries to explain to Melody that she did everything right. *Out of My Mind* shows that language is a tool whose absence can be an unbearable burden. When Melody is able to communicate she is given a new kind of freedom, and a new ability to socialize. However, when she is unable to communicate, either because Elvira is not available or she is not fast enough to relay her thoughts, Melody is left trapped and frustrated with a mind full of words and a body unable to express them.



ACCEPTANCE VS. REJECTION

One of the book's central conflicts revolves around Melody's desire to fit in and participate socially and academically with the able-bodied students at her school. Although she makes progress in certain friendships and is accepted to some extent by her Whiz Kids team, the book leaves open the question of whether Melody will ever truly "fit in."

At times, Melody wants nothing more than to feel like a "normal" child who can easily integrate into the general population at her school. However, what keeps Melody from being "normal" also defines who she is as a person. Melody is often frustrated when her body acts in ways that are not "normal." For example, when Melody gets angry or excited she has what she calls "tornado explosions," physical fits where she cannot control her body. She resents these, and at one point she laments that she can't even express her frustration in a way that feels appropriate. She says, "I feel like stomping on something. Stomping and stomping and stomping! That makes me even crazier because I can't even do that! I can't even get mad like a normal kid." When Melody tells her neighbor and sometimes caretaker Mrs. V that she wishes she were "normal," Mrs. V explains "Normal sucks!...People love you because you're Melody, not because of what you can or cannot do. Give us a little credit."

Rejection is a large part of *Out of My Mind*, and Melody evolves in her ability to deal with it. Instead of seeing rejection as a personal failure, she grows to understand that not everyone is willing or ready to accept her and her abilities, and there is nothing she can do but try her best, be herself, and educate those who do not understand her. Although students and teachers tend to accept Melody, they don't necessarily see her

as an intellectual equal. Even once Melody is officially a part of the Whiz Kids team, for example, some of the other members are unwilling and unable to treat her with respect. Though Melody helps lead her team to victory at the Regional Competition, the team makes no effort to accommodate her at a restaurant that has no wheelchair access, and then they leave her behind when the rest of the team takes an early flight to the National competition in Washington D.C. Melody makes a friend at school, Rose, but even though Rose is kinder to Melody than some of the other students, she also makes the choice to go to Washington without Melody.

Out of My Mind then depicts acceptance as a spectrum. In the end, Melody is never either completely rejected or unequivocally accepted by her classmates—instead, depending on the day or situation, Melody must settle for only partial acceptance academically, on the Whiz Kids team, and in her friendships. Although Melody wishes to be “normal,” she grows to understand that she cannot force her classmates to accept her disability, and she instead must focus on what she can control, and learn to accept herself and her limitations and abilities instead.



FAMILY

Melody’s family is important because it holds everyone accountable to caring for everyone else. While this brings about a sense of belonging and

safety, it can also lead to guilt when characters believe they have caused family members pain, or have been unable to fulfill important obligations. Importantly, *Out of My Mind* does not define family as only biological relatives—the book also includes those who love and support Melody as part of her family. For example, Melody’s next-door neighbor, Mrs. V, is as much a part of her family as her mother, father or sister. Mrs. V sees potential in Melody and challenges her in ways her parents do not, from preparing her for Whiz Kids to teaching her how to safely fall out of her wheelchair as a small child. Melody’s aide, Catherine, is also family. Catherine respects Melody’s intelligence and defends her against other students who try to bully her and undermine her academic accomplishments.

Melody’s (extended) family provides an important support network even as teachers, doctors, and other students dismiss Melody as incapable or speech or thought. Melody’s mother advocates for her in medical settings and in school. Her father builds her a ramp that will allow her to move more easily. Mrs. V and Catherine together help Melody find a Medi-Talker to allow her to better communicate with the world. However family comes with a sense of responsibility for one another, which means that family members feel guilt when they believe they haven’t done enough to help each other out. Melody’s mother blames herself for Melody’s illness. She tells Melody’s father, “I’m the mother...It was my job to bring a child into the world safely, and I screwed it up!” When Melody’s little sister

Penny is hit by their mother’s car, Melody blames herself. She feels as though she should have tried harder to make her mother understand that Penny was behind the car, and she simultaneously worries that her own frustration with Penny somehow led to the accident. Melody is even more concerned that Penny will become brain damaged or physically disabled by the accident and will therefore suffer the same hardships as Melody.

The bonds of family are important and they help the characters in *Out of My Mind* deal with an inhospitable outside world, but family can also be a source of tension when family members worry they’ve inadvertently hurt one another. Melody often believes she can’t support her family in the same way they’ve supported her, but they make sure to let her know that they appreciate her, and that she’s doing all she can. Although her family can be a source a pain, Penny, Catherine, Mrs. V, and Melody’s parents also make up her strongest safety net. Because they are bound together, biologically and by choice, Melody’s family works to address any pain they’ve caused one another.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



FISH

Ollie, Melody’s pet goldfish who is stuck swimming circles in his bowl, reminds Melody of the way she is trapped in her own body. Just like Melody, he can open and close his mouth but can’t say a word. Eventually, Ollie jumps out of his bowl, which leads Melody to assume he’s fed up with his life. The covers of many editions of *Out of My Mind* have a picture of a goldfish leaping out of its bowl, which partially refers to Ollie, but also to Melody, who dreams of expressing herself and escaping the confines of her body. Melody’s inability to save Ollie when he jumps out of his bowl also symbolizes Melody’s general feelings of powerlessness. Worried that her fish will die, Melody can’t put him back in, and she can’t explain to her Mom what has happened. Melody often has difficulty communicating thoughts and emotions she urgently feels, from wanting to get a Happy Meal to trying to warn her mother that Penny has run out behind their car.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Out of My Mind* published in 2012.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ Words have always swirled around me like snowflakes—each one delicate and different, each one melting untouched in my hands.

Deep within me, words pile up in huge drifts. Mountains of phrases and sentences and connected ideas. Clever expressions. Jokes. Love songs.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is one of the first lines Melody delivers to the readers. It is also one of the last quotes in the book. This, the reader later learns, is part of her autobiography, which she creates for her language-arts class. As Melody describes the power of language, she uses language to create intense imagery that helps the reader understand her frustration at not being able to speak. She can experience both snowflakes and words, but when she tries to touch a snowflake, or speak a word, it disappears. This quote highlights the central conflict of Melody's life. In describing her relationship to words, she showcases how talented she is at using language and creating images, all while also explaining how, for so much of her life, her talent has been wasted and misunderstood because she cannot speak.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ Sometimes people never even ask my name, like it's not important or something. It is. My name is Melody.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Melody is in the middle of a description of her physical appearance, describing both how she looks, and how her body moves when it is out of her control. Melody knows that people see her and immediately make assumptions about her. Strangers, teachers, and doctors assume that because she's in a wheelchair, has cerebral palsy, and cannot speak, she doesn't have anything to say, and can't understand anything that is said to her. However, that is not true.

From a young age, Melody has been aware of the way that people discredit her intelligence and even her status as a human being. By not asking her name, they are essentially saying that who Melody is as a person, and what is going on inside her mind are not important to them. It is always important to treat other human beings with respect and kindness, and Melody finds this to be especially true, since she is hyper-aware of what is going on around her at all times.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ I knew the words and melodies of hundreds of songs—a symphony exploding inside my head with no one to hear it but me. But he never asked me about music. I knew all the colors and shapes and animals that children my age were supposed to know, plus lots more. In my head I could count to one thousand—forward and backward. I could identify hundreds of words on sight. But all that was stuck inside. Dr. Hugely, even though he had been to college for like, a million years, would never be smart enough to see inside of me.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Dr. Hugely

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the novel, Melody is five years old, and Dr. Hugely is analyzing her to determine whether or not she'll benefit from going to elementary school. The tests Dr. Hugely uses on Melody do not do a good job of determining how smart she really is. In this quote Melody lists some of her many talents and abilities, many of which are impressive for a girl her age, and none of which can be measured by her doctor.

Although Dr. Hugely is much older, and more educated, Melody knows something that he doesn't. She knows that she is smart and talented, and that not everything can be easily quantified. Melody shows here an invaluable confidence in herself, even in the face of a skeptical authority figure who insults her and tries to limit her future. It's this confidence and perseverance that allows Melody to succeed in pushing her limitations and making her abilities known to others.

☝ “But a person is so much more than the name of a diagnosis on a chart!”

Related Characters: Diane Brooks (speaker), Dr. Hugely, Melody Brooks

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Hugely has explained to Melody's mother that he believes Melody is unintelligent and has no chance of benefitting from school. Melody's mother is incredibly frustrated by this, because she can tell that Melody is engaged with the world, and she is all the more impressive because she manages to communicate despite her disability.

Throughout the novel Melody is often judged based on first impressions. People assume that because it is difficult for her to communicate she doesn't have anything to say. Here, Dr. Hugely has made the same mistake. This quote is also an important example of the power of family advocacy. Because Melody's mother believes in Melody, she's willing to fight back against doctors (and later teachers) who would like to deny her the opportunity for a normal education.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ There's an alphabet strip at the top, so I can spell out words, and a row of numbers under that, so I can count or say how many or talk about time. But for the majority of my life, I've had the communication tools of a little kid on my board. It's no wonder everybody thinks I'm retarded. I hate that word, by the way. *Retarded.*

I like all the kids in room H-5, and I understand their situations better than anybody, but there's nobody else like *me*. It's like I live in a cage with no door and no key. And I have no way to tell someone how to get me out.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The way that other people see Melody is directly related to how she communicates with them. Because she has the communication tools of a small child (despite having the language ability and intellect of someone much older), most people assume she can only communicate at a low level, not realizing that Melody has so much more to say.

Like Melody's fish, Ollie, Melody feels like she's trapped in a cage and cannot get out. Unlike Ollie, who was trapped in his fish tank, Melody's cage is her own mind and her own body. She's full of thoughts and opinions, which she worries she'll never be able to share. Melody also feels trapped in her learning community. Although she shares a physical disability with many of her classmates, she has the most intellectual potential. This is the beginning of an internal conflict for Melody. Does she relate more to her classmates who understand her disability and accept her completely, or does she relate more to the general education fifth-graders who are on her intellectual level, but don't actively include her?

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝☝ "Of course I'll watch Melody," she'd said with certainty. "Well, Melody is, well, you know, really special," Dad said hesitantly.

"All kids are special," Mrs. V had replied with authority. "But this one has hidden superpowers. I'd love to help her find them."

Related Characters: Chuck Brooks, Mrs. Violet Valencia (Mrs. V) (speaker), Melody Brooks

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes in the beginning of the chapter in which Melody introduces the reader to Mrs. V. Mrs. V is an important central character because, as she shows here, she loves Melody like they're part of the same family, and she believes in Melody's potential. Aside from Melody's parents, Mrs. V is the first person to believe that Melody understands what is going on in the world around her. She is also the first person, including Melody's parents, to commit herself to helping Melody learn and grow.

Later in the book, both Melody and Mrs. V make the point that everyone is dealing with some kind of disability, it just depends on your perspective. Here, Mrs. V makes the opposite claim, that everyone is special in his or her own way, and everyone has hidden talents if you're willing to take the time to help nurture them.

Finally, old Nimbus got his way, and the rain came down around me and Mrs. V. It rained so hard, I couldn't see past the porch. The wind blew, and the wet coolness of the rain washed over us. It felt so good. A small leak on Mrs. V's porch let a few drops of rain fall on my head. I laughed out loud. Mrs. V gave me a funny look, then hopped up "You want to feel it all?" she asked.

I nodded my head. Yes, yes, yes.

She rolled me down the ramp Dad had built, both of us getting wetter every second. She stopped when we got to the grass, and we let the rain drench us. My hair, my clothes, my eyes, and arms and hands. Wet. Wet. Wet. It was awesome. The rain was warm, almost like bathwater. I laughed and laughed.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Mrs. Violet Valencia (Mrs. V)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon a storm passes by Mrs. V's house, and she takes Melody outside to experience the rain. Although Melody's parents and some of her teachers are well meaning, much of her life is defined by people trying to protect her from getting hurt. As a result, Melody often misses out on what she sees as "normal" life experiences. Mrs. V is one of the few adults who will push Melody outside of her comfort zone and support her in pursuing things that may be uncomfortable or challenging.

In this moment, Melody is getting the chance to experience rain, but as Mrs. V says, this moment is a stand in for Melody's desire to "feel it all." The rain represents the many life experiences—friendship, education—that Melody cannot easily access. It's also worth noting Melody's tremendous language abilities in this passage, as her evocation of the rain is incredibly moving. In addition, her reference to the storm clouds as "old Nimbus" shows an advanced knowledge of science, vocabulary, and literary personification.

Chapter 7 Quotes

When I sleep, I dream. And in my dreams I can do anything. I get picked first on the playground for games. I can run so fast! I take gymnastics, and I never fall off the balance beam. I know how to square-dance, and I'm good at it. I call my friends on the phone, and we talk for hours. I whisper secrets. I sing. When I wake up in the morning, it's always sort of a letdown as reality hits me. I have to be fed and dressed so I can spend another long day in the happy-face room at Spaulding Street School.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

There is nothing Melody wants more than to be able to participate in "normal" activities in the classroom and on the playground. In her waking life, her disability restricts her movement and her ability to participate physically, and her difficulty speaking has prevented her from forming meaningful relationships with other students at her school.

In Melody's perfect dream world, she would be able to sing, dance, and speak, but she would also be a member of a community. Throughout the novel Melody struggles with the idea of what community she belongs to—whether it is her special learning community, or her Whiz Kids team—and this dream shows how Melody believes her access to social communities is related to her disability. If she could speak and play, she believes, she would be easily integrated into the social groups of her able-bodied classmates.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Ollie spent all day long swimming around that small bowl, ducking through the fake log, and then swimming around again. He always swam in the same direction. The only time he'd change his course was when Mom dropped a few grains of fish food into his bowl each morning and evening. I'd watch him gobble the food, then poop it out, then swim around and around once again. I felt sorry for him.

At least I got to go outside and to the store and to school. Ollie just swam in a circle all day. I wondered if fish ever slept. But any time I woke up in the middle of the night, Ollie was still swimming, his little mouth opening and closing like he was trying to say something.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Ollie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Ollie is a physical representation of how Melody feels all the time. Just like Ollie is trapped in his bowl, Melody feels trapped in her own body and in her own mind. Melody admits that her life is better than Ollie's. She's able to go outside, experience new places, and meet new people, while he is stuck in his tank, in her room, forever. However Ollie's "little mouth opening and closing like he was trying to say something" reminds the reader of Melody's desire— but inability—to speak on her own. Interestingly, many people look at Melody and assume she has nothing to say. In contrast, Melody assumes most people, and most animals, have thoughts and feelings. By imagining that Ollie might be trying to speak, she gives him a degree of agency that she wishes people would give to her. Also, by considering whether or not Ollie sleeps, Melody seems to be empathetically wondering if he has a dream world into which he can escape from his boring life, just like she does.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ I once got one of those electronic dolls for Christmas. It was supposed to talk and cry and move its arms and legs if you pushed the right buttons. But when we opened the box, one of the arms had come off, and all the doll did, no matter which button you pushed, was squeak. Mom took it back to the store and got her money back. I wonder if she ever wished she could get a refund for me.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Penny Brooks, Diane Brooks

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

This anecdote comes in the middle of a chapter about the birth of Melody's little sister, Penny. Throughout the chapter, Melody and her parents have worried that Penny will be born with some kind of disability. Although Penny is born completely healthy, Melody begins considering, for the first time, whether her parents regretted having her.

The broken doll, in Melody's mind, represents her as a baby.

Her doll can't cry or move like it is supposed to, just like Melody couldn't control her body in the way her parents initially expected her to. Although Melody's parents show nothing but love for their daughters, seeing how happy they are with Penny as she reaches developmental milestones makes Melody worry that they regret having her. This passage also shows the painful symbolism of an everyday act—returning something broken to the store—even though this is meant as a kindness to Melody. Melody's life isn't just hard because of her disability; it's also hard because of the meanings her disability projects onto other aspects of life, such as her concern for Ollie's well being.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ The kids in there were mostly fifth graders too. They'd probably be surprised to know that I knew all their names. I've watched them on the playground at lunch and at recess for years. My classmates sit under a tree and catch a breeze while they play kickball or tag, so I know who they are and how they work. I doubted if they knew any of *us* by name, though.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes as Melody is beginning her fifth-grade inclusion classes. Although she's never had classes with her fellow fifth-graders before, she knows who they are because she's watched them before school, after school, and on the playground for many years. The quote emphasizes the difference between Melody's small learning community, composed of students with disabilities, and the able-bodied general fifth-grade population. Although Melody is as smart and as hard working as the general education students, and even though they've been in close proximity for many years, she still isn't a part of their world.

This quote also references an earlier passage in Chapter 2, where Melody notes that nobody ever asks her for her name. Her fellow students, who presumably spent years at the same school, have never thought to learn who she actually is, even as she invests time and energy in learning about them.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ “Some people get braces on their teeth. Some get braces on their legs. For others, braces won’t work, so they need wheelchairs and walkers and such. You’re a lucky girl that you only had messed-up teeth. Remember that.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Violet Valencia (Mrs. V) (speaker), Melody Brooks, Molly North, Claire Wilson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

During Rose and Melody’s trip to the aquarium with Melody’s family, the girls run into Molly and Claire. Molly and Claire both talk directly to Rose while ignoring Melody, and they make it clear that they don’t understand why Rose is spending time with Melody. Mrs. V overhears, becomes angry, and intervenes.

Mrs. V’s point is that everyone has to overcome obstacles in their lives. People often need help, but just because one person needs more help than someone else doesn’t mean they should be made fun of. Disability exists on a spectrum, so Melody’s wheelchair shouldn’t be looked down upon, just as someone’s orthodontic devices shouldn’t be seen as definitive of who they are. If you wouldn’t make fun of someone for needing braces, why would you make fun of someone for needing technology to move? This passage echoes a joke Melody makes later in the novel, “We all have disabilities. What’s yours?”

Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ I can’t believe Dad is making a video of me saying my first words. It’s almost like when he filmed Penny’s first words—well, not really.

I type very carefully and push the button to make the machine speak.

“Hi, Dad. Hi, Mom. I am so happy.”

Mom gets all teary-eyed, and her nose gets red. She is looking at me all soft and gooey.

When I think about it, I realize I have never, ever said any words directly to my parents. So I push a couple of buttons, and the machine speaks the words I’ve never been able to say.

“I love you.”

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Chuck Brooks, Diane Brooks

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

After Melody gets her Medi-Talker, she tells her parents she loves them for the first time out loud. Although Melody’s parents know she loves them, and she’s presumably said “I love you” to them before using her communication board, there’s something powerful about hearing her speak those words. This is one of Melody’s life-changing moments. For her entire life up until this point, she’s felt trapped and unable to say all the things she wants and needs to communicate. In this instance, and for much of the rest of the novel, she’s finally able to let out all the thoughts that have been swirling around her head.

This is also an important moment for Melody’s family. Their love and support is what allows Melody to thrive in other areas of her life. Therefore, it is especially important that Melody is able to tell her mother and father how much she cares about them and appreciates their support.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ “I’m not trying to be mean—honest—but it just never occurred to me that Melody had thoughts in her head.”

A couple of other kids nod slightly.

Miss Gordon doesn’t raise her voice. Instead, she responds thoughtfully: “You’ve always been able to say whatever came to your mind, Claire. All of you. But Melody has been forced to be silent. She probably has mountains of stuff to say.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Gordon, Claire Wilson (speaker), Molly North, Melody Brooks

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

When Melody comes to school with her Medi-Talker for the first time, some students are excited for her, and others are surprised that she has anything to say. Claire and her friend Molly have been rude to Melody throughout the novel. It is easy for the reader to assume that the girls are purely malicious, but this moment reveals their ignorance. Although it is important to treat people with respect whether or not they can hear or understand you, Claire and Molly genuinely believed that their behavior didn’t affect Melody because Melody didn’t have the ability to

understand it. Therefore, they justified their treatment of Melody by arguing that she couldn't tell how rude they were being.

This moment could represent a turning point for Claire and Molly. Unfortunately, it does not. Even after they realize the contributions Melody makes, they do not show her respect, or treat her as an equally capable classmate. Miss Gordon, unlike Claire and Molly, understands Melody's intelligence and her internal life. Her argument is the same argument Melody has been making throughout the novel—just because Melody can't speak doesn't mean she doesn't have something to say. In fact, because she hasn't been able to speak, she has a lifetime of words just waiting to get out.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝ I can answer questions in class lots better with Elvira to help me. For the first time, instead of “pretend” grades that teachers would give me because they weren't quite sure if I knew the answer or not, I get real grades recorded in the teachers' grade book that are based on actual answers I've given. Printed out and everything!

But at recess I still sit alone. It's been too cold to go outside, so we sit in the far corner of the overheated cafeteria until it's time to go back to class. None of the girls gossip with me about some silly thing a boy has said. Nobody promises to call me after school. Nobody asks me to come to a birthday party or a sleepover. Not even Rose.

Sure, she'll stop and chat for a minute or two, but as soon as Janice or Paula calls her to come and look at a picture on a cell phone, Rose will say, “I'll be right back!” then skip away as if she's glad she has a reason to cut out on me.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Rose Spencer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

Although Melody is now able to speak, she is still not a member of the fifth-grade community. She had suspected that the reason she didn't feel fully included was because she could not speak, and so people assumed she had nothing to say. However, even once her fellow students realize she can hold a conversation, they do not care to engage.

This clear separation between Melody and her able-bodied

classmates is especially clear in her friendship with Rose. Their interactions are generally superficial, talking for a minute or two usually while they are in class together. Melody had assumed that what was preventing them from forming a deeper friendship was her communication ability, but even now that she can communicate, Rose still isn't interested in something deeper. Melody is left to wonder if there is any way to be accepted, or if her disability will forever prevent her from fully integrating.

☝ Catherine jumped out of her chair and stormed over to where Claire and Molly were sitting, her new black leather boots clicking sharply on the tiled classroom floor. “I did *not* help her! Did it ever occur to you that she might have some smarts of her own?”

“She can't even sit up by herself!” Claire replied, her voice petulant.

“What your body looks like has nothing to do with how well your brain works! You ought to know that by looking in a mirror!”

Related Characters: Claire Wilson, Catherine (speaker), Melody Brooks

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, Claire assumes that because Melody has a physical disability, she must have a mental impairment as well. This is not the case, which Claire should already know. This discussion is similar to the conversation Claire and Miss Gordon have in Chapter 16, when Claire first realizes Melody has things to say.

Claire equates Melody not being able to sit up by herself with Melody not being able to think by herself or complete difficult academic problems. All her life Melody has dealt with this kind of discrimination. Just because her body needs a wheelchair does not mean her mind is also damaged. Catherine here acts as Melody's protector. Like Mrs. V in Chapter 13, she stands up for Melody. Catherine is therefore a member of Melody's extended family, and is one of the people who helps her succeed by advocating for her.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝ We all have disabilities. What's yours?

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Molly North, Claire Wilson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Melody programs her Medi-Talker to give two responses to the question “What’s wrong with you?” The first response is earnest, and it describes what cerebral palsy is and what it does. The second answer—the quote above—is subtly mocking. Melody intends this response for girls like Claire and Molly, people who don’t seem to understand that Melody’s brain is just like theirs. Melody is used to able-bodied people assuming that because she has a disability, she is irreconcilably different from them. However, as Melody has proved throughout the novel, she is just as smart and just as hard working as her fifth-grade classmates.

This quote mirrors a quote from Catherine in Chapter 17, and another from Mrs. V in Chapter 13. Both women point out that disability exists on a spectrum, and that Melody’s wheelchair is an extreme version of a simpler medical device, like braces for the teeth. It reminds people like Molly and Claire to be grateful for their strong, functioning bodies, while forcing them to consider the ways in which they are not perfectly able.

Melody desperately wants to feel accepted as a contributing member of the team, but during practice she has difficulty participating because her Medi-Talker does not allow her to speak quickly enough. Melody also worries it’s not just her Medi-Talker that prevents her from feeling like she belongs. There’s a possibility that her teammates will never accept her because they feel that her disability makes Melody too different from them.

Throughout the novel Melody is forced to deal with only partial acceptance by her peers. Even after she is allowed into inclusion classes at the beginning of the fifth grade, she still doesn’t feel like a “normal student.” Later, even after she gets her Medi-Talker and is finally able to participate, she doesn’t feel included socially by her peers. Now, although she has proved herself and made it onto the most elite academic team at her school, she continues to feel like an outsider.

Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ *Hmmm, I thought. Claire gets sick in the middle of a crowded restaurant, yet I’m the one everybody looks at sideways.*
They all had to wait for me and Mom. We took our time.
Push gently. Roll down. Bump. Top step.
Push gently. Roll down. Bump. Next step.
Push gently. Roll down. Bump. Third step.
Five bumps down to the bottom of the steps.
And I was still so hungry.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ I still couldn’t get over the fact that I was part of the team. Okay. Truth. There was the team, and there was me, and we were in the same room. But we weren’t quite a team. They appreciated the fact that I usually got the answers right, but... When Mr. Dimming gave us multiple-choice questions to answer, I had to think for only a moment, then hit the correct letter on my machine. But lots of the preparation involved fast-and-furious, back-and-forth discussions, and I had trouble adding anything to what was being said—most of the time.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Mr. Dimming

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

Melody is excited to be a member of the Whiz Kids team, but she worries her teammates don’t view her as an equal.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Claire Wilson, Diane Brooks

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

At a dinner celebrating their team’s regional Whiz Kids competition win, Claire gets sick and vomits all over the floor. Melody is confused and disheartened to see that even though Claire is visibly ill and embarrasses herself in front of the entire restaurant, Melody’s disability is still treated as more noteworthy.

Melody cannot eat without assistance, and so her mother helps feed her. Although Melody eats this way multiple times each day, and the process itself is relatively clean and quiet, her teammates act as though it is very strange. Seeing Melody eat reminds them of her disability, and causes them to see her as different in an undesirable way. Claire’s illness in the restaurant causes a scene, in a way that Melody’s

eating does not. But Claire's illness is temporary, and soon she'll be healthy and a member of the team again. In contrast, Melody will always have her disability, and her teammates will always subtly distance themselves from her. This is especially hard for Melody to realize the night they've won their competition, because she's proved herself intellectually and academically. She had hoped her brain would be enough to earn the respect of her teammates, but it increasingly seems that nothing will.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☝☝ The reaction at school today is just what I expected. Words float out of lips that say nice things to me, but eyes tell the truth. The eyes are cold, as if I had beat the reporter over the head and forced her to print that picture of me. Even Rose acts distant. "Nice picture of you in the paper, Melody," she says. "Thanks, should have been all of us." "I think so too," Rose replies. I just sigh. *I can't do anything right. I don't want to be all that—I just want to be like everybody else.*

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Rose Spencer

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

The day after Melody's team wins the Whiz Kids regional competition, newspaper coverage focuses on Melody's personal story of competing with cerebral palsy, instead of covering the team's win more generally. Her teammates seem jealous that she got personal attention in the press. Melody imagines that the whole fifth grade is angry with her, which is likely not true, but her team is definitely disappointed with the coverage. This is even true of Rose, who is generally the most friendly of the Whiz Kids.

This is especially difficult for Melody because it was not her choice to take the newspaper's attention away from the whole team; in fact, all she wants is to be a team member who perfectly blends in. It's also notable, from an outside perspective, that Melody's story is the most interesting of anyone on her team, and it makes logical sense that newspapers would focus on her. Her teammates in this moment are hypocrites. They, like the newspaper reporter, are fixated on Melody's disability and it makes them treat her differently from everyone else. However, they don't want anyone else to acknowledge Melody's disability if it

means she gets any kind of preferential treatment. What none of the fifth graders seem to understand is that Melody's life is observably more difficult because of her cerebral palsy. The small benefits (extra newspaper coverage, a personal aide) do not make up for the thousands of ways her disability makes her life more difficult.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝☝ Mr. Dimming said slowly, "The six members of the championship Spaulding Street Elementary School quiz team are..." He paused. I thought Connor was going to throw something at him. "Rose, Connor, Melody, Elena, Rodney, and Molly. Claire and Amanda will be our alternates." "I'm an alternate?" Claire gasped. "Molly beat you by two points, Claire," Mr. D explained. "But you still get to come with us and cheer us on and tour the city." "But it was *me* who helped her study! Claire said, outrage in her voice. "That is so *not* fair!" I just shook my head and smiled a little. There is so much Claire doesn't know about stuff not being fair."

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Claire Wilson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

In preparation for the national competition, the Whiz Kids team takes a test to determine who will compete and who will be an alternate. Claire is upset to find that her score is too low for her to compete. Claire's comment that it isn't fair that she didn't make the team is ironic, because it is perfectly fair; Claire didn't get a high enough score, therefore she is an alternate.

In contrast, Claire has observed half a year of Melody's life, in which very little is fair. Melody is smart and hard working, and yet she is continually underestimated. Melody is a useful member of the Whiz Kids team, and yet she doesn't feel like a full member. For Claire to complain about fairness in front of Melody, who deals with an unfair world every day, is to prove she hasn't learned anything about empathy this entire novel.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝ “Your team got beat in one of the late rounds in D.C. last night,” he told me. “They got ninth place—a little bitty trophy.” But they weren’t *my* team anymore. I tried to pretend like I didn’t care.

Related Characters: Chuck Brooks (speaker), Melody Brooks

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

The day after Melody’s Whiz Kids team leaves her behind to compete in Washington D.C., she tires not to get emotionally invested in their score. Throughout the novel, Melody has suspected that she was not considered a full member of her various academic communities. In this moment, her fear is confirmed. By trying to think of her school’s Whiz Kids team as “the” team and not “my” team, Melody hopes she will feel less emotionally invested, and therefore feel less hurt that they abandoned her.

Melody’s father thinks that Melody will feel happy that without her, her team failed to perform well. But she continues to feel upset. She doesn’t care whether or not they performed well without her, she’s hurt that it seems as though they didn’t value her contribution enough to make sure was treated as an equal member of the team.

Chapter 31 Quotes

☝ I glanced out of her large picture window and I watched the wet branches sway. How could I say it? I looked back at my talker and typed very slowly, “I want to be like other kids.” “So you want to be mean and fake and thoughtless?” I looked up at her angry face, then looked away. “No. Normal.” “Normal sucks!” she roared. “People love you because you’re Melody, not because of what you can or cannot do. Give us a little credit.”

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Mrs. Violet Valencia (Mrs. V)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

After Penny’s car accident, Melody expresses her guilt to Mrs. V. She wishes she were like other children because if

she were like other children she would have been able to speak and warn her mother that Penny was behind the car. Mrs. V argues back that Melody shouldn’t wish she were normal, because people love her regardless of what her disability allows her to do. This is a kind sentiment, but misguided. Melody’s life would be easier if she did not have cerebral palsy, and her wish to be “normal” here is not based on wanting to be “fake and thoughtless,” but on being able to save the life of her sister.

Later in the chapter Melody notes “normal doesn’t suck at all.” She has received news that Penny will be okay, and in this case normal means healthy and uninjured. This is in contrast to the kind of normal Mrs. V is talking about, which she imagines existing in contrast to everything Melody is—kind, smart, and caring. Mrs. V imagines normal as something Melody, an exceptionally intelligent, talented student, could never be, and shouldn’t want to be. In contrast, Melody sees normal as a way to blend in and be accepted by her classmates. She also sees it as a stand in for able bodied. This is something she no longer actively desires by this point in the novel, but she does hope that Penny remains “normal” and able bodied after her accident.

Chapter 32 Quotes

☝ When we get to school, the air is chilly, so the aides take us directly to room H-5. As we get settled, I look at my friends there through different eyes. Freddy, who wants to zoom to the moon. Ashley, our fashion model. Will, the baseball expert. Maria, who has no enemies. Gloria, the music lover. Carl, our resident gourmet. Jill, who might have once been like Penny. Not one of them even knows how to be mean.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker), Jill, Carl, Gloria, Maria, Willy Williams, Ashley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

After Penny’s accident, Melody begins to reassess her priorities. After spending so much of the year trying to fit in with the rest of the fifth-graders and escape H-5, she’s reminded of the positive qualities of her special learning community classmates. The able bodied fifth graders have been, on the whole, either cruel or exclusionary, and Melody

hasn't been welcomed into their community. In contrast, her H-5 classmates are all open, kind, and caring, and they accept Melody completely.

Here, Melody takes a moment to consider that her classmates with disabilities are kinder people than her able bodied classmates. In contrast, the general education fifth graders may not have physical disabilities, but they sufferer from a profound lack of empathy.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝ It's like somebody gave me a puzzle, but I don't have the box with the picture on it. So I don't know what the final thing is supposed to look like. I'm not even sure if I have all the pieces. That's probably not a good comparison, since I couldn't put a puzzle together if I wanted to. Even though I usually know the answer to most of the questions at school, lots of stuff still puzzles me.

Related Characters: Melody Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the last lines of the novel. Even though Melody has learned and grown over the course of *Out of My Mind*, there's still learning and growing left to do. She imagines her life as a puzzle. As she gets older she's able to put pieces together and figure out truths about the world and her place in it. By describing the puzzle of her life as something somebody gave to her, she acknowledges the lack of control she has over so many things, like her body, her speech, and other people's responses to her.

As opposed to her metaphor back in the beginning of Chapter 1, where she imagines herself as surrounded by untouchable snowdrifts of words, or in Chapter 9 where she compares herself to a broken doll, in this simile Melody gives herself agency. Although she admits puzzling out her life is difficult, she's ready and willing to try.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Melody begins her story with an ode to language, explaining that all her life she has loved words. Ever since she was a baby and her mother spoke to her and her father sang to her, she's remembered and treasured every word.

Language is Melody's primary way of processing the world, which is ironic because she cannot speak. Language connects her to her family, and features in her memories.



Even though she loves words, Melody feels like they are piling up inside her mind like snowdrifts, because—even though she can read and think deeply—she is unable to speak.

Only after she showcases her language ability to the reader, does Melody reveal the reason she finds language to be so powerful: because she cannot speak. This forces the reader to let go of any initial prejudices they might have had, because they are introduced to Melody's mind before they understand her body's disability.



CHAPTER 2

Melody explains that she can't walk or talk. She has cerebral palsy, which makes her body stiff, affects her balance, and prevents her from holding anything in her hands. She can use a TV remote and operate an electric wheelchair, but she needs the wheelchair to move anywhere. Melody imagines how she looks to the world. She's small for her age, and she sits in a pink wheelchair. She has very little control over her body, and sometimes she has fits where she flails and kicks. She has curious eyes, dimples, and a pretty smile, but she knows people don't always take the time to notice her face, or even to ask her name.

Melody's descriptions of her disability are in stark contrast to her clear and humorous narration. She knows that, based on her looks, many people assume she's not engaged with the world. Her narration makes clear, though, that she is constantly engaged and observant.



Melody can remember being a baby, being bathed by her mother and watching her dad record her on his camcorder. She realizes now that her father was waiting for developmental milestones, like her first steps, which she never took. Even though as a baby Melody wasn't able to walk or talk, she was hyper-aware of the world around her, and she is able to recall it many years later. She remembers her parents playing music, which was extra special for her because she has synesthesia. Melody's mother loves classical music, her dad loves jazz, and she loves country.

Melody showcases her perfect memory, which is much clearer and goes back much further than is strictly "normal." This showcases the divide between her body, which doesn't work the way it should, and her mind, which works even better than many able-bodied children. Melody also emphasizes the importance of her parents, whose love and attention have made her life more bearable.



Melody especially loves the song “Elvira,” by the Oak Ridge Boys. The first time the song ever came on the radio, Melody was so excited she screeched. Her mother could tell she was agitated but Melody was too young to understand why she loved the song, or to explain to her mother what she was feeling.

Melody admits that her near-perfect memory is both a blessing and a curse. She remembers uncomfortable feelings, but is unable to share any of them. More than anything, however, Melody remembers words, and because she can’t use them, she understands how powerful they can be, and what an important tool of self-expression language is. She loves both of her parents, but for her entire life has been unable to tell them, in words, what she loves about them.

CHAPTER 3

Melody thinks back to when she first felt she was different. It didn’t happen all at once; instead she was surprised and frustrated when she couldn’t do small things, like hold a stuffed cat her father brought home for her, or prevent herself from falling face first onto the living room rug. Because her memory was so good, and her mind could do anything she wanted Melody was even more confused by her uncontrollable body. As a baby, Melody didn’t exactly understand what was happening to her body, but her parents did. Her dad would hold her on his lap and talk to her like she was an adult, explaining that he life was going to be difficult.

Melody’s dad did his best to make sure she experienced the world as much as she could. While her mom wrapped her in blankets, her dad would unwrap her so she could feel the sun and the wind on her body. He put a birdfeeder on the porch so he and Melody could sit inside and watch the birds interact.

Melody knows that she’s “ridiculously smart.” She has great hearing and a photographic memory. After watching a PBS special on genius children, she realized her memory worked the same way as theirs. She memorized everything she read, saw, or heard: all of her picture books, infomercials, and the dialogue from her favorite television shows. She likes television, and is happy that she can control the remote to change the channel. She likes watching many types of programs, from old videos of herself, to nature documentaries (which she remembers perfectly). Still, even though she appreciates her memory, she admits “sometimes I wish I had a delete button in my head.”

This is an early example of Melody’s struggles with language. While later she is unable to communicate because of her cerebral palsy, here Melody cannot communicate because she is a baby.



Because of her disability, Melody’s memory is as frustrating as it is amazing. Since she cannot speak, she has no one to share her memories with, and because she has so little control over her body, a disproportionate number of her memories are of uncomfortable situations, physically and emotionally.



Melody underscores the stark difference between her bright, quickly-developing mind, and her body. Because her brain raced ahead, initially it was extra difficult for her to understand why her body was not cooperating. From an early age, her parents were honest and open with her and they did their best not to sugarcoat the difficulties she would encounter.



Melody’s parents try to protect her in different ways, but both display their deep affection for their daughter.



Once again, Melody displays her impressive memory, both the positive and negative aspects. Remembering facts and images is fun, but she also retains information she’ll never need and does not want. This passage also shows that Melody is curious and devoted to educating herself, despite that—as readers will learn—her teachers are not always as devoted to making sure that she learns. Melody’s intelligence, curiosity, and dedication make everyone else’s low expectations for her seem cruel and misguided.



Having so much knowledge but being unable to express it is frustrating for Melody. Sometimes she has what she calls “tornado explosions,” or fits where her body gets tight and then thrashes around. These explosions happen when she’s angry or unable to express a strong emotion, but she can’t control them, and she is embarrassed by them. She remembers being at the toy store as a small child, and seeing blocks on the shelf that she knew were poisonous because she had seen on TV that they had been painted with lead paint. Melody tried to point to the toys to communicate to her mom that they needed to get the blocks removed from the store, but her mother didn’t understand. Melody became so frustrated with trying to explain herself that she had a tornado explosion and her mother, also frustrated and embarrassed at being unable to control her daughter, ran out of the store. Melody’s mother was angry and even called the doctor about the fit, but she never understood what Melody was trying to say.

Melody has very little control over her body, and while that often means it doesn’t move when she wants it to, it can also mean her body moves excessively when she wishes it would stay still. Because her memory is so sharp and she is aware of what is going on around her, these explosions are even more emotionally difficult. In this passage, Melody also has one of her first major miscommunications with her mother. Melody can often get her point across, but ironically it’s often the times when she is the most passionate about communicating that she’s unable to do so.



CHAPTER 4

Melody’s mother wants to enroll Melody in school, so she takes Melody to see a specialist, Dr. Hugely. Doctors can’t “fix” her, and Melody often responds to them by pretending she doesn’t understand them, ignoring their questions and staring at the wall. Dr. Hugely conducts a series of tests with Melody to figure out how smart she is. First, he asks her to stack blocks according to size, which she can’t do because she can’t control her movement. Then he asks her to identify the color blue, which she does. Next, he asks her questions about three objects, and she is supposed to answer “which of these things is not like the other.” Melody has difficulty answering because she cannot speak, and also because she assumes they are trick questions because they are so simple. He asks her what animal gives birth to a calf, but she knows there isn’t just one answer, as many animals have babies that are called calves.

Melody finds doctors frustrating, because their instruments cannot measure her sharp mind. This passage, which shows a medical professional conducting condescending and misguided tests of her intelligence, is meant to show the absurdity of the way in which many people (even doctors) treat disabled people. Though Melody is smarter than this doctor can imagine, his insistence on measuring her intellect through tasks she cannot physically perform is cruel and harmful to Melody. Furthermore, he asks her questions so basic that she thinks they are a trick. This mirrors the way many of her teachers treat her, as will become clear when Melody describes her school environment.



Annoyed by Dr. Hugely’s questions, Melody puts on her “handicap face” and daydreams. Dr. Hugely finishes the evaluation without her help, and explains to Melody’s mother that he believes she is brain-damaged. Melody’s mother argues back that she knows Melody is smart, and explains that Melody laughs at her jokes. Dr. Hugely dismisses this; he doesn’t believe that Melody understands anything more than simple speech, and he believes that she will never be able to speak. He suggests keeping her at home and not giving her an education, sending her to a school for children with disabilities, or sending her to a nursing home.

Dr. Hugely assumes that her physical disabilities mean she has mental disabilities as well, a prejudice Melody must deal with throughout the book. Luckily, Melody’s mother has a special connection with her, and although she cannot speak, she understands Melody’s intelligence. The bond of family, in this case, is more useful than the advice of the doctor, who would have denied Melody the education she cherishes because of his prejudice.



Melody understands the whole conversation, and she is frightened that her mother will send her away. Luckily, Melody's mom fights back. She tells Dr. Hugely what Melody was thinking earlier, that although he has a fancy degree he cannot understand what is going on inside Melody's mind. Melody, her mother argues, is intelligent, and even more so because she has to try so much harder to communicate than anyone else. The chapter ends as Melody's mother rolls Melody out of the Doctor's office, and declares she's enrolling her daughter at Spaulding Street Elementary School.

Melody's mother understands what Melody communicates in her narration in the book, which is that because communication is harder for her, it is even more important, and more impressive. Once again, Melody's mother understands this because of a special familial bond, one that Dr. Hugely is unable to replicate in a hospital setting.



CHAPTER 5

Melody explains what life is like at Spaulding Street Elementary School, where she is now in the fifth grade. A special bus with a wheelchair drives Melody to school everyday. Once she arrives, she sits in the waiting area and watches other children playing. She has been at the school for five years, and in that time she has watched, and been ignored by, most of the children at the school. Although she sees the general education students (the "regular" students) every day and watches them play, they never invite her or any of the other students with disabilities. Melody feels invisible.

Although Melody technically attends an elementary school with students of all abilities, she is essentially excluded from all activities not specifically targeted towards students with disabilities, and she isn't a part of the wider student community. This passage emphasizes how isolating Melody's disability is. The able bodied children clearly don't understand that their exclusion of her is hurtful.



Melody is in a special program called a "learning community," with other students her age with disabilities. Although she was excited at first when she was enrolled in school, Melody often feels that she has learned more from television documentaries than from her teachers. She has stayed in the same classroom the whole time she's been at school, and it's painted in colors that she feels are babyish. Many of her school activities are too easy for her. Melody especially hates one winter tradition of decorating a six-foot-tall Styrofoam snowman named Sydney, which the children in H-5 are forced to play with and decorate.

Although Melody is technically at school, her education is not as comprehensive as it would be were she in the general education classes. The curriculum and activities assume Melody's mind is as underdeveloped as her body, which is obviously not the case. It's tragic that Melody must do most of her learning from television, which, significantly, is unable to discriminate against her because it is not human. Thus, television treats Melody like an able bodied kid, and, as such, it expands her mind.



Some of the other children in Melody's learning community like Sydney, but most of them are frustrated by the snowman. Melody introduces her fellow students and their responses to Sydney. Ashley and Gloria don't like it, Carl sticks pencils and rulers in it, Willy tries to knock it down, and Freddy and Jill don't have strong opinions on it. Willy would rather talk about baseball than play with Sydney, and Freddy would rather zoom around the room in his wheelchair. Melody hates the snowman, but has decided that trying to participate and help decorate it is easier than fighting her teachers.

As she often does, Melody makes a personal concession, by decorating the snowman, rather than making her own life more stimulating and enjoyable. She understands the cost of "rocking the boat," and decides that in this situation it's easier to go along with the teacher's plans. Significantly, it's not just Melody who hates the snowmen—the other kids in her class seem not to like it either. This shows that Melody's intelligence and desire not to be condescended to are true of many people with disabilities, not just Melody.



Melody has a communication board, a Plexiglas tray that has words written on it that attaches to her wheelchair. By pointing to certain words and phrases she can communicate basic thoughts, but she needs more. She jokes that she can understand why people think she's stupid, because she doesn't have the ability to say very much at all. She also explains that some people think she's "retarded," but clarifies that she hates that word. She isn't dumb; she's trapped inside of her own mind.

Although Melody can communicate with her board, the words on it represent only a tiny fraction of all that she wants to say. By limiting her speech, it also limits what other people think of her; the handful of words on the board can make it appear that those are the only words she knows.



CHAPTER 6

Mrs. V is Melody's next-door neighbor, and has essentially become a member of the family. When Melody was two, Mrs. V became her baby sitter. Although Mrs. V is careful with and respectful of Melody, she also treated her like any other baby, picking her up and holding her even when many of Melody's parents' friends wouldn't. Mrs. V was soothing, but she was also no-nonsense. She sees Melody as a child who can learn with the proper guidance, not something fragile or troublesome.

While Melody's parents are often cautious with her, Mrs. V is an especially important figure because she tests the limits of Melody's abilities. Mrs. V assumes that introducing Melody to experiences that are potentially challenging is better for her in the long run, which is true. This respect for Melody's resilience makes Mrs. V an essential member of Melody's family, even though they are not biologically related.



On her parent's workdays Melody would go to Mrs. V's house, and when she got older she would go after school. Mrs. V genuinely cares about Melody and her development. From her first visit, Mrs. V took Melody out of her special chair and put her on the floor. This disturbed Melody at first, but she got used to it. Then Mrs. V put Melody's favorite toy, a monkey, just out of reach. Melody was initially shocked and upset, but Mrs. V believed in her, and eventually Melody flipped over and crawled to her toy. Because of Mrs. V, Melody learns how to scoot, crawl, flip over, and catch herself when she falls.

Unlike Melody's parents, Mrs. V is willing to challenge her and make her struggle in order to teach her. This makes Melody stronger both physically and mentally. It also underscores the importance of Melody's extended family, and the ways that each member improves her life in unique ways.



When she first enrolled in school, Melody realized that if she couldn't talk, then she couldn't participate. Even though she knew thousands of words, she couldn't use them. When Melody was six she watched a documentary on Stephen Hawking. She found this inspirational, partly because he is the smartest man in the world and he's in a wheelchair just like her, but also because he had a better way to communicate with the world: his personal computer. Melody had Mrs. V make her a new communication board, one that included more words, people in her life, and questions. Mrs. V also teaches Melody to read. She makes color-coded flashcards, which Melody quickly memorizes, and when Melody has memorized the flashcards, they lay them out on the floor, and Melody organizes them into sentences with her fists.

Being unable to communicate at school prevented Melody from getting much out of it. Her communication board and her ability to read give her a new portal to the world beyond her mind. Mrs. V demonstrates here that it's crucial that Melody be respected and held accountable to her potential. Instead of letting Melody's mind languish (as her doctor wanted to do), Mrs. V sees no reason that Melody should not learn to read just as any able bodied kid would. While some people (who assume that Melody is less capable than she is) might think that this is cruel, Mrs. V is rewarded for risking asking too much of Melody—learning to read is essential to Melody's happiness and future success.



Melody likes that Mrs. V takes her outside no matter what the weather is. One hot afternoon they sat on the porch together and Mrs. V taught Melody about the clouds. It started to rain, and Melody liked the feeling of a few drops on her head, so Mrs. V took her out into the storm until they were completely soaked. As Melody said, “It was awesome.”

In contrast to Chapter 3, when Melody’s mother bundled her up and her father had her sit with the sun on her face, Mrs. V isn’t afraid to let Melody experience the world in full. Mrs. V doesn’t assume Melody is fragile just because she has a disability, and this gives Melody a newfound sense of freedom and possibility.



CHAPTER 7

In her dreams, Melody can do everything she can’t do when awake. She can walk and run, play, and sing. She has friends that she can speak to, and she calls them on the phone. In the morning she’s disappointed to face reality where she can’t walk or talk.

Melody’s dreams are a fantasy world where she is no longer physically limited by her disability. In the same way that her internal life of words allows her a degree of freedom, her subconscious makes her feel “normal.”



Back in the real world, Melody goes to elementary school and thinks back on all the classroom aides she has had over the years. Normally there’s one male aide to help the boys, and one female aide to help the girls. The aides take the students to the bathroom, help them eat, and wheel them around the school. Melody doesn’t think the aides make a lot of money, especially since they often quit their jobs, but she believes “they should get a million dollars. What they do is really hard.”

Melody values the work the classroom aides put in to make sure that she and her fellow students in H-5 can be comfortable and happy, which allows them to learn better. The aides, and especially Catherine (whom Melody meets later) are part of the extended family that supports Melody and allows her to thrive.



Keeping good teachers is hard, too, but in the second-grade Melody had Mrs. Tracy, who noticed Melody liked to read and gave her audiobooks to listen to during class. When Melody tossed books that were too easy on the floor, Mrs. Tracy understood and gave Melody more challenging books. After Melody had listened to something, Mrs. Tracy would quiz her on it, and Melody got every question right.

Mrs. Tracy is one of the few, rare teachers who sees Melody’s intelligence and potential. Like Mrs. V, she understands the importance of keeping Melody, engaged, stimulated, and constantly learning.



Melody’s third grade teacher, Mrs. Billups, was not good. Either Mrs. Tracy didn’t communicate the students’ needs to Mrs. Billups, or Mrs. Billups didn’t look at the notes, but she treated her students like babies, although they were seven or eight years old. She seemed to think teaching students with disabilities would be easy, which wasn’t true. She played lullabies and children’s songs every morning, over and over, and went over the alphabet, which Melody—who could read well—clearly already knew.

Unlike Mrs. Tracy, Mrs. Billups is unable to see the potential of her students. Although Melody is especially gifted, all of the students in H-5 are curious enough to benefit from stimulation, and from a teacher who actively tries to engage them. Unfortunately Mrs. Billups is not only boring, but she is hurting Melody’s chances to grow academically and develop intellectually.



Eventually, Melody and the other students in H-5 became frustrated with Mrs. Billups treating them like they didn't know or understand anything. One morning they all revolted; Maria threw crayons, and Melody screeched and cried until she had one of her "tornado explosions." Mrs. Billups couldn't control Melody or the class, so she called the principal and then Melody's mother.

When Melody's mother arrived she asked Melody what was wrong. Melody pointed to the alphabet mounted on the wall and her mother understood that Melody, and the other students in the room, were bored by the lessons. Melody's mother confronted Mrs. Billups, and explained that it was frustrating for the students to be taught the same lesson day after day. Mrs. Billups was defensive at first, but began to understand. Still, she told Melody's mother that she was being unrealistic about her daughter's abilities. Melody's mother acknowledged Melody's physical limitations, but continued to argue that she was intelligent, which Mrs. Billups would know had she paid attention. The argument ended when Melody's mother broke the CD with the children's songs in half. All the students in H-5 were grateful, especially Melody.

CHAPTER 8

When Melody was five years old she got a **goldfish** named Ollie. Melody believed that Ollie's life was even worse than hers was. All he could do was swim around and around his little bowl with his mouth opening and closing.

When Melody was seven Ollie jumped out of his bowl. Melody screamed for her mother but she didn't come. Melody tried to save Ollie, and she pulled the fishbowl onto the carpet, hoping the water from the bowl would keep him from dying, but it did not. Eventually Melody's mother came upstairs, but she didn't understand what happened—Melody's mother thought Melody had knocked over the bowl, with Ollie in it, on purpose. Melody's mother assumed Ollie was happy in his life in his bowl, but Melody wasn't so sure. Looking back on this memory later, Melody still feels guilty that she was unable to save Ollie.

Melody and her classmates are bored and frustrated by Mrs. Billups' lessons. Mrs. Billups assumes her students can't learn, but actually they are stuck, unable to communicate that they can learn. Here, Melody's tornado explosion is the result of her inability to say in words what she wants and needs.



Melody's mother understands her daughter in a way most other people do not. On one level, she believes that Melody is trying to communicate with her, and she listens to what Melody is saying. On another level, Melody's mother understands how intelligent Melody is, and therefore she realizes how bored and trapped Melody must feel so much of the time. By advocating for Melody, her mother demonstrates the importance of family bonds and trust within families, and she pushes back against Mrs. Billups' ignorant assumption that just because Melody and her classmates can't easily communicate, they must not be able to learn at all.



Melody identifies with Ollie, because she sometimes feels trapped in her body, unable to communicate. She imagines that Ollie also wishes for freedom.



Ollie's life in his small fishbowl reminds Melody of her own limited ability to interact with the world. His death further underscores what Melody can and cannot do. When Ollie jumps out of his bowl, Melody is reminded that she cannot move, even to save something she cares deeply about, and she cannot speak, even to call for help. What's worse is that Melody's mom believes that Melody killed the fish, which is insulting and hurtful to grieving Melody.



On Melody's eighth birthday, her parents gave her a golden retriever puppy. Melody named the dog Butterscotch after her favorite candy. Butterscotch is a good dog; she sleeps at Melody's feet every night and knows that Melody loves her even if Melody can't say it. A few months after Melody got Butterscotch she was sitting in the living room watching *The Wizard of Oz* and fell out of her wheelchair. Butterscotch made sure she wasn't hurt, and scratched at the door until Melody's mother came to check on them. Sitting watching the movie afterwards, Melody wondered what she'd ask the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* for. She decided she'd want to be able to sing and dance.

Butterscotch becomes a member of Melody's extended caring family. She is another individual who cares about Melody, and will go out of her way to make sure that Melody is safe and happy. Watching the Wizard of Oz gives Melody an opportunity to think about how her life would be different if she could wish away some aspects of her disability. She doesn't wish to be "normal," but just wishes that she could better express herself through song and dance.



CHAPTER 9

Melody's mom became pregnant when Melody was eight years old. Melody could tell her mother was pregnant even before her mother knew because she smelled different and her skin was softer. When her mother officially announced her pregnancy, Melody and her mother agreed that they hoped this baby turned out healthier than Melody did. Melody's mom assured her that "we love you...but we're hoping this child doesn't have to face the challenges you do."

Melody's intimate connection with her mother, the same connection that allows them to communicate even though Melody cannot speak, alerts her to her mother's pregnancy. The pregnancy is an opportunity for Melody to consider how her parents feel about her. It's clear that they love her, but they also acknowledge the burden that having another child with a disability would place on their family.



Melody's mother was careful to stay healthy during the pregnancy. Melody worried about her new baby sibling. Would her parents have time for both of them? What if her parents sent her away to make time for the baby? One afternoon Melody overheard her parents talking, worrying that their new baby would have a disability like Melody. Melody's mother admitted that she didn't think she could handle another child with a disability, and confessed that she thought Melody's disabilities were her fault, since she was the mother. Melody's father tried to comfort her, explaining it isn't her fault, and there's nothing she could have done. Melody wished she could tell her mom that it wasn't her fault, but she isn't able to speak.

Melody's parents love her. Her cerebral palsy has no impact on how they feel about her. However, her parents hope their new child is able bodied because of how difficult Melody's life is. Melody's mother feels guilty because she worries that somehow she caused Melody's disability. Once again, Melody wants to speak, but she cannot. It must be painful for Melody to not be able to comfort her mother in her time of need, especially since some of her mother's anxiety revolves around Melody.



Melody's little sister, Penny, was born perfectly healthy. Sometimes her parents would fight, because two kids were harder to take care of than one, especially since Melody required so much extra care. Melody often felt guilty. She knew life would be easier for her parents if they only had one child.

Melody's disability causes many of the people in her family to feel guilt. Her mother worries that she caused Melody's disability, while Melody worries both that she's a burden on her family and that they wished she were healthy.



Melody got an electronic doll for Christmas, but it was broken. It was supposed to talk and cry and move its body when a button was pushed, but all it could do was squeak. Melody's mother returned the doll to the store. Melody wondered if her parents ever wanted to get a refund for her.

Melody's electronic doll is a representation of Melody herself. Melody bought the doll expecting it to work, just like her parents had her with the expectation she would be healthy. The key difference, however, is that Melody returns the doll to the store, while her parents have done their best to provide for her and give her a happy "normal" life. Melody worries that her parents wish they could return her, however nowhere in the book do her parents imply that they do not love her or want her in their lives.



Penny was a healthy baby who developed exactly as she was supposed to. She could crawl, sit up, and even talk. By the time she was one year old she could even walk. Melody's dad followed her around taking videos of her progress. This made Melody jealous sometimes, watching a baby do what she never could. Still, Melody was happy to share her favorite books with her little sister, and loved that Penny's third word after "ma-ma" and "da-da" was "Dee-Dee," for Melody. Having two children meant Melody's parents were busier all the time, and this occasionally led to tensions and small fights.

It is difficult for Melody to see her sister reaching all the milestones she was unable to hit. Melody rarely allows her frustration with her sister to show, because in reality she is not irritated with Penny, but rather at herself and her own body's limitations.



CHAPTER 10

Every day has a similar routine. In the morning, Melody's mom and Penny come to wake Melody up, and then Melody's mom takes her to the bathroom. Although doctors said Melody couldn't be potty trained, she could go to the bathroom by the time she was three. Melody hated dirty diapers, which helped motivate her to train herself.

Although medical professionals believed Melody would be unable to complete many simple tasks, her ability to bathroom-train herself demonstrates her perseverance and work ethic.



Melody and her mother can often communicate without words. Melody's mother understands when Melody is hungry or thirsty, and she even laughs at her jokes. In the evenings, Melody can tell that her mother is tired out, and she does her best to calm her mom with a gentle touch.

Arguably Melody's most important relationship is with her mother, who, because she can communicate with Melody and understand her intelligence, remains her biggest advocate.



On Saturday mornings, Melody's mom relaxes with her daughters. Melody's mom reads Melody the comics, which she loves, especially Garfield. For her tenth birthday Melody gets a book of Garfield comics. Melody wishes she were like a character in a comic sometimes, with thought bubbles floating over her head speaking for her.

Melody often wishes that she could communicate. In Chapter 8 she wishes she could sing, and here she imagines a world where she could communicate via thought-bubble. Both methods are much easier than trying to spell out words on her limited communication board, which controls how she interacts with most of the world.



Penny can already say a lot of words, but when Melody tries to talk she just makes noise. Her parents mostly understand what she's saying, even though her communication board doesn't work very well. Still, sometimes communication breaks down. One afternoon Melody wanted a Big Mac and a vanilla shake, but her dad just couldn't understand her. Melody got so frustrated she started having a tornado explosion. A few weeks later, driving past a McDonald's Melody kicked and screeched so her dad would know she wanted to go there for dinner. This time he understood, but he never connected it to Melody's tornado explosion earlier.

Watching Penny speak is frustrating for Melody, who knows many more words than her little sister but cannot say them. The example of a breakdown of communication in this chapter, where she wants to go to McDonalds, is similar to other tornado explosions, like in Chapter 3 where she tries to warn her mother about unsafe toys, or in Chapter 7 where Mrs. Billups doesn't understand how bored her students are.



CHAPTER 11

Melody begins the fifth grade. She's excited to have a new electric wheelchair, which gives her a new freedom. She can move across a room without anyone pushing her.

Until this point, the book has been mostly recollections of Melody's past. From here forward, the book is in the present tense. Melody's new wheelchair gives her mobility that she controls. Not only does it give her greater freedom of movement, but it gives her a choice about where she goes.



Mrs. Shannon is Melody's new fifth-grade teacher. She's committed to making sure the students learn this year, and has already read the records of all the kids in the class. She knows that Melody likes books on tape, and is excited for her students to take part in new "inclusion classes" outside of room H-5. Melody is so excited about the inclusion classes she can barely contain herself.

Mrs. Shannon is another important authority figure because she believes in Melody's abilities and tries her best to accommodate both Melody's disability and her intelligent mind. Inclusion classes offer the possibility of integrating with the larger student body, and potentially feeling like a "normal," mainstream student.



Melody's first inclusion class is music with Mrs. Lovelace. Melody already knows the names of the other students, because she's watched them on the playground for years, but she doubts they know her. When the class starts Willy yells and Jill cries, and Melody is nervous they'll be kicked out. Some of the other students start to laugh, and two girls, Molly and Claire, mock Willy behind the teacher's back.

Even though Melody has attended the same school as the fifth-graders in her inclusion class, and even though she knows who they are, Melody understands that she is not a fully integrated member of her school's community. In her music class, she's also worried that her H-5 classmates with less self control will remind the rest of the students of the way they are different from Melody, when all she wants is to be the same.



Mrs. Lovelace punishes Molly and Claire by making them stand for the rest of the class for being rude to Melody and the other students with disabilities. Mrs. Lovelace then plays a few songs. Gloria, Willy, and Maria all love it, and Melody's synesthesia has her seeing green, which means the music is very good. Mrs. Lovelace has students from the fifth-grade partner with students from Melody's classroom. Even though Claire and Molly are audibly rude, Maria kisses Claire on the cheek. A girl named Rose, who had been upset when the rest of the class laughed at Willy and Jill, volunteers to be Melody's partner, which makes Melody happy.

Mrs. Lovelace includes Melody and her classmates in the fifth-grade music lesson, essentially forcing everyone to get along. Melody is technically in the class, but it remains a question how much a part of it she really is. Melody's synesthesia is an example of a hidden talent, not visible from the outside. Like her love of learning, her love of music and her ability to experience it with multiple senses is unrelated to her cerebral palsy, and is partially disguised by it.



Melody returns to Mrs. Lovelace's class every Wednesday. Rose continues to be her partner, which excites Melody so much that she can barely sleep the night before and always wears her best outfits. Melody worries that Rose will decide she doesn't like Melody after all, but Rose is kind to her and talks to Melody with the assumption that she can understand. They speak using Melody's communication board, and they even joke about how neither of them likes jazz. Rose tells Melody secrets and describes going to the mall with friends. Melody appreciates that Rose confides in her, but wishes she could be the kind of friend Rose went to the mall with.

Rose is Melody's first real friend, and the first person, who isn't a teacher, family member, or Mrs. V, to show an interest in her. At first, Melody feels that Rose treats her as a friend, and she likes that Rose acknowledges all the things they have in common—they're both smart fifth grade girls, they like school, they don't like jazz. However, Melody can tell that Rose doesn't treat her as a complete friend. They interact at school, but Rose doesn't seem interested in extending the friendship beyond friendly exchanges in class. Even though Melody appreciates that Rose accepts her more than many of her other classmates, she wishes Rose's acceptance meant Rose would treat her fully as a friend.



CHAPTER 12

More and more inclusion classes are added as the school year progresses. Although Melody reminds readers that “inclusion” doesn't mean I'm included in *everything*,” she's still excited to sit in classes, change classrooms, and have kids greet her in the hallways. Still, Melody is frustrated that she is unable to participate in class, since she cannot speak and cannot raise her hands.

Although she's technically included in more and more classes as the school year goes on, often Melody doesn't feel like an authentic member of the class. It's difficult for her because, while she can keep up intellectually, from the outside it looks as though she isn't interacting with the material at all.



In October Melody's parents meet with Mrs. Shannon for a conference. Mrs. Shannon makes it clear that she knows how smart Melody is, and she commits to finding Melody a “mobility assistant” who will function as a personal aide. Melody's aide arrives the next day. Her name is Catherine and they immediately start talking and joking. Melody wants to make fun of Catherine's bright clashing outfit, but worries that she'll sound too mean. It's difficult for her to say anything subtle or complex.

Mrs. Shannon once again demonstrates that she is on Melody's team, and that she will fight for opportunities for her. Catherine becomes another member of Melody's extended family. She is someone who, although not biologically related to Melody, cares about her wellbeing, and goes out of her way to help her succeed.



Melody is now in a language-arts class, too. The teacher, Miss Gordon, is young and energetic. She plays games with the students, like vocabulary bingo. Melody knows all the words but can't move fast enough to compete. Miss Gordon teaches in an empathetic way—when she teaches about Anne Frank, the students squeeze into a small space to feel how Anne really felt. Although Melody can't participate, she understands the idea. Miss Gordon also gives Melody books on tape. Although Melody can read, it's easier for her to listen. Eventually, Miss Gordon assigns a long-term biography project. While the other kids ask specific questions about how long it'll take or how hard it will be, Melody is just excited to be able to participate in regular classes.

Miss Gordon's style of teaching—having children try to experience the hardships of Anne Frank—is similar to Sharon Draper's writing style, which tries to get readers to empathize with Melody by having them, through her first-person narration, step into Melody's mind and Melody's experience. The Anne Frank activity also underscores the basic differences between Melody and many of her classmates. While they have to try hard to imagine what it would be like to live a life where you feel trapped, Melody experiences these feelings every day.



Catherine makes it so Melody can take tests. During spelling tests Melody points to letters and Catherine writes them down. One day Claire accuses Melody of cheating and suggests that Melody's life is easier than either Claire or Molly's because Melody has a personal aide.

Melody is now also able to take a history class. Although the teacher, Mr. Dimming, isn't as fun as Mrs. Gordon, Melody likes the class even more. Mr. Dimming isn't very popular with the student body, but Melody thinks it's unfair. Melody knows he's really smart, and she respects that he runs the school's quiz team.

In history class Melody works hard to memorize the presidents and vice presidents. She does well on the test, getting an 85% even though Mr. Dimming suspiciously checks to see if Catherine is helping her. Rose, who is also in the class, is disappointed to get a 75%. When Rose asks Melody her score, Melody mixes up the numbers and points to 58%. Rose is sympathetic, but she consoles Melody in front of the entire room so everyone assumes Melody did poorly. She can't explain to Rose her mistake, so Melody just thanks her, and is happy that Rose touches her arm goodbye. In the afternoon, Melody has to return to H-5. Mrs. Shannon is out sick, so Melody watches *The Lion King* (again) and sits through an addition lesson (again). Melody wonders about whether she'll ever learn long division, and what her new friend Rose is doing this afternoon.

CHAPTER 13

Penny often tries to run away from Mrs. V's house, not because she dislikes Mrs. V, but because she loves to run. This afternoon, she tries to run because it's a nice fall day outside. Later, inside, Penny scribbles in a coloring book. Melody wishes she could hold a crayon in her hand. She can visualize pictures in her mind, but she can only make a squiggle. She wants to draw something for Rose. Melody thinks Rose is beautiful like a real flower, but she hasn't noticed any thorns.

Mrs. V checks the mail and sees she's won a contest for which the prize is taking six people on a trip to the downtown aquarium. Altogether Mrs. V and Melody's family are only five people, so Melody asks if Rose can come too. In the weeks leading up to the trip, Rose and Melody whisper about the aquarium at school, which makes Melody feel "like a real girl!"

This is one of many examples of Claire and Molly failing to understand how much harder Melody's life is than theirs. What they fail to understand is that, although Melody sometimes gets extra assistance, it's because physically she cannot do as much as Molly or Claire, and so special accommodations, while improving the quality of her life, still do not make it as easy as Molly or Claire's.



Melody initially likes Mr. Dimming because students underestimate him, just like they do with Melody. In the same way that Melody's disability can distract from her intelligence, Mr. Dimming's fashion sense and personality distract from how bright he is.



Mr. Dimming's class provides Melody one of her first opportunities to showcase her intelligence. Because of a small slip up, Rose and her other classmates assume she performed much worse than she actually did. Everyone's acceptance of Melody's lower score demonstrates that they don't expect much out of her academically, even Rose, her friend. Back in H-5, Melody is forced to wonder whether because she is in classes for students with disabilities she will miss out on important knowledge that her fifth-grade peers are receiving. For her, immersion is partially about feeling included, but also about being able to keep up intellectually.



Once again, Melody is frustrated by a body that doesn't respond to her wishes. She also thinks about Rose, a friend who she believes accepts her. However, the line about thorns keeps the reader cautious of Rose's potential hidden dark side.



Melody's friendship with Rose, and the opportunity for them to hang out outside of school like "real girls" is exciting for Melody. At this point in the book, nothing has made Melody feel more "normal" or accepted than this friendship with Rose.



On the day of the trip Melody wears a cute outfit, but Rose doesn't notice it. Rose gets along with Melody's whole family, and she thinks Penny is especially cute, even remarking "she's a genius" when Penny says Rose's name. Melody thinks this is the happiest day of her life, and even her parents are calm and relaxed.

As they're moving through the aquarium Melody and Rose run into Molly and Claire, who are on a trip with their Girl Scout troop. Rose goes over to talk to them and is reluctant to tell them that she's hanging out with Melody. She describes the day as "not so bad," which Melody hears. Melody's mother wants to go over and intervene but her father holds her back. Mrs. V, however, will not be held back. She calls out Claire for her braces, explaining "some people got braces on their teeth. Some get braces on their legs," and other people need wheelchairs. Mrs. V tells Claire she should feel lucky that only her teeth are damaged. Rose and Melody spend the rest of the day together, and when Melody's family drops Rose off she says she's had a good time. Melody was happy to spend the day with her, but wonders if she's telling the truth.

CHAPTER 14

The Monday after Thanksgiving break Rose brings a new laptop to school. Melody imagines what a laptop made for her could look like. It would have big keys and would connect to her wheelchair. She signals to Catherine that she wants a computer like Rose has, and Catherine understands that Melody doesn't want a laptop, but a special computer, just for her, for communicating.

Later, in language arts class, Melody thinks about the biography project. She decides to investigate Stephen Hawking. She wants to know how he does day-to-day activities, how he goes to the bathroom, how he parents his children. She's especially interested in seeing how he talks and does math. Catherine promises to investigate a computer for Melody.

A close friendship with someone her age is something Melody has never had before, and so it makes her feel like she imagines girls her age are supposed to feel. Ironically, Rose comments on Penny's intelligence, while overlooking the fact that Melody might actually be a genius.



Molly and Claire can't understand why Rose would want to hang out with Melody. They see Melody not as a smart girl with a disability, but as a disabled girl who has nothing interesting to offer the world. Even though Rose's response to Molly and Claire is not forceful and doesn't defend Melody, she understands something Molly and Claire don't—that Melody has an internal life, and feelings that can be hurt. Mrs. V wants to protect Melody because she cares about her, in the same way Melody's parents care about her. At the end of the day Melody, who felt good about the outing at the beginning, wonders if Rose really enjoyed spending time with her, and if Rose really likes her and accepts her as a friend.



The prospect of a personal computer is exciting for Melody. One of her primary struggles in life is communicating all the thoughts inside her head, and a computer would allow her a new degree of self-expression.



Stephen Hawking is exciting to Melody because, like her, he is unable to control much of his body, but is still widely recognized to be a genius. It makes sense that Melody would be interested in another smart person who uses a wheelchair, particularly someone who is famous for his intelligence.



CHAPTER 15

As Christmas approaches, Catherine and Melody research adapted computers and talking keyboards. Together they find one that allows people without voices to speak through the machine, and Catherine prints out the information for Melody to bring home. Melody shows the printout to Mrs. V, who shows it to Melody's parents. Mrs. V convinces Melody's mother the computer is a good idea, and when her mother sees insurance covers half the cost she convinces Melody's father.

The Wednesday before Christmas the computer, called a Medi-Talker, arrives. Mrs. V wants to read the instructions, but Melody starts playing with it immediately. As Mrs. V helps her add words and phrases, and Melody feels "like Christopher Columbus bumping into America." She can't wait to take it to school, and specifically wonders what Rose will say.

Melody names her Medi-Talker Elvira, after her favorite song, and because it feels more personal to give it a name. She picks a voice that sounds like a young girl, and is interested to find the voice can speak in many languages, reminding Melody that there are children around the world who need help talking.

Melody says her first words to her family this first afternoon with Elvira. She thanks Mrs. V for her help, and they both tear up. When Melody's parents get home her dad films her, in the same way he filmed Penny's first words. Through Elvira, Melody greets her parents, and then tells them "I love you" for the first time.

CHAPTER 16

Melody takes Elvira to school for the first time after winter break. For the first time ever, Melody is the center of attention for something positive, not something embarrassing her body did without her permission. Melody is able to joke with Catherine about fashion, and later in language arts she greets her class verbally.

Together Melody, Mrs. V, and Catherine research talking computers. This showcases Mrs. V and Catherine's investment in Melody's well being. The prospect of a personal computer is exciting because it will allow Melody to communicate much better than she can now, and although her immediate family, Mrs. V and Catherine all believe in her intelligence, a talking computer would allow her to prove herself and interact with the world more easily.



The Medi-Talker provides Melody the keys to a whole new world. Where she was once essentially silent and others had to guess what she was thinking, her computer gives her access to words, one of the things she loves most in the world. Melody hopes the Medi-Talker will help her classmates accept her, and she especially hopes it will help develop her friendship with Rose.



Although this isn't often considered in the novel (because Melody is the only one with her specific disability in her hometown), Melody is a member of a global community of children and adults who are unable to speak, but do have a lot to say.



Language is powerful. Although her family knew she was grateful for their help and that she loved them, being able to actually hear this is more moving than anyone could have imagined.



Elvira allows Melody to feel truly included in her inclusion classes. The ability to speak means she can participate, and it also lets her classmates know that she has thoughts and feelings that she wants to share.



Some of the other students seem like they want to make fun of Melody and Elvira, but Connor, one of the popular kids, says he thinks it's cool, which makes everyone else leave Melody alone. Everyone except for Claire, who makes fun of the "funny-looking computer." But Melody doesn't mind, and she even has a pre-programmed funny response. She is able to tell other pre-programmed jokes to the class, and for the first time in her life she feels like she's part of the group.

Although the other students in the class are impressed with the machine, Claire raises her hand to say she never considered that Melody had thoughts to share with the class. Miss Gordon explains that Melody had no choice but to stay silent, and that it must be liberating to finally be able to speak. Rose also understands Melody's struggle. She tells Melody she can't imagine how hard it must be to have her words trapped inside of her mind, and when Melody asks on her Medi-Talker if Rose wants to be friends, Rose agrees immediately.

CHAPTER 17

Elvira helps make Melody's school day "almost pleasant." She can chat with other students and answer questions in class. For the first time, her teachers give her real grades, because they can finally see her engagement and progress. But even though Melody is more integrated into her classes than ever before, she still feels isolated socially. Rose talks to her for a few minutes in the cafeteria, but Melody notices that Rose doesn't call her after school, or invite her to sleepovers.

In January, Mr. Dimming gives his history class a practice test for the Whiz Kids quiz team. Melody answers the questions on Elvira and prints out her answers. Mr. Dimming is surprised when Melody participates, and even more shocked that she receives the only perfect score in the class. The whole classroom is shocked. Melody receives a candy bar as a prize, but is embarrassed by the negative attention she receives from girls like Claire and Molly who suggest Melody has cheated or guessed, when, in fact, Melody knew all the answers because she is so smart.

Catherine tries to comfort Melody, suggesting she study extra hard to get onto the Whiz Kids team. Melody doesn't think it will ever happen, and she feels even worse when Mr. Dimming says that the qualifying test will be even harder, because "If Melody Brooks can win the first round, then my questions must not be difficult enough!"

Even though Melody is the subject of negative attention, she's able to defend herself in a way that endears her class to her. Melody's clever comeback is something that a "normal" student would do, and the class's warm response makes her feel like just another student.



Throughout the book Claire and Molly disrespect Melody and act as though she can't understand them, but here is the only time one of the two explicitly says she didn't even consider Melody's internal life. Once again, Melody is judged by her physical disability, even though, had Claire been paying attention, she would have seen Melody's intelligence. Notably, the only reason Claire now understands that Melody has something to say is that Melody now has a way to say it, thanks to her Medi-Talker.



Melody's Medi-Talker helps her participate in class, but it becomes clear that there is more separating her from her classmates than her ability to speak. She still doesn't quite belong. Her friendship with Rose, especially, is a source of angst. Rose is kind to her and pays attention to her, but is unwilling to commit to a deeper, more meaningful friendship.



Mr. Dimming, like so many others, has assumed that Melody is unable to learn, even though she comes to his class every day and seems engaged. Claire and Molly, who often underestimate Melody, find it difficult to imagine that she could outperform them on an exam.



Catherine tries to support Melody, as Mrs. V does later, and assure her that she is smart and capable. Unfortunately, Mr. Dimming's continuing dismissal of Melody's ability makes it difficult for her to feel confident. Once again he dismisses her intelligence, writing her high score off as a fluke.



CHAPTER 18

Melody goes home upset at being underestimated once again. Catherine calls Mrs. V to explain what a bad day Melody has had, and Mrs. V is furious that Mr. Dimming treated Melody so dismissively. Mrs. V convinces Melody that instead of sulking, she should get started studying. Melody is resistant at first, believing she won't be allowed on the Whiz Kids team, but Mrs. V insists that if Melody proves herself indispensable, the team will need to have her. Mrs. V and Melody study together all afternoon and into the evening. Melody's dad is worried that Melody is being set up for failure, but she insists that she really wants to try.

Mrs. V and Catherine help convince Melody to channel her anger and frustration at being underestimated by Mr. Dimming into studying for the Whiz Kids team. By overlooking her, Mr. Dimming just inspires Melody to try even harder to prove herself. Mrs. V is Melody's biggest advocate, and she even stands up to Melody's father who worries that Melody will be disappointed. He knows that Melody is smart enough to get on the team, but worries she will nonetheless be denied a spot. Ultimately, Melody is let down by the Whiz Kids, but it's right that Mrs. V is encouraging Melody to push herself.



The next day Melody studies for the Whiz Kids test with Catherine. Melody admits she's nervous, but Catherine assures her that she can do it. Melody skips her inclusion classes to prepare for the test, and she is aware that nobody notices she's missing.

Melody continues to funnel her frustration at being overlooked into her studying. She's disappointed to realize that, although she has felt like she is part of her immersion classes, her classmates don't seem to notice or care that she's in the class, making her feel like she isn't a real member of the community.



CHAPTER 19

For the next week, everyone in Melody's life helps her study for the Whiz Kids test. At school, Catherine helps her, and at home Mrs. V, her mother, and her father quiz her.

Melody's immediate and extended family bond together to help her succeed. This underscores the importance of all the adults in her life who see her potential.



Melody also makes time to add new sentences to her Medi-Talker. She has two automatic responses to the question "what's wrong with you?" One, is serious, and explains that she has cerebral palsy. The other is more tongue and cheek, intended for clueless or rude people like her classmates Claire or Molly. It says, "We all have disabilities. What's yours?"

Melody jokes about the way ability and disability interact. She jokes that everyone has some degree of disability, and that her disability is just more visible than most, implying that some people are lucky that their disabilities don't majorly affect their day to day lives.



The weather is warm the Saturday before Melody's test. She goes outside with Mrs. V and looks at birds. Melody says she'd like the freedom of flying. Melody's mother comes outside too and says how impressed she is that Melody has learned so many words. Mrs. V counters that Penny has also learned thousands of words, and that it isn't impressive that a smart child would be able to learn.

Mrs. V once again stands up for Melody and shows how she has more faith in her than even her parents do. Mrs. V points out that Melody is often praised for doing simple tasks that come naturally to her, like learning words, which only seems impressive because of her outward appearance. Melody's brain works perfectly, Mrs. V argues, so she shouldn't be praised when it works as it is supposed to.



Melody knows that her mom, her dad, and Mrs. V all believe in her. But she also knows that the rest of the world doesn't necessarily think she can succeed, and they don't necessarily want her to.

Melody's family is incredibly important because they give her strength and confidence, especially when the rest of the world doesn't think she's capable of anything.



CHAPTER 20

On the day of the Whiz Kids tryout Melody has to stay late after school to take the test. Rose is surprised to see that Melody has come to take the test, and Mr. Dimming tries to kick Melody out of the room. Melody will not leave, and explains that she's there to take the test just like everyone else. Mr. Dimming says he's worried Melody will get hurt, but she says she's tough and will not budge.

In trying to protect Melody, Mr. Dimming instead accidentally discriminates against her. Even though he's seen her in class and has seen her test scores, he doesn't believe that she's capable of excelling at his very hard test. However, Melody won't back down because she understands her own intellectual ability and knows that she's tough enough to take the test and to deal with failure if she doesn't perform well.



Melody takes the test with the rest of the students, and because she has studied so much she knows many of the answers. She describes it as "the hardest, most exciting thing I'd ever done." After the test Mr. Dimming tells Melody he was just trying to protect her, and warns her in advance that she might be disappointed. When her mother comes to pick her up, Mr. Dimming tells them that he's impressed with Melody's achievements, although Melody does not believe he means it sincerely.

Melody performs well on the test because she is smart and because she studied. Once again, by trying to protect her feelings, Mr. Dimming accidentally insults Melody, suggesting that he doesn't think she's smart enough to take the test, to get on the team, or to deal with rejection.



CHAPTER 21

On Tuesday, Mr. Dimming announces the new Whiz Kids team members. Melody is nervous, and initially disheartened when she isn't announced as an alternate. But she wasn't announced as an alternate because she earned a perfect score, and made it on to the primary team, along with Connor, Claire, and Rose. Mr. Dimming apologizes for underestimating her, and promises to contact the quiz team officials to make sure they can accommodate Melody, but her new teammates are unwelcoming, and even Rose is disbelieving.

For the first time, Mr. Dimming acknowledges Melody's intelligence. Unfortunately, Melody legitimately earning a spot on the team does not make her teammates less skeptical of her abilities or ready to embrace her as belonging to the Whiz Kids.



Melody gets so excited that she loses control of her body, and has a tornado explosion in the middle of class. Catherine has to wheel her out, and Melody is proud of making the team but embarrassed about her outburst.

Melody's tornado outburst emphasizes the way Melody is and is not like her classmates. She is like them because she is smart, driven, and now a member of the Whiz Kids team, but she still has her disability, and her lack of bodily control separates her from her peers.



CHAPTER 22

Every weekday afternoon for the next two weeks the Whiz Kids team meets after school to practice. Although all of the kids are in the room together, and Melody knows her teammates appreciate that she gets the answers right, she doesn't feel like she's part of the team. She's able to answer multiple-choice questions quickly, but she can't contribute to the discussions that make up most of the practice time. She's also unable to participate in bonding activities, like eating pizza, which she can't do without help. Claire still makes rude comments about how Melody will look strange on TV and expresses surprise at Melody's intelligence, but Melody defends herself with Rose's help.

Although Melody is officially on the team, she doesn't feel like a part of the team. The team interacts in ways that make it hard for Melody to join in, so although she is physically there, she doesn't become socially integrated into the group, and doesn't feel like she can contribute to general discussions. This is similar to how Melody feels in many of her classes—physically present, but not accepted.



CHAPTER 23

The day of the competition, Melody is nervous about answering questions correctly and about the reporters who might show up, but Mrs. V assures her that she'll be admired by the public and seen as "Spaulding Street Elementary School's own personal Stephen Hawking."

Melody admires Stephen Hawking, and she is writing her language arts biography report on him. When she's not wishing she were "normal," and is instead feeling more comfortable with her body and her illness, Stephen Hawking is an icon and an inspiration. He's a man who, although he is in a wheelchair, seems to be able to accomplish anything he puts his mind to.



After school, Melody's mom drives her to the studio where the competition will be filmed. Catherine joins her and together they make sure Melody will be accommodated. The stage manager, Paul, has set up a special answer board for Melody so she can better participate. He explains that his son is also in a wheelchair, and wishes her luck.

Paul understands the accommodations Melody needs. His empathy comes from his own personal experiences. He is one of the only strangers in the book who understands that Melody is smart and deserves to participate, and that she sometimes needs special accommodations, which don't make her less intelligent.



The rest of Melody's team arrives and prepares to compete. Claire tells Molly, an alternate, that she deserves to be on the team instead of Melody. Melody tries to tune them out and mentally prepare for the competition.

Even during the competition, some of Melody's teammates can only see the ways that Melody is different and distracting, instead of the ways she is valuable, as a teammate and as a human being.



CHAPTER 24

The competition begins. Melody's team competes first, and Melody, with her alternative answer board, is given a special introduction. The teams do a quick practice round, and then the real questions begin. Every student on Melody's team has different strengths and weaknesses—Connor misses most of the spelling questions, and Melody has trouble with math—but Melody's team wins the first match 81 to 77 points. Backstage in between rounds Mr. Dimming congratulates Melody on her success. Rose also tells Melody what a good job she's done, and Connor acknowledges that Melody beat him on some of the questions. More teams compete over the course of the evening, and in the end Melody's team has the second highest score, and must go back on stage to compete in the final round for a chance to travel to the Whiz Kids Championships in Washington D.C.

Everyone on Melody's team has different strengths and weaknesses. Intellectually, their strengths and weaknesses have nothing to do with their physical bodies, and the fact that every teammate is different (and so their strengths complement one another) is what allows them to perform so well in the first round of the competition. For the first time, Melody feels like a valuable member of the team, as opposed to an outsider who happens to be competing with her classmates.



CHAPTER 25

The final round of the competition has the most difficult questions so far, but because Melody has studied so much, and because she listened to so much music with her mother, father, and Mrs. V, she's able to answer questions in many subjects. Towards the end of the round, Melody's team is behind 78 to 81. The next question is about synesthesia, which Melody easily answers because she has the condition. Leading into the final question, Melody's team is tied 82–82. Even though the final question is about time and math, Melody, and everyone else on her team, gets it right and wins the competition.

Melody's support network of her parents, Mrs. V, and Catherine has helped her study hard and memorize answers to many of the questions. She's able to get most of the questions right because of the studying she's done, but her synesthesia, a special ability she has, helps her score the winning point and lead her team to victory. In the end, what helps Melody win is that she is different from her teammates.



Melody is so excited she loses control of her body. This embarrasses her teammates, especially Claire, but the crowd is yelling so loudly no one can hear Melody's happy noises. Melody's family rushes to congratulate her, and she's surrounded by photographers and journalists who want to take her picture and interview her.

This is an example of Melody losing control of her body because of a positive emotion. Luckily, because she's so happy at her win, and because her family immediately surrounds and congratulates her, she doesn't have a chance to be embarrassed or to feel like she's not fully a member of her Whiz Kids team.



Melody and her team are arranged on the stage for a television interview with Channel Six News. The other students are briefly interviewed, but the reporter is most interested in Melody, who answers questions with Elvira. The reporter wonders how winning the competition will change Melody's life at school, and Melody admits she hopes other students will talk to her more. Claire shocks Melody by stealing the spotlight and insisting she does talk to Melody all the time, and lies that she and Melody are close friends who eat lunch together every day. Claire even tells the interviewer "Melody is a lot smarter than she looks."

Melody's cerebral palsy has been a source of tension and anxiety for much of the novel, but here, for the first time, her disability is what makes her unique, and is what makes the reporter interested in her. Claire, who has shunned Melody because her disability makes her different, changes her behavior when she realizes that Melody's differences can be seen in a positive way, and that by coying up to Melody she can be in the news, too.



CHAPTER 26

After the competition, Mr. Dimming suggests the team and their parents all go straight from the studio to a celebratory dinner. Rose and one of the alternates, Elena, encourage Melody to come, and Connor admits they couldn't have won without her, although Molly disagrees. Melody is excited to go to the restaurant, but is worried when she sees that it is accessible only by stone stairs. Melody's mother talks to a waiter who explains there is normally an accessible elevator but it is temporarily broken. Melody's mother is angry, but there is nothing she can do, so she carefully pushes Melody and her wheelchair up the stone steps.

In the restaurant, everyone is joking and talking and having a good time. Everyone, except for Claire, who is oddly quiet. When the food arrives everyone starts eating except for Melody, who needs her mother's help. Melody is nervous, because although she eats out with her family, she has never eaten in front of her Whiz Kids team. But her dinner is getting cold, and so Melody's mother helps spoon it into her mouth. The other kids at the table all watch, and then the conversation quiets down. Even though she's still hungry, Melody is uncomfortable and stops eating. Her mother offers to take her home, and they prepare to go as everyone else looks at the dessert menus.

Claire gets up from the table without eating dessert because she feels sick, and then she vomits on the floor and on Mr. Dimming's shoes. Some of the other children laugh, and Melody wonders if Claire felt as embarrassed throwing up as Melody did simply eating. She considers how Claire got sympathy, but Melody just received sideways looks.

CHAPTER 27

The day after the Whiz Kids competition Melody is on the front page of the local newspaper. The article is about the team, but it focuses on Melody's particular ability, and the featured picture is of Melody alone. Melody's mother and father are happy for her, but Melody worries that the other kids at school will resent her for being in the spotlight. At school, Melody feels as though everyone is looking at her coldly, and even Rose seems distant. Melody tries to make amends, and she says it should have been the whole team in the paper. Rose agrees. In class, Mr. Dimming calls out Melody for helping the team win, but the clapping seems "more polite than sincere."

Melody is finally treated like a valuable team member by some of her teammates. Although Molly is still unable or unwilling to acknowledge Melody's ability, Rose, Conner, and Mr. Dimming, at least, are finally comfortable saying that they're glad she's on the team, and they want her to continue to participate. The meal is off to a rocky start when the restaurant doesn't have a wheelchair ramp, and so Melody is left behind by her teammates as her mother pushes her up the steps. This foreshadows future problems with the Whiz Kids not accommodating Melody.



Melody feels like a part of the group for a moment, but eating emphasizes how different she truly is from her classmates, all of whom can feed themselves easily. Watching Melody struggle to eat reminds everyone at the table that although Melody is very smart, she has physical differences, which distract Claire and Molly especially.



Melody continues to return to this moment throughout the novel. Although she eats cleanly and tries her best to be "normal," Claire vomits all over the restaurant, and is still treated as being more "normal" than Melody. It seems that no matter what Melody does, it will be difficult to be accepted by her peers. In contrast, it seems that no matter what Claire does, she'll remain a member of the Whiz Kids team.



Melody's intelligence, and her impressive accomplishment—helping her team win the regional Whiz Kids competition—is recognized by the press, which is why they publish a picture of her. Although members of her team appreciate her help, she immediately feels like an outsider again. In the past, Melody felt like an outsider because her classmates didn't think she was smart enough. Now, she doesn't feel like part of the group because she's gotten too much acknowledgement for her talents.



Melody is disheartened, and when she gets back to H-5 she tells Catherine she feels like her teammates don't even want her on the team. Melody thinks her teammates think that she looks funny and that she makes the whole team look weird on television. Catherine comforts her, and after school Melody goes to her first practice for the Championship. Melody starts to feel better answering questions with the team, but she notices that no one mentions the newspaper article, and Rose, Claire, and Molly all whisper together as she leaves.

Melody continues to feel as though she is not a real member of her Whiz Kids team. No matter what she does, her team will come up with excuses not to fully welcome her in, whether it's that they don't think she deserves to be on the team, or that they're jealous that she's gotten so much attention for being on the team.



CHAPTER 28

The Whiz Kids team practices almost every day for the next two weeks. Six kids, instead of four, are allowed on the team for the competition, and Melody makes it, as do Rose, Connor, Elena, Rodney, and Molly. Claire is upset that she's an alternate and she claims it isn't fair, although Melody reflects that Claire doesn't know anything about life being unfair.

Melody again earns her spot on the team, but as we find out later in the chapter, it's still not enough for her team to fully embrace her. Claire's ignorance reminds the reader that just because someone is able bodied and apparently healthy doesn't mean that they'll necessarily be kind, empathetic human beings.



Melody has never been on a trip away from home before, so she is extra excited to travel to Washington. The night before she's set to leave, she buys a stylish new outfit and thank you cards for Catherine and Mrs. V for helping her prepare. Melody can hardly sleep. She wonders if Rose is nervous too, and she thinks about how much she wants to sit with Rose on the plane just like the other girls.

Almost greater than her excitement for the trip is Melody's excitement at being a member of the team and getting to ride on an airplane with her friend, all things that make her feel more like a "normal" girl.



The next morning, Melody, her mom, her dad, Mrs. V, and Penny drive to the airport and arrive at the check in desk right on time. Although they've made sure to get there early in case of emergency, the woman at the desk explains the flight has been cancelled because of weather. The next flight won't get into Washington until after 9pm, which will be too late for Melody to compete. Melody's mom is furious. She asks what happened to the rest of the Whiz Kids team, and the woman at the desk explains that the rest of the team had eaten breakfast together and arrived at the airport extra early. They were then able to switch to a different flight, avoid the storm, and make it to the competition.

Melody is devastated by the news that she can't get to Washington, and the news that her teammates were getting together without her. Although Melody is an important member of the Whiz Kids team and everyone knows it (whether or not they choose to acknowledge it), it's clear that her team felt uncomfortable enough around her that they chose not to spend time with her and not to tell her they switched flights, which they knew meant Melody would have to stay behind.



Mrs. V, Melody's mother, and her father try to figure out what happened. Mrs. V wonders if Mr. Dimming left Melody on purpose, and her mother hopes that "surely they wouldn't have left her behind on purpose." Melody's father is so angry he punches a brick wall. Melody feels stupid, angry, and helpless. Her mother and Mrs. V try to comfort her, but there's nothing they can say or do to make Melody feel better.

Melody's family hopes that Melody was left behind by accident, but whether or not it was accidental, Melody understands that she was not respected enough as a member of her Whiz Kids team for them to make an effort to guarantee she'd be at the competition.



CHAPTER 29

When she gets home, Melody goes straight to bed and cries into her pillow. Butterscotch tries to comfort her but nothing helps. Melody doesn't understand why the team didn't invite her to breakfast, and why they didn't call her to tell her what had happened. She wishes she could stomp on something, but she can't make her body do anything.

Mr. Dimming calls in the evening, and Melody's mom answers. She's angry, and asks why they weren't called. Mr. Dimming apologizes, tells Melody's mother that Melody was the brightest person on the team, and he says he'll make it up to her, but Melody's mother makes it clear there's no way he can make up for leaving her behind. After hanging up, Melody's mother holds her in her lap and rocks her softly to comfort her.

The betrayal by Melody's teammates is shocking. Although she suspected they didn't fully accept her as a member of the team and as a friend, Melody still thought they knew that she was an asset and deserved to be there. Melody's situation is extra frustrating because she cannot express her anger verbally or even physically.



Although Mr. Dimming understands how important Melody is to the team, he still didn't make an effort to make sure she was at the competition. Although his acknowledgment of her abilities is a breakthrough, it is too little too late. Melody's relationship with her family is the only comfort she can find in this moment.



CHAPTER 30

The day after the national competition the weather is awful, rainy and windy, but Melody insists on going to school anyway. Her dad tells her that her team got ninth place, and lost in a late round. Melody tries not to care, and not to think of them as her team anymore. Although she's been excused from school for the day, and her mother suggests she stay home, Melody feels that skipping school would be like giving up. As she gets ready for school everything seems to be going wrong, and her mother gets more and more frustrated. As the morning progresses Melody's mom begs her to stay at home, but Melody refuses. She wants to see Catherine and thinks that maybe she'll help make Melody feel better.

Because of the rain, Melody uses her manual wheelchair and leaves her Medi-Talker at home. Because Melody's dad hurt his arm, her mom has to load everything into the family car by herself in the rain, and she gets more and more frustrated. When Melody points out that she forgot Catherine's thank you card, and her mom angrily goes back to the house to get Melody's book bag. When Melody's mom has gotten back in the car, Melody sees Penny run out of the house with her mom's umbrella, which she's also forgotten. Melody tries to signal to her mom that Penny has run outside of the house. She screams and scratches at her mom's hand, but her mom doesn't understand. In fact, her mom gets so fed up she hits Melody on the leg, something she's never done before. Even though she's shocked and upset, Melody keeps yelling as her mom reverses the car, and hits Penny.

Melody tries to mentally distance herself from her team. She hopes that if she refuses to accept them as her teammates anymore (just like they didn't accept her), the pain of their rejection will hurt less. She insists on going to school because Catherine, like Mrs. V, is one of the few people who can cheer her up and make her feel better about herself and her situation.



This is a moment in Melody's life where she desperately wants to communicate but cannot. Just like when Ollie, her goldfish died, or when she was in the toy store and tried to alert her mother to toys she knew were dangerous, Melody is unable to say what she wants and needs to say. This is always frustrating for her, but in a few instances in the book, including this one, it becomes literally a case of life or death.



CHAPTER 31

An ambulance comes for Penny, and Melody's mom and dad go with it. Mrs. V takes Melody out of the car and into the house and comforts her. Mrs. V tells Melody the accident wasn't her fault, and that she should be proud of trying to prevent it, but Melody blames herself. Melody thinks if only she wasn't mad at Penny, and if only she hadn't made her mom take her to school, nothing would have happened.

Melody first worries that Penny will die, and then worries that Penny's brain will get damaged and she'll end up like her classmate, Jill. Melody tells Mrs. V that she wishes she had been in the accident, and she claims that no one would miss her. Mrs. V argues back, saying that she would miss Melody, as would her parents. Melody also remembers Ollie, her **goldfish**, whom she was unable to save when he jumped out of his bowl.

Melody wishes she were normal, even though Mrs. V says that Melody is special because she's unique. A phone call from the hospital interrupts the conversation — Penny has a broken leg and some internal injuries, but she's going to be okay. Melody reflects that "normal doesn't suck at all."

Melody's concern for Penny mirrors concern about Penny's health during Melody's mother's pregnancy. A key difference is Melody's mother was worried she somehow caused Melody's disability and would somehow cause Penny to become sick, whereas here Melody is putting the blame on herself.



Penny's accident brings up Melody's feelings of helplessness in the face of disaster, like when Ollie died and she was unable to save him. More than anything Melody wants to be able to communicate, and she especially wants to communicate to prevent those she loves from getting hurt.



Melody explicitly wishes she were "normal." Although this wish comes specifically in the context of trying to prevent the accident, Melody is also thinking about how if she were "normal" many of her other problems would be fixed—she'd be best friends with Rose and she'd be in D.C. with the Whiz Kids team. Mrs. V tries to convince Melody that she's unique because she's not "normal," but Melody sees that her disabilities are a burden, and she isn't sure that being unique is important enough to her that she wouldn't want to be "normal" instead.



CHAPTER 32

The weekend after the accident Melody's mom spends nights at the hospital with Penny, and Mrs. V takes care of both Melody and her father, who is so shaken by the accident that he can barely take care of himself. Melody worries about Penny's injuries. She's glad to hear from Mrs. V that Penny won't need a wheelchair, and that there are no signs of brain damage.

At school on Monday Melody feels ready for anything. After the trauma of her weekend, the quiz team hardly matters. As she wheels into H-5, she suddenly feels differently about her friends in the class. Each of them, Freddy, Ashley, Willy, Maria, Gloria, Carl, and Jill have a special talent or interest or skill and not one of them even knows how to be mean. Melody realizes that she doesn't know where she belongs.

Mrs. V shows how important she is as a member of Melody's extended family as she takes care of both Melody and her father.



Melody's classmates in H-5 are her community. She accepts them and they accept her. However, Melody feels torn between her H-5 community, where everyone is kind and seems to understand her, and her academic classmates, who don't respect her, but who intellectually stimulate her.



When Melody goes to Mr. Dimming's class, he is clearly uncomfortable. Rose won't make eye contact with her and everyone is uncharacteristically quiet. Melody asks bluntly "Why did you leave me?" Together the quiz team explains that they didn't plan to leave her behind, instead they got breakfast without her and then rushed to the plane. Melody wonders why they had breakfast without her, and if they intentionally got together without her. Rose says no, but Claire says that they were worried she'd slow the group down (even though Melody points out that the group didn't leave Claire behind when she threw up in the restaurant).

When Melody asks why no one told her they were getting on the plane, Rose admits that she had Melody's phone number, but the whole team decided not to call her. Mr. Dimming and the team try to apologize by giving Melody their 9th place trophy. Melody starts laughing and knocks it onto the floor where it breaks. She tells the class she doesn't want it, and wheels herself out of the room.

In this moment, the Whiz Kids team confirms what Melody has long suspected—that although she was on the team she wasn't considered part of the team. Even though she helped them win the regional competition, her physical disability prevented her team from trusting or valuing her. Melody also points out the group's bias against her, because even when Claire was sick they didn't feel the need to shut her out.



Even though Melody had believed Rose to be her friend, it is clear that Rose never fully thought of their friendship as deep and real, and didn't feel that they were equals, as friends or as teammates. After her traumatic weekend, the Whiz Kids team seems less important to Melody. The consolation prize isn't important to her anymore, partly because she's been reminded of what is important in her life, and partly because she no longer feels like a participating member of the team.



CHAPTER 33

Melody thinks back on her time in fifth grade so far. Fifth grade is probably hard for many kids, but Melody has to deal with so much more. She has the same questions about growing up as everyone else—is she cool enough, will a boy ever like her—while also navigating a world with a disability that makes everything more challenging.

Penny comes home from the hospital with some bruises and a cast, but no lasting damage. Melody begins work on her biography project for Miss Gordon's class, part of which involves writing an autobiography. Melody's biography begins in the exact same way *Out of My Mind* begins, with an ode to language and words.

In some ways, Melody deals with the same questions and concerns as any able-bodied fifth-grader, but she also realizes that because of her disability she will never be exactly like everyone else, and her day-to-day struggles will necessarily be more complex. As much as she wanted to fit in and be accepted by her classmates, Melody comes to understand that she can't necessarily expect other 10 and 11 year olds to fully understand her personal experience.



The fact that the last chapter of the book focuses on Melody's writing and Penny's return from the hospital suggests that in the end, what's most important is Melody, her internal life, and her relationship to her family. Although the Whiz Kids experience was devastating, in the end it was less important than Melody's private intellectual development, and the health and safety of her immediate family. The book begins and ends with the exact same passage, in which Melody talks about the beauty of words. This last chapter ends with an ellipsis (...), suggesting that it will continue on, and that the whole book has been Melody's biography for Miss Gordon's class. This underscores the power of language, and how through the written word Melody can communicate a lifetime of memories and experiences.





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