



One Great Book: Volume 1, Episode 5 *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper

[Show Notes](#)

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One Great Book Volume 1, Book 5: *Out of My Mind*

[UPBEAT INTRO MUSIC]

Hey readers, I'm Anne Bogel, and you're listening to One Great Book, where each week I pull one stand-out selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it.

[MUSIC]

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[1:11]

Readers, in the first four episodes of One Great Book we've covered—um, forgive the bookish pun there—three literary novels and one essay collection that feels right at home among them, style-wise. Today I want to tell you about *Out of My Mind*, a middle-grade novel by Coretta Scott winning author Sharon Draper, and I want to begin by assuring that you that yes, these books belong together on the same bookshelf, for the same reader.

These are things I know about my reading life: I enjoy stories told from unexpected angles, I love getting behind the scenes, whether that's learning how things are made or how someone experiences the world. I love stories that help me experience the world through someone else's eyes. And I *always* love a good story, well told.

And I never want to miss out on a good read because it happens to be in the “wrong” section of the bookstore or the library, categorized in such a way that I don't immediately think / am the target audience. But if I'm not careful I can miss out on some great reads that way. And that would be a shame because *Out of My Mind* is one. Great. Book.

[MUSIC]

[2:23]

Out of My Mind introduces us, the readers, to ten-year-old Melody Brooks. She's a girl who longs to be like everybody else in her class. She wants to play with friends, and feel accepted by them, and do all that normal kid stuff. But Melody's life isn't what her classmates consider normal, not at all: She's confined to a wheelchair because she can't walk. She's in fifth grade, but she's never spoken one single word. She has no way to tell you what she's thinking. To her fellow students, and honestly to many of the adults in her life as well, Melody is defined by one thing: that she has cerebral palsy. But Draper takes you inside Melody's head to understand things from her point of view, and *what a view it is*.

Melody is incredibly bright. She saw a PBS special on geniuses once, and she has a lot in common with those kids: she remembers EVERYTHING she sees, or that she reads, her memory is near-photographic. But *nobody knows* because she's trapped in an uncooperative body. She can't



tell her teachers enough with the preschool lessons already, she wants to *learn* something. She can't tell anyone when she is really craving a Big Mac or a vanilla milkshake. She can't tell her parents she loves them. And her life is full of small indignities, like, well, in Melody's words, "going to the bathroom at school just plain sucks."

[MUSIC]

[3:51]

But then. Melody discovers something that gives her a voice, for the first time. Things change for Melody, and quickly—suddenly she can tell her parents she loves them, she can finally make a friend, she can get that Big Mac. And the secret that she never wanted to keep is OUT, and everyone finally knows she's the smartest kid in school. She makes the quiz bowl team, and they rack up win after win once Melody is on the team. Anyone who's read E.L. Konigsburg's *The View from Saturday* knows that these quiz bowl competitions make for seriously exciting reading. I AM NOT KIDDING.

Melody has a lot of hardship in her life, but Draper really does not want anybody to feel sorry for Melody. Melody herself would be highly irritated to find out you did. That's not the point of the book. No, Draper, whose own child has a disability, wanted to make Melody an unforgettable character, not one you would pity, but a character you can cheer for! Melody is spunky, she's determined, she's funny, she's a joy on the page. But that doesn't mean things don't go badly wrong for her before the book is over.

Out of My Mind is a terrific read for readers all across the age spectrum. Kids will relate more to Melody, of course. As an adult reader, I appreciated the wonderful adults in this book. Melody's parents are gems, Melody's mom completely demolishes a clueless grown-up because of the way they treat Melody on more than one occasion, and I'll admit those scenes were so good I read each one more than once. I especially love Mrs V, Melody's next door neighbor, Mrs Violet Valencia. Mrs V is Melody's sometime-caretaker and all-the-time cheerleader. She sees potential in Melody, potential nobody else sees accept her parents. She has zero sympathy for her, and Melody loves her for it. And you will too—if you read this book and *don't* wish at some point that you had a Mrs V in *your* life, I will eat my copy or something similarly drastic. Melody would *love* that!

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[5:43]

I highly recommend *Out of My Mind* for readers of all ages, especially those who enjoyed Cece Bell's graphic novel *Ei Deafo*, and Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's fantabulous novel *The War That Saved My Life*, because WWI era Susan and Melody's neighbor Mrs V are kindred spirits. I should probably throw in *Wonder* here, OF COURSE read it if you enjoyed R. J. Palacio's 5-million-copies-sold blockbuster.

Draper says that *Out of My Mind* is a book that speaks for those who cannot speak, and that should remind us of the humanity in us all. It's a story about finding your voice—one that will make you laugh, and make you cry, though more laughter than tears I promise. It's a story about facing hard things, and also about overcoming them. It's a story about how the people around us can make us more ourselves, and also about how they let us down.

In short, if you enjoy a good story—make if you enjoy a feel-good story, well told, that takes you places you've never been and never could go but for the power of literature, *Out of My Mind* may be the next great book you're looking for.

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Thanks to Kellen Pechacek for his sound design on today's episode.



[7:45]

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Readers, that's it for this episode, thanks so much for listening.

And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.