

Rae S. Russell (6th Grade: Cleveland, Ohio)
Level I Semifinalist
Letter to Sharon Draper concerning her book, *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper:

I've never noticed that people can feel very left out or ignored until the day I discovered this for myself. I usually have friends everywhere I go, but at my ballet class, I feel very left out and ignored. I'm there stretching while everyone else is just talking. In your book *Out of My Mind*, Melody—who has cerebral palsy—helped me to understand this problem.

Melody made a new friend, Rose, when the “special” and “normal” kids came together in music class. When Rose greeted Melody then left her to go to her friends to show them her phone, Melody felt left out. Melody and I try not to let it get under our skin. We know we're different, but we don't really know why people treat us differently.

Melody's life mirrors my own in a way. Melody was treated differently because she had cerebral palsy; I'm treated differently in my ballet class because, as I can only come once a week, my routines are not as fluid as those who can be there more often. Maybe I stand out since I'm not as advanced as the rest of the group, or because I'm the only black person in the whole studio.

The first step that Melody took to make new friends was to try out for the “Whiz Kids.” She got on the team! Inspired by Melody's bravery and success, I decided that I, too, should take the first step to reach out to others when I feel left out. I realized that there is no need to wait for another person to make the first move. Having put that plan into action, I can proudly say that I have turned some of those strangers in my ballet class into friends.

Melody's team won every round except for one. On the international round they left Melody behind and came back with a ninth place trophy; Connor thought that Melody should have it. I liked the ending of the story even though it didn't have a happy ending. I really changed my way of thinking and my way of treating people which is to “treat others as you want to be treated.”

Sincerely,

Rae S. Russell