

A special greeting to the students and readers of Pennsylvania—

Like Melody, I honestly cannot find the right words to say how thrilled I am that you selected *Out of my Mind* to receive the Young Reader's Choice Award. Throughout the novel, I tried to show the power of language, and the deep, rhythmic heartbeat of words in our lives.

Melody says, "Everybody uses words to express themselves. Except me. And I bet most people don't realize the real power of words. But I do. Thoughts need words. Words need a voice."

How frustrating to live one's whole life without any means of communicating. Although Melody is fictional, thousands of people live her situation in real life. They too, simply want dignity, understanding, and a means to let others know what's on their mind. They want to be respected as individuals, not as representatives of a group, or a physical condition.

I hope that Melody's story will continue to embrace us all, lift us, and make us thankful for every step we take, for every word we speak. I think all great stories emerge from deep truths that rest within us, truths that can resound in the minds of others. And sometimes readers can discover some truths about themselves as well.

This novel speaks for those who cannot speak. And I hope that it reminds readers of the spirit and passion and humanity in us all.

Thank you so very much.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Draper