

In this month's book, *Out of My Mind*, a young girl with cerebral palsy joins an inclusion classroom. When she gets a computer that allows her to speak to her family and peers, she surprises them with her intelligence. As another student says, "...it just never occurred to me that Melody had thoughts in her head." Melody has been trapped inside her own mind, and she now has the opportunity to join the world in a big way - being in interesting classes, making friends, trying out for the school quiz team. But, the painful challenge of her limited communication skills, plus others' judgment and rejection, sometimes makes the world feel less than welcoming to her.

This story is told entirely in Melody's narrative voice, so we as readers are privy to a version of Melody that no one else gets to know. We celebrate, panic, and suffer right along with her. Her story is deeply relatable, even for those of us who are fortunate enough to express ourselves easily. Which of us hasn't experienced the pain of being misunderstood and underestimated? And, which of us hasn't made the mistake of judging someone else based on appearance or prejudices? This book accomplishes that most difficult thing: it allows us to recognize ourselves and to grow our compassion for people that are different from us.

I hope you enjoy this month's book and that your club's conversation takes you in many interesting directions. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook page! [bit.ly/GLbookFB](https://www.facebook.com/GLbookFB)

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

This month's book is about a girl who struggles to communicate, and so others don't always understand her or who she is. Even as a person who communicates fairly easily, it can seem that others don't see the real us.

Consider the following question: "What is one thing that you wish others knew or understood about you?" This could mean people in your family, teachers, kids at school, your friends, or all of the above.

Pair up and discuss, or share as a whole group.

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

You might decide to start the discussion with every member saying her favorite part of the book before reading discussion questions. Some groups might have time to get to all of these questions, but many groups will pick one or two questions and spend the whole meeting discussing those. Feel free to come up with your own discussion questions, or bring up any ideas that came up while you were reading.

- For Melody, what seems to be the most challenging thing about not being able to speak? Have you ever tried to go for any particular length of time without speaking? What was challenging for you, or what do you imagine would be challenging?
- Why is music important to Melody? Why is it important in this story?
- What do you think about Melody's appointment with Dr. Hugely? How does Melody's mom respond to the doctor's diagnosis that her daughter is "severely brain-damaged and profoundly retarded?" How might Melody's life have been different if her mother had responded in a different way?
- What purpose does Mrs. V fill in Melody's life?

- Why is Melody so excited to join the inclusion class?
- What is it like when Melody meets Rose for the first time?
- What kind of person and friend do you think Rose is? Do you think she's a true friend to Melody? Why or why not?
- How does the medi-talker impact Melody's life? How do you think Melody feels when she finally talks to her parents and the other kids?
- When Melody gets the best score on Mr. Dimming's quiz, some of the other kids accuse her of cheating. Why do they do that, and how do you think Melody feels about it? Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do?
- When the quiz team goes on to Washington, DC without Melody, what does it show about them? What does her response - and the way she confronts them - show about her?
- Do you think Melody is different in any way at the end of the book? How?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

We tend to make more progress when we have clearly defined goals. What is the life that you envision for yourself? Can you talk about it in as much detail as possible? Try focusing on what's really exciting and amazing about your plans and goals. Next time you're feeling frustrated, go back to that plan and see if you can focus on making some part of it happen.

If your group is feeling crafty, you might do this as a drawing exercise or even a collage activity with pictures cut from old catalogues and magazines.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share around the circle so everyone has a turn, or give time so anyone who wants to share can do so. If you've made art, you can place it around the room, gallery-style, and let everyone walk around the room checking out the different pieces.

Closing, 5 minutes

Make sure you've chosen a date for your April meeting (the last one of the year!) before parting ways.

Further Reading

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more books like it, here are some suggestions. If there are other books you would like to recommend, we'd love to hear them! Please share them on our **Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook Group** bit.ly/GLbookFB so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi - Charlotte is from a very proper family, not at all the kind of young lady who would find herself traveling *alone* from England to Rhode Island with a band of rough sailors and a suspicious captain. And, yet... that's exactly where she is. The intrigue and adventure never stop in the pages of Charlotte's entertaining journal.

Flygirl by Sherri L. Smith - Ida Mae Jones wants to fly more than anything. But young black women in 1940s Louisiana don't have many opportunities. When the Army forms a women's airfare, she decides to use her light skin to pass as white so she can join. Is denying who she is a price she's willing to pay for her dreams?

Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mulally Hunt - Ally struggles with reading, but she hides it well. Her new teacher wants to help her, but Ally's not sure she wants to deal with this problem on top of everything else life is throwing at her.

Rules by Cynthia Lord - Twelve-year-old Catherine loves her little brother David, who is autistic. Yet she also feels embarrassed by his odd behavior, and frustrated that he takes up all their parents' energy. She wants to carve out an identity that is separate from David's needs. A new friend from her brother's clinic helps her to see David - and herself - in a whole new way.