



*2018-2019 Letters About Literature Contest  
North Carolina statewide winner from Level 3  
Huda Haque of Morrisville, NC*

Dear Sharon Draper,

There's one infallible way I can tell a book has changed me. A physical reaction of some sort, whether it be shedding tears or chuckling aloud, is a signal of the author's sheer mastery of words, their ability to manipulate my emotions by writing. Over the years I've spent (and continue to spend) poring over books, ones of historical adventures and others of supernatural warriors, there are a few that evoke this deep feeling in me. These books have helped to define parts of my life, and I carry them deep inside me as I experience the world. *Out of My Mind* was the first one.

I distinctly recall being 8 and taking in the cover. Never a fan of fish, I approached the book skeptically, not understanding the metaphor it posed. Yet eventually, I gave in, as many book aficionados do. From the very beginning, I was pulled into the life of Melody, a life so different from mine. I'd never been friends with someone like her, only seen people with disabilities from afar, causing my mind to create a false boundary. Her world was one I quickly felt myself being engulfed into. I marveled at her sharp wit, her brilliant memory, and her inner monologue. The character you created was bursting with a thousand vivacious colors the world and I had seemed to be blind to all this time.

Throughout reading, I felt as if I became close to Melody. She was the epitome of the intelligent, marvelous student that I had always deeply admired, yet not the embodiment I had envisioned. Her struggles, although different from mine, became deeply personal ones, ones I became invested in and cared deeply about. Then, as I reached a certain page, my heart dropped. The scene where Melody is left at the airport completely shattered me, and filled me with an inexplicable, deep sadness, the kind that arises from cruelty no eight-year-old could ever fathom. I cried, for Melody and her innocence, for her parents, and most of all, I cried for what I thought was the harsh reality of this world. That some people truly are, for lack of a better word, mean.

I could have looked back on this and just accepted this as you trying to say that, simply, life is not fair. Some are just devoid of empathy, of compassion, of what we think makes us human. Some people are just born unlucky and are tasked with facing cruelty along their lives. Instead, I took this as a sign that it is important to combat these kinds of people in life. We should never accept these kinds of actions as just reality, but rather actively work to make this world one where "out-of-the-way" kindness is no longer considered "out-of-the-way". I truly believe that your book left an indelible impression on eight-year-old me, one that led me to remember the importance of kindness and make me have character I can be proud of. And so throughout the years, I've tried my best to apply the lessons your book instilled in me in all aspects of my life, from helping struggling children in school, to opening my heart to new people, and learning to forgive.

Thank you so much for your beautiful book and the life lesson it gave me. Your writing has inspired me to write my own stories since that day, in hopes that it can one day leave a lasting impact on some other little girl.

From,

Huda

**The North Carolina Center for the Book** is a program of the North Carolina Humanities Council and is an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Through a variety of program formats and initiatives, the NC Center works to foster an interest in books, reading, libraries, and North Carolina's literary heritage. The North Carolina Humanities Council began operating the NC Center in 2018. To learn more visit [www.nchumanities.org](http://www.nchumanities.org) **Letter's About Literature** is a nationwide competition that asks students in grades 4-12 to read a book, poem, or speech and write to the author about how the work affected them.