

Chapter 20 Excerpt

Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper, excerpt from chapter 20 (pages 176 – 182)

...I didn't go out for inclusion classes all day—I wanted to study until the last minute—but as soon as the last bell rings, I grab Catherine's arm. "Hurry!" I type. "To Mr. D's room."

Even though I am in the electric chair, we set it to manual so she could push me. I am too nervous to drive.

When we arrive at Mr. Dimming's room, a group of kids from my history class are already there, whispering together and going over note cards. They look up in surprise when Catherine wheels me in.

"Hi, Melody," Rose says. "What are you doing here?" Her voice doesn't sound as friendly as usual.

"Quiz team," I type.

"She can't be on the team," I hear Claire whisper to Jessica, wrinkling up her nose [...]

Molly thinks that's really funny. She screeches like a blue jay when she laughs.

I decide to ignore them even though I feel my anger rising. I have to stay focused. Several more students file into the room, from both grades five and six. I don't know the sixth graders very well—they have different recess times. I wonder if they're smarter. They've had more time to learn stuff.

A few kids point at me and whisper. When Mr. Dimming hurries in carrying a stack of papers sealed in plastic, he scans the room to see who's here. He frowns slightly when he sees me, but he sets the test papers on his desk and greets us all.

"Welcome," he says. "I'm so glad that so many of you have chosen to try out for the competition this afternoon. It's going to be challenging as well as fun. Are there any questions before we get started?"

Connor, of course, raises his hand.

"Yes, Connor," Mr. Dimming says with a good-natured sigh.

"Uh, will we get pizza and stuff during practice like last year?"

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“Don’t you think you need to make the team first?” his friend Rodney yells out.

“Rodney is right. Let’s do one thing at a time.” Mr. Dimming lifts the stack of test papers from his desk and holds them like a treasure.

“I hold in my hand the official test questions from the national Whiz Kids headquarters in Washington, D.C. I will be reading the questions to you, just as it’s done in real competitions, and then—” He stops and stares.

Everyone looks around to see what has interrupted him. It’s me.

Mr. Dimming taps the stack of papers for a moment, clears his throat, and addresses Catherine. “You know, I don’t think it’s appropriate for Melody to be here. This is not a recreational activity just for fun. The purpose of this meeting is to choose our official team.”

He isn’t even speaking to me. He’s looking right over my head at Catherine, as if I were invisible. Now I am really mad.

I turn up the volume on my machine—very loud. **“I am here to take the test.”**

Mr. Dimming blinks. “Melody, I don’t want your feelings to get injured. The test is very hard.”

“I am very smart.”

“I just don’t want you to be hurt, Melody.” He sounds sincere. Sort of.

“I’m tough,” I type.

“You go, girl!” Rose suddenly says from the front of the room. A few other kids clap their support.

That makes me feel a little better. Just a little.

Catherine speaks up. “By law, she cannot be excluded. You know that, sir.”

“Yes, but—”

“Read the questions to the students just as you had planned. They’ll write their answers on notebook paper. Melody will record her answers, then print them out for you.”

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"How do we know you won't be helping her?" Claire asks.

"Because I won't be in the room," Catherine replies. "Too bad, because you might need some help!" Catherine grins at her, but Claire just looks away.

I tell Catherine, "**Go now.**" I almost push her away. "Thank you."

"Your mom is coming to pick you up?"

"Yes."

"Good luck, Melody. You're my champ, no matter what, you got that?"

"**Got it!**" I wave as she leaves the room.

Mr. Dimming shrugs his shoulders and continues with the directions. "There are one hundred quiz questions. I will read each prompt one time and each answer only once. You will have thirty seconds to record each response. Please write only the capital letter: 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' 'D,' and sometimes 'E.' Are there any questions?"

Claire's hand shoots up.

"Yes?"

"How do we know Melody doesn't have answers stored in her machine? Us normal people aren't allowed to use computers."

"Why are you so worried about Melody?" Rose answers before Mr. D has a chance to. "Are you scared she'll get a higher score than you?"

"No way!"

"Then be quiet so we can get started."

Mr. D smiles at Rose. "Students, get out two sheets of paper. One to write on. One to cover your answers. We believe in honesty, but an extra sheet of paper can't hurt."

Everyone shuffles to find paper and pens. Then a feeling of quiet expectation falls over the room. Mr. Dimming unseals the official test and opens to the first page.

"Let us begin," he says, his voice suddenly sounding very official. "Number one. The capital of Colombia is:

A. Brussels

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- B. Santiago
- C. Bogotá
- D. Jakarta.”

He pauses while everybody scribbles their answers. I punch in the letter C. Good old Mrs. V and her capital quiz cards!

“Number two,” Mr. Dimming continues. “Gerontology is the study of:

- A. The elderly
- B. Gerunds
- C. Germs
- D. Rocks and jewels.”

I punched in the letter A. So far, so good.

The test continues for the next thirty minutes or so. He asks questions about atoms and clouds, about fish and mammals, about famous religions and dead presidents. Some of the questions I’m sure of. I guess on a couple. The math questions make me sweat. This is the hardest, most exciting thing I’d ever done.

The very last question is a killer.

“And number one hundred,” Mr. D says, relief in his voice. “The small intestine of an average adult, if stretched out vertically, would measure about how long?

- A. Eight to twelve inches
- B. One to two feet
- C. Five to seven feet
- D. Twenty to twenty-three feet.”

I punch in the letter D, hoping I’ve guessed right, and breathe a sigh of relief. It was over.

“Pencils down, please,” Mr. Dimming tells us. “Make sure your name is on your paper, then cover it with the cover sheet and pass it up to me.”

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As everyone gathers papers and scribbles their names hurriedly, I push the print button on my Medi-Talker. A slim sheet with my answers emerges from the side. Mr. Dimming walks back to where I sit and rips it off. He doesn't look at me.

"We're done here," he tells the class...

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