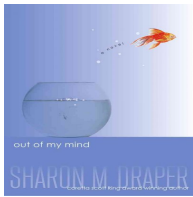


Through Another's Eyes



One of the great things about good books is that they can reveal life through

another person's eyes. That revelation is especially engaging when the character has some barrier to ordinary self expression. I recently read two fine books that offer fresh perspectives on school and life in general from characters who have trouble communicating with the world.

Out of My Mind by Sharon M. Draper is the story of Melody Brooks, a fifth grade girl who has spastic bilateral quadriplegia, also known as cerebral palsy. It limits her body, not her mind. The only parts of her body she can control are her thumbs. Her mind is full of words, knowledge, and opinions that she can't express because she can't speak or write. Melody is a strong, affectionate, and very funny observer of her narrow world. This is the triumphant story of how a teacher's aide and a dedicated neighbor help unlock Melody's mind and give her a voice.

Caitlin Smith has a different set of challenges communicating with the people around her. She has Asperger's Syndrome. Though her body and speech aren't limited, she has trouble relating to her own emotions and to those of others. This is especially troubling because her older brother was killed in a school shooting. Caitlin thinks of the tragedy as "The Day Our Life Fell Apart." Now she and her Dad are alone and her inability to process emotions makes it difficult for them to live with the loss. A sympathetic school counselor spends time with Caitlin each day to help her deal with her grief, learn about empathy, and to show her how to respond to the social cues of her classmates. Mockingbird by Kathryn Erskine gives insight into the thoughts and feelings of a unique individual.

Both of these excellent books are recommended for readers in 4th-6th grade. They are entertaining, compelling and guaranteed to make you wonder about the thoughts and feelings of people you see every day, but have never spoken to...yet.

Posted by Mary F. on March 13, 2012

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