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## Sharon Draper: Zarrow award winner

# Zarrow Award winner meets Tulsa kids who read her novel 'Out of My Mind'

■ Hoover students discuss book with author



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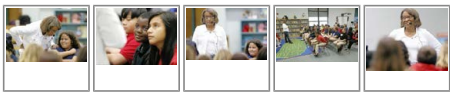
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Hoover Elementary School sixth-grader Mia Thompson gets instructions on an illustration from best-selling author Sharon Draper, winner of the Tulsa Library Trust's 2015 Anne Zarrow Award, on Friday. Thompson was to close her lips to resemble Melody, a character in Draper's novel "Out of My Mind," who has cerebral palsy. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

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By **SAMANTHA VICENT** World Staff Writer | 0 comments

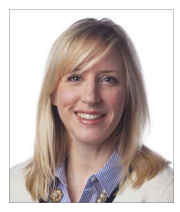
Sharon Draper asked a group of sixth-graders at Hoover Elementary School on Friday to identify the racial background of the protagonist in "Out of My Mind," her 2010 New York Times best-seller.

The students had received copies of the Cincinnati author's book on Aug. 21, and all finished reading it by Thursday. The 295-page novel, which is a first-person story of an 11-year-old named Melody who has cerebral palsy, does not once mention her ethnicity.

After polling the students — most thought Melody was Caucasian — Draper said she deliberately made the character's race ambiguous because she wanted readers to realize Melody and her struggles for acceptance in the book could be any young person.

"Because of that, the book's been translated into 18 languages," she told the group. "Kids in Romania see her as Romanian. Kids in Brazil see her as Brazilian."

## Tulsa World Staff Writer Andrea Eger



Andrea Eger has worked at the Tulsa World since 1999 and has covered public education since 2000. She has completed intensive professional development in education reporting with the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Education Writers Association.

Over the years, her work has garnered her three first place awards in investigative individual reporting from the Society of Professional Journalists – Oklahoma Pro Chapter and numerous first place awards in education reporting from SPJ and the Great Plains Journalism Awards, an eight state competition.

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Draper visited the school, located at 2327 S. Darlington Ave., in advance of receiving the Tulsa Library Trust's 2015 Anne V. Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature at the Hardesty Library on Friday evening. The honor is bestowed to authors who make a "significant contribution" to young adult literature.

Her visit marked the end of the 2015 summer reading programs for children and teens, and each sixth-grader at Hoover received a

copy of "Out of My Mind."

"When I first gave it to them, I had everybody write their name in it so they felt like they had some ownership," Hoover librarian Alex Gates said.

"And I think that made a difference in their excitement level because it was their book, not just a book from the library or a book that their teacher had."

Draper discussed her passion for creating children's books and her hope that the students who read "Out of My Mind" gain something positive from the narrative. In the novel, Melody is "the smartest child in the room," with a photographic memory, and although her disability makes her unable to walk and talk normally, she successfully joins a scholastic team with students who don't have disabilities.

Draper's daughter also has a disability, but she said Melody is not based on her.

"You can be anything that you want to be," Draper said. "I tell (students), 'I believe in you. I believe in your possibilities.'"

Hoover sixth-grader Jaylynn Palmer said after the presentation that he thought "Out of My Mind" was "awesome and empowering."

"Melody did a whole lot of things to get what she wants," said Jaylynn, 11. "Melody was the first disabled kid in a book I've read that's been in a Whiz Kid competition. ... She got to go in a regular class, and she got to make friends along the way."

Jaylynn said he wants to read more of Draper's work, including the author's most recently published novel, "Stella by Starlight." The new book is set in the Depression era and was partly inspired by a secret journal that Draper's grandmother kept in the early 20th century, and it deals with racial prejudice in the South.

Gates said the students asked insightful questions on Friday, and he believes the message of accepting others who are different is universal for preteens and young teenagers.

"I think it's about looking past the physical disabilities of someone, which I think everybody struggles with, and just accepting someone for who they are and what they're good at."

Samantha Vicent 918-581-8321

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## Nour Habib

Staff Writer Nour Habib covers suburban school districts. She joined the Tulsa World in 2011, and previously was a general assignment reporter for the Scene section. She graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in journalism and political science. Before joining the World, she covered education for a community newspaper.

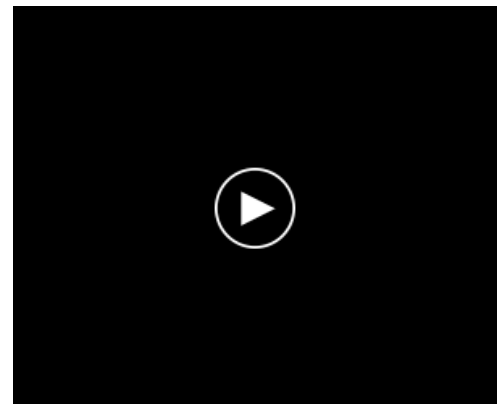
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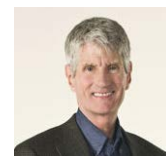
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