1. The novel opens with a powerful discussion of the power of words and language. How does this help capture the reader’s attention? What predictions can the reader make about the narrator of the story? What inferences can be made about the thought processes of the narrator's mind?

2. In a world that does not work for her, what seems to cause the biggest frustrations for Melody?

3. Describe Melody's parents. How do they learn to communicate with Melody and help her to overcome everyday problems? Why are those efforts sometimes a complete failure?

4. How does Melody feel about school? How does she fit in with her classmates and what makes her different from the rest of the children in H-5? What would be Melody's ideal school situation?

5. Discuss Melody's teachers since she began going to school. What does this say about her school system, or about attitudes at her school about teaching children with special needs?

6. Describe Mrs. V. What role does she play in Melody's development? Why is she a necessary addition to Melody's life?

7. What is significant about the story of Ollie the fish? How does Ollie's life mirror Melody's? Describe Melody's feelings when she is unable to tell her mother what really happened.
8. Describe how the introduction of Penny as a character changes the family dynamics. Analyze Melody's complicated feelings about her little sister.

9. How does the inclusion program change Melody's school experiences? Describe both positive and negative results of the program. Describe Melody's deep, unrealized need for a friend.

10. What does Melody learn about friendship during the trip to the aquarium? Make a comparison between Ollie's life, the life of the fish in the aquarium, and Melody's life.

11. How does Melody's computer change her life, her outlook on life, and her potential? Why does she name it Elvira?

12. Why does Melody decide to enter the quiz team competition? What obstacles must she face and overcome just to get on the team?

13. What does Melody learn about friendship and the relationships of children working together as she practices and competes with the quiz team? What does she learn about herself?

14. What is ironic about the events at the restaurant after the competition? How does this scene foreshadow the events that led up to the airport fiasco?

15. Describe Melody's feelings before the trip to the airport, while she is there, and after she gets home. How would you have coped with the same situation?

16. Describe Melody's extreme range of emotions as she tries to tell her mother that Penny is
behind the car. How did the scene make you feel?

17. Discuss the scene in which Melody confronts the kids on the quiz team. What is satisfying about how she handles the situation? What else might Melody have done?

18. Why is the first page repeated at the end of the book? How has Melody changed, both personally and socially, from the beginning of the book to the end?

19. How would this story have been different if it had been written from a third-person point of view; from the point of view of her parents, for example, or simply from the viewpoint of an outside observer?

20. Explain the title of the novel. Give several possible interpretations.

Activities and Research

1. Put yourself in Melody's chair. Write a paper that tells what it would be like to be Melody for one day. Write about your feelings and frustrations.

2. Investigate the problems of children with cerebral palsy, especially those that are of school age. How does it affect the child socially, academically, and personally?

3. Investigate the possible causes of cerebral palsy, and what preventative measures, if any, can be taken by the mother.

4. Research current laws for inclusion of children with disabilities into classrooms. What effect, if any, do such things have on a school community?

5. Research current treatment options or communication devices for young people like
6. Write a letter to one of the characters in the book explaining your feelings about the events in the story. What advice would you give Melody, Rose, Mr. D, or Mrs. V?

7. Describe the relationship between the able-bodied children and Melody. Would you describe it as a true friendship? When situations become monumental and overwhelming to young people, what is likely to happen? Explain.

8. Imagine it is the last day of fifth grade. Write a letter or create a conversation between one of the following pairs of characters:
   * Rose and Melody
   * Melody and Mrs. V
   * Melody and Catherine
   * Mr. D and Melody
   * Melody and Claire

9. Trace the story of one of the following characters. Imagine you are a reporter doing a story on one of their lives. Write everything you know, as well as whatever you can infer about the character in order to write your magazine article.
   * Claire
   * Mrs. V
   * Mr. Dimming
   * Rose
   * Penny

10. You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.
    * Student with Disabilities makes Quiz Team
    * Child Struck by Family Car
    * Big Storm Grounds Air Traffic
    * Local Quiz Team Wins Big

This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.
1. On page 4 Melody writes that “sometimes people never even ask my name, like it’s not important or something.” How important is your name? Would you like to tell us something about why your parents chose it or what makes it so special?

2. Is there a character in the story that you think would be fun to get to know?

3. On the bottom of page 7, Melody describes not being able to forget anything. What would that be like for you? Would you like to be able to remember everything? Why or why not?

4. Please re-read Melody’s description of kids in her school on pages 27-28. Would you please tell us ways that these kids are like or different from kids in Brighton?

5. Melody wonders on page 70 what she would ask the wizard for if she were blown to Oz. If you had a chance, what would you ask for?

6. To me the saddest part of the story was on page 77 where Melody wondered if her mother ever wished she could get a refund for Melody. What part of the story was the saddest for you?

7. Did anything in the story make you laugh?

8. Did anything in the story make you angry?

9. Let’s list a few things that are a normal part of our lives, things we might take for granted, that would be special to Melody.

10. What did you think of the statement on page 142 that Miss Gordon looked like she wanted to “squeeze Claire like an empty toothpaste tube”? I wonder if any of us has felt that way and I wonder if anyone has felt that way about us!

11. What did you think about Claire while you were reading this book? Was there any part of the story when your opinion of her changed?

12. Please read Melody’s description of 5th grade on page 293. Is that what 5th grade is like in Brighton? How would you improve this description?

13. Pretend you are the editor. You just read the ending of the story. What suggestions would you give the author to improve it? Or would you approve it as written?

14. What would you say causes the biggest frustration for Melody?

15. What do you think about Melody’s school situation? What about it is good for her? What about it would you improve if you could?
16. Why did the author include the story of Ollie the fish?

17. When Melody decided to try out for the quiz team, what advantages and challenges did you think would happen? Did it turn out the way you expected? What was different?

18. On pages 289-290 Melody confronts the class about leaving her behind when they went to Washington D.C. If she had asked you the night before what she should say and how she should act, what would you have told her?

19. How would the story be different if it had been written from a different point of view? What if Melody’s parents had told the story? What if it was told from the point of view of an outsider describing everything to us?

20. What did you think when you first saw the title? What do you think about it now? Why do you suppose Ms. Draper chose it?

21. If you wrote a letter to a character in the story, which one would you choose? What would you like to say to him/her?