A Teacher's Guide for

# Speak

by

## LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

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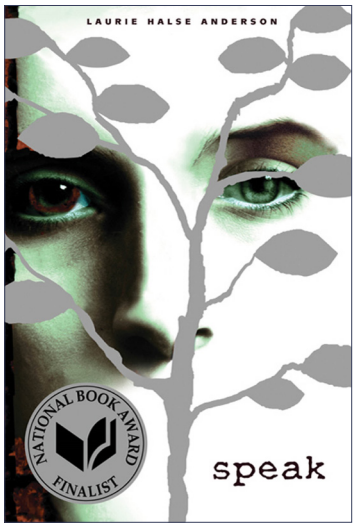


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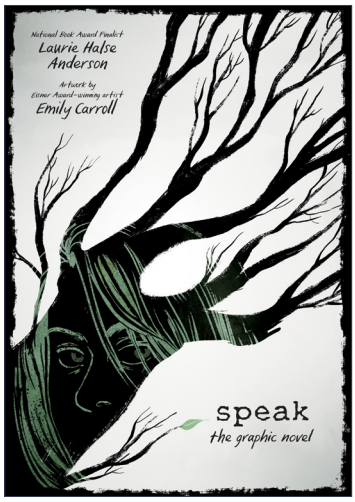


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## About the Book

"Speak up for yourself—we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless—an outcast—because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. Through her work on an art project, she is finally able to face what really happened that night: She was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her.

## About the Author

Laurie Halse Anderson is a *New York Times*–bestselling author who writes for all ages. Known for tackling tough subjects with humor and sensitivity, her work has sold nearly five million copies. Two of her books, *Speak* and *Chains*, were National Book Award finalists. *Chains* also made the Carnegie Medal shortlist in the United Kingdom. Her most recent YA novel, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, was longlisted for the National Book Award.

## About the Illustrator

Emily Carroll, an Eisner Award–winning illustrator and the author of *Through the Woods*, is also the creator of many popular web comics. She lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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# About the Guide

For those who are just starting to use graphic novels in the classroom, here are a few helpful hints. First, students need to be shown how to read a graphic novel as even the most advanced readers can get lost when reading a new medium. Panels are generally read from top to bottom and left to right, but they are not always presented as linearly as traditional text. It is beneficial to walk the entire class through a single page or panel together. Page 4 of *Speak: The Graphic Novel* is a great page to review because there is so much going on visually and the panels overlap. Have students discuss in small groups what is going on using specific textual/visual evidence (e.g., looks on faces, raucous crowd, sound lines, use of light and shading, etc.). Additionally, students should be exposed to visual tools of the graphic novel medium: various lettering styles (as on p. 245), differing dialogue bubbles (such as the one used for whispering on p. 6), contrasting shading and use of forced perspective (such as the authority the girls project on p. 157), body language (e.g., stiffness on p. 74), and isolation (p. 65). Graphic novels are not just pictures that appear with text—the images are an integral part of the story, and a lot will be missed if they are ignored. The reader must pay attention to details in the background, where eyes are looking, and so much more.

Graphic novels offer a multitude of differentiated instruction opportunities and can be used for every reading level. A powerful example is providing a visual for students who are not native English speakers or for struggling readers who can read the graphic novel first and then move on to the prose novel. They can then refer to the visuals to aid comprehension of the prose in the traditional novel, thereby building students' confidence and allowing them to participate in the classroom.

# Pre-reading Activities

## *Prose and Graphic Novel*

1. Ask the students to create a list of the top ten lies people have told them about high school. Allow students to share their ideas with the class. Discuss why these lies exist or why students think they are lies. Another variation of this activity is to give the students the list of ten lies from the book and ask students what their reactions are. Do they agree? Do they think the list needs to be changed? Why do they think these lies exist? Ask students why the book starts with this list.
2. Ask the students to describe a time in their lives when they felt powerless and then have them draw an image of that experience. Allow students to share their answers with a peer and then invite students to share ideas with the class. (Teacher tip: look for patterns in their answers. Did their feelings come from isolation? Trauma? Confusion?)
3. Hand out the book to students. Ask them to analyze the title, *Speak*, as well as analyze the cover of the book and then make predictions about the story. Allow students to share their answers and predictions.

# Discussion Questions

## *Page numbers noted refer to the graphic novel*

1. Melinda states "Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say" (p.14). Describe your reaction to the illustrations and words on this page. Do you agree or disagree with her words? What early theme is being suggested with this statement?
2. Describe the importance of the mirror on pp. 25–27. How does Melinda see herself and how do you think others view her? Mirrors are a recurring symbol. Why? Do mirrors accurately display how you view yourself? Explain the message the mirrors convey.

3. The graphic novel contains figurative language supported by images to convey how Melinda is feeling. On p. 43, identify and explain the figurative language used and explain what it means. Also, describe the importance of the spotlight—is it real, or is it symbolic of being put on the spot? What is the significance of this moment for Melinda?
4. Melinda speaks to the reader through her thoughts, but finds it difficult to speak to the characters in the story. Still, she communicates through her body language and even explains how she fakes interactions (p. 53) by using nonverbal gestures that don't really match how she's feeling. How do the other characters react to her not speaking? Should they do something to help her?
5. On pp. 70–71, Melinda is illustrated in a startling way. React to the words and images on these pages. Are the words literal or figurative? What emotions or ideas are being conveyed? How is the symbol of the mirror being revisited?
6. On pp. 72–73, what is IT? Using textual or visual evidence, explain why Melinda is so upset. What might you infer through textual evidence on these pages?
7. Discuss the significance of Melinda's "Closet Space (see pp. 79–82)." What do you see in this section? What is the significance of the objects in it? (For example, notice the use of the Maya Angelou poster: What is her significance to Melinda? To the reader? On p. 272, to Melinda it appears that Angelou's gaze has changed. Why?)
8. On p.81, analyze how the artist used images to express abstract emotions. What do the shadows represent? How do they relate to the words on the page? (This is a good opportunity to discuss the use of contrasts. Hint to the students that dark pages often parallel Melinda's inner pain.)
9. David Petrakis is a contrast to Melinda. He speaks out against the bigotry of his teacher, and Melinda remarks that she's "never heard a more eloquent silence (p. 88)." Discuss the power of knowing when to speak and when to be silent (see pp. 86–88). (This is a good opportunity to discuss the first amendment, which is alluded to subtly through the juxtaposition of the classroom flag. This idea returns with the reference to the suffragettes on p. 284, where David reminds her of the importance of speaking up.)
10. React to the symbolism in the sculpture on p.103: What do you see? What do you think it means? Use specific textual evidence to support an inference you've made about Melinda's pain. (This is a great opportunity for students to compare the prose version and the graphic novel illustration. Students can draw the sculpture first, and then compare it to the version in the graphic novel.)
11. Describe the illustrative use of light and darkness on pp. 121–122. What is the snowball in Melinda's throat? What do you think happened? Use details from earlier in the book, along with the words and images on this page, to support your idea.
12. Analyze the two sections titled "Naming the Monster (see pp. 148–151)" and "Can IT (see pp. 156–161)." Describe Andy Evans and how he and Melinda differ in their reactions to one another. Use specific examples to support your analysis.
13. In the section titled "Lunch Doom (see pp. 182–186)," analyze the use of shading, eye focus, and contrast for Melinda and Heather. Where is the focus? What are the feelings expressed by Heather? By Melinda? Infer what Heather's and Melinda's perspectives are and the meaning of friendship to both.
14. Analyze why Melinda relates to the style of Cubism in "Riding Shotgun (see pp. 206–215)." Use this information to determine why the section ends with Melinda seeing her art teacher from a Cubist perspective. (This would be a great cross-curricular lesson with social studies and art—exploring Cubism and examples of artwork using this style, such as *Guernica*).
15. Look at pp. 244–246. How does the lettering chosen convey a particular mood? What is the secret that Melinda has been unable to share? What is her fear? (This fear is alluded to on p. 283: she is afraid of being blamed.)

16. Despite their separation, Melinda decides to write a note warning Rachel that Andy is dangerous, on p. 273. In the illustration, whose hand is on her shoulder? What is the message there? (Compare this to the idea of solidarity and sisterhood in the #MeToo movement and to the idea of finding a voice through community.)
17. On p. 275, how does Mr. Freeman's advice to Melinda about the tree convey the theme of the story? Can you connect this to other examples in the book?
18. From pp. 297–300, Melinda struggles with the question "Was I raped?" What are the myths about rape that are revealed here? What is the significance of her internal conflict? (She was young, she was under the influence, she did not give her consent, they did not discuss it. This section uncovers the reality that rape is more than a sexual encounter; she is forced to relive the attack in her mind over and over again).
19. On p. 335, when others start to respond on the bathroom wall in "Chat Room," Melinda thinks, "I feel like I can fly." What is the significance of her reaction? What allows her to feel this way? What is the message here?
20. Reread the section "Prey (see pp. 347–363)." How does this section revisit the images and symbols used throughout the book? How does Melinda regain her voice and her power?

# Common Core Activities

## *Prose and Graphic Novel*

### *Symbolism Scavenger Hunt*

Visual images and symbols are central to giving Melinda a voice in both the prose version and the graphic novel version of *Speak*. As students go through the graphic novel, they can keep a running commentary on the use of images in the book and then attempt to interpret their meanings. Or, like Mr. Freeman does in the book, you can have students pick slips of paper with a different symbol randomly out of a hat. Students would then note and analyze the use of the symbol over the course of the story, using textual evidence to support their analysis. Another, more differentiated approach would be to assign symbols to students individually or according to homogenous ability grouping, by level of difficulty. Groups can then create a digital presentation that explains the significance of their symbol throughout the novel. Groups can share their presentations, and then students can discuss how these symbols relate to one another.
*Possible symbols include: trees, eyes, lips, monsters, seasons, rabbits and wolves, birds, mascots, seeds.

**CCSS.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.**
**CCSS.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.**

### *Socratic Seminar—The Meaning of Isolation*

The story begins with Melinda saying "I am outcast," which sets the tone of isolation in the story. Generally, people are accustomed to being in groups; therefore, Melinda's separation from her classmates, her parents, and her friends confuses her, incapacitates her, and ultimately makes her question her place in the world. Consider how the graphic novel illustrates this experience (see pp. 190, 191, 237, 247, 311, for example). Ask students to record and react to specific examples of isolation in the story as they read. Remind students that examples can be verbal or nonverbal (Melinda hunched over, etc.). Announce a date to hold a Socratic Seminar and instruct students that they should come ready with textual evidence to discuss aspects of Melinda's isolation. For example, her isolation allows her to confront her pain, but it also seems to make her pain more difficult to handle because she lacks the support of others. This theme could be extended by asking the following question: Is there textual evidence that suggests that others in the story feel isolated too (e.g., Mr. Freeman, Hairwoman,

Heather, Ivy, Melinda's mom)?

**CCSS.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.**
**CCSS.SL.9-10.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.**
**CCSS.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.**

## Compare and Contrast the Prose Novel and the Graphic Novel

Ask students to evaluate the positives and negatives of the story in the prose book form and in graphic novel form. Have students choose prose that speaks to them and explain why. Also have students choose a panel that speaks to them and explain why. Students can debate specific scenes and how they translate from one version to the other (possibilities include the description of the closet, the sculpture, and the flashback to the night of the assault, which are all vividly similar and different; give students opportunities to compare and analyze). Students can also be encouraged to discuss the significance of changes between the editions, such as modernization, multicultural representation, or anything else that they notice. For each difference, discuss their meaning and significance to the theme and overall feeling of the story. (Allow for a flexible forum as students are going to want to discuss the differences!)

**CCSS.RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.**
**CCSS.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.**

## Character Traits

Instead of physically interacting with others, Melinda becomes an observer. Therefore, the other characters are presented and developed through Melinda's eyes. If reading the prose version first: Have students follow one character through the novel, gathering textual evidence that describes 1) What the character looks like, 2) What the character says or does, and 3) How others in the novel react to the character. Once the students have their information, they should draw their interpretation of the character based on the descriptions in the prose. Beside their illustration, students can write a poem or paragraph revealing the story through their eyes rather than Melinda's. Ask students to consider these questions: What would you see? What would you think? Have students explain the perspective they chose to give their character. Lastly, students can compare their image to the illustrated version in the graphic novel. If they are different, explain why this might be. (For example, Ms. Keen's character has changed. Discuss why.)

**CCSS.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.3.A Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.**

## Researching Allusions

The novel is filled with references to several famous fictional and real-life figures that are meant to parallel Melinda's experiences and emotions. Give students a list of these references: Dracula, Maya Angelou, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Hester Prynne, Ariel, Gregor Mendel, Pablo Picasso, and the Suffragettes. In pairs, or individually, have students research one of these references by using credible print and online sources. Have students present to the class what they found out and what they think the allusions are meant to express about Melinda and about a message in the story.

**CCSS.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.**
**CCSS.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.**

## What Happens Next?

*Speak* ends with Melinda stating, "I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow" (p. 369 in the graphic novel). Ask students to decide what happens next for Melinda. Using details from the story, create another chapter either immediately following the conclusion of the story, or years later. Students can write in prose and include illustrations, or they can create their own graphic novel version. Ask students to name their sequel and to decide what happens now that Melinda has a voice. Stories can be shared digitally with the class.

**CCSS.W.9-10.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.3.E Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.**

## A Call to Action

Melinda finds herself unable to speak because she fears how others might view her following the rape. Sadly, the victims of sexual assault often feel powerless a second time in trying to deal with the aftermath of their attack. With the #MeToo movement, many are calling for more attention to the issue, more support for the victims, and more accountability for the assailants. Ask students to research the issue of sexual assault and the movement by reading credible print and digital sources. Students should then draft a speech proposing initiatives in schools, the community, or in the nation that are intended to educate people on sexual assault, or they can write a speech asking the school board, the town council, or the government to implement preventative measures, provide resources for victims, pass legislation, etc. Using the visual medium, students can also create awareness posters, videos, etc.

**CCSS.W.9-10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.**
**CCSS.W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.**
**CCSS.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task**

Tim Smyth is a high school Social Studies educator who integrates comics and graphic novels as powerful literary tools in the classroom. He travels the country providing professional development to educators at comic cons, universities, education conferences, and teacher workshops. Joan Smyth is a middle school English Language Arts teacher of 20 years, who is also certified in Social Studies and Library Sciences. She routinely integrates cross-curricular activities and utilizes a differentiated approach to teach numerous texts such as *Speak* in her eighth-grade classes.