



KS3 & 4 TEACHER RESOURCES FOR

Speak



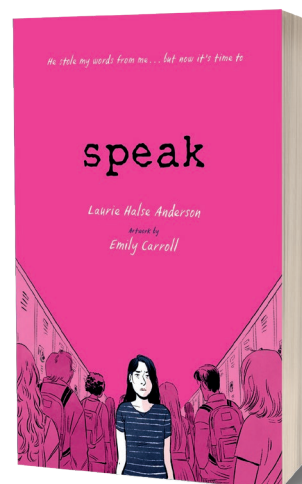
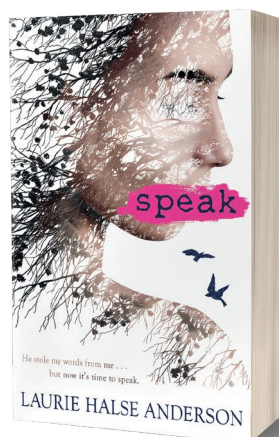
BY LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

ABOUT SPEAK

Speak is the story of Melinda – a girl in high school who is unable to speak after she is sexually assaulted. As an outcast at Merryweather High, the narrative follows her as she tries to navigate the new school year following the incident. Through her work on an art project, Melinda is finally able to face what really happened. But before she can make peace with the ghosts of her past, she has to confront the reality of the present – and stop someone who still wishes to do her harm.

Written in sardonic and witty prose, the book is a great text for KS3 and 4 students, especially for tackling topics around consent, creative writing and English comprehension. The recently published graphic novel edition is also an excellent way of encouraging visual learners to access the themes and topics presented in the text.

The following resources feature activities and discussion questions for both the text and the graphic novel.





PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Before reading the novel, ask the students to create a list of the top ten lies people have told them about school. Allow students to share their ideas with the class and 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 classmate and then invite students to share ideas with the whole 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 analyse the title, *Speak*, as well as analyse the cover of the book and then make predictions about the story. Allow students to share their answers and predictions.

SYMBOLISM SCAVENGER HUNT

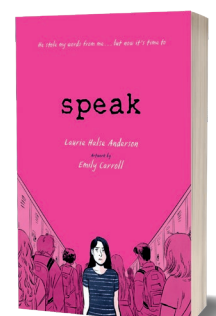
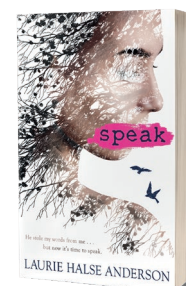
Visual images and symbols are central to giving Melinda a voice in both the prose version and the graphic novel version of *Speak*. As students go through the graphic novel, ask them to make notes on the use of images in the book and then attempt to interpret their meanings. Or, like Mr Freeman does in the book, you could have students pick different symbols randomly out of a hat. Students can then analyse the use of the symbol over the course of the story, using textual evidence to support their analysis. Another approach could be to assign symbols to students individually or in small groups. Groups can then create a presentation that explains the significance of their symbol throughout the novel. Groups can share their presentations, and then the students can discuss how these symbols relate to one another. Possible symbols: trees, eyes, lips, monsters, seasons, rabbits, wolves, birds, mascots, seeds.



DISCUSSION: THE MEANING OF ISOLATION

The story begins with Melinda saying, 'I am Outcast,' which sets the tone of isolation in the story. Melinda's separation from her classmates, her parents, and her friends confuses her, weakens her, and ultimately makes her question her place in the world. Consider how the graphic novel illustrates this experience (see pages 190, 191, 237, 247, 311, for example). 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.). Set aside a lesson where students are instructed to come ready with textual evidence to discuss aspects

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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.). Set aside a lesson where students are instructed to 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 mum)?

COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE PROSE NOVEL AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Ask students to evaluate the positives and negatives of the story in prose form and in graphic novel form. Have students choose a section of prose that speaks to them and explain why. Also have students choose a panel in the graphic novel 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). Students can also be encouraged to discuss the significance of changes between the editions, such as modernisation, 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.

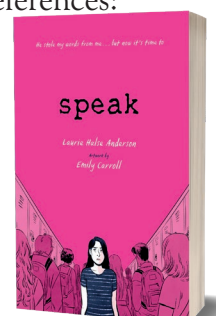
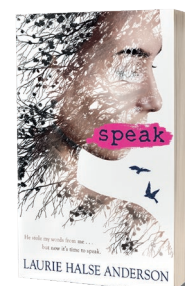


CHARACTER TRAITS

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 an interpretation of their character based on the descriptions in the prose. Beside their illustration, students can write a poem or paragraph revealing the story through their chosen characters' 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.)

RESEARCHING ANDERSON'S REFERENCES

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 and present their findings to the class. Ask them to think about what these references are meant to express about Melinda and about the message of the story.

'I SAID NO.'

A topic central to *Speak* is consent and the repercussions of rape. Ask your students what they believe 'consent' means and write their answers on the board. Reiterate the importance of the classroom being a safe space for them to discuss this topic. Then, in groups, ask them to write down verbal and non-verbal signs of a non-consensual interaction, for instance, 'turning away' or 'saying no'. Afterwards, discuss as a class how this is explored in the novel and the impact on Melinda. How is the rape spoken about throughout the text? How do others in the novel react to what happened to Melinda? Ask your students to discuss in groups how they would check if they were unsure someone was giving their consent. Throughout the exercise, encourage them to speak to you if they have any questions or are unsure of anything. For more information on consent lesson plans, visit the PSHE association or gov.uk.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Speak ends with Melinda stating, 'I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow' (p.198 prose form; p.369 graphic novel form). Ask students to decide what happens next for Melinda. Using details from the story, create another chapter set 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 with the class.



A CALL TO ACTION

Melinda finds herself unable to speak because she fears how others might view her following the rape. Sadly, victims of sexual assault often feel powerless after the event as they try to deal with the aftermath of their attack. With the #MeToo movement, many are calling for more attention to the issue, more support for victims, and more accountability for the assailants. Ask students to research the issue of sexual assault and the #MeToo movement. Students should then draft a speech proposing initiatives in schools and the community that are intended to educate people on sexual assault, or they can write a speech asking the school, the council, or the government to implement preventative measures, provide resources for victims and pass legislation. Students can also do this visually by creating awareness posters, videos, etc.

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