

# Speak

by Laurie Halse Anderson

When she calls the cops and breaks up an end-of-summer party, Melinda Sordino becomes an outcast, but her reasons remain secret to everyone—even herself.

## THEMES

rape, mental health, problem-solving, family, friends, snobbery, guilt, courage, confession, redemption

## I. PRE-TEACHING

### A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

demented, canopy, errant, wan, paparazzi, mayhem, gelatinous, integral, Eurocentric, patriarchs, harried, demure, abysmal, predators, conundrum, literature, symbolism, conjugate, bigoted, misdemeanor, felony, obnoxious, infestation, germinate, asphyxiated, vulnerable, wistful, banshees, obsess, deranged, gargoyle, segment, tenacious, rejection, genetics, espresso, humid, blight, suffragettes, self-incrimination, toxic, amnesia, banished, detonate, arborist, devious, dormancy, loathsome, symmetrical, shards

### B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. Have you ever called the police? What was the occasion? Did anyone get in trouble because of your call? How did this make you feel?
2. Have you ever lost a friend because of a misunderstanding? How did you handle it?
3. Have you ever been a victim of sexual harassment, even rape? Why is it important to speak about it?
4. Do kids in your school seem to be in different cliques or groups? Why do teens tend to group themselves this way? What does it feel like not to be in one of these cliques?
5. Do you have a favorite teacher who is more than a teacher? How does this teacher help you?

## II. PRESENTATION

### A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with “First Marking Period”: How does Melinda’s best friend Rachel treat her? What happens to Melinda in the lunch room? What assignment does Mr. Freeman give them? Where does Melinda go to hide? Why does Heather hate high school? What memory does Halloween bring back? How does Melinda feel about the “Marthas.” What happens when she helps Heather decorate the teacher’s lounge? What does she call her nightmare?
2. Continue with “Second Marking Period”: Why does the ecology club object to the name “Tigers” for the school

mascot? How does Melinda fix up her closet? What is Mr. Neck upset about? How does David Petrakis react? Why does Melinda like biology class? Why isn’t she able to tell her parents the truth about what happened to her? What mistake has Heather made with the Marthas? Who is “IT”? What does Mr. Freeman do to his painting?

3. Continue with “Third Marking Period”: What does the principal decide about the school mascot? Why does Melinda wish she were in fifth grade again? Why does Heather decide they should stop being friends? What happens at the meeting at school with Melinda’s parents, the counselor, and the principal? What does Melinda realize as she looks at the Picasso book? What do the “two Melindas” in her head argue about? What had happened at the party? Why had she called the police?
4. Complete the tape with “Fourth Marking Period”: What does Melinda decide to do about Rachel and Andy? What does Mr. Freeman tell her about her trees? What does Ivy say about Andy? What does Melinda write on the bathroom wall? Why has Heather come to see her? What does Melinda tell her? How does Melinda manage to tell Rachel what happened at the party? How does Rachel respond? What does Ivy show her? What happens at the prom? What does Andy accuse Melinda of? What happens when he attacks her? Who does she finally open up to?

### B. For Discussion:

1. When Melinda describes, “The First Ten Lies They Tell You in High School and “Ten More Lies They Tell You in High School,” why does she feel they are lies?
2. Why is Mr. Freeman’s able to reach Melinda when no one else can?
3. Trees as a symbol play a strong role in the story. Why does she have trouble drawing trees? How do trees represent her beginning to accept what happened? How do seeds serve as a symbol?
4. Why is it important to Heather to join the Marthas? In what way is this charitable group uncharitable? What mistakes does Heather make trying to fit in?
5. Why does Melinda call Andy “IT”? Why does the attempted rape in the janitor’s closet finally give her back her voice?

### III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

#### INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

##### A. Language Arts:

1. Have students write about losing a good friend. Why did it happen? How did they feel about it? Did they make up with the friend? Why or why not?
2. Have students write about a secret place of their own. How did they find it? When do they go there? What does it do for them?
3. Have students share poems by Maya Angelou.
4. Heather tells Melinda the Marthas don't understand irony because they like rules too much. Have students look up the meaning of *irony* and use it to explain Heather's comment.

##### B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that might be appropriate to some of the scenes. Rap or Hiphop would fit the high school scenes. Students might make up a rap song about the story.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could cover the board with white, draw trees in the different seasons, collect leaves to put on the board, add a cover of *The Scarlet Letter*, a red "S" for "silent," packets of seeds, a poster showing Maya Angelou, valentines, paintings by Picasso, pictures of tigers, hornets, and wombats, and other items mentioned in the story.
3. Have students sketch trees and make a mural for the classroom, hallway, or library.
4. Have students learn about one of the art masters Mr. Freeman mentions—Kahlo, Monet, O'Keeffe, Pollock, Picasso, and Dali.

##### C. Social Studies:

1. Have students learn more about Martha Stewart. What is she known for? Why is she sometimes made fun of? How has she recovered her reputation after her encounter with the law?

2. Have students learn more about rape cases. What is date rape? Why is this considered rape? Why do the rapists feel it isn't rape? Why do so few victims come forward?
3. Have students discuss their school mascot. How was it chosen? What is it meant to represent? Why do some groups find school mascots like *Indians* offensive?
4. Mr. Neck is furious because his son can't get a job and blames immigrants for the problem. Have students learn more about the current debate regarding immigrants, especially Mexicans. Why is this a problem? What is being done to solve it?
5. Melinda does her report on the suffragettes. Have students learn more about the struggles to give women the vote.

##### D. Science and Math:

1. Mr. Stetman spends most of the year trying to convince the class that algebra has its uses in the real world. Have students discuss this. What practical applications can they find for algebra? Why study it?
2. When Melinda smells the apple in biology class, a pleasurable memory comes back to her. Have students learn about the connection between memories and smells in the brain. What part of the brain houses memory? Why do smells so often evoke them?
3. When Melinda cuts her thumb and Mr. Freeman puts bleach on the wound, she describes it as "some kind of AIDS regulation." Have students learn more about AIDS.

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