

# Individual Learning Packet

## Teaching Unit

# Speak

by Laurie Halse Anderson

written by Mary L. Grimes

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ISBN 978-1-60389-936-9  
Reorder No. 302173

### Note To Teacher

*Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, is a coming-of-age novel about a teenage girl who feels forced to live with the secret of being a rape victim.

Melinda Sordino just started high school, but from the first few pages readers will understand that she has lost some close friends over the summer. Using artful foreshadowing and subtle hints, it becomes obvious that Melinda has a deep secret that is weighing on her conscience. Melinda struggles with many difficult issues throughout the course of the book: the change/loss of identity, fear of being chastised by her peers for speaking out about a serious issue, a longing for close friends, marital issues between her parents, the lack of adult support, etc. Students will enjoy Anderson's use of imagery, the realistic portrayal of high school, how Melinda's relationships with different characters develop, and her humorous sarcasm and wit. This novel does deal with mature subject matter, especially that of rape and underage drinking; these subjects are handled delicately. Younger or more immature students may have difficulty with such subject matter.

All references come from the Penguin Group, Platinum Edition of *Speak*, 1999.

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify Melinda's personal growth over the course of the novel.
2. identify and discuss Anderson's use of sensory images and how they relate to Melinda's emotions.
3. understand the use of tone in specific scenes.
4. discuss how this is a coming-of-age novel for Melinda.
5. identify examples of conflict.
6. discuss how similes and metaphors enhance the overall success of a scene.
7. find examples of comic relief and how they add or detract from the scene.
8. identify the subplot(s) and how it affects Melinda throughout the novel.
9. identify the antagonist(s) throughout the novel.
10. define the vocabulary terms listed throughout the unit.
11. understand the author's style.
12. identify and define the various literary terms used in *Speak*

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss how Melinda changes throughout the course of the novel. What experiences were responsible for this change? Was her change positive?
2. Discuss Heather's character. How does she fit into the story? How is Heather a beneficial person for Melinda? How is Heather the opposite of Melinda's character?
3. Throughout *Speak*, Melinda implies or gives clues about the incident that occurred the summer before her freshman year of high school. Make a list of clues Melinda gives.
4. Mr. Freeman's name is symbolic because it represents his state of mind. His inner freedom and liberal way of thinking allows him to stay open to any possibility, and it allows him to see the truth when others are too consumed with other things. Mr. Freeman is a positive influence for Melinda in this way. How is he a negative influence?
5. Melinda says that she may decide to be an artist "if [she] grow[s] up." (Pg. 78) What does she mean by this statement? Is she serious?
6. Is Heather a stereotypical teenager? Explain your answer.
7. Discuss the Marthas. Are they typical of a clique? Justify your answer in a well-constructed essay.
8. Discuss why Melinda describes Andy Evans' name as "short stabby"? (Pg. 90)
9. Discuss the "Code Breaking" section. Do you agree with Melinda that breaking Hawthorne's "code" would be fun, or do you side with Rachel? Why?
10. Consider the following: "Up until this very instant, I had never seriously thought of Heather as my one true friend in the world. But now I am desperate to be her pale, her buddy, to giggle with her, to gossip with her. I want to paint her toenails." (Pg. 105) Why do you think Melinda is suddenly desperate for Heather's friendship?
11. Identify at least five examples of body language throughout the course of the novel. What message does each instance send?
12. Explain the following quote: "I press it into the cut. The white cells of paper dissolve as the red floods them. It doesn't hurt. Nothing hurts except the small smiles and blushes that flash across the room like tiny sparrows." (Pg. 109)
13. Discuss how Melinda's emotions affect her physically.

19. The narrator describes her ritual of eating on the white furniture without getting caught. Essentially, this description is a metaphor that is also a major theme in this novel. What theme is being described?

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20. What does the narrator mean by “My room belongs to an alien”? Describe what the narrator is going through. How do her emotions correspond with the theme of identity?

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21. The narrator thinks of changing her room, and although she does not even “know what [she] want[s] it to look like, anyway,” there is also another factor that makes her stifle her need to change her room. What is it? What does this reveal about the narrator?

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22. The narrator comments on Nicole’s strength because Nicole can get changed in front of the entire gym class, something that is difficult for the narrator. How is the narrator also using “strength” in a figurative sense as well?

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23. Rachel’s changing her name corresponds with three themes of this novel: coming of age, finding one’s identity, and the search for individuality. Explain how it fits into all three.

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### Third Marking Period

#### VOCABULARY

**asphyxiated** – suffocated

**conundrum** – a difficult situation

**exile** – to be cast out (usually from a community, state, or country)

**jicama** – a vegetable similar to a turnip

**penetrate** – to pierce

**tenure** – holding a position on a permanent basis

**vespiary** – a colony or nests of wasps or hornets

1. What literary allusion does Melinda make when she describes her encounter with Andy Evans in the parking lot?

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2. What does Melinda do when she skips school? How is skipping school like going to school for Melinda?

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3. How does Melinda personify their class' analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*?

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4. What does Melinda associate with speaking up?

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5. Why does Melinda think Mr. Freeman is the sanest person she knows?

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## Fourth Marking Period

### VOCABULARY

**arborists** – plant specialists  
**bichon frise** – a breed of dog  
**indentured** – to force into servitude  
**indoctrination** – an instruction  
**leper** – a person infected with leprosy (a contagious bacterial disease that results in paralysis, deformation, and ulcers on the skin)  
**mononucleosis** – an infectious illness  
**natter** – to chatter  
**suffragettes** – a supporter of women’s rights  
**tenacious** – strong, determined

1. Discuss the title, “Exterminators,” in the first section of the fourth marking period. Why is this title relevant to the actions that take place in this section? Who or what do you think the title refers to?

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2. According to Melinda, what are some of the signs of spring?

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3. What does spring symbolize? What could this mean for Melinda?

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4. What literary allusion does Melinda mention in “Spring Break”?

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