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Sample

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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Speak

by Laurie Halse Anderson

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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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.

Speak

First Marking Period

VOCABULARY

“Pas mal” – [French] “Not badly”

abstinence – not engaging in sexual intercourse

blathers – nonsensical talk

dryad – a mythological spirit once thought to inhabit oak trees; also known as *nymphs* (tree nymphs), these spirits were believed to live as long as the tree in which they lived.

errant – wandering, roaming

gelatinous – having the consistency of gelatin

inconspicuous – not noticeable

indoctrination – an informative meeting

integral – essential, imperative

interrogation – a serious set of questions

PDA – “Public Displays of Affection”

reconstituted – reconstructed, reformed

suburbia – the suburbs; residential areas outside city limits

wan – pale; exhausted

1. The first sentence sets the tone for the entire book:

“It is my first morning of high school. I have seven new notebooks, a skirt I hate, and a stomachache.”

What do you think the narrator conveys using this tone? Do you think the narrator will maintain this tone throughout the first section?

2. What is significant about the following quote: “...I figure it’s the best chance I have to make eye contact with one of my friends, if any of them have decided to talk to me yet”?

14. Reword the following quote and explain its symbolism and significance to the title of the book.

“Ask me to help you find the wind.”

15. The narrator chooses a tree as her art project. What do you suppose the tree symbolizes?

16. What literary device best describes the section entitled “Español.”

17. The narrator sarcastically mentions that her family communicates with notes on the counter. What does this say about her family life?

18. The narrator describes her mother and the problems her mother encounters at work. Since this introduction comes directly after the narrator’s comment on communication, what does this say about their mother-daughter relationship?

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?

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

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

4. What does Melinda associate with speaking up?

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