



Speak

by Laurie Halse Anderson

Teacher's Guide

Written By Lori Lindemann

LIVING
LITERATURE
SERIES

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Synopsis

First Marking Period

On the first day of school a freshman, Melinda Sordino, entered high school with no friends and no one to sit with during the assembly in the auditorium. Her old friends were very angry because she had called the cops at Kyle Rodger's party at the end of the summer. She hung out some with a new girl named Heather, but Heather wanted to join clubs and get involved in school activities. Melinda didn't communicate with her parents except when it was absolutely necessary and then only by leaving notes. The first day of school she got in trouble with the social studies teacher, Mr. Neck, in the cafeteria. He pegged her as a troublemaker from the first time he saw her. She thought of her English teacher as Hairwoman because her hair was brown on top and fried orange on the bottom. Melinda was late to classes, skipped classes, and avoided people whenever possible. She had scabs on her lip from biting it. She came upon an abandoned janitors' closet and made it her hideout at school. She stole a pad of late passes from Hairwoman's desk in case she was caught in the hall. One day she was heading to her hideout closet, when Heather found her and insisted she go with her to a pep rally. Someone recognized her name and connected her to the call that brought the cops to Kyle's party. The other students were very ugly to her. At the end of the pep rally she was accidentally knocked down three rows of bleachers. When interim grade reports went out, her parents yelled at her over dinner, and she was pretty unresponsive. Her other

teachers were Mr. Freeman – art; Ms. Keen – biology; Mr. Stetman – algebra. Melinda didn't understand algebra at all. Heather had joined the group of "Marthas" and she had to decorate the teacher's lounge, and Melinda helped her. Afterward, walking down the hall, Melinda saw IT. IT went to Merryville H.S. too. IT was walking with a cheerleader; IT smiled and winked at Melinda. At the end of the marking period she got a bad report card.

Second Marking Period

Melinda's parents made her stay after school for extra help. She hung out in her refurbished closet. She was having difficulty speaking; her throat was always sore, her lips raw. She wanted to confess everything, hand over the guilt, the mistake, and the anger to someone else. But she used her closet as a quiet place that helped her hold all those thoughts inside her head where no one could hear them. Her biology partner was David Petrakis; he was also in her social studies class. Thanksgiving dinner was a fiasco; she took the turkey bones to school and made an art project that Mr.

Freeman liked. It was kind of

creepy; the theme was pain. David Petrakis had a confrontation with Mr. Neck who opened a discussion then closed it when it wasn't going his way. David's parents supported him and hired a lawyer; then David taped the classes to make sure it didn't happen again. One of the gifts Melinda got for Christmas was a drawing pad with charcoal pencils. She was touched that her parents had noticed her drawing. She had a strong desire to talk to them about "that night," but she didn't know how. In gym class the coaches found out Melinda could swish a free throw, so they offered her an A if she could teach Basketball Pole, aka Brendan Keller, to



swish free throws. Melinda only communicated with silence, one word answers, or short phrases. In biology she was dissecting a frog with David when she had a flashback to “that night” and passed out. She wished she could have the memory cut out of her brain. Heather got a modeling job and Melinda went with her. Melinda thought of buying gold eye shadow, but she chose Black Death nail polish instead and planned to buy something tubercular gray to match. She was depressed, and she had a sore throat all the time. Heather was supposed to make posters for the Marthas’ food drive. Melinda made and hung the posters for her. IT crept up behind her and whispered, “freshmeat.” Her parents yelled at her again about grades. She had been having trouble sleeping, so she slept in her bedroom closet. She scratched her wrist with a paperclip. Her mom told her suicide was for cowards and gave Melinda a book to read since Melinda wasn’t talking to anyone. Melinda was eating lunch at the Marthas’ table and IT was finally identified as Andy Evans. Heather asked if he was really as bad as she’d heard. The Marthas said it was rumor—that he was gorgeous and rich and just the itsiest bit dangerous. He walked over to the table to talk to Emily, but twirled Melinda’s ponytail. She ran to the bathroom and threw up.

Third Marking Period

Melinda missed the bus and had to walk to school. She was going to stop by a donut shop, but IT walked out. When he spotted her, she ran home. She wondered, “Why didn’t I run like this when I was a one-piece talking girl?” She decided not to go to school that day. They were reading *The Scarlet Letter* in English. Melinda thought she should wear and S for silent, for stupid, for scared, for silly, for shame. Heather told Melinda she didn’t want to be friends any more. Valentines Day was dismal—one card from Heather that said thanks for understanding. Melinda met with the principal, the guidance counselor, and her parents; they were trying to understand her behavior and grades. Melinda was mute during the entire meeting. She skipped school again and got sent to Merryweather In-School Suspension (MISS). That was fine until Andy Evans walked in and sat down next to her. She went to all classes for five days, so her parents rewarded her with clothes. Mr. Freeman gave her a ride to her mom’s store and told her, “You’re a good kid. I think you have a lot to say. I’d like to

hear it.” She didn’t reply. Since she was having trouble sleeping at home, she went to her closet after school and slept. She was awakened by yelling; there was a basketball game going on. She walked to the gym and watched the last minute of it. Afterward David invited her to a party at his house; she refused. She went home and crawled up on the roof and thought back to the party in August. She and Rachel had gone to the party together. Melinda drank three beers and walked outside the circle of light because she thought she might throw up. A gorgeous senior stepped behind her and started flirting with her. He asked her to dance with him. She was dizzy and he started kissing her. For a moment she thought she might start high school with an older boyfriend who would look out for her. He asked, “Do you want to?” What did he say? I didn’t answer. I didn’t know. I didn’t speak. When they were on the ground, she mumbled that she needed to leave. He covered her mouth with his lips then with his hand. Her mind screamed, “NO I DON’T WANT TO!” But she couldn’t get the words out. He smelled like beer, was mean and hurt her. Afterward, he got up, zipped his jeans, and smiled. Then she stood in the middle of a drunken crowd and called 911 because she needed help. She never said a word, but the cops got the location from the call. Someone jerked the phone away and slapped her. She crawled out of the room and walked home to an empty house without a word.

Fourth Marking Period

Melinda went to the mall and talked some to Ivy. She kept going to classes and working on her tree project for art. Rachel, her best friend from junior high, became interested in Andy Beast (Evans) and they were getting more and more cozy. Melinda worried about Rachel and wrote her an anonymous note warning her about Andy. She continued working on her tree project. Mr. Neck made an announcement: anyone who was flunking social studies could write an extra-credit report on a cultural influences at the turn of the century. Melinda wrote a great report on the suffragettes. Then he changed the assignment and told her she had to present it orally to receive credit. David helped her work out a plan. Mr. Neck had her put in MISS again. David sent her a note; he was upset that her parents hadn’t supported her. She thought David should become a judge. The next time she saw him he said that he might call her. Melinda was

working alone in the art room after school when somebody flicked the lights off. IT was there—Andy Beast. Then he turned the lights on and asked her if she knew where Rachel was. Rachel came in, and Ivy came in just a minute later. Ivy sat down beside Melinda at the table. Rachel left with Andy. Ivy said he was trouble with a capital T. Melinda walked home and into her closet; she stuffed her mouth full of fabric and screamed and screamed. She stayed home from school and wondered, “Was I raped?” Saturday she raked the dead leaves off the shrubs. In gym class, she played tennis against Nicole. Nicole won, but Melinda played well. The yearbooks came out. There was one bad picture of Melinda in it. She was walking away from the camera—no need to buy a yearbook. In art Melinda got ink on her shirt and went to the bathroom to clean it. Ivy came to help. Melinda wrote on the bathroom wall, “Guys to stay away from – Andy Evans.” Andy asked Rachel to the prom, and Melinda was worried about her. Heather came crawling back and asked Melinda to help her decorate for the prom. Melinda said no; it felt good to say no. Melinda told Rachel that Andy had raped her. Rachel called her a liar and left. Ivy took Melinda into the bathroom by the art room and showed her some of the comments written about Andy Evans by other girls on the bathroom wall under where she had written “Guys to stay away from – Andy Evans.” Their comments gave Melinda some satisfaction. An arborist came and trimmed the dead part of the tree in Melinda’s front yard so the tree could grow and be strong again. Melinda rode her bike and ended up at the rape scene. She tried to figure out how to grow and be strong again. She went home and ate lunch with her parents then slept on the couch until after midnight. She woke up feeling antsy. She rode her bike again and felt free. On the Monday after the prom, Heather was not at school; there were a lot of complaints about the lame decorations. Rachel had broken up with Andy during the prom. He’d been all over her, and she swore at him and danced the night away with another guy. Melinda was feeling so much better she thought she didn’t need her little closet hideaway at school any more. She went to clean it out, and Andy found her there, trapped her, and locked her in with him. He hit her and tried to rape her again, but she screamed and fought back. She broke the mirror and held a piece of broken glass to his throat. Nicole and the lacrosse team heard the

commotion and were outside the closet—angry with sticks held high. The lacrosse players spread the story, and suddenly Melinda was popular. Her mom took her to get her hand stitched. Rachel left a message on the answering machine that she wanted to talk to Melinda. On the last day of school, she was still working on the tree project. She realized IT happened when she was drunk and too young to really realize what was happening. He hurt her; it wasn’t her fault and she could still grow. She turned in her project and Mr. Freeman gave her an A+. She cried and he said, “You’ve been through a lot, haven’t you?” The frozen stillness inside her melted and the words floated up. She said, “Let me tell you about it.”

Author Sketch



With her first work of fiction for young adults, *Speak*, Laurie Halse Anderson became a finalist for the prestigious National Book Award. That novel won an array of honors for Anderson, the author of three earlier picture books, for its searing portrayal of a fourteen-year-old girl who becomes mute after a sexual assault.

Anderson was born October 23, 1961, in Potsdam, New York. Her father was a Methodist minister who wrote poetry on the side. She earned an A.A. in 1981 from Onondaga County Community College and a B.S. in Language and Linguistics in 1984 from Georgetown University. She married Gregory H. Anderson on June 19, 1983, and spent the rest of the decade as a wife and mother of their two daughters—Stephanie and Meredith. While raising her family, she worked as a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and as a freelance magazine writer and editor. Her hobbies include reading, running, skiing, hiking, basketball, history, travel, and genealogy.

Anderson decided to become a writer in second grade. She said, “My teacher, Mrs. Sheedy-Shea, taught us how to write haiku. The giant light bulb clicked on over my head....I hope every second grader learns how to write haiku.” After she started writing poetry, she spent hours and hours reading every book in the school library. She added, “The books took me everywhere—ripping through time barriers, across cultures, experiencing all the magic an elementary school library can hold.”

Anderson can closely relate to Melinda, the main character of *Speak*. She said, "I started ninth grade as a 'dirt bag.' We moved to a new school district, and the dirt bags/wastecases were the people willing to forgive my unfashionable clothes and relative poverty. But she joined the swim team and ran track, and her high school experience eventually became more enjoyable. The inspiration for *Speak* came from a bad dream that woke Anderson one night in the summer of 1996. At that time she had been reading *Reviving Ophelia*, a best-selling study about preteen girls and the difficulties they face. This combined with her own high school experiences became the basis for the book.

Anderson rises each day at 4:30 a.m. to write, and she writes until noon. She researches in the afternoons. She is a popular author on the school-and-library lecture circuit, and students often ask her if she will write another book featuring Melinda. She answers, "Writing [*Speak*] was a bizarre experience. I feel like Melinda dictated it to me. I would love to write another book with her so I could have her hanging out in my head again. But it's up to her. If I try to resurrect her just to hammer out a sequel, it will be awful. You have to respect your characters as much as you do your friends."

Critic's Corner

Laurie Halse Anderson's first novel for young adults, *Speak*, received an array of prestigious awards and was met with critical acclaim.

The review in *Booklist* said, "Melinda's voice is distinct, unusual, and very real as she recounts her past and present experiences in bitterly ironic, occasionally even amusing, vignettes. In her YA fiction debut, Anderson perfectly captures the harsh conformity of high-school cliques and one teen's struggle to find acceptance from her peers. Melinda's sarcastic wit, honesty, and courage make her a memorable character whose ultimate triumph will inspire and empower readers.

Publishers Weekly said, "In a stunning first novel, Anderson uses keen observations and vivid imagery to pull readers into the head of an isolated teenager." The book is narrated by Melinda, who is having a miserable freshman year, "yet

Anderson infuses the narrative with a wit that sustains the heroine through her pain and holds readers' empathy....through the first-person narration, the author makes Melinda's pain palpable." The reviewer continued, "Though the symbolism is sometimes heavy-handed, it is effective. The ending, in which her attacker comes after her once more, is the only part of the plot that feels forced. But the book's overall gritty realism and Melinda's hard-won metamorphosis will leave readers touched and inspired."

According to *Horn Book*, "Melinda's distinctive narrative employs imagery that is as unexpected as it is acute: 'April is humid....A warm, moldy washcloth of a month.'" "Melinda's nightmare discloses itself in bits throughout the story....Melinda aches to tell her story, and well after readers have deduced the sexual assault, we feel her choking on her untold secret....*Speak* will hold readers from first word to last."

Kirkus Reviews said, "A frightening and sobering look at the cruelty and viciousness that pervade much of contemporary high school life, as real as today's headlines....The plot is gripping and the characters are powerfully drawn, but it is its raw and unvarnished look at the dynamics of the high school experience that makes this a novel that will be hard for readers to forget."

Some of the awards garnered by *Speak* are: a 2000 Printz Honor Book, a 1999 National Book Award Finalist, An Edgar Allan Poe Award Finalist, a 1999 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize Finalist, Winner of the SCBWI Golden Kite Award, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Quick Pick, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, a *Booklist* Top Ten First Novel of 1999, A BCCB Blue Ribbon Book, a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and a *Horn Book* Fanfare Title.

Other Works by the Author

Fever 1793 (2000)
Saudi Arabia (part of "A Ticket To" series) (2001)
"Wild at Heart" series
Fight for Life: Maggie (2000)
Homeless: Sunita (2000)
Manatee Blues (2000)
The Trickster (2000)
Fear of Falling (2001)

Trapped (2001)
Say Goodbye (2001)
Storm Rescue (2001)
Teacher's Pet (2001)
Catalyst (2002)
Time to Fly (2002)
Prom (2005)

Picture Books

Ndito Runs (1996)
Turkey Pox (1996)
No Time for Mother's Day (1999)
Big Cheese of Third Street (2002)
Thank You, Sarah: The Woman Who Saved Thanksgiving (2002)

Bibliography

"About Laurie Halse Anderson."
http://www.writerlady.com/about_me.html
 Sime, Richard and Laura Mongello, eds. *Elements of Literature*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2000. pp. 707-718.

General Objectives

1. To define rape
2. To identify signs of depression
3. To become aware of students who don't fit into any groups
4. To evaluate teacher-student relationships
5. To discuss the importance of having friends at school
6. To compare and contrast characters

Specific Objectives

1. To discuss the evidence of Melinda's depression and withdrawal
2. To find evidence of Melinda's emotional state in her art and her behavior
3. To understand the full extent of Melinda's longing to tell what happened
4. To evaluate the shame Melinda felt
5. To compare and contrast Melinda and Heather
6. To analyze Andy Evan's behavior
7. To discuss the symbolism and stages of the trees Melinda drew and carved
8. To identify the unseen, emotional effects of rape

Literary Terms and Applications

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present these terms:

Figure of Speech: a word or phrase that describes one thing in terms of another and is not meant to be understood as literally true. Figures of speech always involve some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things. The most common figures of speech are the simile, the metaphor, and personification. Simile – (p. 74) "All the anger whistles out of me like I'm a popped balloon." (p. 122) "Art without emotion is like chocolate cake without sugar." Metaphor – (p. 5) "I stand in the center aisle of the auditorium, a wounded zebra in a *National Geographic* special, looking for someone, anyone, to sit next to." Personification – (p. 91) "Turtlenecks creep out of bottom drawers." Sometimes an author will combine several figures of speech. (p. 136) "The moon is asleep and I'm sitting on my porch like a frozen gargoyle, wondering if the sun is going to blow off the world today and sleep in."

Dialogue: conversation between two or more characters. In the written form of a play, dialogue appears without quotation marks. In prose or poetry, however, dialogue is usually enclosed in quotation marks. Laurie Halse Anderson chose to write the dialogue in *Speak* in an unusual way. It's a combination of how dialogue is usually written in a play and in prose. The way it's written calls attention to the fact that Melinda doesn't always participate in dialogue even when others try to engage her in a conversation. When she does participate her contribution is minimal. It emphasizes how little Melinda actually does speak. An example is on page 61.
 Dad: "It's supposed to be soup."
 Me:
 Dad: "It tasted a bit watery, so I kept adding thickener. I put in some corn and peas."
 Me:
 Dad: [pulling wallet from his back pocket] "Call for pizza. I'll get rid of this."

Point of View: the vantage point from which a story is told. The most common points of view are omniscient, third-person limited, and first person. *Speak* is told in first-person. In the first-person point of view, one of the characters, using the personal pronoun I, tells the story. *Speak* gives total insight into Melinda's thoughts and feelings.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Norma Johnston, *The Dragon's Eye*
David Klass, *You Don't Know Me*
E. L. Koningsburg, *Silent to the Bone*
John MacLean, *Mac*
Susan Beth Pfeffer, *Family of Strangers*
Carol Plum-Ucci, *The Body of Christopher Creed*
Dyan Sheldon, *Tall, Thin, and Blonde*
Nicholas Wilde, *Down Came a Blackbird*
Stephen Manes, *The Obnoxious Jerks*
Gloria Miklowitz, *Past Forgiving*
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Alice Alone*
Rob Thomas, *Rats Saw God*
Ruth White, *Weeping Willow*

Story Collections

On the Fringe (Dial, c2001)

Non-Fiction

Michael Maloney, *Straight Talk about Anxiety and Depression*
Elaine Landau, *Teenagers Talk about School—and Open Their Hearts about Their Closest Concerns*
Nancy Venable Raine, *After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back*
Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape*
Patricia Wever Francisco, *Telling: A Memoir of Rape and Recovery*

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central themes and situations in *Speak* should include these aspects.

Themes

- dynamics between high school students
- cliques
- ostracism
- acceptance
- rape
- withdrawal
- depression
- self-depreciation
- friendship
- healing
- teacher-student relationships
- peer pressure

Motifs

- how high school students interact with one another
- how cliques exclude others
- the shame of being ostracized by friends and classmates
- that acceptance is critical to self-esteem
- the unseen effects of rape
- the two way relationship between withdrawal and depression
- the value of true friends
- the obligations teachers have toward students
- the power of peer pressure

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. We fall into clans: Jocks, Country Clubbers, Idiot Savants, Cheerleaders, Human Waste, Eurotrash, Future Fascists of America, Big Hair Chix, the Marthas, Suffering Artists, Thespians, Goths, Shredders. I am clanless....And I don't have anyone to sit with. (p. 4)
(High school students break into groups. Most of these groups are obvious and easily identifiable to other students. It is paramount to students to fit in somewhere. Melinda tells us from the beginning, that she doesn't fit in anywhere, as many groups as there are, she doesn't fit with any of them.)
2. I need a new friend. I need a friend, period. Not a true friend, nothing close or share clothes or sleepover giggle giggle yak yak. Just a pseudo-friend, disposable friend. Friend as accessory. Just so I don't feel and look so stupid. (p. 22)
(This is another passage that emphasizes Melinda's outcast status at school and how desperate she is just to have someone, anyone, to sit with so she doesn't look and feel like such an outcast.)
3. For a solid week, ever since the pep rally, I've been painting watercolors of trees that have been hit by lightning. I try to paint them so they are nearly dead, but not totally. Mr. Freeman doesn't say a word to me about them. He just raises his eyebrows. One pic-

ture is so dark you can barely see the tree at all. (p. 30-31)

(Melinda's depression is obvious in her artwork. Mr. Freeman knows the significance of the clues she's leaving to her emotional state, but he isn't sure how to help. He is really the only teacher who tries to reach out to Melinda and help her.)

4. I see IT in the hallway. IT goes to Merryweather. IT is walking with Aubrey Cheerleader. IT is my nightmare and I can't wake up. IT sees me. IT smiles and winks. Good thing my lips are stitched together or I'd throw up. (p. 45-46)
(This is the first indication that another student is the cause of Melinda's depression. Her horror at seeing this person is obvious to the reader, but the characters around her are unaware of her feelings.)
5. I almost tell them right then and there. Tears flood my eyes. They noticed I've been trying to draw. They noticed. I try to swallow the snowball in my throat. This isn't going to be easy. I'm sure they suspect I was at the party. Maybe they even heard about me calling the cops. But I want to tell them everything as we sit there by our plastic Christmas tree while the *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* video plays. (p. 72)
(Throughout the novel, Melinda has not had a close relationship with her parents. She has a horrible secret and she doesn't feel that she can talk to them about it. She was so touched that they noticed she was spending time drawing, that she momentarily felt close to them and felt the desire to tell them what happened that night at the party.)
6. "If you ever need to talk, you know where to find me." I unbuckle the seat belt and open the door. "Melinda," Mr. Freeman says. Snow filters into the car and melts on the dashboard. "You're a good kid. I think you have a lot to say. I'd like to hear it." I close the door. (p. 123)
(Mr. Freeman has seen the signs of depression and wants to help Melinda. He's not sure how to help. By saying this, he is giving her the opportunity to open up to an adult, but she closes the door on the opportunity because of the guilt she's feeling.)
7. GUYS TO STAY AWAY FROM – Andy Evans – He's a creep. – He's a bastard. – Stay Away!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! – He should be locked up. – He thinks he's all that. – Call the cops. –What's the name of that drug they give perverts so

they can't get it up? – Diprosomething. – He should get it every morning in his orange juice. I went out with him to the movies—he tried to get his hands down my pants during the PREVIEWS!! (p. 185-186)

(Andy was a gorgeous, rich, seemingly popular senior boy. Up until she read these comments on the bathroom wall, Melinda thought everyone liked him. To see so many reaffirmations of her opinion of Andy did her a lot of good.)

8. Beast: "You're not going to scream. You didn't scream before. You liked it. You're jealous that I took out your friend and not you. I know what you want." His mouth is on my face. I twist my head...No. A sound explodes from me. NNNOOO!!!" (p. 194)
(Melinda had felt guilty about being raped the night of the party because she'd been unable to forcefully say No to Andy Evans. Even though she was raped, she was the one who felt guilty. In this instance, she has matured enough to fight back; she refuses to be his victim again.)
9. "You've been through a lot, haven't you?" The tears dissolve the last block of ice in my throat. I feel the frozen stillness melt down through the inside of me, dripping shards of ice that vanish in a puddle of sunlight on the stained floor. Words float up. Me: "Let me tell you about it." (p. 198)
(Mr. Freeman had realized that Melinda was depressed and had reached out to her earlier in the school year, but she didn't confide in him. This time when he reaches out to her, she feels ready to discuss everything that has happened to her. The words float up, and she is ready to speak.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What were the first things you learned about Melinda?
(Melinda was dreading going to school her first morning of high school. Her friends were not speaking to her, and she was the only person sitting alone on the bus. The ninth graders were sent into the auditorium, where they broke into clans (cliques). Melinda was not a part of any the groups. She didn't have anyone to sit with. The kids behind her were laughing, and she knew they are laughing at her.)

2. How did Melinda find a hideaway at school?
(When Melinda was trying to avoid Mr. Neck because she hadn't done her homework for his class, she left the cafeteria with him following her. She went down the senior hall. When Mr. Neck was about to catch up to her, she turned a corner, opened a door, and stepped into the darkness to hide. Mr. Neck continued down the hall. When she turned on the light, she realized that she'd found an abandoned janitor's closet. She thought it was the perfect place for her to hide.)
3. Describe Melinda's hideout closet at school when she first found it.
(The back wall had built-in shelves filled with dusty textbooks and a few bottles of bleach. A stained armchair and an old-fashioned desk were behind a collection of mops and brooms. There was a cracked mirror tilting over a sink littered with dead roaches and cobwebs. The faucets were so rusted they didn't even turn.)
4. Explain Melinda's art project assignment.
(Each student drew a piece of paper from an old globe. On the paper was the name of an object. Students would have to spend the year turning that object into a piece of art. They would sculpt it, sketch it, papier-mâché it, carve it, create computer-aided designs of it. By the end of the year, students had to make their object say something, express an emotion, speak to every person who looked at it. Melinda's piece of paper had "tree" written on it.)
5. Why didn't Melinda's parents ask her about the party?
(Melinda didn't tell her parents that she was going to the party. They thought she was spending the night with Rachel. When she got home neither of them were there.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why were students angry at Melinda for calling the cops and causing them to come to Kyle's party?
(There had been a lot of underage drinking at the party. Some of the students got in trouble. One girl said her brother was arrested and that caused him to lose his job. No one knew the real reason Melinda dialed 911, they only knew what had happened because she called 911.)
7. Why was fitting into a group so important to Heather?
(Heather was new to Merryweather High School; she had just moved to New York from Ohio. She felt that making the right friends would help her get into the groups she wanted to be accepted into.)

8. Why didn't Melinda tell anyone what happened the night of Kyle's party?
(When Andy Evans first started kissing Melinda, she thought that he would be her boyfriend and protect her when they started high school. She didn't realize what was happening at first. When she did realize it, her mind screamed NO, but she couldn't get the words out. She felt guilty; she even questioned herself wondering if she'd really been raped. She felt it was partially her fault, and that guilt and the angry response of the students at the party kept her from telling.)

Questions 9-11 (Critical Level)

9. Why did Andy Evans continue to torment Melinda?
(Andy went to the same high school as Melinda. He saw her from time to time and smiled or winked or said things that horrified her. He seemed to feel no guilt about what he had done. Based on the girls' comments on the bathroom wall, this may not have been unusual behavior for him. He carried on as if he'd done nothing wrong.)
10. Why did Melinda help Heather get into the Marthas even when she realized Heather was using her?
(Melinda had always realized that Heather was not her true friend and that they were very different. Heather vocalized her plans for gaining social acceptance, and couldn't understand why Melinda wasn't as interested in getting into a group as she was. Heather would talk Melinda into helping her with some project for the Marthas then not take up for Melinda when one of the Marthas criticized it. Melinda realized this, but she was desperate for someone to sit with and walk with at school so she would not be totally alone.)
11. Explain how Mr. Freeman's frustrations were similar to Melinda's.
(Mr. Freeman was upset with the school board because of budget cuts. He, like Melinda, felt like he had no control and like he didn't matter. He also evidenced his frustration and depression in his art, just as Melinda did.)

Questions 12-14 (Creative Level)

12. Write four diary entries from Melinda's point of view. Choose the four most important days of the summer and her freshman year. Explain why you place such importance on these four days.
13. Describe a memorable day of your summer. Draw a tree to symbolize it.
14. Continue Melinda's story. Write the next chapter in her voice. Start with the first day of her sophomore year.

Across the Curriculum

Art, Music, and Dance

1. Draw trees that express different moods, and explain to your class how each tree symbolizes a mood.
2. Draw and paint a mural of the important events in the novel.
3. Find songs that relate to the moods and themes of the novel. Bring them to class and share with your class how each song relates to the novel.

History and Social Studies

1. Divide into teams and debate the immigration issue that arose between Mr. Neck and David Petrakis.
2. David Petrakis argues with Mr. Neck about the freedoms guaranteed by the first amendment. Make a list of the amendments to the U.S. Constitution and discuss in groups the one that has had the greatest effect on you.

Language Arts

1. Choose three things from the novel and tell what they symbolize.
2. Make a character list and tell if the characters are stereotyped, flat, or rounded.
3. Explain the turning point of the novel.
4. Research Maya Angelou and tell why you think Melinda respected her and was inspired by her.

Science

1. On page 66-67 Melinda describes an apple tree growing from an apple seed inside an apple. Research this and find out if an apple tree can grow that way or if the seeds have to be taken out of the apple and planted. Report your findings to your class.
2. Melinda is depressed about the snow and cold weather in Syracuse, New York. Research the area and determine average snowfall,

average rainfall, average temperature in summer, and average temperature in winter. Create a visual representation of your information to present to your class.

Math

1. If Melinda took four years of math at your high school and had perfect attendance each year, how many hours would she spend in math classes.
2. Mr. Stetman tried repeatedly to think of ways that students would use algebra concepts outside math classes. Think of an everyday application of algebra concepts that you think you might use as an adult. Write your idea on a paper and share ideas in small groups.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Explain the novel's theme or message.
2. Using scenes from the novel, paint a mural showing the major events.
3. Discuss in small groups the lessons you can take from Melinda's life and apply to your own.
4. Explain the lesson you think Laurie Halse Anderson wants readers to learn from this novel.
5. Identify the point-of-view of this novel. Explain why that is an effective way to tell this story.

Alternate Assessment

1. Make a character list and describe each character.
2. Retell, in summary, the events of the novel in chronological order.
3. Compile a list of events that made Melinda feel like an outcast.

Vocabulary

Match each bold print word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| A. pale | F. wayward | K. invasion | P. instruction |
| B. penalties | G. frightened | L. unsigned | Q. movement |
| C. injuring | H. explode | M. ugly | R. regular, even |
| D. run | I. stylish | N. scheming | S. disgusting |
| E. shout | J. walk heavily | O. bother | T. conceited |

- _____ 1. I flip the cushions to show their pretty white side then **bolt** upstairs.
- _____ 2. The principal spots another **errant** student in the hall.
- _____ 3. She comes from the “play till death or **maiming**” school of athletics.
- _____ 4. She’s smudging mascara under her eyes to look exhausted and **wan**.
- _____ 5. She says I shouldn’t be **intimidated**; I have to get involved.
- _____ 6. I hear his footsteps **lumber** down the hall.
- _____ 7. He’ll **rant** for the rest of the period, forty-three minutes.
- _____ 8. She looks half-cute, half- **sophisticated**.
- _____ 9. The pro-immigration forces **erupt** in applause and hooting.
- _____ 10. We plead with her, send **anonymous** notes. She doesn’t listen.
- _____ 11. Ninth grade is a minor **inconvenience** to him.
- _____ 12. If I ran a high school, I would include stuff like this in the first-day **indoctrination**.
- _____ 13. She’s too **vain** for glasses.
- _____ 14. Some part of me has planned this, a **devious** internal compass pointed to the past.
- _____ 15. The day is getting hotter and there’s no **circulation** in here.
- _____ 16. He is not as tall as my memories, but is still **loathsome**.
- _____ 17. This tree is not perfectly **symmetrical**.
- _____ 18. I look at my **homely** sketch.
- _____ 19. The **consequences** for minor offenses like being late to class were stupid.
- _____ 20. My feelings are chewing me alive like an **infestation** of thoughts, shame, and mistakes.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Use each name only once.

- | | | | | |
|------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| A. Melinda | C. Andy Evans | E. Mr. Neck | G. Rachel | I. Melinda's mother |
| B. Heather | D. David Petrakis | F. Mr. Freeman | H. Ivy | J. Hairwoman |

- _____ 1. had just moved to New York from Ohio
- _____ 2. Melinda's best friend from junior high
- _____ 3. the art teacher who tried to get Melinda to talk about her problems
- _____ 4. Melinda's lab partner in biology
- _____ 5. the manager of a downtown clothing store
- _____ 6. had a hideout closet at school
- _____ 7. raped Melinda at a party during the summer
- _____ 8. taught English and tried to come up with writing topics that would interest students
- _____ 9. taught Social Studies and sent Melinda to MISS for not giving an oral report
- _____ 10. the first of Melinda's junior high group to start talking to Melinda in high school

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Melinda called her parents from Kyle's party.
- _____ 2. During her freshman year, Melinda's friends were very understanding.
- _____ 3. IT was David Petrakis.
- _____ 4. Heather wanted to fit in with the Marthas.
- _____ 5. Melinda's parents did not complain when her grades dropped.
- _____ 6. Melinda's mom quit her job so she could spend more time with Melinda.
- _____ 7. Melinda made an art project out of turkey bones.
- _____ 8. Melinda was the only girl at her high school who did not like Andy Evans.
- _____ 9. Melinda was worried about Rachel going to the prom with Andy.
- _____ 10. The last day of school, Melinda was ready to tell Mr. Freeman about her experiences.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase in the parenthesis that makes the statement correct.

1. Melinda started high school with **(no , only a few)** close friends.
2. Melinda skipped classes and stayed in **(a closet , the bathroom)**.
3. Melinda went to Kyle's party with **(Rachel , Andy)**.
4. **(Mr. Neck , Mr. Freeman)** would not allow his students to disagree with him on the issue of immigration.
5. Heather wanted to be **(a cheerleader , a Martha)**.
6. Girls wrote comments about Andy **(on the bathroom wall , in Melinda's yearbook)**.
7. Melinda **(pulled out her hair , bit her lip)** when she was anxious.
8. **(David , Heather)** invited Melinda to a party to celebrate the basketball team winning a game.
9. The arborist cut away parts of the tree in Melinda's front yard because **(they were dead , they were shading the sunflowers)**.
10. Melinda fought against Andy with a broken **(broom handle , piece of mirror)**.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the relationship between Melinda and Rachel.
2. Compare and contrast Mr. Freeman and Mr. Neck.
3. Explain why Melinda felt guilty about what happened at Kyle's party.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Some names will be used more than once.

- | | | | |
|------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| A. Melinda | C. Andy Evans | E. Mr. Neck | G. Rachel |
| B. Heather | D. David Petrakis | F. Mr. Freeman | H. Hairwoman |

- _____ 1. attacked Melinda in her hideout closet at school
- _____ 2. gave interesting writing assignments and snuck in grammar lessons
- _____ 3. was a social outcast for calling the cops to a party
- _____ 4. the teacher Melinda wanted to talk to about her experiences
- _____ 5. the Social Studies teacher who got in trouble for violating students' first amendment rights
- _____ 6. bit her lip and had difficulty speaking
- _____ 7. gave Melinda an A+ on her art project
- _____ 8. invited Melinda to a party to celebrate winning a basketball game
- _____ 9. was a new student who wanted to fit into the Marthas
- _____ 10. went to the prom with Andy Evans

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. At the beginning of high school, Melinda had a lot of friends.
- _____ 2. Rachel was always kind to Melinda.
- _____ 3. The subject of Melinda's art project was a tree.
- _____ 4. Melinda skipped classes and did not finish all her homework.
- _____ 5. Melinda's lab partner, David Petrakis, refused to speak to her.
- _____ 6. Melinda was Mr. Neck's favorite student.
- _____ 7. Melinda helped Heather with some projects for the Marthas.
- _____ 8. Mr. Freeman offered to listen to Melinda if she ever wanted to talk.
- _____ 9. Melinda did not tell her parents she was going to Kyle's party.
- _____ 10. During the year, Melinda had trouble sleeping at home.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each phrase below with a reason or justification.

1. Melinda called 911 during Kyle's party because_____
 2. Students were mad at Melinda for calling the cops because_____
 3. Melinda's grades dropped because_____
 4. Melinda and her dad had pizza for Thanksgiving because_____
 5. Melinda's parents did not ask any questions about Kyle's party because_____
 6. Melinda hid out in the closet at school because_____
 7. Melinda was worried about Rachel going to the prom with Andy because_____
 8. Melinda wrote a great report on suffragettes for Social Studies because_____
 9. Melinda fought against Andy in her hideout closet because_____
 10. Melinda was finally able to tell Mr. Freeman what had happened to her because_____
-

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the relationship between Melinda and Heather.
2. Explain the truths Melinda came to realize during the school year about herself and her experience.
3. Analyze why Andy Evans continued to torment Melinda.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. J | 11. O | 16. S |
| 2. F | 7. E | 12. P | 17. R |
| 3. C | 8. I | 13. T | 18. M |
| 4. A | 9. H | 14. N | 19. B |
| 5. G | 10. L | 15. Q | 20. K |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A |
| 2. G | 7. C |
| 3. F | 8. J |
| 4. D | 9. E |
| 5. I | 10. H |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. no | 6. on the bathroom wall |
| 2. a closet | 7. bit her lip |
| 3. Rachel | 8. David |
| 4. Mr. Neck | 9. they were dead |
| 5. a Martha | 10. piece of mirror |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A |
| 2. H | 7. F |
| 3. A | 8. D |
| 4. F | 9. B |
| 5. E | 10. G |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

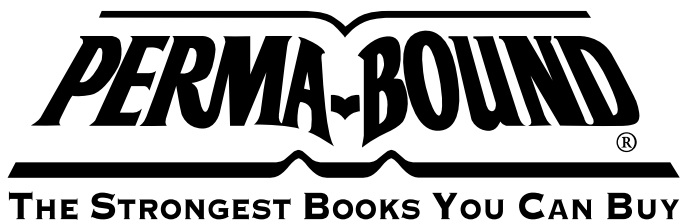
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

- she had been raped and needed help
- the cops busted up the party and some students
- she skipped classes and did not do all her homework
- the turkey soup her dad fixed was a gloppy mess
- they did not know she was going to the party
- she did not want to go to class or to see other students
- she was afraid Andy would hurt Rachel like he had hurt her
- she was failing Social Studies and needed the extra-credit the teacher promised for the report
- he was trying to rape her again; she had matured and had the emotional strength to fight back
- she realized she was not to blame for Andy raping her

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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