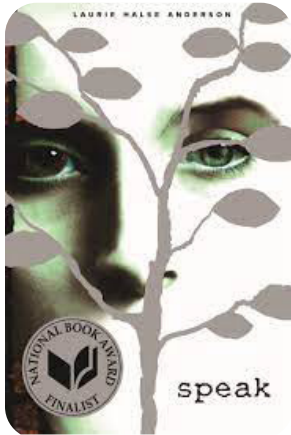


A WISE book discussion *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson



Laurie Halse Anderson's novel, *Speak*, follows the freshman year of Melinda Sordino after she is assaulted by an older boy at a party over the summer. When Melinda tries to get help, her friends turn their back on her and people at school bully her for calling the police at the party. Feeling completely alone and unheard, Melinda stops speaking entirely. Over the course of the book, Melinda struggles with keeping up with school work, loneliness, rage, self-harm, and fear of encountering her rapist in the hallways.

Throughout the year at school, there are many opportunities for teachers and administrators to notice how Melinda is struggling, but none seem interested in learning why or trying to help. The one exception is her art teacher, Mr. Freeman. Melinda's parents also consider Melinda's behavior teenage "acting out." **How do**

you think Melinda's year would have been different if she felt supported by the adults in her life?

As one of the ways she responds to being raped, Melinda stops speaking almost entirely. She also copes with some different self-harm behaviors, like pulling at her lips until they bleed, scratching or cutting herself, and isolates herself as much as possible, sometimes hiding in her closet. Despite how lonely she feels, she turns down any invitations from classmates. **What changes when we understand that behaviors which might seem rude, aloof, or weird are really survival tactics? Recognizing that sometimes strategies both help and hurt, how might you support friends and loved ones that do similar things?**

At many points throughout the year, Melinda considers telling friends or family about the rape, but does not up until the very end of the book. She says, "It will take brain surgery to cut [the memory] out of my head." She cannot stop thinking about it, but cannot bring herself to talk about it either, so she feels trapped by the memory. **What fears keep Melinda from telling people? How could we be the kind of people that survivors could trust to tell?**

Melinda describes many different ways the rapist, Andy, who she calls "IT," purposefully taunts and scares her: whispering, "Freshmeat," in her ear, touching her hair, coming up behind her, sitting on her desk when she is drawing, all culminating in him attacking her again in her closet at school. **Why does he go out of his way to harass her? How do their differences in power and status support him in doing this?**

When Melinda's former best friend Rachel starts dating Andy, Melinda tells her about the rape. Rachel accuses Melinda of lying because she is jealous of their relationship. **Why would Rachel want to believe that Melinda is lying? What other excuses are used throughout the book to defend him? How do these excuses create a culture where people get away with rape, and survivors suffer?**

With Ivy, Melinda writes on the bathroom wall a warning to other girls to stay away from Andy Evans. A few days later, Ivy brings Melinda back to the bathroom to see how other girls have agreed and written their own traumatic experiences and warnings about Andy. After reading, Melinda says "I feel like I can fly." **Why is this moment so significant? What does it demonstrate about the ripple effects of speaking about our experiences?**

Would you like a WISE educator to help facilitate a conversation with your book group?

Please contact Kate at 603-448-5922 ext. 111 and we can explore these and other thoughts together.