Based on

Speak
By Laurie Halse Anderson

About the Book:
Melinda is starting her first year of high school with no friends, a complete outcast, because she ended a summer party by alerting the cops. But what her friends don’t understand is that Melinda had a very good reason to dial 911—she had just been raped by a high school senior at the party. Melinda does not report the rape and keeps her secret deep inside, the stress of which affects her grades, her relationships, and takes her to the point of near destruction. With unexpected kindness from her lab partner and her art teacher, Mr. Freeman, Melinda begins to crawl out of her hole of despair and realizes that she must speak the truth. But before she comes forward with the truth, her attacker finds her alone and attempts another assault. This time, Melinda is prepared to make him pay.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

- Author Laurie Halse Anderson offers a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt in her note to readers. Read this quote to students and ask them to predict how it may relate to the story: “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”
- Review advanced vocabulary words from the book and ask students to keep a list of unfamiliar words as they read. Here is a beginning list of vocabulary words: errant, blather, degrading, natter, demure, conundrum, dryad, wistful.
- Open a discussion on peer relationships by asking if students have ever felt like an outcast at school. If they’re comfortable, ask them to share how they overcame that situation.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

- This story illustrates that a single choice can greatly influence your life and can affect all your relationships. Have you ever made a choice that had a great impact on your life, either negatively or positively? Did it affect your relationships with others?
- Why does Melanie describe herself as a “good actor”? Do you think keeping things inside and “acting” was her way of coping with her problems? How does Melinda’s report card reflect how she is managing the stress of her secret?
- What does Melinda mean when she says, “My house is shrinking and I feel like Alice in Wonderland.”
- Describe how Melinda’s relationship with her mother changes from the beginning of the book to the end.
- When Melinda describes her mom she says, “she could have been a snake handler.” What does Melinda mean by that statement? Is Melinda different from her mom? If so, in what way?
- Why does Melinda have a hard time warning Rachel about Andy, “the Beast”? After Melinda finally tells her about Andy, how does Rachel react? How do you think Rachel feels after the truth comes out at the prom?
- Do you think Melinda’s life would have been different if she went to the authorities immediately after the rape? If so, describe how it may have been different at school and home.
- Why did Melinda feel safe in the art room? Do you think in some way Melinda’s “tree” art project helped her through her pain? How was the art teacher, Mr. Freeman, supportive even though he was not aware of her problem?
- Do you think Melinda’s tree was a reflection of her emotions? When Melinda describes her tree art project at the end of school she says, “One of the lower branches is sick. If this tree really lives someplace, that branch better drop soon, so it doesn’t kill the whole thing. Roots knob out of the ground and the crown reaches for the sun, tall and healthy. The new growth is the best part.” What do you think she meant by that?
- Read and discuss the interview with author, Laurie Halse Anderson, at the back of the book.
Student Activity (found on the last page of this PDF):
Students will use a plot organizer to define the story’s structure.

Related Activities:
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **The Art of Emotions:** Melinda’s art project was therapeutic to her and helped her deal with her pain. Have students think of a painful or happy memory in their lives and ask them to express those feelings through the creation of tree art. Provide different art mediums for them to explore their feelings through this art project.

- **Mascot Madness:** Throughout the story, Principal Principal changed Merryweather High’s mascot from Trojans, to Blue Devils, to Tigers, to Wombats, and finally to Bees. Have students work in groups to come up with their own school mascot. For presentation to the class, students can create a poster or cheer introducing their mascot.

- **Information Is Power:** Have students locate resources that provide support for sexual assault victims. A great place to start is the RAINN organization, which is one of the largest anti-sexual assault organizations in the country. Find information on RAINN at [http://www.rainn.org/](http://www.rainn.org/). Have students select a topic to research and then create a fact sheet with their findings. Here are some suggested topics: ways to reduce your risks of sexual assault, creating a safety plan, ways to help someone you know who has been raped, steps on recovering from a sexual assault, local resources for victims, statistics on sexual assaults.

- **Figuratively Speaking:** Anderson uses figurative language in her story to create images for the reader. Read these phrases from the book and ask students to define what the author is saying. You may also ask students why the author described the person or scene in that way.
  - “Principal Principal pauses with a look on his face like Daffy Duck when Bugs is pulling a fast one.” (page 17)
  - “I have been dropped like a hot Pop Tart on a cold kitchen floor.” (page 21)
  - “There is a beast in my gut, I can hear it scraping away at the inside of my ribs.” (page 51)
  - “The long curly cord snakes around and around her thin body, like a rope tying her to the stake.” (page 59)
  - “…cold air is easier to breathe, slipping like silver mercury down my lungs and out again.” (page 151)

- **Movie Time:** This book was made into an independent film. Share the movie with students and afterward compare and contrast the film with the book. As a project, students can design a movie poster advertising the film. You could also have them write a movie review.
Plotting Away
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The plot is the essence of the story. It connects the story from beginning to end and provides the characters with a problem or conflict to solve.

Directions: Use this plot structure organizer to describe the events in the book. Each segment of the plot structure is defined below.

Exposition – The start of the story before the action begins or where background information is given to understand the story. Ask yourself, what did the author need to explain to readers?
List Resolution Events: ____________________________

__________________________

Rising Action – The major events or conflicts leading up to the climax. Ask yourself, what event causes the action to begin to rise?
List Rising Action Events: ____________________________

__________________________

Climax – The turning point or most intense moment in the story. Ask yourself, where does the story peak?
List Climax Events: ____________________________

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Falling Action – All events after the climax before the resolution. Ask yourself, which events lead up to the conclusion?
List Falling Action Events: ____________________________

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Resolution – The conclusion or result of story, when loose ends are wrapped up. Ask yourself, how is the story resolved?
List Resolution Events: ____________________________

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