

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: 7th grade IELA

School: OOMS

Book Title: Speak

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Author: Laurie Halse Anderson

Pages: 198

Publisher: Penguin

Copyright: 1999

Book summary and summary citation:

Overview

Melinda Sordino suffers through her freshman year at Merryweather High School in silence. Her transition from middle school to high school is complicated by a misunderstanding which sends Shockwaves throughout her existence. Gradually, readers become aware that Melinda is spiraling out of control as she becomes mute and loses interest in herself, her family, and school. Abandoned by her friends, she yearns to confide in them. Her voice is presented through a subdued inner monologue which becomes stronger and louder as Melinda struggles to reveal the truth behind her action to call for help at a summer party. Ostracized because her classmates believe she betrayed their trust, Melinda expresses herself through an art project and gardening. She ultimately confronts her antagonist and begins to heal.

-Book Rags

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific references to the OLSD curriculum maps.

- Identify the author's purpose for writing/explain an author's perspective
- Examine character development: conflict, how interactions affect plot
- Analyze setting and its importance to the text
- Infer theme, pattern, symbols from all different genres and cultures
- Examine an author's style and identify the literal vs. implied content
- Respond to literature by interpreting, critiquing, reflecting, and judging with specific references

Include two professional reviews of this title:

Awards

- Michael L. Printz Honor Book
- National Book Award Finalist
- Edgar Allen Poe Award Finalist
- *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize Finalist
- Winner of the SCBWI Golden Kite Award
- ALA Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults
- *Publisher's Weekly* Best Book of the Year
- BCCB Blue Ribbon Book
- *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year

"An uncannily funny book even as it plumbs the darkness, *Speak*, will hold readers from first word to last."

-*The Horn Book*, starred review

(Amazon.com) From Publishers Weekly

In a stunning first novel, Anderson uses keen observations and vivid imagery to pull readers into the head of an isolated teenager. Divided into the four marking periods of an academic year, the novel, narrated by Melinda Sordino, begins on her first day as a high school freshman. No one will sit with Melinda on the bus. At school, students call her names and harass her; her best friends from junior high scatter to different cliques and abandon her. Yet Anderson infuses the narrative with a wit that sustains the heroine through her pain and holds readers' empathy. A girl at a school pep rally offers an explanation of the heroine's pariah status when she confronts Melinda about calling the police at a summer party, resulting in several arrests. But readers do not learn why Melinda made the call until much later: a popular senior raped her that night and, because of her trauma, she barely speaks at all. Only through her work in art class, and with the support of a compassionate teacher there, does she begin to reach out to others and eventually find her voice. Through the first-person narration, the author makes Melinda's pain palpable: "I stand in the center aisle of the auditorium, a wounded zebra in a National Geographic special." Though the symbolism is sometimes heavyhanded, 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. Ages 12-up. (Oct.)
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Kirkus Reviews

A frightening and sobering look at the cruelty and viciousness that pervade much of contemporary high school life, as real as today's headlines. At the end of the summer before she enters high school, Melinda attends a party at which two bad things happen to her. She gets drunk, and she is raped. Shocked and scared, she calls the police, who break up the party and send everyone home. She tells no one of her rape, and the other students, even her best friends, turn against her for ruining their good time. By the time school starts, she is completely alone, and utterly desolate. She withdraws more and more into herself, rarely talking, cutting classes, ignoring assignments, and becoming more estranged daily from the world around her. Few people penetrate her shell; one of them is Mr. Freeman, her art teacher, who works with her to help her express what she has so deeply repressed. When the unthinkable happens—the same upperclassman who raped her at the party attacks her again—something within the new Melinda says no, and in repelling her attacker, she becomes whole again. 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. (Fiction. 12+)

What alternative texts could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey
Title: Scorpions
Title: Beaten

Author: Margaret Peterson Haddix
Author: Walter Dean Myers
Author: Suzanne Weyn

Document any potentially controversial content:

Contains passages that refer to a violent sexual act (rape). However, there is no graphic sexual content. Melinda, the main character in *Speak*, goes through emotional struggles as a result of the rape. There is one instance of underage drinking that takes place before the novel starts but is referred to, and there is some minor profanity, including two uses each of the words b**** and damn.

Keeping in mind the age, Academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated ☒ Regular ☒ At risk ☒

GRADE LEVELS: 6 ☐ 7 ☒ 8 ☒ 9 ☒ 10 ☒ 11 ☒ 12 ☒

Reading level of this title: (if applicable) ages 12 and up

Date submitted to department chair: April 2012

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin for the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults