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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Speak

by

Laurie Halse Anderson

(New York: Penguin Group, 2006)

Author:

Laurie Halse Anderson is the *New York Times* bestselling author who writes for kids of all ages. Known for tackling tough subjects with humor and sensitivity, her work has earned numerous ALA and state awards. Two of her books, *SPEAK* and *CHAINS*, were National Book Award finalists. Mother of four and wife of one, Laurie lives in Northern New York, where she likes to watch the snow fall as she writes. [From teenreads.com]

Summary:

Laurie Halse Anderson's award-winning, highly acclaimed, and controversial novel about a teenager who chooses not to speak rather than to give voice to what really happened to her.

"Speak up for yourself - we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows that this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless, outcast, because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. As time passes, she becomes increasingly isolated and practically stops talking altogether. Only her art class offers any solace, and it is through her work on an art project that she is finally able to face what really happened at that terrible party: she was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her. Her healing process has just begun when she has another violent encounter with him. But this time Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication. In this powerful novel, an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself. [From bookbrowse.com]

Questions:

1. What do you think Melinda has done to get such a bad reaction from her former classmates?
2. What is Merryweather High School like? What are some of the clique as Melinda defines them?

3. Art class is entitled “Sanctuary.” WHY?
4. What is Melinda’s art assignment? What do you think about it?
5. Would you say that Melinda is going to have an easy or hard first year of high school? Why?
6. Why do you think that the author chooses to use the mascot as a debate topic in Melinda’s High School? What purpose does it serve in the novel? (Meaning: It is [funny](#), sad, silly, etc.?)
7. What do you think about the "IMMIGRATION SITUATION?" Is Mr. Neck right or wrong? What about David Petrakis? Do you think he was right about sticking up for himself?
8. What happens to Melinda's family on Thanksgiving? Describe what each family member was doing on this day.
9. What does Melinda's first attempt as her tree look like? What does she make it out of? Why do you think that Mr. Freeman really likes it?
10. Does Mr. Freeman act like a “regular” adult? What is so different about the way he treats his students?
11. Why does Mr. Freeman paint a question mark by Melinda’s tree?
12. What happens on Valentine’s Day? How do you think Melinda feels about this day in general?
13. Where does Melinda go after the Valentine’s Day disaster? What do you think prompts her actions? Why would she go there just to leave?
14. Throughout the novel, Laurie Halse Anderson refers to plants, quite often. Why is this? What about a plant is similar to the main character, Melinda?
15. Explain the “two Melinda’s” from Melinda’s point of view.
16. What happens when Melinda runs into IT in the hallway? Explain Andy Evans’ actions. Why does he torture Melinda in this way?
17. Ivy and Melinda discuss Andy Evans. What does Ivy say about him? Do you think that Ivy has the potential to be Melinda’s friend again? If so, how is she different from Rachel/Rachelle?
18. What happen in gym class on page 169 - 170? How is gym class a METAPHOR for how Melinda has grown throughout the novel? [From brighthouse.com]