

Approved for use in English I

Summary of the Work:

Speak chronicles the journey of a young girl through her freshman year of high school after a terrible summer incident has led to isolation. The novel is written from the main character, Melinda's, point of view and includes her inner dialogue. Although Melinda begins reluctant to speak and become nearly mute, the reader is exposed to her thoughts and struggles as she works her way out of the depression and isolation that surrounds her. Through the novel, the reader is able to relate to Melinda's struggles not only in school, with her friends, peers, and the boy who attacked her, but also to her struggles with her parents and authority figures at school. Melinda is able to heal through her use of art and writing, and eventually finds the strength to regain her voice.

Rationale:

Speak is an ideal choice for the 9th grade curriculum because it deals with the same age group and new experiences Freshman will be dealing with. As a novel, it allows students to discuss and understand issues they may be in the midst of from an objective point of view. It further allows readers to become more sensitive to situations others may be going through. Positive outlets for dealing with stress, depression, and violence are examined, as well as the issues of peer pressure and free speech. Through examining a fictional character, students are able to openly discuss the hardships of the first year of high school and brainstorm ways themselves and their peers can overcome the silent pain of isolation within a crowd.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Booklist (Vol. 96, No. 2 (09/15/1999))
 Horn Books (September/October, 1999)
 Kirkus Review (1999)
 School Library Journal (December 1999)
 School Library Journal (October 1999)

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Book Links (A.L.A.) 01/01/00
- Books for the Teen Age (NYPL) 04/01/99
- Publishers Weekly starred 09/13/99
- Booklist 09/15/99
- 1999 National Book Award Finalist
- School Library Journal Best Book of the Year (1999)

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 690
- Readability Level: 7.1

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:
 Approved for Adoption: 2004

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Speak deals with important, but occasionally disturbing, issues that arise in an adolescence life. The issue of rape, isolation, confrontation with adults, and peer pressure is examined in the novel, but also dealt with and solved in a positive, constructive, and artistic manner.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Speak invites students to use their thinking skills to investigate possible solutions for real life problems. Journaling can be effectively implemented to compliment the writing style and respond to personal situations in the text. The readability of the novel allows freshmen easily access the text and the themes contained within.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

The novel is included in the Freshman English I course description but is appropriate for all levels of English I.