

*Laurie Halse Anderson*

artwork by  
*Emily Carroll*

**speak**  
*the graphic novel*

*Farrar Straus Giroux  
New York*

### *Author's note:*

I wrote the original *Speak* in the late '90s, before the Internet, before cell phones, and before the awesome phenomenon of graphic novels. I wrote it to deal with the depression and anxiety that had shadowed me since I was raped when I was thirteen years old. I never dreamed that the book would be published. I couldn't imagine that people would want to read it, or share it with friends, or teach it, or turn it into a movie.

But here we are, because life can be bewilderingly wonderful sometimes.

I've watched the growth of graphic novels with excitement, and have long pondered how to transform the story of *Speak* into the graphic novel form. Art and artistic expression play a significant part in Melinda Sordino's transition from traumatized victim to empowered survivor. The story and the form seemed to be a natural fit, but only in the hands of the right artist.

Emily Carroll is that artist. Her artwork combined with my story have created a new expression of what it feels like to have your voice stolen from you, the battles that must be endured to find it again, and the triumph of speaking up.

Thank you so much, Emily, for sharing your talent and for all of your hard work on this book. Thanks also to our genius editor, Joy Peskin, and fabulous art director, Andrew Arnold, for helping us blend words and images to create magic. The entire Macmillan team has supported the novel, and now the graphic novel, with energy and passion that is very much appreciated.

I reserve my deepest thanks for two groups:

The community of educators who have boldly championed *Speak* through countless censorship challenges have helped change the national conversation about sexual violence. I salute their courage and am grateful for their friendship. My extended, blended family (including biological relatives and those of the heart) has cheered me on through years of writing, travel, some struggle, and much joy. They have taught me all that I know about the power of love to heal. My boundless love for them weaves the greatest story of all.

—Laurie Halse Anderson

*To everyone seeking their voice  
and reaching for their power*

# FIRST MARKING PERIOD

“Welcome to  
Merryweather”

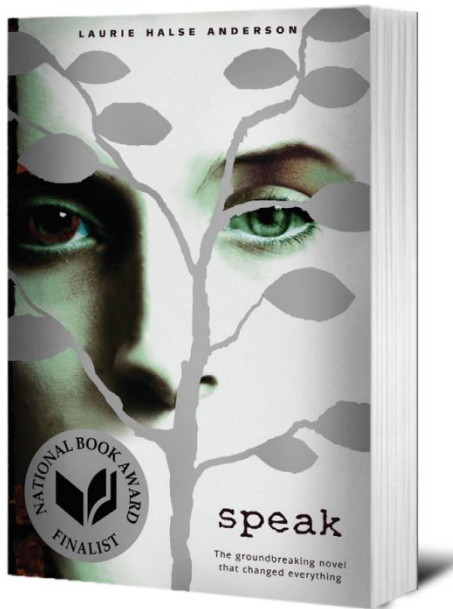


*It is my first morning of high school.*

*I have seven new notebooks,  
a skirt I hate,  
and a stomachache.*



*This is what  
I was dreading. HA*



## **SPEAK**

When *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, was released as a novel in 1999, its frank prose and relatable narrator resonated immediately. Teachers, librarians, and parents alike watched young people, especially young women, tear through it and then pass it right along to friends they thought also needed to read *Speak*. *Speak* would go on to become a National Book Award Finalist, an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults, and a Golden Kite Award winner, among many other honors over the years since its release. The book's power with its audience hasn't faded; nor have the objections to its direct discussion of sexual assault.

To call Emily Carroll's visual adaptation of *Speak* 'powerful' would be a staggering understatement. Carroll's use of negative space, nonstandard panel arrangement, inner monologue, and the flashback story are central to the original novel collaborate to absorb the reader into Melinda's battle to find her voice and her place as a high school freshman trying to recover from a sexual assault the previous summer.

This adaptation has already garnered a number of honors. *Speak: The Graphic Novel* is a *School Library Journal* Best Book of 2018, a 2019 selection as an Amelia Bloomer Best Feminist Book for Young Readers, and a nominee for both the Eisner and the Edgar Allen Poe Awards, among others.

**Laurie Halse Anderson** is a *New York Times*–bestselling author who writes for all ages. Known for tackling tough subjects with humor and sensitivity, her work has sold nearly five million copies. Two of her books, *Speak* and *Chains*, were National Book Award finalists. *Chains* also made the Carnegie Medal shortlist in the United Kingdom. Her most recent YA novel, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, was longlisted for the National Book Award.

**Emily Carroll**, an Eisner Award–winning illustrator and the author of *Through the Woods*, is also the creator of many popular web comics. She lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

**OVER 3 MILLION COPIES SOLD**  
**A NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST**  
**A MICHAEL L. PRINTZ HONOR BOOK**

**SPEAK** tells the story of Melinda, a high school freshman who is increasingly isolated and outcast after being raped by an upperclassman at a party. Her healing process takes time, but eventually Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication.

*A note from the author*

### **What makes your book real?**

“I was a lost teenager. My parents struggled and I didn’t have anyone who understood the battles I was fighting in my heart. Books kept me alive and more; they helped me find my path and my people. I try to write books that can help today’s readers. Not everyone is as messed up as I was (thank goodness!), so sometimes my books give teens insight into people or situations that they haven’t experienced. You know what’s real? Real is the need we all have to connect with each other. Sharing stories is the best way I know to do that.”  
—LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

#### **Themes:**

- Sexual violence
- Communication barriers
- Friendships, cliques, and bullying
- Teachers and teaching
- School policies
- Family tensions
- Mental health
- Art as therapy
- Students standing up to authority

#### **Discussion Questions**

- Discuss the title of the novel and its significance. What roles do silence and truth play in the story?
- Is there a relationship between speaking and listening? Can one exist without the other? Melinda states “*Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say*” (p.14). Describe your reaction to the illustrations and words on this page. Do you agree or disagree with her words? What early theme is being suggested with this statement? Melinda says: “*It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, zip it. All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie.*” Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Do the events in the novel support or negate her statement? Does her outlook change at any point in the novel? How so?
- Is it possible to speak without spoken words? Why or why not? Identify passages in the novel to support your position. Emily Carroll draws Melinda often reacting silently to the words of others. What should we infer from these depictions? What do the author and artist want us to see or feel about Melinda’s silence?
- What is friendship? Describe the important elements of Melinda’s relationships with Heather, Ivy, Nicole, and Rachel. Is she ever really friends with any of them? Can friendship mean something different to different people? Cite different passages in the novel as evidence of your opinion. Melinda’s friendship with Heather is nuanced and complicated; we’re not sure if Melinda even *likes* Heather sometimes. Why does she spend so much time with Heather, including helping her win over a new group of friends? Reread the scene when Heather tells Melinda she doesn’t want to be



friends anymore (182–186). Heather says, “*We were never really, really friends, were we?*” Is Heather right in saying this? Why or why not?

- Discuss the social hierarchy of Merryweather High. What role does the concept of identity play in the novel? Why is belonging to one of the many clans so important to Heather and so unimportant to Melinda?
- Why does Melinda isolate herself from her friends? Is she justified in doing so? In what places is Melinda able to find sanctuary at school? How do the characteristics of these places provide a window into her character? The graphic novel contains figurative language supported by images to convey how Melinda is feeling. On p. 43, identify and explain the figurative language used and explain what it means. Also, describe the importance of the spotlight—is it real, or is it symbolic of being put on the spot? What is the significance of this moment for Melinda?
- Why do you think Melinda refers to Andy Evans as IT in the beginning of the novel? At what point does she start to call him by name? Why?
- What does Melinda learn in art class? What does the tree she spends the year creating finally come to symbolize? Trees figure prominently in the imagery throughout *Speak: The Graphic Novel*. How does Melinda’s selection of a tree as her art theme for the year reflect her struggles? Discuss the ending of the book and the relevance of the last scene. What finally allows Melinda to speak?
- How does David Petrakis contribute to Melinda’s quest to find her voice? How does Mr. Freeman influence her? What role do her parents and the other adults in the novel play in Melinda’s journey?
- Despite her internal sense of humor, Melinda seems depressed to the outside world. In what ways is her depression evident? How do the people around her react to her behavior? Do you think they respond appropriately? Melinda speaks to the reader through her thoughts, but finds it difficult to speak to the characters in the story. Still, she communicates through her body language and even explains how she fakes interactions (p. 53) by using nonverbal gestures that don’t really match how she’s feeling. How do the other characters react to her not speaking? Should they do something to help her?
- Animals also factor into the storytelling often, and Melinda interacts with them in a range of ways: the frog dissection (136), the bird Melinda sees as part of a flashback on her day off from school (175), the bunnies (231), even the turkey that ends up inedible on Thanksgiving (90). Is there any pattern to their purpose? How do the author and artist collaborate to anthropomorphize animals throughout the narrative?

- Flashbacks: How does the author and artist's use of flashback slowly reveal what has happened to Melinda impact our experience with the book? How would the book feel different if we were given the entire narrative of Melinda's assault at the beginning of the book?
- Panels: After viewing examples of classic panel layouts in comic books and graphic novels, find examples in *Speak: The Graphic Novel* where Emily Carroll chose asymmetrical panel layouts, single-panel pages, and other unusual ways to visually divide up a page of narrative. Why might she have done this? How does it impact these moments in the narrative?
- Negative space: When artists use negative space, the background is darkened and the image we are meant to notice emerges in white or lighter tones. We see an early example of this when Rachel mouths "I HATE YOU" to Melinda in the chapter titled "Welcome to Merryweather." Try to speculate a purpose for this use in the book. What kind of moments does Emily Carroll choose for this technique? What impact does it have on our perception of these moments?
- Describe the importance of the mirror on pp. 25–27. How does Melinda see herself and how do you think others view her? Mirrors are a recurring symbol. Why? Do mirrors accurately display how you view yourself? Explain the message the mirrors convey.
- On pp. 70–71, Melinda is illustrated in a startling way. React to the words and images on these pages. Are the words literal or figurative? What emotions or ideas are being conveyed? How is the symbol of the mirror being revisited?
- Look at pp. 244–246. How does the lettering chosen convey a particular mood? What is the secret that Melinda has been unable to share? What is her fear? (This fear is alluded to on p. 283: she is afraid of being blamed.)
- Research the **#MeToo movement** in mass media and politics. How did it begin? How did it gain and maintain momentum? What have been its outcomes so far? Reflecting on these questions, how is it similar to and different from previous protest movements around women's rights?
- Melinda adds a poster of Maya Angelou to her hideout closet at school. One of Maya Angelou's most famous works is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, an autobiographical narrative that includes an account of experiencing sexual assault. What other women writers have included sexual assault stories in their work?