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**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

## **START A CONVERSATION ABOUT . . .** **. . . *finding your voice***

### **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?
- 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 says: "It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it. All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say." 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?
- What keeps Melinda silent? What is she afraid of?
- 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?
- Melinda nicknames many of the other characters throughout the novel. Discuss the significance of this habit and how it contributes to the development of the story and your experience as a reader.
- 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?
- In what places is Melinda able to find sanctuary at school? How do the characteristics of these places provide a window into her character?
- What does Melinda learn in art class? What does the tree she spends the year creating finally come to symbolize?
- 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? How would you respond?
- What role does rumor play in the story? Discuss how rumors and truth can be connected. Is one more powerful than the other?
- Reflect on Melinda and Rachel's written conversation they have in the library. Discuss Rachel's reaction to what Melinda tells her. Why do you think she behaves as she does? Does she believe Melinda?
- How does nature manifest itself in the story line and contribute to meaning? Discuss how the changing of the seasons could be argued to mirror Melinda's ability to speak.
- Is it possible to speak without spoken words? Why or why not? Identify passages in the novel to support your position.
- Discuss the ending of the book and the relevance of the last scene.
- What finally allows Melinda to speak?