

Speak Out! Reach Out!

Speak Out! Reach Out!

A Thematic Unit Using Laurie Halse Anderson's Novel *Speak* and the Arizona English Language Arts Standards

by [Dr. Lee Brown](#), Assistant Professor of Secondary Education
Arizona State University West College of Teacher Education and Leadership
and
Amanda Logan

This teacher's guide is Copyright 2004 by the authors. It is reproduced here with their kind permission. Please contact the authors directly with any questions or comments on this guide.

First published in *Arizona English Bulletin*, journal of the [Arizona English Teacher Association \(AETA\)](#).

At next year's AETA conference, participants will have the opportunity to meet and work with one of today's most celebrated Young Adult Literature authors--Laurie Halse Anderson. Since its publication in 1999, *Speak*, has become an instant classic, assuming a place alongside such groundbreaking works as Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Brett Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero* and Michael Dorris' *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*. *Speak* has been on the New York Times Best Seller List and was nominated for the National Book Award.

In short, Laurie Halse Anderson is a phenomenal writer. If you are looking for ways to get students involved in your classroom, you've found it. Her authorship opens many doors and suggests numerous possibilities. As English educators, we are constantly trying to collect unit materials that we can use to stay current, interesting, and, at the same time, have an important and relevant message to portray to the students. *Speak* will do all of that. As we developed this unit, we were regularly amazed by Halse's creative use of language as well as her ability to balance a topic as serious as rape with comedic moments.

It is AETA's hope that many of you will have the opportunity to work with *Speak* prior to the conference. To this end, we are offering a "ready to go" resource unit that provides a range of activities for high school students and is completely in line with the Arizona English language arts standards.

Curriculum Development Outline

The unit was developed using the four kinds of objectives described below. Many of the specific objectives and the activities that follow are based on Arizona standards; however, the unit is clearly unified around a dominant theme.

I. Word Attack - Word attack is used broadly to include objectives and activities related to pronunciation skills, vocabulary building and concept development. The unit has a specific word list.

II. Theme - Theme objectives will involve moving from general statements of the literature standards to the specific skills and tasks associated with *Speak*; writing and creating presentations that deal specifically with social and psychological survival messages. Each theme will need to be more than a single word concept: each theme needs to be rich in ideas, ripe for controversy and discussion and both challenging and appropriate to the student's intellectual growth.

III. Study Skills - These objectives are aimed at the development of a variety of study skills. Graph reading, finding resources sources in the community and on the Internet, devising plans and following directions are represented in this unit.

IV. Comprehension - Comprehension objectives require students to master techniques from locating the main idea in simple materials to using complex thinking skills to understand the images and metaphors

SPEAK OUT UNIT ASSESSMENT

Name _____

Team _____ Teacher _____

RUBRIC: 1=Failing 2=Needs Improvement 3=Proficient 4=Advanced Standards and Objectives Level of Mastery

PART I (WORD ATTACK)

The student will:

1. Recognize and define the meaning of the words in said passage (Arizona W-P1).
2. Read aloud a two hundred-word passage with 97% accuracy.

PART II (THEME)

The student will:

1. Devise and execute a community service project related to *Speak* (Arizona VP-P2).
2. Recognize, analyze and evaluate an author's use of literary elements such as mood, tone, theme, point of view, diction, dialog and figurative in *Speak* and related literature (Arizona R-P2).
3. Compare and/or contrast universality of themes in *Speak* with real-life experiences and/or other works of literature (Arizona R-P5. PO 2).

PART III (STUDY SKILLS)

The student will:

1. Plan, organize, develop, produce and evaluate an effective multimedia presentation, using tools such as charts, photographs, maps, tables, posters, transparencies, slides and electronic media).
2. Conduct an interview, taking appropriate notes and summarizing the information learned (Arizona LS-P4.).

PART IV (COMPREHENSION) [Comprehension objectives are derived from Arizona R-P1]

The student will:

1. Extract, summarize, clarify, and interpret critical details and elements of literature.
2. Supporting assertions with evidence.
3. Relate new information to prior knowledge and make predictions based on evidence presented and extend the ideas presented in the text.

Total Unit Points: 40

Your Score: ____

Rationale for Students

On the road of life, we encounter many situations that test our strength. Sometimes, the challenge seems so great that we may think there is no possible way out. We hear stories of this nature every day on the nightly news; we read about them in the paper. We have all watched, or possibly read in horror and thought, "That will NEVER happen to me!" It is important for all to know that such things do happen, and in fact, may happen. If not to us personally, difficult situations may invade our families, whether it be a mother, sister, aunt, or cousin. Over the next few weeks, we are going to read a story about Melinda, a ninth grade girl who became a victim of date rape at a summer party. This story will contain emotional moments and an intimate glance into the world of a young person forced to deal with a very big issue. Anderson has created a character that is more than a victim or a statistic. Melinda has a perceptive eye and a sharp wit and in language that is both bitter and funny, she takes the reader through a range of experiences with teachers, friends and family. And as we share these encounters, we learn that all experiences, positive as well as negative, can make us stronger if we muster the courage to struggle through them.

Date rape is not a pleasant topic to talk about, but the harsh reality is that date rapes account for 78 percent all rapes, making it by far the most common. One in four girls will become a victim to date rape before they reach the age of 25. Three of every five rapes that take place happen to girls before the age of eighteen. Even scarier yet, the University of Tennessee's Daily Beacon reports that 84 percent of women date raped knew their assailant. During this unit, we will take a look into one type of survival, emotional survival. We will be sharing personal anecdotes, listening to guest Speakers, and reading a

wonderful, very personal novel. At the end of this unit, you will have gained insight into the meaning of strength, courage, and survival. It is my hope that our reading of *Speak* will teach you important survival skills and “how to deal” when certain rough situations occur. But, just as importantly, it will instruct you on how to recognize signs of problems in others so that you can be there for them (support), and how and where to go for help. On a purely academic level, you will strengthen your reading skills. In addition, you will reinforce: word attack, study, comprehension, writing, and thinking skills. The primary standard is Arizona R-P1. [Apply reading strategies such as extracting, summarizing, clarifying, and interpreting information; predicting events and extending the ideas presented; relating new information to prior knowledge; supporting assertions with evidence; and making useful connections to other topics to comprehend works of literature and documents.]

Learning Activity One: Defining Survival

Related Objective: Word Attack #1

Learning activity steps:

1. Work together in small, cooperative groups. Consider the following questions: Can you define *survival*? What does it mean to survive? How do people survive? Describe a personal survival experience. Are there different levels of survival? What are they? What characteristics coincide and encourage survival?
2. Compare your definition to those in your group. How is yours different? Does survival mean something different to everyone? Why? What shapes our ideas of what it means to survive?
3. Write down your personal definition of survival, and then compare it to the dictionary definition. How does your definition measure up? Are there any important aspects that you left out, or that the dictionary failed to mention?

Learning Activity Two: Unfamiliar Words Dictionary

Related Objective: Word Attack #3

Learning activity steps:

Although the novel *Speak* is not a particularly difficult book to read, there will be words that you come across that are unfamiliar or unclear in meaning. Since you are being held accountable for knowing all words in this book with 97% accuracy, as we read the novel, you will:

1. Keep a list of all unfamiliar words that you come across in the book (include the page number where you found the word). In addition, add the special vocabulary words and phrases related to these themes: *Alienation, Depression, Anxiety, Interior monologue, Irony, Recluse, Support group, Clique, In crisis.*

2. Read the dictionary definition of each word.
3. Reword the definition using dictionary that is yours.
4. Include one example of how you might use the word in a sentence. You should have *at least* twenty words in your Unfamiliar Words Dictionary (UWD) when you turn it in at the end of the unit.

Learning Activity Three: Picking a Voice

Related Objective: Word Attack #2

Learning activity steps:

1. Pick a short section from the novel that you feel is a good representation of the author's use of voice.
2. Present the section to the class (oral interpretation). Give reasons why you chose the section, how the author's use of voice makes the selection meaningful, and how the section would be different if a different tone or voice were used.

Learning Activity Four: Guest Speaker on Depression

Related Objective: Theme #1

This activity will require locating and inviting a guest speaker on the subject of depression to the classroom. The speaker might be the school psychologist, a public mental health service provider or a psychiatrist in private practice

1. Predict: before the speaker arrives, record in your reading journal your personal definition of depression. *Speak* provides a lens for examining depression. The interior monologue is rich with information. Read and respond to the following passage:

"No, I guess not. It was a long time ago. She stops and draws a spiraling circle. I stand on the edge and wonder if I'm going to fall in. The party was a little wild, she continues. But it was dumb to call the cops. We could have just left. She slides the notebook back to me." [p. 183]

2. Discuss: What is the speaker doing? What is the speaker's state of mind? Is the speaker depressed?
3. Select at least one other passage to share with the guest speaker. Ask about key terms--alienation, depression, anxiety, coping, crisis behavior and how to be an effective member of a peer support group. All journal entries for this activity shall be called "Guest Speaker Two."
4. Clarify: as the speaker is presenting, take notes (especially when she talks about the signs of depression).

5. Question: after the speaker is finished, record in your journal something you found of particular interest.
6. Summarize: summarize the speaker's presentation, making sure to highlight the most important aspects and the main ideas.
7. As a class, compile a list of the signs of depression. Distribute the list across campus, making them available to all students; include places to go or call for help.
8. Send a class thank you email to the speaker, thanking her for her time, as well as the wealth of information she shared.

Learning Activity Five: Service Project

Relating objective: Theme #1

Learning activity steps:

1. Plan a carwash that will produce charity funds for the Women and Children's crisis fund. It will be entirely in your hands to make this work. You, as a class, will plan, prepare, and carry out this event. You must find ways to publicize this event, whether it be flyers or over the radio. If you come to me with ideas, and have no way to "make them happen," I might consider helping.
2. Carry out the event and donate the funds.

Learning Activity Six: Clans, Cliques and Outsiders

Related objective: Theme #2

Learning activity steps:

1. Read the following passage from *Speak*:

"Older students are allowed to roam until the bell, but ninth graders are herded into the auditorium. We all fall into clans: Jocks, Country Clubbers, Idiot Savants, Cheerleaders, Human Waste, Eurotrash, Future Fascists of America, Big Hair Chix, the Marthas, Suffering Artists, Thespians, Goths, Shredders. I am clanless. I wasted the last weeks of August watching bad cartoons. I didn't go to the mall, the lake, or the pool, or answer the phone. I have entered high school with the wrong hair, the wrong clothes, the wrong attitude. And I don't have anyone to sit with." [p. 4]

How do word choice, tone, and voice all contribute to saying a lot more than simply what is on the surface?

2. Individually consider the following questions. Record your responses in your reading journal. Head this section "Clan Passage". Questions about the passage: Who is the speaker? What is the conflict that the speaker faces? Why is the listing of different social

circles significant? What type of tone is used here? Why?

3. Next, form groups of four and discuss the following: Critical Thinking Questions:

- o Why are the ninth graders treated differently than "the older kids"?
- o Given the circumstances in the passage above, how would you feel? Have you ever felt like the speaker? Describe in detail a time in your life when you feel you could relate.
- o Why do you think the speaker is facing this problem?
- o Is she really an outcast?
- o High school is a time when things like hair and clothes can make an immediate difference in the way you are treated. Why do you think these things are so important in high school? Does this change in life after high school?
- o Why is it important to have a "clan"?

4. After allotting time for discussion, I will call on groups to share their findings.

Learning Activity Seven: The Tree

Related Objective: Theme #2

Learning activity steps:

1. Think about what intangible object the "tree" or art project in the novel represents. "Tree. Tree? It's too easy. I learned how to draw a tree in the second grade... You just chose your destiny, you can't change that." [p.12]
2. Write a short two-page reaction essay, backing up your thoughts with evidence from the novel. Some things to consider:
 - o Melinda's progression on the project .
 - o "Art" block.
 - o Her dedication to the project.
 - o Mr. Freeman's encouragement and guidance.
 - o The arborists [p.187].
 - o Her final project.

Learning Activity Eight: Learning to Speak about the Elephant

Related objective: Theme #3

Learning activity steps:

1. Read the poem "Elephant in the Room" (author unknown).

There's an elephant in the room.

It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?" and "I'm fine," and a thousand other forms of trivial chatter. We talk about the weather. We talk about work.

We talk about everything else, except the elephant in the room.

*There's an elephant in the room.
We all know it's there. We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.
It is constantly on our minds. For, you see, it is a very large elephant.
It has hurt us all.*

*But we don't talk about the elephant.
Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.*

*For if I cannot, then you are leaving me....
alone....
in a room....
with an elephant.*

2. In your reading journals, respond to this poem. Label this entry "Elephant Poem". Some things to consider:

- o Who is the speaker in this poem?
- o What is the "elephant"? What does the elephant represent?
- o What will be accomplished if they talk about the elephant?
- o What are your thoughts about the mood of the poem?
- o What elements of dialog are used in the poem? Why are they effective?
- o How does this poem relate to *Speak*? Have you ever had an elephant in the room?

Learning Activity Nine: I'm Nobody

Related objective: Theme #3

Learning activity steps:

1. Read the following poem by Emily Dickinson:

*I'm Nobody! Who are You?
by Emily Dickinson*

*I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us -don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.*

*How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!*

2. As a class, discuss: the Speaker, the theme, how it relates to *Speak*. Consider:

- o Is the Speaker really nobody? What is the Speaker's mood? Bitter? Playful? Sad?
- o What is this poem really talking about?
- o Is the desire to be alone always a sign of bad mental health? What are some other reasons for wanting to be alone?

o When someone rejects our company, how do we feel? Whose problem is it? Record your initial reaction as well as your thoughts after we discussed the poem. How did your view of the poem change?

3. Use a variety of passages from the novel for comparison. One example is:

Heather: "You don't like anything. You are the most depressed person I've ever met, and excuse me for saying this, but you are no fun to be around and I think you need professional help." [p. 105]

Have the students complete a compare/contrast quick-write. Suggest that they discuss their interpretation of Emily Dickinson's poem, the passage above, as well as other moments in the novel that deal with becoming reclusive.

Learning Activity Ten: Friendship

Related objective: Study Skills #1

Learning activity steps:

1. Read the passage:

I need a new friend. I need a friend period. Not a true friend, nothing close or share clothes or sleep giggle giggle yak yak. Just a pseudo-friend, disposable friend. Friend as accessory. Just so I don't feel and look so stupid. [p.22]

2. Define "friendship" as a class. Use a mind map on the board with student-suggested secondary "bubbles". Students will also suggest the characteristics they value in a friend.

3. Get in groups of four. Decide which characteristics are most important to your group. Make a graphic representation of your consensus using Inspiration software or a transparency. Present the model to the class with all group members participating.

4. Whole class discussion: What do you do if you recognized strange behavior in a friend? Would you ignore it? Confront them on it? Tell an adult? Talk to their parents? We will be focusing on the idea that it is important to demonstrate that you care. As a friend, you must weigh the consequences of not taking action. You are the closest to your friends, and you may spend more time with them than their own families. Would you be prepared to deal with the consequences if you failed to SPEAK OUT?

5. In the same groups used earlier, create and perform a public service announcement (a taped TV or radio message) advocating Speaking Out. Create a scenario—a depression, drugs, or other mental health crisis—that portrays a friend helping out.

Learning Activity Eleven: Guest Speaker from the Women and Children's Crisis Center

Related objective: Study Skills #2

Learning activity steps:

1. Predict: before the speaker arrives, think up a few main idea questions you would like to have answered-e.g., what services are available for victims of sexual abuse? If I thought a friend was a victim, what should I do? List your questions in your reading journals.
2. Listen to the speaker, taking an active part in what she is presenting to you. Ask questions after she is done presenting. Also, take note of three unfamiliar words the speaker uses; define them later in your journal.
3. Summarize what you learned from the presentation in your reading journals under the heading "Guest Speaker One."
4. Write a class thank you to the speaker.

Learning Activity Twelve: The Interior Monologue

Related objective: Comprehension #1

Learning activity steps: Very often, what someone is thinking is very different from what that person is saying or doing. This tension can be ironic and humorous. And it can be fun to write. Read the selection below-a more humorous example of interior monologue written by Dorothy Parker.

Excerpt from Dorothy Parker's "But the One on the Right"

I knew it. I knew if I came to this dinner, I'd draw something like this baby on my left. They've been saving him up for me for weeks. Now, we've simply got to have him--his sister was so sweet to us in London; we can stick him next to Mrs. Parker--she talks enough for two. Oh, I should never have come, never. I'm here against my better judgment, to a decision. That would be a good thing for them to cut on my tombstone: Wherever she went, including here, it was against her better judgment. This is a fine time of the evening to be thinkinabout tombstones. That's the effect he's had on me, already, and the soup hardly cold yet. I should have stayed at home for dinner. I could have had something on a tray. The head of John the Baptist, or something. Oh, I should not have come.

Well, the soup's over, anyway. I'm that much nearer to my Eternal Home. Now the soup belongs to the ages, and I have said precisely four words to the gentleman on my left. I said, "Isn't this soup delicious?"; that's four words. And he said, "Yes, isn't it?"; that's three. He's one up on me.

At any rate, we're in perfect accord. We agree like lambs. We've been all through the soup together, and never a cross word between us. It seems rather a pity to let the subject drop, now we've found something on which we harmonize so admirably. I believe I'll bring it up again; I'll ask him if that wasn't delicious soup. He says, "Yes, wasn't it?" Look at that, will you; perfect command of his tenses.

Here comes the fish. Goody, goody, goody, we got fish. I wonder if he likes fish. Yes, he does; he says he likes fish. Ah, that's nice. I love that in a man. Look, he's talking! He's

chattering away like a veritable magpie! He's asking me if I like fish. Now does he really want to know, or is it only a line? I'd better play it cagey. I'll tell him, "Oh, pretty well." Oh, I like fish pretty well; there's a fascinating bit of autobiography for him to study over. Maybe he would rather wrestle with it alone. I'd better steal softly away, and leave him to his thoughts.

2. Experiment with this genre by creating an interior voice of a character in one of the following states:

- o Longing
- o Envy
- o Inebriation
- o Joy
- o Grief
- o Boredom

Create some tension between the external setting and dialogue and the interior voice. Try at least one hundred words.

Learning Activity Thirteen: Media Lesson

Related objectives: Comprehension #2

Learning activity steps:

1. View movie clip from *Girl, Interrupted*. Show the scene where Susanna is forced to see the psychiatrist by her parents. This includes the part at the psychiatrist's office: "Dr. Potts: Susanna, four days ago, you chased a bottle of aspirin with a bottle of vodka. Susanna: I had a headache."

2. In your journal, write three things that this scene has in common with *Speak*. Include details in your comments; use your understandings about motives and behavior to make inferences and draw some conclusions.

3. Have a class discussion about what is happening:

- o Are her parents against her? Is the psychiatrist against her?
- o What is wrong with Susanna? Why did she take drastic action in the first place? Is she an outcast? Is she unloved? How do you know?
- o Do you feel Susanna needs help? Why?
- o What would you do if this were your best friend? Would you support Susanna, her parents, the psychiatrist? How are Susanna and Melinda alike? How are they different? How are Melinda's and Susanna's parents alike/different?

Learning Activity Fourteen: Maxims, Sayings and Clever Quotations

Related Objective (s): Comprehension #3

Learning activity steps:

1. Individually, consider old maxims and sayings that you have heard. Some examples include:

- o What doesn't kill you will only make you stronger.
- o It's survival of the fittest and only the strong survive.
- o Strength in numbers.

2. Think, write, pair, share: Consider where these sayings may have come from and why they are still used today.

3. Write a short essay on different sayings, scripts, or clichés that you have heard over the years. Discuss the sayings you found especially true, who said them to you, and how these works have affected your decisions.

Culminating Activity: Dealing with a Friend in Crisis

Learning activity steps:

You will be responsible for demonstrating the skills you have attained in this unit through a final journal entry. Choose one of the following and respond:

1. You are a teacher at a local high school. One of your usually active students has suddenly begun to withdraw. You suspect she is suffering from depression. How could you be sure? What steps would you take?

2. You are a seventeen-year-old girl. You notice your friend has been acting weird. You think something major is going on - you heard a rumor that she was raped at a party. Using what you have learned from this unit, talk about what actions you would take, in priority order, and give reasons why you would or wouldn't do certain things.

3. You are a sixteen-year-old boy. You have been pressured by your "friends" to keep your mouth shut about a rape you know occurred at a party last Friday. Your best friend, Tom, was the one who did it. You heard him bragging in the locker room. The victim, Emily, hasn't been to school all week. Although you don't know the girl, she seems really quiet and nice. How do you react? This entry should be at least two pages in length. You will need to pay attention to grammar and conventions. Although this will not be a "formal essay", it should be representative of your best writing. After you respond to the prompt, you will turn in your reading journal in to me for a final grade.

References

Laurie Halse Anderson (1999). *Speak*. New York: Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers.

[Emily Dickinson. "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"](#)

[Dorothy Parker. "But the one on my right."](#)