

## **Silence Is Not Always Golden: Finding Your Voice**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Being a high school reading teacher I deal with some very reluctant readers. Many of my students are behind in their reading levels by as much as three or four grades. To keep my students plugged in, I try to find the perfect material. If I do not choose well, I will lose many of them before we really get into a book. I have found that many of my students are interested in true stories and coming of age stories. They need to be able to relate to the characters and the plot. Another aspect I need to consider is that many of my students are “at risk.” A student is often behind one or more grades as a result of being a child of divorced parents, a child of an absent parent, a child in poverty, or a child with children. An “at risk” child is at risk for failure. Because many of my students have been through their share of turbulent times, they often need help dealing with the various issues, which surround their lives.

Many teenagers feel alone, angry, afraid and alienated as they make their way from childhood to adulthood. They often feel that they are the only ones with whatever difficulty they are burdened with. What is worse is that these young people are unable to express their feelings of fear, anger or alienation in ways that help them deal with the situation. They act out in the classroom by trying to be funny or acting aggressively toward the teacher or other students; or, sometimes they just seem to withdraw within themselves. I have experienced students becoming angry with me at the tiniest provocation and I think to myself, “This kid can’t possibly be that angry about what just happened.” When I explore the student’s situation I find out he/she had serious problems at home. Kids can be very cruel. This is learned early on when little kids laugh at other kids for a variety of reasons. I have seen kids get laughed at because they made a mistake in class. Perhaps they have given a wrong answer, misspelled a word or misread a word in a text. The school bully makes the fat kid the butt of his jokes and others join in by laughing which increases the humiliation of that one child. All of these children learn that if they are different or wrong or have some weak point, they had better be careful because they may become the target of ridicule amongst their peers. This leads kids to be afraid to try because they might be wrong; afraid to express themselves because they might be perceived as weird or strange and they may be ostracized by the others. Teenagers, like everyone else, get frustrated and angry; but unlike younger kids they have the societal expectation of knowing appropriate methods for dealing with these feelings. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Students often do not know how to verbalize their frustrations. I have seen too many fights in the hallway and in the classroom. Teenagers get frustrated because they are not yet adults, but they are not little kids either. They feel the pressures of coming adulthood and all it entails. Trying to find your place in the world with a healthy sense of self is incredibly stressful.

In this unit I would like to help my students deal with the issue of finding their voice as a way of dealing with anger, frustration, fear and alienation. I believe this can be accomplished through reading and reflecting on books that lend themselves to these themes. Students will read about contemporary young people who are going through extremely difficult events and see how these characters live through these events. Students will learn to question their current strategies in dealing with these issues as well as develop new ones. They will be able to take their newfound knowledge and ideas as they mature and grow into adults. My ultimate hope for this unit is that they will be happier and more fulfilled adults.

Students will be reading *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, *You Don't Know Me* by David Klass. The reading and reflecting of these selections will benefit my students in several ways. First, their vocabulary will improve as they read new words in a meaningful context. Second, they will be able to improve their reading comprehension by practicing good reading skills such as summarization, inferencing, finding fact and opinion, looking at cause and effect and questioning. Students will also be able to see how ignoring a problem will not make it go away; how succumbing to peer pressure can alter the course of your life forever; how things are not always what they seem; and how misplaced loyalties can leave you asking what could have been.

### ***SPEAK***

One of the books I will use in this unit is *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. *Speak* is about a girl named Melinda Sordino who, on the eve of her freshman year in high school, is raped at a party. The rapist is an upper classman from school. She calls 911 but when the operator comes on the phone Melinda is unable to speak. Responding to the 911 call, the police break up the party and now not only does Melinda have the rape to deal with but also she is now ostracized by all of her friends. They have found out that she is responsible for summoning the police but never learn the reason why. Neither her parents nor her long standing friends seem to notice that something is wrong with Melinda in spite of the fact that her grades continue to decline, and she continually chews on her lip to the point of bleeding. She is all but totally alone as she goes through her freshman year until almost the end. She is attacked again by the same boy only this time she finds her voice and fights back. A new student named Heather befriends her but Melinda never reveals herself to Heather either.

Students will appreciate the high school setting of *Speak*. The teachers are given nicknames like Mr. Neck, the social studies teacher, and Hairwoman, the English teacher. Students separate themselves into groups, which is typical of many high schools. There are right and wrong hairstyles, clothes and attitudes. If a person does not have these when they enter high school they may be headed toward social trouble. Melinda is also cynical toward school rules, norms and authority figures. This too is part of any normal high school.

Melinda, with her lack of voice, speaks for many teenagers who, for fear of what others will think, do, or say, spend each day alone with their troubles. For the students who do not have any trouble speaking what is on their mind, they will perhaps develop some compassion and understanding for those who do. The quiet student can slip by everyone, other students and teachers alike. If we do not hear someone complain, we assume everything is all right when in reality silence has its own message. Melinda points this out when she talks about another student who is protesting his social studies lesson. The boy eventually walks out of class. To Melinda, “he says a million things without saying a word...I have never heard a more eloquent silence” (56). Sometimes people may feel that if their trouble is not spoken out loud, it will go away or that the pain associated with the trouble will not be as great. In Melinda’s case she thinks that if she does not talk about the rape, then she can pretend it never happened. At one point Melinda says, “The whole point of not talking about it, of silencing the memory, is to make it go away” (82). The students who have engaged in self-destructive behavior will be able to relate well with Melinda. When Melinda’s parents ask her what is wrong with her because her grades are going down and she does not talk to them, her response is, “They don’t want to hear anything I have to say” (87). She writes a runaway note to her parents but they never even see it. They are out of touch with their child. At one point Melinda scratches her wrist with a paper clip. When her mom sees the wound her reply is, “I don’t have time for this, Melinda” (88). I have heard female students talk and compare notes on their various attempts at self-mutilation. When I have talked to classes in general about self-mutilation, their response is usually something like, “how dumb.” They fail to consider the pain associated with this type of behavior. When students read and reflect on *Speak*, perhaps they will be able to see themselves or a friend from a different perspective and be able to make healthier choices and decisions. It is like when people talk about spousal abuse and, in ignorance, they say how stupid the person is for staying in an abusive situation. People do not really consider the abused person’s whole situation. It is almost a type of prejudice. Melinda’s story will enable students to develop a deeper understanding of others and therefore develop a deeper understanding of themselves. In developing compassion and empathy they will be better equipped to interact with society in general once they are out of school.

Before my students begin reading they will do pre-reading activities. This is extremely helpful with reluctant readers because it can give them a purpose for reading. What I would like to do is something I feel fairly certain every teacher has wished he/she could do at some point in their careers; this is to get every student to put tape over their mouths for a class period. This would of course be voluntary but I would let them know that a class participation grade would be included in the activity. We would then have sustained silent reading with a book of their choice for twenty minutes, after which I would have them write a response to what they read. The response would be specific in that they would have to write how their book made them feel. I would then have them share their response with a partner but they would not be allowed to speak or write. They would be allowed to draw pictures or act out their self-expressions. When this is completed I will have them take the tape off and have them write a page or two on how it

felt to be unable to speak. They can then share their thoughts or feelings with the class. We can then discuss how different people felt. This experience alone will be memorable for the students as well as raise quite a few questions. The students will ask what the purpose of the exercise is and what they were supposed to learn from it. Together we will find out the answers to these questions as we discuss how some people feel that they are unable to speak even without tape and what would cause someone to feel that they could not talk. We will discuss their feelings associated with not being able to speak. I expect the students to feel frustrated and relieved when the tape comes off. We can then talk about what it is like for people who out of fear or shame are unable to “take their tape off.” Students will discuss the reasons why fear and shame can prevent someone from feeling like they can speak about what is going on in their lives. We will talk about why we laugh at others’ pain and how it feels to be the recipient of other people’s ridicule. We will talk about why people ridicule each other. What is gained by engaging in such an activity? We would consider those people in terms of time. My student would not be able to talk for probably thirty to forty minutes but we would consider what it would feel like to live like that for an extended period of time. We would talk about what it would do to a person. Actually this activity would probably take two or three class periods. I believe this activity would be both fun and insightful as students consider quiet people from a different perspective. They will begin to question what motivates this kind of behavior, which will intrigue them when they first encounter the book they are about to read.

When my students receive a copy of *Speak* they will have strong opinions and ideas as to what the story is about. As the students read, we will annotate. We will summarize, infer, ask questions, write personal impressions and look for facts and opinions. As reluctant readers my students do not always know how to summarize, infer, ask questions and write their impressions for what they have read. *Speak* lends itself to practicing these skills because it is divided by short titled sections. For each section students will be able to practice writing summaries. The book is also divided by grading periods so once the students have summarized each subsection we can look at and analyze these to write a summary for each grading period. This will allow my students to start with a small chunk of text and work their way up to being able to summarize larger pieces of text. Students will also learn how to ask questions where the answers are not necessarily presented on the page. Every third subsection, students can write a question beginning with how or why. They can write their questions on the board and we will be able to answer them as a class. Students like to put their work on the board and by allowing as many people to go to the board at one time that can fit, those student who are unsure or who are shy will not be as afraid to risk themselves by putting their work on display. Writing personal impressions may seem like a simple task but my students do not tend to be too free with their thoughts at first. It is easy for them to write “this sucks!” To get them to explain why they think something sucks is a different matter. After each grading period in the book I will have students move around the room and share their impressions with at least five other people. They will have one to two minutes to talk (this will be timed) while the other person must listen. The listener must write down what the speaker has to say. I will also guide them to note those parts where Melinda eludes to the night of her assault and

how she keeps her pain buried within herself. We can discuss what effect that might have on a person. The reader does not know that Melinda has been raped until the very end so there will be a lot of room for speculation for lines like, "I'm hanging a poster outside the metal-shop room when IT creeps up" (86). "IT" refers to the senior boy who has raped her. What could bring a person to refer to another person as it? At what point does a person become an it and cease being a person?

After reading the story I would like to have someone from either the police department or some other social service agency come talk to my students about date rape and abuse in relationships. Many students see rape as a crime centered around sex without understanding that it is an assault on a person's body. I will also have them pair up to research and write a report about rape, the consequences of rape or what kind of help is available for victims of rape as extra credit. They can then share their findings with the rest of the class.

### ***MONSTER***

*Monster* by Walter Dean Myers is an intriguing book in that in the end the reader, like the protagonist, is left unsure about what has actually happened. The story is about a sixteen-year-old boy, named Steve Harmon, who is on trial for felony murder. The crime occurs in the process of another crime, which is robbery. Two young men have gone in to rob a drug store. They have not brought a gun but the storeowner has a gun. In an attempt to protect his store, the storeowner uses his gun to fend off the robbers but there is a struggle, the gun goes off and the owner is killed. Allegedly Steve's part in the crime was to go into the drug store before the actual robbery to make sure there were no customers. Another interesting aspect of the book is that it is written in the form of a movie script written by the protagonist Steve Harmon. Before his arrest, Steve was enrolled in a film class in high school. The title of the book comes from the district attorney's description of Steve to the jury. The whole story is the progression of the trial and Steve's thoughts and feelings as he spends time in court and in jail. In the end he is found not guilty but when he finds out the verdict he moves to hug his attorney but she turns away from him as he spreads his arms to hug her. He is left with the question, "When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away" (281).

Reading and reflecting on this book, my students see someone who is not really sure who he is. You get the impression that before his indictment he had an idea of who he was but through the course of the trial he is less sure. Steve seems like an average teenager before his arrest. He goes to school, has a favorite class (film class), and lives at home with his mom, dad and little brother. He is working through trying to determine who he is and where he fits in the world. There is a neighborhood thug named King whom Steve has admired. Steve writes in his journal: "I had looked at him and wanted to be tough like him" (96). King is Steve's co-defendant. Steve is loved by his parents but he seems to feel that his incarceration is testing that love. When his dad comes to see him

in jail he sees his father cry for the first time. Steve writes, "It's like a man looking down to see his son and seeing a monster instead" (116). Steve is left questioning everything he has ever known about himself. He repeats over and over how he is a good person. His lawyer tells him she has to make him look different from King. She has to make him look good. This implies that he could look like a bad person. Can anyone really tell what a good person or bad person looks like? This situation will give students a perspective from which to question their beliefs concerning what a good or bad person looks like.

Appearance is another type of self-expression. Just like we make judgments about others based on whether they are loud or quiet, we also make judgments about others based on appearance. Students can consider the questions, What does our appearance tell other people?, What does our facial expressions tell other people?, How can someone looking at someone else start a fight?, and What do we tell others when we avoid eye contact on a regular basis or when we stand tall? Steve, like Melinda, also is stifled in his inability to speak but where hers is internal, his is external. He cannot speak in the courtroom because he is not permitted except when he takes the witness stand and then his speech is stifled. He cannot speak in jail because he is terrified of the other inmates. He cannot tell his mom and dad how he feels because of the hurt and fear he sees in their eyes. At one point he has a dream where he states, "I was trying to ask questions and nobody could hear me. I was shouting and shouting but everyone went about their business" (63). Even though my students have not committed any crimes they will still be able to relate to Steve's fear of the unknown in spite of the fact that Steve's fear is amplified by his extreme situation. Teenagers are faced with the unknown in a way unlike any other time in their lives. Soon they will be expected to leave the nest and go make their own way in the world. That can be pretty scary! Students at my school don't like to talk about things that scare them. They say they are not scared because they don't want to be ridiculed by their peers. This part of the story creates an avenue through which we can talk about what kinds of things scare them. We can create a list of things that scare them at school, at home, with relationships and perhaps even touch on seemingly irrational fears. Students will be able to see from their peer's responses that they are not alone in their fears. From this list we can then discuss what they do with their fears. How do they express them? Do they hide them, talk about them or just try to ignore them hoping they will just go away? They will also understand the sense of not being heard and not being known that Steve is living through. Oftentimes teenagers don't feel heard. They are constantly being told to be quiet by teachers and administrators. They tell each other to "shut up" which is generally responded to with "you shut up." They have troubles with boyfriends or girlfriends and have no arena to talk through their troubles. We can talk about this situation and how students and teachers might work together to help students find a time and place to deal with their problems.

For a pre-reading activity I would like to pair the students and then have them create a biography for a monster. Before they begin, we will brainstorm a list of infamous or semi-infamous monsters they may be familiar with. This will help them to generate their own ideas for their biographies. We can talk about what makes a monster a monster. We can examine how the idea of a monster changes as a person gets older. How does society

define a monster? How does a person become a monster? These are but a sample of the questions that can be asked from this part of the story. I am sure some students will think of questions that I have failed to consider. They would be instructed to draw a picture of their monster, explain what he does that makes him a monster, how he spends his leisure time when he/she is not out being scary, what his/her likes and dislikes are and anything else that comes to mind. The pairs can then present their creations to the class. From this activity the students will have a collective idea of the concept of monster and they will be primed to read *Monster*.

Reading *Monster* can generate new vocabulary, provide my students with genuinely good material with which to practice their reading skills and most importantly generate some thought-provoking discussions. Steve insists that he is good and yet there he is in jail on trial for felony murder. Can that happen to a really good person? Steve admits to the reader that he went into the drugstore, looked around and walked back out, but on the witness stand he denies ever being in the drug store that day. Do people ever lie so convincingly to others that they wind up convincing themselves or do people lie to themselves and then work to convince others of their beliefs? He also tells the reader "I know what right is, what truth is. I don't do tight ropes, moral or otherwise." (271) Which does the reader believe? Which will my students believe? On what will they base their decision? Is it ever ok to lie? These are questions my students will deal with as we read through *Monster*. This will help my students to examine their own morality. We will be able to discuss right, wrong and various degrees of those. In Steve's case if he did what he is accused of did he really do anything wrong? All the time I see students do things they are not supposed to. These are little things like poking the guy in front of them or throwing a ball of paper and yet these students will lie about it like it was nothing. If you tell them you saw them throw the paper and that they are lying sometimes they will still deny it. This is something I do not understand but after a discussion with my students about Steve denying any culpability I will have a better understanding of my students and my students will have a better understanding of themselves. Steve's predicament of not being able to express himself will also make an interesting discussion and perhaps could lead to an interesting paper. I know students have been in the office where they are not allowed to speak their minds and even if they did no one would believe them. This leads back to the paper throwing question. How is it that adults in authority sometimes do not listen to or believe teenagers? How does this effect teenagers at the moment? How does this effect them over time? If adults assume students are lying because of their past experiences then how do students deal with not being believed when they are telling the truth? This can lead to a discussion about assumptions we make about others. On what do we base those assumptions? What assumptions do teenagers have about adults? What assumptions do adults have about teenagers? *Monster* seems to have limitless possibilities for learning moments, epiphanies and thought generating discussions.

Steve is an African American, which brings up the idea that more African American males, go to prison than any other ethnic group. As a class we can discuss whether or not this is really true. If it is then, what is the cause of such an epidemic? If we determine that

is not true, then where did that idea come from? Students can research the topic in groups to examine this issue. Their findings will be discussed which will bring new thoughts and ideas to the forefront of my students' minds.

*Monster* lends itself to being read by the whole class because it is written like a movie script. Students will take turns reading different parts. It also has a journal, which is divided into days. The students can keep a reading log and divide it up according to the days given in the journal. Students can summarize each day as well as note the various points at which Steve notes his innocence or guilt.

After my students read *Monster*, I will divide the class into two groups and they will debate as to whether Steve Harmon committed the crime that he is accused of. Both sides can create an argument for innocence or guilt based on the evidence given in the book. Students can examine how their emotions can effect their decisions. They will be able to see how difficult it might be to keep emotions out of a judgment of determining someone's innocence or guilt. I will grade them on a rubric where the best thought out arguments receives the best grades. That would be the arguments that find the most support from the text for evidence. This will help my students to see the importance of reading a text more than once to get a better understanding of what they have read. Students generally dislike having to read something twice but perhaps if they have a real purpose for doing so the experience will be less painful. This will also benefit them in their writing. In English class they are often asked to prove their point based on what they have read. They do not have a lot of experience with having to go back and find the quote that will make their point believable. Also, it is my understanding that on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, they will be expected to show their ability to use this skill. The more they learn and practice this skill, the better off they will be when they actually take the test.

### ***YOU DON'T KNOW ME***

The third selection I would like to use in this unit is a book entitled *You Don't Know Me* by David Klass. This is a story about a boy who, unbeknownst to his mother, is being abused by his mother's boyfriend. An interesting aspect of this story is that in spite of its sad theme, it has some really humorous parts. The boy's name is John and he likes to point out more than once that he is named after a toilet. His natural father left when he was a baby never to be seen or heard from again. John's mother works long hours at a factory while her boyfriend does not have a regular job. His irregular employment is in dealing with stolen merchandise. The reader learns this when John is made to go with him on an escapade. You never learn the name of John's mother's boyfriend. He is just referred to as "the man who is not my father." The humorous part of the story revolves around John's love life and school life. He calls his school an anti-school because according to John, "school is a fun place and this place is torture" (pg 8); his home is not a home because he does not feel loved or safe there; and his friend is not a friend because he is after the same girl as John. As a matter of fact very little in John's life is what it



appears to be. Nothing seems to fit a normal definition of what it should be for John. This will most likely confuse my students. In the process of understanding the text my class can discuss the meanings of various institutions in their lives. For instance, what makes a home a home? How would they define school? How would they define a friend? In answering these questions, students will consider different aspects of their lives that they have most likely taken for granted and in doing so learn more about themselves. This will also serve the purpose of helping students develop their questioning skills. I have found, in the case of my students at least, that students are often so busy answering questions they tend to be a bit befuddled when they are asked to create their own questions.

John also plays the tuba and his band teacher, Mr. Steenwilly, is the one who winds up saving John when the man who is not his father proceeds to beat his brains out. Mr. Steenwilly suspects something is wrong and passes by John's house on a semi-regular basis. John does not tell his mother that he is being abused because he is convinced that she does not know him nor does she care to. He is also convinced that if she knew, she would choose the man who is not his father over him. In the end, when John is in the hospital, he finds out that his mother does love/know him and she would indeed choose him over the man who is not his father.

Reading and reflecting on this story will benefit my students in several ways. It will reinforce the idea that even though it may be difficult to tell someone what is going on, it is always better in the end. If John had confided in Mr. Steenwilly or his mother early on he would not have wound up in the hospital with bandages all around his head. Sometimes people go through difficult times thinking they are the only ones with their particular troubles, but if they can see that someone else is going through the same thing, then they might not feel so all alone. John's story is so strong that reading it may prompt a student who is going through a similar experience to come forward so that that student can receive help from the appropriate school personnel. John's worry that his mother will choose the boyfriend over him is not unfounded from my experience with students. Just today at work I had a student tell me that her mother's boyfriend has been trying to touch her and still the mother wants to be with her boyfriend. She is but one example of three students that I have talked to who have similar stories. I can't help but think that if there have been three girls that I know of in the last five years of teaching, how many more are there that I don't know about? If this story reaches those students and helps them deal with some similar situation of abuse in the home, then it would be well worth the reading.

Another issue that John deals with is abandonment by his father. In one scene in the story John makes up a father-son talk about girls. He gets to a certain point and is unable to continue because he does not have a father. John writes, "in a fantasy, I cannot have my father speak knowledge to me that I myself do not own." (60) Too many students have been abandoned by their fathers. This creates anger, frustration and pain for too many people. *You Don't Know Me* does not deal at length with that issue but it does open the door for the class to discuss this topic. Where do young people go for guidance when there is no father or father-figure around? What support groups are available to help these

students? This would be a good opportunity for one of the councilors or a representative from Big Sisters or Big Brothers to come talk to the students. This presents another opportunity for a book to make a real difference in someone's life. Another aspect of this discussion can be the students who have both parents but do not appreciate them might see their parents from a new perspective and develop a greater appreciation for them. Also, those same students might develop a greater understanding and possible empathy for those students who are missing a parent.

John also deals with trying to date the girl of his dreams. This is something many students can relate to. He manages to ask the girl out via a note passed in class. All students know about passing notes in class but to John's surprise "Glory Hallelujah," (83) this is what John calls her, swallows his note whole. She agrees and they go out, but on this date he learns what kind of girl she is which is exactly the kind of girl he does not need. The girl works hard to get John in trouble with her father and fortunately for John she does not quite succeed. Gloria talks John into coming in after the date where she takes him down to the basement. She proceeds to turn the music up loud enough to wake her sleeping father and when he comes pounding on the door she tells John not to worry that the door is locked. John is trying to figure out how to get out of the situation as Gloria's father is pounding on the door. John narrowly escapes through a doggie door only to get home and be abused by the man who is not his father.

As a pre-reading activity for *You Don't Know Me* I will have my students write a letter to their mother or father telling their parent one thing that they would really like for their parents to know about them. This could be something that is really mundane like "I don't like cheerios for breakfast every morning" to something more crucial like "it hurts my feelings when you..." I will not send the letters. Rather, I will place them in a large envelope so that when we are finished reading the book, the students can take their letters back. They can reread them, and decide whether or not they want their letters sent on to their parents. From there we will begin reading the book. As we read we will again annotate by way of a reading log and discuss. Students will summarize, ask questions, answer each other's questions, generalize, infer and predict. One of the interesting aspects of *You Don't Know Me* is that John uses at least one unusual word for every chapter. He always follows this usage up with "whatever that means." This will give my students an opportunity to examine the usage of more difficult words. It will be interesting to see my student's reaction as they move from the more serious tone set at the beginning of the story to the lighter tone of John's life at school.

After reading the selection, students will look at their letters to their parents and we will discuss whether or not it is important to keep information from parents. Do students usually do this? If so, why? What would stop a teenager from telling their parents about their lives? The students will use these ideas to create their own story in which a teenager has trouble communicating his or her problems to others who might be able to help them. Students will share their stories with the class. I would also like to have my students create a window display for one of the display cases in the school that tells other students

the importance of telling someone when you are in trouble. Students need to know that they are not alone and that there are people out there who can help them with what ever the problem is.

I will culminate this unit with a question wall. This is a take off on the word wall. I will have the students write all of the questions they have written throughout this unit on a large piece of paper. At the end of the unit students will be allowed to go to the question wall and find their two favorite questions. They will then have to use one to two sheets of paper to discuss those questions and what those questions mean to them personally. They will also of course have to answer the question. Students will not be able to choose short answer questions because then they will not be able to fill the pages required by the assignment. This activity will help the students see the importance of asking questions rather than taking things on face value. It will also help them to see the value of a well thought out question. Hopefully, as they go through discussing the question they will have an epiphany about themselves and or life in general.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson Plan One**

This lesson is designed to be an extra credit activity, as it would loose impact if all students participated in it. It can be implemented before students begin reading *Speak*. Even though not all students will be participating in the actual activity, the whole class can participate with the results of the activity.

#### ***Objective***

Students will practice informal writing, gather information though observations, draw conclusions, make inferences and present information to others.

#### ***Materials Needed***

Paper, pen or pencil

#### ***Activities***

Students will go through a normal school day with one difference. They will not speak to anyone. Students will keep a journal four times about observations. They will note how they felt, how other students and teachers reacted to them, and any questions that came to mind throughout the day. Students will then draw conclusions and make inferences based on their observations. Students will then present their observations, conclusions, inferences and questions to the class. The class can then respond to any questions raised as well as ask their own questions of the student presenting to the class.

## **Lesson Plan Two**

This lesson will be used while students are reading *Speak*. Students will look for clues as to why Melinda will not speak.

### ***Objective***

Students will read and evaluate text for information and purpose. Students will also make predictions.

### ***Materials Needed***

*Speak*, paper, pen or pencil

### ***Activities***

Class will read selection together. For the first grading period of the story I will point out lines in the story which allude to the night of Melinda's assault. As the class progresses through the book, I will cease to point out clues and encourage students to find clues on their own. As students find clues, they will be added to a continual list. When we reach the point in the story where Melinda's secret is revealed, we will review our list to re-examine the clues. We will examine Laurie Halse Anderson's use of the word "it" when referring to Melinda's attacker and draw conclusions.

## **Lesson Plan Three**

This lesson is a pre-reading activity for *Monster*. It will allow students to draw from their prior knowledge and imaginations and to be creative while setting a purpose for reading. It will also allow them to work collaboratively with a fellow student.

### ***Objective***

Students will create a visual representation of a monster and write a biography for their monster that they will present to the class.

### ***Materials Needed***

Notebook paper, art paper, pen or pencil, colored pencils, markers, yarn, glue, sequins, tissue paper.

### ***Activities***

Class will brainstorm different aspects of monsters. This will include famous monsters, what monsters look like, how they behave, what they eat, and their most defining

characteristic. After this students will be partnered to begin creating a visual representation of a monster. Students will be given one or two days to complete their representations. Once this is complete, students will begin writing a biography for their monster. They will include his/her childhood, education, and a day in the life of the monster. The pairs of students will then present their representations to the class along with the biographies. These will be assessed by how much effort was put into the work, how much attention was paid to detail and how much critical thinking was utilized for the overall assignment. Once the presentation is made, the rest of the class will be encouraged to ask questions of the presenters. This will be accomplished by giving extra points to those who ask questions.

#### **Lesson Plan Four**

This lesson will be used after students have read *Monster*. Students will re-create a mini version of the story to argue Steve's innocence or guilt.

#### ***Objective***

Students will improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills through re-telling, developing an argument and making judgments based on information presented.

#### ***Materials Needed***

Paper, notes from the selection, pen or pencil

#### ***Activities***

The class will be divided into four groups. One group will work to defend Steve; one group will work to prosecute him; one group will serve as the jury; and the last group will serve as a panel of judges. The defense and prosecution will have 30-40 minutes to look through their annotations for evidence to support their argument. While they are preparing, the jury will be expected to sit quietly and read from a book or magazine of their choice or write a letter to a friend. The panel of judges will have the job of making sure everyone is doing what they are supposed to be doing. Once the allotted time is up, both sides will present their arguments using the evidence given in the text. Each side will have ten minutes to present their argument. Afterward, the jury will decide which side presented the best argument. The panel of judges will ask questions of the jury to determine why the jury made the judgment that it did. This assignment will be graded according to a rubric which will take into account the amount of evidence given from the text in the form of quotes, the reasoning used to make judgments, and the type of questions that are asked by the judges.

## **Lesson Plan Five**

This lesson will be used as a pre-reading activity for *You Don't Know Me*. Students will be asked to consider their relationship with their parents.

### ***Objective***

Students will write for a specific purpose.

### ***Materials Needed***

Paper, pen or pencil

### ***Activities***

Students will be asked to write a letter containing one of the following to their parents: (1) what would you tell your parents if you could tell them anything? (2) What do you wish your parent would do for you or for himself or herself that does not involve getting you something? (3) What one thing could you or your parents do to improve your relationship with them? The letter will not be sent to the parent initially rather it will be placed in an envelope to be opened once the class has read the book in its entirety. At this time students will have the choice of having their letters sent to their parents or not. Students will also be given the opportunity to change their letters if they wish to. This assignment will be graded on whether or not students write the letter. I do not intend to read them as I want the students to be as candid as possible.

## **Lesson Plan Six**

This lesson will bring the whole unit together. It will allow students to choose from a selection of activities, all of which are designed to take the idea that communication is vital outside of the classroom to the rest of the school and hopefully extend to the community. This will reinforce the idea that reading can make a real difference in a person's life.

### ***Objective***

Students will improve reading comprehension by generalizing, writing and presenting to a specific audience.

### ***Materials Needed***

Paper, pen or pencil, poster board, information such as statistics gathered from organizations designed to help young people with their problems, markers, pictures from magazines

### *Activities*

Students will work in small groups of three or two or on their own. They will have a choice of writing a poem, writing a letter to a friend, writing a morning or afternoon announcement, making a poster, helping to create a display case or writing a public service announcement for a local radio station. All of these activities will center on the value of using your voice to deal constructively with your problems. This will enable the students to share with other students what they have learned about how communicating can go a long way toward solving any problem that a person might be having. This will also create the possibility for students to help others, and thereby help themselves.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999.

This book tells of a teenage girl who is raped and is unable to find her voice to tell anyone what has happened to her. Eventually she is attacked again by the same person, only this time she finds her voice and prevents the assault.

Duran, Miguel. *Don't Spit on My Corner*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1992.

This book is about a young man growing up in the barrio in Los Angeles during WWII. The young man, Mike tries to find his place in a society that he feels has no use for him.

Klass, David. *You Don't Know Me*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001.

This book tells of a young man who is being abused by his mother's boyfriend. He believes no one cares, especially his mother. In the end he finds that she does care when he is beaten so badly he is sent to the hospital.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 1999.

This book tells of a young man who is accused and tried for felony murder. He is eventually found not guilty but he is left feeling totally alienated.

Tashlik, Phyllis, ed. *Hispanic, Female and Young: An Anthology*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1994.

The stories in this book do not just touch young, female Hispanic people but people from other cultures as well. Reluctant readers really enjoy this book.