

# speak

the graphic novel

## READING GUIDE



La Rioja



CRIE  
CENTRO RIOJANO  
DE INNOVACIÓN  
EDUCATIVA

Esta guía ha sido creada por docentes de La Rioja como material de apoyo para el profesorado de lenguas extranjeras.  
Promueve el aprendizaje competencial, y puede integrarse en los Proyectos de Innovación Educativa "Tirar de la Lengua", "Almazuela 2.0: Radio, televisión y prensa", así como en los proyectos bilingües y plurilingües.

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## Why this guide?

This reading guide is designed for English teachers of *Bachillerato* to use Laurie Halse Anderson's highly acclaimed book *Speak: The Graphic Novel* in the English classroom. The guide provides numerous activities, reading and conversation questions, final project ideas and support materials to facilitate the English teacher's work.

QR codes provide access to links and support materials.

This publication may be used in conjunction with the 10 physical copies of the book available through the *Centro Riojano de Innovación Educativa*.

## Why promote reading?

Reading is a superpower at the reach of only the brave. There are definitely risks to it, but being superhuman couldn't come without its drawbacks. Yes, people around may try to discourage you if they see you reading while they're trapped on their screens. They have the intuition you're growing into something bigger than life, and they are right.

From the moment you start being a reader you'll never be bored again, hundreds of characters will go along with you wherever you want to take them. They'll tell you their secrets and sorrows, they'll

share their happy moments and tricks for life.

The long-cherished human dreams of the time machine and teletransportation already exist and you can easily carry them with you. Books! Take a peek into the details of any era and landscape and live as a Roman or an alien, choose to be a tormented assassin or a powerful king.

And as you live all those lives your own will evolves in a much more meaningful and deep way than without this mighty tool, the book.

# Why *Speak*: the Graphic Novel?



Are you tired of listening to your students say they do not have time to devote to reading? *Speak: the Graphic Novel* by Laurie Halse Anderson will take less time than an ordinary book, and what is more, it will help students be submerged into reading at the same time as they explore their high school life with some guidance taken from the book. The comic-like way of presenting the story will definitely make your students get hooked on reading.

*Speak* has been considered such a powerful book because depression, sexual assault and 'adult themes' come to light, giving readers the possibility to find their voice. This novel has even been banned from some libraries, and although published some years ago, it keeps resonating nowadays. Why not explore teenagers' social and emotional world from school?

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## Laurie Halse Anderson



Laurie Halse Anderson (1961, New York) has published numerous notable works, predominantly in the area of Young Adult Fiction and Historical Fiction. *Speak*, first published as a young adult novel in 1999, launched her career and was quickly positioned as an invaluable work depicting teenage life and the experience of sexual assault. It was adapted into a graphic novel in 2018, illustrated by the award winning illustrator Emily Carroll. The same year of its publication, Anderson revealed her own experience of rape and trauma. *Speak* was followed by another second memoir *Shout* (2019).

FIRST MARKING PERIOD

## Warmup Questions:



1. At the beginning of the school year it is normal to have expectations in mind. How do you think your course will be like? Try to predict it following the story: *It is my first morning of high school...*
2. Expressing emotions can be sometimes tricky. Play charades in groups to challenge yourself.
3. Think about what you would like to achieve in this school year or even in life, and decide a successful way to do so. Draw a timeline.
4. Talk about routines you have got on weekdays and how they differ from the ones at weekends.



Charades cards

## In depth activities:

- There are many **compound adjectives** in this section. Look for some of them and write sample sentences to show you understand their meanings.
- Look for **American terms** (e.g., janitor) in the book and give their **British equivalent** (e.g., caretaker).
- Play **Pictionary** to revise vocabulary from the section.



Pictionary cards



## Creativity:

- Think about things you would have liked to tell some of your teachers but you did not.
- Create a semester report card in which you include what you think should be assessed at school. You can also give yourself marks for each of the items included in your report card.

# Writing & Conversation Questions:

## writing

- Melinda's teachers can be very demanding. Do you think homework is really necessary?
- Melinda is afraid of looking at herself in the mirror and hides it in the wardrobe. What are you afraid of? What's your main fear?
- Report cards play an important role in this novel. Do marks really reflect intelligence or talent?

## speaking

- Friendship: "she didn't even bother to find out the truth, what kind of friend is that?" What makes a good friend?
- Heather says kids "have to join different clubs that have the Right People." Why do students do after school activities in your country?
- In *Speak* there are the Marthas, the cheerleaders, the jocks, the foreign exchange students... They are all stereotyped cliques. Which cliques can you find in your school?



## Comprehension Questions

- Melinda starts a new term at a new school as a freshman. How does she feel? How well does she adapt to school life?
- Melinda finds refuge in the old janitor's closet. Why does she choose such a place?
- Names in the novel have a meaning. Find examples and try to explain what they stand for.

## Phrasal Verbs & Expressions

look back	(p.8)
piss off	(p.9)
get an eye on	(p.11)
deal with	(p.12)
sleep over	(p.17)
beat out	(p.17)
turn into	(p.18)
figure out	(p.18)
act out	(p.20)
pull off	(p.20)
rip out	(p.21)
dwell on	(p.21)
walk in	(p.22)
send out	(p.23)
geek around	(p.29)
cheer on	(p.29)
hang out	(p.30)
find out	(p.32)
try out	(p.34)
sneak down	(p.40)
screw over	(p.44)
settle down	(p.45)
drop out	(p.54)
freak out	(p.54)
put over	(p.56)
gobble up	(p.60)
dress up	(p.61)
nag someone	(p.67)
pick up	(p.69)
look like	(p.69)



Quizlet  
activity

SECOND  
MARKING PERIOD

## Warmup Questions:



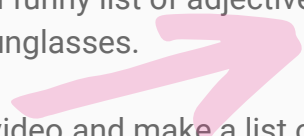
1. In some American schools they have mascots. Have you ever heard of that? Is there a mascot in yours? If not, what type of mascot would you like to represent you and your schoolmates? Can you really identify with one?
2. The Christmas holidays are around the corner. How do you normally feel about them? If you had a say, how would you celebrate Christmas?

### In depth activities:



[link to video](#)

- Which is better?
  - "Nicole's old lacrosse stick hit me in the head."
  - "Nicole's barf-yellow, gnarled, bloodstained lacrosse stick hit me in the head."
  - Use your imagination and make a long and funny list of adjectives that describe your favourite lipstick, jeans or sunglasses.
- Heather likes modelling. Watch the following video and make a list of all the negative adjectives and expressions that people use to describe themselves. Then, turn them into compliments.



## Creativity:

- In the novel there are different nicknames given to some teachers. Take Hairwoman and Mr. Freeman as an example. Use your imagination and invent new nicknames for your teachers (be witty, never offensive). Then share them on a Padlet and cast your vote for your favourite.
- Museum time: Everyone has nice childhood memories and cherished objects, like Melinda. Bring your first teddy bear to class, a special stone or any other object that means something to you, or a picture of some special childhood memory, and share their story with your classmates. On a piece of paper, explain why they are so important to you. Then put them on display in the classroom together with your classmates' and enjoy the exhibition.



# Writing & Conversation Questions:

## writing

- People around Melinda don't understand her reactions. Have you ever felt misunderstood by your parents, friends or teachers? Give examples and explain what happened and how you felt.
- During her biology class, Melinda remembers a happy episode with her family by an apple tree. What family memory do you treasure the most?

## speaking

- In the second term we can see David Petraki rebelling against Mr. Neck's racism. Have you ever taken a rebel stand against an unfair teacher or situation at school?
- Melinda creates a sculpture in art class and Mr Freeman tries to interpret. Show students different pieces of modern art and have them interpreted:
  - Tracy Enim's *My Bed*.
  - Picasso's *Guernica*.
  - Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*.
  - Jackson Pollocks's *Blue Lines*.



# Comprehension Questions

- There are two instances of rebellion against authority in school in this marking period, one by a student (David Petrakis against Mr Neck), and one by a teacher (Mr Freeman against the Principal). Melinda is awed by both of them. In your opinion, what causes this admiration?
- In the second marking period Melinda has several unusual reactions (tears, loss of consciousness, self-harm, apathy...) to apparently normal situations (a cut, a frog biopsy). Why do you think adults are so oblivious when they witness these reactions?
- Heather is Melinda's only friend. What kind of relationship do they have?

## Phrasal Verbs & Expressions

take down (p.79)  
fish out (p.79)  
figure out (p.84,  
114, 133, 155)  
sit down (p.88)  
burst over (p.91)  
come down with  
(p.101)  
dry out (p.101)  
look at (p.104)  
get away with (p.110)  
give up (p.113, 117)  
drown out (p.114)  
come up with (p.115)  
split up (p.117)  
spy on (p.123)  
grow up (p.133)  
pass out (p.139)  
go away (p.141)  
cut sth out (p.141)  
remind of (p.145)  
turn into (p.146)  
dream sth up (p.147)  
screw up (p.157)  
look for (p.158)  
get rid of (p.162)



Kahoot  
activity

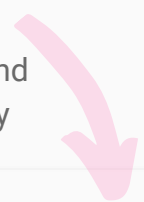


## Warmup Questions:

1. Winter, snow; everything freezes, feels like hibernating... "Why go to school?" Do you feel like Melinda at this time of the year?
2. The protagonist defines herself as a frozen gargoyle wondering if the sun is going to blow off the world today and sleep in. She talks about the cold and the silence, about depression. Is that a common feeling? What could cheer up Melinda?

## In depth activities:

- Flipped classroom: ask your students to watch the following video on symbolism at home. Then ask them to find more examples of visual and written symbols in *Speak*, as well as in other books, songs or films they like. Share the results in class.
- The third marking period ends at a climax. What would have happened if the police had arrived at the party in time to trap IT? Imagine different scenarios using the third conditional.



link to video



## Creativity:

- Describe a character that would fit in each of these groups: the Marthas, the sporty kid, the geek, the exchange student... Write a short dialogue and act it out.
- Friendship and love are very important in high school. Why don't you get hands on and make friendship necklaces, bracelets or key rings for your beloved ones?
- Make a list of ridiculous school projects, like the Marthas' (e.g. mailing snowballs to the weather-deprived children in Texas.)

# Writing & Conversation Questions:

## writing

- What book, among the ones you have to read this academic year, would you eliminate? Choose one and write a for/against essay providing arguments that support your decision.
- Melinda thinks that fifth grade was easy. Do you agree? In your experience, which grade has been the most complicated so far? Write an opinion essay on this topic.
- Melinda had a hard Valentine's day. Have you ever sent a card on 14 February? Received one? Write a descriptive essay about your worst/best Valentine's day ever.

## speaking

- In the third marking period, Melinda is suspended for her poor marks and behavioural problems. Try to convince the principal that she doesn't deserve that punishment (persuasion activity).
- With reference to *The Scarlet Letter*, Melinda says she should wear the letter S (S for silent, stupid, scared...). Think of yourself. What letter would you wear? Pick your letter and say why.
- David Petrakis invites Melinda to his place after the game, but Melinda comes up with different excuses to reject the invitation. Make a list of excuses not to attend a party/date and share them with your classmates. Then choose the best one.

## Comprehension Questions

- Mr. Freeman made Melinda study Picasso. At first she was upset, but then Cubism stole her breath away. Why? What brought that change about? What made her connect with the artist and his work?
- During this marking period Heather decides to break up with Melinda. Why?
- At the end of the fateful party, everybody gets mad at Melinda. Why? What are the consequences for her afterwards?

## Phrasal Verbs & Expressions

blow off (p.171)  
play hooky (p.171)  
get sth over with  
(p.175)  
let sth out (p.175)  
blurt sth out  
(p.175)  
tear sth up (p.177)  
get along (p.178)  
break the code  
(p.178)  
find out (p.178)  
speak up (p.179)  
make sth up (p.179)  
blow sb off (p.185)  
break out (p.186)  
grow on sb (p.192)  
jerk sb around  
(p.198)  
cut class (p.187,  
204)  
blow sth up (p.179)  
trot out (p.230)  
gulp sth down  
(p.237)  
knock sb off his  
feet (p.240)  
slow down (p.241)



**Kahoot  
activity**

## FOURTH MARKING PERIOD



### Warmup Questions:

1. The Fourth Marking Period starts in spring. How do you usually feel when spring begins?
2. How is school life at that time of the year?
3. Melinda finishes school feeling quite differently than at the beginning of the school year. Do you experience the same after you finish each school year?

### In depth activities:

- Genetics: in her favourite class, biology, Melinda says: "I got my 'I don't want to know about it' gene from my dad. I got my 'I'll think about it tomorrow' gene from my mom." Which genes have you inherited from your parents?
- Find examples of positive and negative thinking in the characters Melinda and Heather and write them down.
- The walls of the girls' toilets at Melinda's school are covered in messages and acronyms. What do these acronyms stand for? Give more examples.

### Creativity:

- On page 265 there is a second 'Lies they tell you in high school' list. Create another list for lies you were told when you were a kid.
- The Hornets need you! Write a cheerleader chant and prepare a choreography to perform in class.

# Writing & Conversation Questions:

## writing

- Childhood fantasy (p. 264): read Melinda's. Write a narrative-type essay on your own childhood fantasy. How would you feel if it became real?
- Final essay topic content. Compete with Hairwoman no more and come up with a challenging final essay topic based on the novel. The class will write an essay on the winning topic.

## speaking

- Emulate Melinda's fantasy about a talk show (pages 298-299) In this role-play activity each student stands for one of the main characters. A student will be the moderator.
- Take IT to trial. Simulate a trial of Andy Evans. Each student takes a different role (judge, defense attorney, witnesses, etc.)

## Comprehension Questions

- We witness the dynamics of Melinda's family at Easter. Think about how much we know about her family through their celebrations of festivities (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter). What is the impression we get of her family?
- Spring is the season of thawing. Look for examples in the 4th Marking Period of Melinda's own thawing.
- In this chapter Melinda finally gets her voice back. Talk with your partner about the different moments when she finally manages to express herself.
- David Petrakis is an important secondary character, how does he help Melinda recover her voice?
- In this chapter, IT tries to attack Melinda again. Compare the two scenes (3rd Marking Period, pages 238-249; 4th marking period, pages 249-363). What is visually different about them? How do the images help express the change Melinda has experienced?

## Phrasal Verbs & Expressions

- start up (p.253)
- find out (p.254)
- sign up (p.261)
- take after (p.263)
- pick up (p.264)
- hang out (p.267)
- cover up (p.271)
- shut up (p.278)
- stand up for (p.280)
- haul off (p.281)
- show up (p.282)
- cheat on (p.282)
- look up (p.283)
- speak up (p.284)
- chew sth. on (p.285)
- turn out (p.295)
- clean up (p.303)
- pair off (p.306)
- hunt down (p.310)
- put up with (p.311)
- move sb. out (p.312)
- help out (p.321)
- back up (p.321)
- stand up to (p.324)
- carve out (p.330)
- break up (p.331)
- chop down (p.337)
- screw up (p.342, p.352)
- kick out (p.344)
- grow on sb. (p.347)
- take off (p.348)
- give off (p.350)
- open up (p.362)
- write down (p.366)
- run away (p.368)



Kahoot  
activity

FINAL CUT



## Comprehension Questions

- Why do you think Mr Freeman is included in this coda (final pages, epilogue)?
- What does Melinda's interaction with the senior student tell us about her?
- Melinda finally manages to finish her tree, what does it symbolize?

## Extra Credit



- Write a report on the Suffragettes and present it to the classroom.
- Write a report on the First Amendment and present it to the classroom.
- Write a report on Maya Angelou and present it to the classroom.
- Write a report on Banned Books and present it to the classroom.

# Final Project

## Why a final project?

Because it gives meaning and purpose to the whole project and it puts students at the centre of the reading process.

You may take a pick at one of these options, depending on your students' profiles and tastes.

1. It might be the case that, while reading this novel, some of the songs you like come to your mind. It would be great to share them with your mates to see the feelings the story itself has evoked in each of you. Make a playlist with 1 or 2 songs per marking period to create a soundtrack for the book itself.
2. Report cards are shown at the end of every marking period but the last one. Draw the missing final report card. What does it illustrate? (Try displaying the 3 report cards together to inspire students in their creative process).
3. Have you stopped to think what Melinda's story would have been like, had her parents or friends reacted differently?
  - a. Rewrite the story recreating different scenarios by using the 3rd conditional. e.g., what would have happened if...her parents had noticed something weird was going on; or her friends had had her back; she hadn't been raped?
  - b. Draw a comic strip to illustrate the different scenarios.
4. Being a teenager can be tough, and it can be even tougher to explain how one feels throughout that period. Some visual support, like a meme, could help you express those feelings. Take a quick look at the following Tumblr (Teenager Posts Tumblr: 15 Hilarious Insights Into High School Life | HuffPost Teen) and create your own meme on "What is it like to be a teenager?"
5. Debate on the following statement: How realistic are TV series about real school life (Euphoria, Élite, Ser o no ser (RTVE), Sex Education...)?



# Still I Rise

## WORKING WITH THE POEM BY MAYA ANGELOU

This short and powerful work is central to the collection of poems by Maya Angelou published in 1978. In fact, the book's title is *And Still I Rise* and contains some of the key themes shared by many of the other poems. But let's get deep into the poem and you will see why we have chosen it for our little project.

Our final aim will be a group reading of the poem and the recording and editing of a video. To do so, we will make sure we understand the poem well first.



[link to poem](#)

- Scan the poem for words or expressions you don't understand. Look them up in the dictionary and write them down, including the phonetics and the translation into Spanish.
- Now you are ready to read the poem carefully at your own pace.
- The personal pronouns in the poem mean more than you may think at the beginning. Who is hiding behind the personal pronouns YOU and I?
- In pairs look for an example of a simile and a metaphor and explain their meaning.
- Find two examples in which rhythm is achieved in the poem.
- Find two references of the history of black people in the US.
- Watch the video of the author's reading of the poem. Remember you can open the transcription.
- In the video, has her body language thrown light on the meaning? How?
- Now it is your turn to read it aloud. The teacher will tell you which stanza you are going to read. Make sure you know how to pronounce all the words.
- We'll choose a decent background, check for cracks in the walls and avoid them, and then we will shoot the video. Each person or pair will read a stanza and the whole group will read the final 'I rise, I rise, I rise' together.
- Now we are ready to edit it and be proud of our work. Enjoy!



[link to video](#)





# Further Reading

## FICTIONAL WORKS MENTIONED IN SPEAK

### Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Maya Angelou is a reference for Melinda. In the first of her seven autobiographies, the acclaimed *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya narrates how she was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend at the age of eight. As a result, she didn't speak for almost five years. This book appears frequently in banned-book-lists in the USA as well.

### Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

An American classic, it might be a quite difficult read for your students, but it's worth explaining the enormous influence this novel has had in American culture.

### Julia Álvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.

Julia Álvarez's successful first novel is also mentioned in *Speak* as one of Melinda's chosen reads. Álvarez's family is originally from the Dominican Republic, and she was raised there until her family had to flee to the USA when she was 10. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is autobiographical as well, and describes the complex process of assimilation and integration of a young Latina immigrant.

## Graphic Novels

(because your students love them)

**Maus: A Survivor's Tale**, by Art Spiegelman

The graphic novel that changed the genre forever. A classic that has returned to the bestseller lists thanks to its ban from classrooms in McMinn county, Tennessee.

**Persepolis**, by Marjane Satrapi

Another modern classic graphic novel. The story of Iran seen through the eyes of a child who turns into a teenager in convulsive times.

**Fun House** by Alison Bechdel

Another classic, it is frequently banned in the USA because of its treatment of homosexuality. A more difficult read, it is advisable for stronger groups.

## Novels

(because why not?)

**The Handmaid's Tale**, by Margaret Atwood

Even though it was written in the eighties, it is more popular than ever. This dystopia has become uncannily realistic. Advisable for stronger groups.

**Speak**, by Laurie Halse Anderson

Before the graphic novel, there was a very successful novel. It could be interesting to compare both texts.

**The Perks of Being a Wallflower**, by Stephen Chbosky

An epistolary novel written from the perspective of the main character. Similar in context and topics as *Speak*, it might be a good alternative to it.

# Take It Further:

## Banned Books in the News



[link to article](#)

‘Adults are banning books, but they’re not asking our opinions’: meet the teens of the Banned Book Club

### The Guardian

This piece, which appeared in the international edition of the British newspaper *The Guardian* might be interesting for teenagers. Here are some activities designed for it. They include vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar and writing activities.



[link to PDF material  
to work with news  
article in class](#)

## Banned Books

*Speak* has been banned by several school boards in the US. It regularly appears on lists of the most banned books of the year in the USA. Here are some links to newspaper articles in Spanish and English and American websites to check with your students if the topic is compelling for them.

### Articles in English

'US conservative parents push for book bans – and unintentionally make reading cool again.' *The Guardian*

"Books For All: NYPL Supports the Right to Read Banned Books' *The New York Public Library*

'Top 100 Most Banned and Challenged Books: 2010-2019' ([ala.org](#))

"Nashville library debuts 'I read banned books' cards amid censorship efforts' *The Guardian*

### Articles in Spanish

La Biblioteca Pública de Nueva York sale al rescate de los libros prohibidos en EE UU' *EL PAÍS* ([elpais.com](#))

"El veto conservador a libros se multiplica en Estados Unidos' *EL PAÍS* ([elpais.com](#))

### Websites

[American Library Association Banned and Challenged Books](#)

[Unite Against Book Bans - uniteagainstbookbans.org](#)

# Talking About Consent and Sexual Assault

Talking about sex, rape or consent can be a prickly issue to deal with in the classroom. Here you are some ideas on how to tackle it with your students. Click here to get students talking.

Watch this clip “Tea and Consent” with your students. Afterwards you can ask them the following questions to encourage whole-group discussion:

1. What does tea stand for in the clip?
2. Does the message of the video get across to its audience?
3. How do you feel after watching it? Has it made you change your views on consent?
4. Is it OK to change one's mind at the last minute? Why is it sometimes considered unacceptable?
5. Do you think consent affects both men and women equally?

It is not easy to talk about sexual abuse in the classroom, but debating about consent might be easier. Public debate on social media about consent can be controversial and even virulent, and the same may happen in the classroom. As male/female perspectives might be different on this topic, you can try to divide students according to their sex (whole group or smaller groups to get them to talk more) and ask them to debate from the point of view of the opposite sex.



link to  
Tea and Consent  
video

## Where to go

*Some general guidelines:* <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/es/temas-de-salud/para-adolescentes/bullying-seguridad-y-privacidad/agresion-sexual-abuso-y-violacion>

*Specific help in your region:*

<https://www.larioja.org/servicios-sociales/es/mujer/centro-asesor-mujer>



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