

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III HONORS 2009

Dear Mrs. Anderson,

Your novel *Speak* was such a change from any other book I have ever read. Your character Melinda was a very easy character to relate to because she struggled with many problems that all of us have.

As a freshman in high school, I was physically and sexually abused by an ex-boyfriend. Contrary to Melinda after she was raped, I became known as “easy.” I punished myself for any pleasure I ever felt with my ex when IT was abusing me, and I became subject to my own abuse as a result.

Superficially, I was outgoing, an honors student, an excellent athlete, and a great friend; but on the inside I was screaming for someone to notice, to care, and to help me. Like Melinda, I did not tell anyone about what had happened; I kept my secret and I struggled with emotions that were way beyond my maturity level. I was afraid to tell anyone because I feared that they would not believe me, or if they did, they would look at me and treat me differently.

For about a year I wanted to die; I wanted my life to end so that I would not have to deal with the pain anymore. At one of my weakest spans of time, I was self-injuring and suicidal. In your novel *Speak* Melinda has no friends at all, but although I had friends, there was still no one I could communicate with, not one “friend” I could trust and confide in about what I had gone through, and especially no one that would understand the feelings and emotions running rampant through me.

In the end I met a guy who really cared. He convinced me to go into counseling, and he held my hand every step of the way. At this point my parents had known that I was depressed, but I could not speak with them; I could not tell them what had happened because I knew they would not understand. I was also terrified that they would be disappointed in me because I had not lived up to their standards.

I read *Speak* this past summer, and it convinced me that telling the truth and coming clean was the right thing to do, so I sat my parents down one night and told them everything. I told them about my abuse, my depression, and the mistakes I had made my freshman year. Admitting that IT had abused me was extremely hard and having to tell my parents everything made me relive it all. It shocked them to their cores, but it made them able to understand more about me. There were many tears shed that night, and I know I lost their trust, but coming out and really speaking to them for the first time lifted a huge burden off my shoulders.

Your novel made me realize that there are different kinds of speaking. For a year after the abuse, I spoke to everyone, but I did not really *speak* to them. I spoke to them about the weather, school, and what everyone was wearing. All the while, I really wanted to *speak* to them; I wanted to tell them how IT had hurt me and have them know that I was not as happy as I seemed. I am glad now that I am able to not only speak with my boyfriend, but also with my parents and a few close friends about what happened.

It has now been two years since the abuse, and the guy who abused me is out of my life forever. I am still with my boyfriend who was the first person to know about the abuse, and he will most likely be the last one to leave me. My parents and I are working on building the trust back that was broken that night I spoke. I am now not only happy on the outside, but I am now happy on the inside. I have graduated from therapy, and I am working towards college and hoping to survive an all-honors junior year.

I just wanted to thank you so much for writing *Speak* and creating a magnificent character like Melinda that many girls around the world can identify with. I know that *Speak* changed my life, and I hope that it touches the hearts of everyone else who reads it. I hope it makes people more aware of what is going on around them and what people go through on a regular basis. People in today’s society are very self-absorbed and after reading *Speak*, it made me realize that we need to be more compassionate and reach out and effect other people’s lives that are not our own.

Thank you for writing this exquisite novel.

Sincerely,

Jessica

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