

# The factors that helped melinda recover



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Melinda Sordino is broken. She drifts through her freshman year of high school, failing her classes and being ridiculed by her peers. She might have stayed broken, too, had it not been for key aspects of her life that inspired her to change. This takes place within the book *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. At the end of her eighth-grade year, Melinda and her friends go to a high school party. Once there, Melinda gets drunk and is taken advantage of by a senior, Andy Evans. The story focuses on Melinda's journey towards recovery and how she conquers her fear of speaking. Over the course of the book, three things in Melinda's life put her on the road to recovery. One of these things is art class and the teacher in charge of it. Another is Melinda's lab partner, David Petrakis. Finally, there is an abandoned janitor's closet that Melinda discovers and puts to good use. These things all are crucially important to Melinda as she fights her way through her freshman year.

On the first day of school, Melinda wanders into her art class where she is greeted by the art teacher, Mr. Freeman. Mr. Freeman soon establishes himself as the only adult Melinda trusts: he teaches Melinda how to speak through art, how to express herself in a way that makes Melinda feel safe. While Melinda talks very little throughout the book, she couldn't have said more. This growth is evidenced by Melinda's year-long art project of painting a tree. Melinda's trees represent whatever stage of healing (or worsening) she is going through. "I've been painting watercolors of trees that have been hit by lightning. I try to paint them so they are nearly dead, but not totally." (Anderson 30-31) Melinda is representing how she feels damaged and broken, and, "nearly dead." These trees are Melinda's way of thinking

about herself and what happened- she may not realize it, but by painting these trees she is getting her suppressed feelings into the world.

However, Melinda is not the only one who tries to communicate through silence. Melinda's lab partner, David Petrakis, simply got up and left when a cruel teacher delivered a lecture. " He says a million things without saying a word. I make a note to study David Petrakis. I have never heard a more eloquent silence." (57) The only difference is, David is not silent in order to hide his thoughts. He is the opposite- he stands up for himself and makes his opinions known. He helps Melinda give a presentation on the suffragettes without a presentation, but says to her afterward: " But you got it wrong. The suffragettes were all about speaking up, screaming for their rights. You can't speak up for your right to be silent. That's letting the bad guys win. If the suffragettes did that, women wouldn't be able to vote yet." David convinced Melinda to try to truly speak and make a difference in the world around her instead of living so passively. But this kind of massive change doesn't happen overnight. It needs to be nurtured so that it can grow.

One day, while running from Mr. Neck, Melinda stumbles across an old, abandoned janitor's closet. She quickly claims the space as her own and uses it as her retreat or hideaway for whenever things get rough. She decorates the room with things that hold meaning to her and feels safe thinking about what happened to her here. This closet protects Melinda throughout the story until she is fully healed and is ready to live again. It also fits in with one of the motifs in the story: seeds. Melinda frequently talks about seeds in the book, about the process they go through in order to grow. " If the seed is planted too deep, it doesn't warm up at the right time. Plant it

too close too close to the surface and a crow eats it. Too much rain and the seed molds. Not enough rain and it can't get started." Melinda's closet is like the hole that seeds require to grow- it separates her from the outside world just enough so that she can be alone and think about what happened, but it does not completely isolate her or act as a crutch. It simply shields Melinda until the time is right for her to sprout.

These components of Melinda's life are what she needed to blossom. This can be applied to everyday life in a very significant way; it teaches people the lesson that even though we may feel traumatized or broken in some way, we can always find a way to make ourselves whole again. Melinda did this through art, the ongoing support of David Petrakis, and through her closet. If people are to make use of this lesson, they must find things in their life that can heal them. Melinda was assaulted viciously when she was very young; that is not something that is easily forgotten. But Melinda nurtures herself through these key aspects in a way that effectively brings her back to life.