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Eng 112 B

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9 December 2024

Consent and Sexual Assault: Showing Young Adults the Lasting Impacts Assault has and Why it  
Should not Occur

**Rationale:**

Adolescence is characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes as a person matures from a child into an adult. It is during this time when puberty occurs, involving hormonal shifts that heavily influence sexual feelings, interests, and behaviors, and changes in brain structure regarding reasoning, impulse control, and decision making are developing. Adolescent teens may feel pressured or driven to experiment with their sexuality during this time period which can be confusing and traumatizing. These new sexual feelings mixed with developing impulse control can lead to a bad outcome, and it is important for adolescents to understand the *heavy* impact rape and assault can have on *any* individual. It is important they develop empathy for those who have been in this situation so they feel driven to act better and understand the importance of consent.

I am choosing to dive deeper into this subject in young adult literature since sexual assault has been an ongoing issue for years that has not been resolved. Although survivors are becoming more comfortable coming forward about their stories, no real change has been instilled and I feel it is important to educate the future so this issue can begin to be resolved. In chapter one of *Adolescents in the Search For Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, the survey states that the most prominent primary issue adolescents face is peer pressure; including drinking, drugs, sex, and weapons (8). This stood out to me since this is the most prominent issue adolescents feel and America has currently nominated someone to power who has acted in this

way. I feel educating and having adolescents (future generations) become more aware and empathetic of this issue whilst their brains are developing around themselves, their sexuality, and their decision making could decrease the amount of cases and teens feeling peer pressure in any way in the future. A big part of young adult literature is also books about real life experiences (Chapter 4), and assault and literature about assault is one way to educate young adults of the weight it carries and the burden it creates.

Diving into young adult literary works, such as *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, offers adolescents a perspective of how isolating being assaulted can feel and can grow their empathy. The protagonist, Melinda, is sexually assaulted at the beginning of the story and tells her story of finding her voice from a first person perspective. Melinda shares her thoughts as she comes to terms with her assault that occurs the Summer before her freshman year of high school, and slowly begins to find her voice to speak up for herself. This could not only aid students in feeling less alone if something has happened to them, but offers a perspective of the lasting impacts rape has on someone and how it negatively affects their life.

### **Introducing the Unit:**

- 1) At the end of the previous class, I would instruct students to reflect on a time they felt uncomfortable due to a third party, and if they cannot come up with something themselves ask a loved one or someone close for their example. In the next class, I would ask the students to take out a piece of paper and either a pencil or a black pen to write anonymously. I would ask the students to write down their scenario, and crumple their paper. I would then walk around with some sort of basket to collect them all, mix them up, and pass them back out to the students so everyone has someone else's paper. As they

feel inclined I would ask that they share what someone has written down out loud to the class.

\*Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to have the students become empathetic of the struggles and situations their fellow classmates have been through. Giving them time to reflect on their own scenarios (or ask a close person for their story) creates a vulnerability in the class and facilitates respectful communication about these difficult topics.

2) Once the responses have been read anonymously, I would ask for the students to reflect on questions underneath their fellow classmates response:

- a) How would you feel if you were in **this** situation?
- b) How did your classmates' scenario where they were made uncomfortable make you feel? (Examples: sad, awakened, angry, understanding, etc.)?
- c) What can you do to avoid putting someone in this situation or making them feel this way?

\*Purpose: This would further deepen the students empathy for one another and facilitate a respectful classroom environment when speaking about such difficult situations and subjects. This validates the students' situations they have been through to hopefully continue to facilitate a safe space in the classroom for the rest of the unit.

### **Working Through the Unit:**

1) Since *Speak* covers such intense topics that can be triggering, the reading will be complete at home so students can take breaks as they need. I will warn the students that this is a bit of a graphic novel, and following the first day of reading (through the first few chapters) will give a powerpoint presentation on:

- a) What assault means

- b) What sexual assault means
- c) What consent means
- d) How often it occurs (statistics)
- e) Resources available for victims

\*Purpose: This introduces the severity of the topics discussed in the novel and introduces students to what these three key terms are so everyone is on the same page.

2) I would ask that as the students read the novel, they keep track of Melinda's thoughts and feelings on the subject as the novel progresses in preparation for their final paper. Some guiding questions could be:

- a) What are quotes that reflect Melinda's emotions regarding her assault?
- b) Who does Melinda speak to about it and evidence why she doesn't speak?
- c) What coping strategies/ tools does Melinda use to help her find her voice and cope with her assault?

In class, I would divide the class into groups based on who found evidence/ quotes for their specific topic so they could discuss and then share as a class.

\*Purpose: This assignment would follow the evolution of Melinda's progress, and lack thereof, regarding her assault. This way at the end of the novel the students can write a final paper and reflect on how this sexual assault impacts Melinda. Having the students share in groups provides a safe space for people to share in smaller groups if they are not comfortable sharing out loud. Sharing the evidence as a class introduces students to evidence they may have missed to allow them to further reflect on Melinda and her scenario.

Beyond the Text:

- 1) I would play a video of a clip from Nextlix's *Thirteen Reasons Why* of Hannah Baker describing how her sexual assault made her feel. I would give a trigger warning so if students are uncomfortable hearing about someone's assault they could either play music in headphones or leave the room.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB2rJgyYP8o> (start at 1:53)

I would then ask the students how this audio made them feel and what some of the emotions Hannah expresses were.

\*Purpose: Some students do better with visuals and hearing opposed to reading, and it is important they all have an understanding of the lasting impacts assault has on someone.

- 2) I would print out the lyrics to Billie Eilish's song "Your Power," hand them out to all the students:

"Try not to abuse your power

I know we didn't choose to change

You might not wanna lose your power

But havin' it's so strange

[Verse 1]

She said you were a hero

You played the part

But you ruined her in a year

Don't act like it was hard

And you swear you didn't know (Didn't know)

No wonder why you didn't ask

She was sleepin' in your clothes (In your clothes)

But now she's got to get to class

[Pre-Chorus]

How dare you?

And how could you?

Will you only feel bad when they find out?

If you could take it all back

Would you?

[Chorus]

Try not to abuse your power

I know we didn't choose to change

You might not wanna lose your power

But havin' it's so strange

[Verse 2]

I thought that I was special

You made me feel

Like it was my fault, you were the devil

Lost your appeal

Does it keep you in control? (In control)

For you to keep her in a cage?

And you swear you didn't know (Didn't know)

You said you thought she was your age”

[Pre-Chorus]

How dare you?

And how could you?

Will you only feel bad if it turns out

That they kill your contract?

Would you?

[Chorus]

Try not to abuse your power

I know we didn't choose to change

You might not wanna lose your power

But power isn't pain”

I would ask students to annotate the song and after the first reading ask them what they think this song is about. I would write their responses on the board so they can have these in mind when listening to the song again. As a class, we would continue to read, annotate, and share until the complexity of the song and its meaning is understood.

\*Purpose: This song reflects not only assaulting someone but using power and age as a weapon to peer pressure them into thinking this behavior is okay. This provides perspective to another form of sexual assault to have students be aware of the weapons an assaulter can have and that it is *not* okay.

**End of the Unit:**

- 1) To end the unit, I would ask students to use the evidence from the text they have gathered to write a paper about Melinda and her assault. They can pick from any of the three topics given at the beginning of the text to reflect on her journey and emotional evolution throughout the text.

\*Purpose: This essay is a chance for the students to not only reflect on the text but to also see the time it took for Melinda to *begin* coping with the traumatic event and find her voice to speak up for herself. It further emphasizes to the students why assault should not occur and should grow their empathy for victims of this abuse.

- 2) A more fun assignment to end off the unit would be to draw a tree, as Melinda is instructed to do, but my directions would be to draw a family/ friend tree of people you would go to in a time of need.

\*Purpose: This is more for fun, but can also be used as an outlet for students who use art to cope. It is one last chance for the students to empathize with Melinda before ending the unit, and reminds them of people who are in their corner during a time of need.



- 3) The purpose of this unit is to educate adolescents about assault and why it is important to prevent it. To round off the entire unit, I would again ask students to reflect on how to prevent such events from occurring and why these events should not occur.

**YA Contemporary Fiction:**

- 1) *Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky: Charlie, the fifteen-year-old narrator is quiet and withdrawn, but he is also extremely observant and thoughtful, always paying close attention to everything going on around him. Charlie is grappling with the death of his best friend and his Aunt Helen, and coming to terms with the assault his Aunt Helen put him through.
- 2) *"A Child Called It,"* Pelzer, David: This is a memoir that recounts the author's experiences of extreme abuse during his childhood at the hands of his alcoholic mother. She would beat, starve, and isolate him to deny him basic human necessities. This is a different kind of assault but is still important for children to be educated about it.
- 3) *Asking for It,* O'Neil, Louise: Eighteen year old Emma goes to a party one night and wakes up on the front porch of her house with no memory of what happened. However, people took photographs expliciting what happened to Emma that night.
- 4) *What Happens Next,* Colleen Clayton: This story follows another character that cannot recall what happens to her, sixteen year old Cassidy, causing her to become alienated from her friends and pick up unhealthy habits. She develops an eating disorder and obsesses about losing weight due to her assault, showing another way assault impacts someone.

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