Symbolism In Laurie Halse Anderson Novel

Speak, an award-winning novel, by Laurie Halse Anderson told the story of a young girl, Melinda, who was raped the summer before her high school freshman year by a classmate at a party. She did not fully understand what had happened to her; she kept it to herself and stopped talking. Symbolism was prevalent throughout the entire novel to further the development of Melinda's emotional, social, and physical struggles caused by what happened to her the summer before freshman year. One of the several symbols utilized by Anderson was comparing Melinda to the tree she was assigned to draw. The trees were mentioned in almost every chapter.

Toward the beginning of the novel, Melinda was assigned a year-long project in art class. Each student was instructed to pick a paper out of a globe that had an object on it, then they would have all year to complete a drawing of it. "I plunge my hand into the bottom of the globe and fish out my paper. 'Tree.' Tree? It's too easy. I learned how to draw a tree in second grade." (Anderson 12). After she starts the project, she struggles to bring her tree to life. This event represents the desolation and depression that she is facing every day.

Closer to the end of the novel, Melinda's dad is talking about how the tree in her front yard is sick and dying. He then hires some men that cut the sick and dying part away so it does not infect the entire tree. This symbolizes "the danger Melinda faces in letting the pain take over every aspect of her life" (Mahoney 1). She stopped speaking to everyone, and no one knew what had happened. The tree was sick and dying about to take over the rest of it like the depression and pain were about to take over who Melinda used to be. She needed to face what had happened and accept it.

Finally, after all the pain she has been through, her tree is now alive and breathing. "My tree is definitely breathing; little shallow breaths like it just shot up out of the ground this morning… One of the lower branches is sick." (Anderson 196). She knows now that she is unable to forget about the rape. "There is no avoiding it, no forgetting." (Anderson 198). Her art teacher is very impressed by her tree and she receives an A+ on her project.

To conclude, Anderson used symbolism in a very appreciable, ubiquitous way. The tree helped to better perceive the progress of Melinda from "not being able to bring her tree to life" to "a living, breathing tree." Melinda grew from not telling a single person to telling what happened to better accept it. The novel ended with " "(Anderson 199).