

“The Only Class That Will Teach You to Survive”: Art and the Depiction of Trauma in *Speak: The Graphic Novel*

Laurie Halse Anderson’s YA novel *Speak* was published in 1999 to critical acclaim and numerous censorship efforts due to its inclusion of a sexual assault. It currently ranks 60th in the ALA’s list of the top 100 challenged/banned books from 2000-2009. In February 2018, *Speak* was adapted as a graphic novel, written by Anderson and illustrated by Emily Carroll. Like the original novel, the comic contains representations of sexual assault, self-harm, and depression, but unlike its predecessor, the adaptation depicts these things pictorially as well as verbally, and in an even a more visceral manner than the 2004 film. In *Graphic Women*, comics scholar Hillary Chute writes of “the risk of representation”—the risk authors working in the semiautobiographical tradition take when they depict themselves or characters very much like them in comics—claiming, “The medium [...] can perform the enabling political and aesthetic work of bearing witness powerfully because of its rich narrative texture.” Because *Speak* is semiautobiographical, and because Melinda, its protagonist, is a young visual artist herself, I argue that the graphic novel adaptation performs a kind of double risk, extending the “political and aesthetic work” of the original text. By rendering the powerful artwork Melinda creates *and* using the unique comics medium to visually convey her psychological trauma, Anderson and Carroll reinvent *Speak* and take it to even riskier places. Melinda’s art teacher tells his students his is “the only class that will teach [them] to survive” (15), and in the era of #MeToo, *Speak: The Graphic Novel* reinforces and bolsters the original text’s cry for vocalization, representation, survival, and healing.