



**PRIME STAGE
THEATRE**

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“Where Literature Comes to Life”

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- **May 1-10: Prime Stage Theatre premieres “Speak” at New Hazlett**
 - **Adaptation of best-selling young adult novel depicts redemptive power of art**
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PITTSBURGH — “The first day of school and already I’m a wounded zebra separated from the herd,” declares Melinda, the 14-year-old protagonist of *Speak*.

That’s the opening line from **Prime Stage Theatre’s** world premiere adaptation of the acclaimed 1999 young adult novel by Laurie Halse Anderson. Cast into dramatic form by Pittsburgh playwright **Tammy Ryan**, *Speak* follows the transformative journey of a troubled teen who uses a paint brush to reclaim her literal voice and emotional balance following a devastating personal trauma.

The production runs for 7 shows May 1-10, 2026 at New Hazlett Theater, 6 Allegheny Square East, on Pittsburgh’s North Side. Tickets (adult \$40, artist/educator \$25, group \$25, student \$20) are available by calling (412) 320-4610 x10 or ordering online at <https://newhazletttheater.org/events/speak>.

Directed by **Dana Hardy Bingham**, the 12-member *Speak* cast includes **Milena Casciani, Jacqueline Germer, Grace Gouwens, Jeff Johnston, Sadie Karashin, Eamonn McElfresh, Justin Mohr, Anne Marie Sweeney, Evan Vay, David Wang, Zora Rose** and **Aylee Gardner** as Melinda.

The play features original music composed by Pittsburgh singer/actress **Carla Bianco**, who starred on Broadway as Maureen in *RENT* and co-wrote the #1 Billboard dance hit *The Lover That You Are* by Pulse.

“*Speak* is a powerful story about overcoming the destructive effects of bullying and social ostracism,” says Prime Stage Theatre artistic director **Dr. Wayne Brinda**. “It is a book that has resonated continuously for a quarter century with youth, parents and educators. We’ve already had people thanking us for the courage to bring it to the stage.”

Inspired by her own turbulent teen years, *Speak* launched Anderson’s career as one of the most influential voices in young adult literature. The book has been translated into 35 languages and screened in 2004 as a major motion picture starring Kristen Stewart.

Anderson will attend the post-play discussion at Prime Stage Theatre show on Saturday, May 2.

The play’s run coincides with the recognition of May as Mental Health Awareness Month, notes Brinda.

“This is a contemporary story told with honesty, humor and insight,” he says. *Speak* is a vivid testament to resilience and believing in one’s own inner strength to find the way forward — no matter what age you may be.

Or, as Melinda finally comes to affirm at play’s end, “You have to know what you stand for, not just what you stand against.”

Since its founding in 1996, Prime Stage Theatre has presented over 110 plays that introduce student and family audiences to classic and contemporary works of world literature and history.

Speak concludes the theatre’s 2025-26 season that featured *Mr. Edgar A. Poe Presents: Tales of Mystery, Horror & Imagination* by Lawrence C. Connolly and *Freedom House: Giving Life a Second Chance* by L.E. McCullough.

“Each of our plays this season has been a world premiere from a Pittsburgh playwright,” says Brinda. “We want audiences to see how events in our community can be brought to life on the stage with a unique local perspective.”

WHAT: Prime Stage Theatre presents the world premiere of *Speak*; written by Tammy Ryan and directed by Dana Hardy Bingham; adapted from the novel by Laurie Halse Anderson

WHERE: New Hazlett Theater, 6 Allegheny Square East, Pittsburgh PA 15212

WHEN: 7 shows running May 1-10, 2026

- Fri. May 1 at 7:30 p.m. (Preview Night, pay-what-you-can admission)
- Sat. May 2 at 7:30 p.m. (Opening Night with post-play discussion featuring *Speak* book author Laurie Halse Anderson live on stage)
- Sun. May 3 at 2:30 p.m.
- Fri. May 8 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sat. May 9 at 2:30 p.m. (Sensory Inclusive, pay-what-you-can admission)
- Sat. May 9 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sun. May 10 at 2:30 p.m. (Audio Describe and Live Caption, sponsored by Downtown Pittsburgh Lions Club); On-Stage Pre-Show, Actor Voice ID and/or Touch Tour at 1:30 p.m., Audio Pre-Show at 2:15 p.m.; Performance at 2:30 p.m. Real Time Live Caption Performance by Advanced Realtime Captioning Solutions)

TICKETS: Tickets (adult \$40, artist/educator \$25, groups \$25, student \$20) are available by calling (412) 320-4610 x10 or ordering online at <https://primestage.com/productions/speak/>

SPONSORSHIP: In partnership with Pittsburgh Action Against Rape, funding from Staunton Farm Foundation and official media sponsor SLB Radio

* Prime Stage Theatre promotes accessibility for [special needs audiences](#). Prime Stage Theatre audio describer Nathan Ruggles has won a national Achievement Award in Audio Description from the American Council of the Blind.

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