

*Spoken: A Novel* by Melanie Weiss

Estimated Lexile Level: ([www.lexile.com](http://www.lexile.com)) 810L – 1000L

Questions for Writing and Discussion:

1. Take a look at the quotation from Jeanette Winterson just before the prologue of the novel. HOW do the characters and/or events of the novel SHOW (rather than just tell) language to be a “finding place”? Cite textual evidence in your response.
2. In the prologue (9), Roman tells us that his name refers to the city of Rome, Italy. A *roman* also means a novel or story. Do YOU think this is an appropriate name for the main character? Why or why not? Be sure to cite textual evidence in your response.
3. Roman says things like “she’s so brainless” (14) about his mother. What do YOU make of Roman’s mother? What did you think of her decision-making skills at the beginning of the novel? At the end?
4. What do you think of Kirk? Do YOU think he’s a good father figure for Roman? Why or why not? Make sure you cite textual evidence for your response.
5. Reread the last sentence in chapter two (19). What makes us who we are? Is it DNA? Our upbringing and/or culture? The choices we make? Why do YOU think that?
6. In chapter eleven, Roman says that he “sure could use [a friend] right now” (44). How do YOU know when you’re ready to make new friends?
7. *Spoken* is a coming-of-age story (sometimes called a *Bildungsroman*). Coming of age stories focus on how the main character changes from being a child to more of a grownup. What do YOU think is the purpose of reading and writing stories

about young people growing up? What other coming of age stories can you think of?

8. In chapter thirteen, Grandma quotes Eleanor Roosevelt: “Do one thing every day that scares you” (47). What do YOU make of this advice? Do you agree? Disagree? Why?
9. Weiss often mentions the brands of cars, cereals, clothes, and other items. Why do YOU think branding features so heavily in this story? What is being communicated by mentioning the names of so many corporations in a coming-of-age story that takes place in the United States?
10. In chapter sixteen, Roman says to his mother, “I hope you have a plan” (55). What do YOU think he means by this? Do YOU think it’s appropriate for him to be parenting his parent? Why or why not?
11. In chapter eighteen, Roman claims that his therapy session was “useless” but that his conversation with Zuzu is “cathartic” (58). Why do YOU think this is?
12. What is it about spoken word poetry that first excites Roman? Why does he “give a damn” (87) about Mr. Collins’ projects? Be sure to use textual evidence in your response.
13. “There is an honor code at Spoken Word: Respect the mic” (104). What does “respect the mic” mean to the students in the book? What does it mean to YOU?
14. In chapter thirty-six Roman is analyzing DNA for his lab report when Zuzu approaches him with the idea to try to contact his dad. HOW do these two things mirror each other? Can you find any other examples of this kind of “mirroring” in the novel?

15. Before leaving for London, Roman checks the sizes of the clothes his mom bought him and notes that she “got them right” (165). Why is this moment significant?
16. What does Roman mean when he thinks to himself, “Marcel is the real deal” (184). How can he tell?
17. What is the significance of Roman’s mom selling the BMW and replacing it with something that “makes more sense” (190)?
18. Remember that the genre this novel falls into is *coming of age story* (*Bildungsroman*). With that in mind, what do YOU think Roman’s mom means when she says, “It’s not easy being the grownup” (191). Use textual evidence in your response.
19. What *themes* do YOU see emerging in this story? How do the actions and attitudes of each of the characters (mom, Roman, Grandma, Grandpa, Zuzu, Kirk, Claire, Marcel) demonstrate those themes? Be sure to use textual evidence in your response.