



# SpeakForge

*Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Speakforge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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The Speakforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*



# Echo

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\*ECHO — \*who's listening? speak to THEM, not at them.\*\*

Echo was a kid who watched everyone. She had big, kind eyes. She always looked right at you when you spoke. She wore a cool vest with many pockets. In one pocket, she kept a small, worn card. It was her audience map. In another, a tiny tone tracker. It looked like a little mood ring for your voice.

This was super important. Echo showed everyone how to speak. She taught them to know *who* they were talking to. Then, they had to change *how* they talked. It was like magic. A great speech for one group might make no sense to another. Even with the exact same words! People listen differently.

Echo's special trick was to figure out the audience first. Who were they? What did they already know? What did they care about? What words would they understand? What stories would make sense to them? Then, she would change her voice. She would change her words. She would change her examples. The main idea could stay the same. But the *way* she said it changed.

It was like wrapping a present. The present inside was the same. But the wrapping paper was different for each person. A talk about the weather to grown-up scientists would sound different. A talk about the weather to a class of nine-year-olds would sound different too. Echo was the master of changing the wrapping.

Echo taught them to think: "This speech is for *them*, not for *me*." She had a big rule



# Hark

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\*HARK — \*listen all the way through. don't rehearse your reply.\*\*

Hark looked like a small deer. He stood on two legs. He wore a chunky vest, forest-green with soft bark-brown stripes. A tiny ear-charm dangled from one ear. He also carried a small attention-card.

Hark was quiet. He stood very still. He listened deeply to everything. He always paid attention to what other people *actually* said. Hark loved to say, "Listen all the way through. Don't rehearse your reply." His ear-charm and attention-card were his special tools. He used them to jot down the speaker's main idea. He noted their supporting details. He even wrote down how they felt. Then, he'd sum it all up. This made sure he understood *before* he answered.

This is a big deal. Hark shows us how to do *active listening*. It's a speaking-craft. It means you LISTEN-ALL-THE-WAY-THROUGH. Half of talking and listening is just listening. Most kids – and grown-ups too – aren't very good at it. Usually, people hear the first few words. Then they start thinking about their own answer. They miss the rest of what was said. Then they jump in with a reply that doesn't fit. Hark does the opposite. He hears *all* the words. He listens even after he thinks he knows where the person is going. He takes a moment. He sums up what he heard. He might say, "So you're saying X — is that right?" He does this *before* he replies. The summary makes sure he understood. The pause gives the speaker a chance to add more.

Hark teaches us how to listen well. He teaches that "your reply waits; the speaker doesn't." He teaches the rule: "summarize before responding; ask before assuming." This skill helps with debates. It helps with talking to friends. It helps with understanding feelings.

Hark says: \**"I am Hark. The skill I teach is active listening. The move is listen all the way through. don't rehearse your reply."*\*  
*"Hear all the way through. Then summarize. Then respond."*

One day, the group was practicing a debate. Pitch started an argument. "I think the school day should start later," Pitch said. "Right now, we're all zombies in first period. If we started at, say, nine o'clock, everyone would be more awake. We'd learn more."

Truss (from chapter 4) listened. His brain buzzed. *Later start? No way!* he thought. *That means less after-school time for clubs! And what about sports practice?* Truss's eyes glazed over a little. He started forming his counter-attack in his head. He was ready to jump in.

Hark noticed Truss's eyes. He saw Truss wasn't really listening anymore. "Listen all the way through, Truss," Hark said quietly. "Don't rehearse your reply yet."

Truss stopped mentally drafting his answer. He took a breath. He forced himself to focus on Pitch again.

Pitch finished his argument. "Plus," Pitch added, "I could actually eat breakfast instead of just grabbing a granola bar. And I know some people worry about after-school activities. But we could just shift those later too. Or, maybe, have a shorter lunch to make up for it. The main thing is, we'd be more focused when it matters most."

Truss blinked. *Shorter lunch? Shift activities?* He hadn't even considered those parts. His whole counter-argument was about to be totally off-base. He would have missed Pitch's best points.

"Now," Hark said. "Summarize what Pitch said. Then respond."

Truss took a deep breath. "So, Pitch," he began. "You're saying we should start school later, like 9 AM. This would make everyone more awake and help us learn better. You also think we could adjust after-school stuff or lunch to make it work. Is that right?"

Pitch smiled. "Exactly! You got it."

NOW Truss responded. "Okay, I get your point about being tired. But if we shift everything later, what about kids who have jobs after school? Or younger siblings they pick up?"

Truss's response was much sharper. It actually addressed Pitch's argument. He even included the details Pitch had added. He didn't just talk past Pitch.

"That's how debate works," Hark said. "Not by interrupting. It works by listening. Then summarizing. Then responding to what was *actually* said. Everything else is just talking past each other."

Resonance the mentor smiled. "Hark holds the room together," she said.

LOAD-BEARING **no-real-orator-mascotization gate** (continues).

LOAD-BEARING **anti-debate-as-combat gate**: Hark's craft explicitly counter-codes the cultural framing of debate as VERBAL COMBAT where you "win" by interrupting + dismissing. The cast frames debate as STRUCTURED LISTENING + STRUCTURED RESPONSE — closer to mutual understanding than to verbal warfare. Cross-app with DebateForge's collaborative-debate framing.

Cross-app: Hark echoes DebateForge sibling (debate-as-listening); DialogueQuest's listening-craft; EthosForge's empathy-as-skill; VentureQuest's Listen (parallel customer-discovery listening); TruthQuest's Wonder (start from "I don't know yet" — listening posture).

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## Voice register

Careful-deer-tween. Hark is still + listening-deep; speaks in summarize-first + listen-all-the-way + don't-rehearse.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

No-real-orator-mascotization + anti-debate-as-combat gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Active-listening pedagogy: foundational in Carl Rogers's *On Becoming a Person*; CCSS ELA Speaking & Listening anchor standards; Habits of Mind framework (Costa & Kallick).



# Pitch

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\*PITCH — \*your voice is a road. not a wall.\*\*

Pitch was a small creature. Pitch looked like a chunky cartoon bird, ready to sing. Pitch wore a bright, fancy vest. A tiny voice-card hung around Pitch's neck. A tone-tracker was clipped to the vest. Pitch's fur was warm amber. It had soft rose stripes.

Pitch always listened closely. Pitch heard every little change in a voice. Pitch loved to say, "Your voice is a road. Not a wall."

Pitch taught kids about their voices. Pitch showed them three special tools. These tools were like dials on a radio. You could turn them up or down.

The first tool was VOLUME. This meant speaking loud enough. Your voice needed to reach the back of the room. But you should never yell. Yelling just made people cover their ears.

The second tool was PACE. This meant speaking slowly enough. People needed time to follow your words. But you shouldn't drone on. That made everyone fall asleep.

The third tool was **PITCH**. This meant making your voice go up and down. A flat voice was boring. It was like a long, straight line. A voice with good **pitch** had hills and valleys. It kept things interesting.

Pitch taught that your voice was a tool. It had these three dials. You needed to learn them. Then you needed to use them well.

Pitch said, "I am Pitch." Pitch's voice was clear and warm. "I teach you how to use your voice. I show you how to make it strong and interesting."

Pitch held up a tiny claw. "The big idea is this: *your voice is a road. not a wall.*"

Pitch held up three fingers. "Three dials: volume, pace, pitch. Try to change just one dial per sentence. That keeps your audience walking with you."

Today was practice day. Hark and Pose sat on small stools. Other kids from the group sat around them. They were all ready to listen. Pitch stood on a small, raised platform. Pose had helped Pitch get the perfect standing spot. Pitch looked ready.

"Okay," Pitch chirped. "I will give a one-minute speech. It's about my favorite book."

Pitch cleared a tiny throat. The voice-card glowed faintly. The tone-tracker blinked.

Pitch began to speak. "My favorite book is called *The Mystery of the Missing Moon Rock*. It is about a young detective named Pip. Pip lives in a small town. One day, the town's special moon rock disappears. Pip decides to solve the mystery. Pip looks for clues everywhere. Pip talks to many people. Pip finds a secret tunnel. Inside the tunnel, Pip discovers the moon rock. It was hidden by a mischievous squirrel. Pip brings the moon rock back. Everyone is happy."

Pitch finished the speech. The words were all there. But Pitch had spoken in a flat voice. It was the same volume. It was the same pace. It was the same **pitch**.

Hark yawned a little. He tried to hide it. A girl named Lena was drawing on her notebook. A boy named Sam was picking at a loose thread on his pants. Nobody looked very interested. Ten seconds was all it took. Their eyes had glazed over.

Pitch stopped. Pitch looked at the group. "See that?" Pitch asked. "That was a wall."

Hark looked up. "A wall?"

"Yes," Pitch said. "A voice wall. It's hard to climb. It's boring to listen to." Pitch tapped the tone-tracker. It showed a perfectly flat line. "Let me try again. Same words. But this time, I will use different dials."

Pitch took a deep breath. The voice-card glowed brighter.

Pitch started the speech again. "My favorite book is called *The Mystery of the Missing Moon Rock*." Pitch said the title a little louder. "It is about a young detective named Pip." Pitch slowed down on Pip's name. "Pip lives in a small town." Pitch's voice dropped a bit there, like a secret. "One day, the town's special moon rock disappears." Pitch said "disappears" with a rising tone, making it sound important.

The kids leaned forward. Lena stopped drawing. Sam stopped picking at his pants. Their eyes were wide. They were listening now.

"Pip decides to solve the mystery." Pitch's voice was firm. "Pip looks for clues everywhere." Pitch sped up a little, like Pip was rushing. "Pip talks to many people." Pitch's voice went up and down, like talking to different people. "Pip finds a secret tunnel." Pitch whispered "secret tunnel," making everyone lean even closer. "Inside the tunnel, Pip discovers the moon rock!" Pitch's voice burst out, full of excitement. "It was hidden by a mischievous squirrel." Pitch said "mischievous squirrel" with a funny, low growl. "Pip brings the moon rock back. Everyone is happy!" Pitch finished with a big, happy flourish.

Pitch smiled. "That was a road," Pitch said. "The audience walks along it. There are turns. There are slopes. There is scenery. A wall has none of those things. A wall is hard to climb."

Resonance, their wise mentor, nodded slowly. A small smile touched Resonance's lips. "Your voice is a road," Resonance said. "Not a wall. Pitch teaches the road."

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## Voice register

Careful-thrush-tween. Pitch is warm + voice-modulating; speaks in three-dials + road-vs-wall + vary-one-per-sentence.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

No-real-orator-mascotization gate LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Voice-and-tone pedagogy: foundational in CCSS ELA Speaking & Listening; Toastmasters Competent Communicator curriculum; speech-pathology + voice-coaching literature (Linklater *Freeing the Natural Voice*).



# Pose

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\*POSE — \*stand. then speak. the body teaches the voice.\*\*

Pose was a bit like a careful flamingo. She always stood perfectly still. Her cartoon vest was chunky and blue. It had soft cream stripes. Pose carried a small stance-card. She also had a grounding-tracker. These tools helped her check her body. She watched how people stood. She did this *before* they said a single word. Pose was small, but she felt very grounded. She was always aware of how she held herself. She loved to say, "Stand. Then speak. The body teaches the voice."

This was super important. Pose taught about **posture + presence**. It was her special skill. This skill was all about how *the body teaches the voice*. New speakers often worried about their words. They thought only about *what* to say. Good speakers knew better. They focused on their body first. They thought about *how* to stand. Your body really shapes your voice. Tight shoulders can make your voice sound tight. Standing on one foot makes your voice wobble. Locked knees can even make you feel dizzy. Pose had a special checklist. You did it *before* you spoke. First, your feet needed to be flat. No tip-toes allowed. Your feet should be about shoulder-width apart. Make sure your weight is balanced. Keep your knees soft. Don't lock them stiff. Your shoulders should be down and back. Breathe low, from your belly, not your chest. Once your body felt settled, your voice could come out clear. Trying it the other way around just didn't work as well.

Pose taught us to feel our bodies. She said, "Your body is like your voice's home. You need to settle your home first." Her main rule was simple. "Feet flat. Weight balanced. Breath low. Do all this *before* you say your first word." This idea connected to other things. It was like the stage presence in PerformanceForge. It was like grounding yourself in DanceQuest. It even linked to MindForge, about how your body and mind work together.

Pose would often say, "I am Pose. I teach **posture + presence**." She added, "My special move is *stand. then speak. the body teaches the voice*." She would then repeat her simple steps. "Feet flat. Weight balanced. Breath low. Then speak."

The cast gathered for their first presentation rehearsal. The room buzzed with nervous energy. Everyone had a topic ready. Pitch, who would be in the next chapter, was excited. She bounced on her toes. She was ready to launch into her words. Pitch took a deep breath. She opened her mouth to speak.

Then Pose held up a gentle hand. "Hold on, Pitch," Pose said softly. Her voice was calm. "Stand. Then speak." Pitch paused. She looked a little confused. "Let's check your stance first," Pose suggested. "Feet?"

Pitch glanced down at her shoes. One foot was way out in front. Her weight was all tipped forward. She looked like she was about to fall over. "Balance it out," Pose instructed. "Both feet flat on the floor." Pitch shifted her weight. She planted both feet. She tried to stand evenly. It felt a bit strange at first.

"Good," Pose nodded. "Now, shoulders?" Pitch realized her shoulders were tight. They were practically up by her ears. She hadn't even noticed. "Drop them," Pose said. "Roll them back a little." Pitch let her shoulders fall. She rolled them back. A tiny sigh escaped her lips. She felt a little looser.

"And your breath?" Pose asked next. Pitch took another breath. It was high in her chest. Her shoulders went up again. "Drop the breath," Pose advised. "Let your belly expand when you inhale." Pitch tried it. She pushed her stomach out as she breathed in. It felt weird. Like a balloon filling up. But then she felt a little calmer.

"Okay," Pose said, a small smile on her face. "NOW say your first sentence."

Pitch took a moment. She looked at her feet. She felt her soft knees. Her shoulders were down. Her belly moved with her breath. Then she spoke. "Hello, everyone. Today I will tell you about..."

Her voice was different. It was much calmer. It was steady. It didn't wobble or rush. Pitch even sounded more confident. She hadn't changed a single word. But the sound was completely new.

Hark, who would appear in chapter three, watched closely. His eyes were wide. "Wow," Hark whispered. "Her voice changed completely." He shook his head in surprise. "Same words. But a totally different body. It made a different effect."

Resonance, their mentor, smiled. She nodded at Pose. "That's it," Resonance said. "Stand. Then speak. The body teaches the voice." Everyone in the room seemed to understand a little better now. It wasn't just about the words. It was about everything else too.

Here's something important about Pose. She never talked about famous speakers. You know, like people from history or presidents. She didn't mention them at all. The cast learned the *skill* of speaking. They didn't try to copy anyone's personality.

Another big rule was this: Pose's checklist wasn't about being perfect. It was about finding your own best way to stand. Some kids had different bodies. Maybe they used a wheelchair. Or they had one leg. Or they felt pain sometimes. A "standard" way of standing might not work for them. The cast knew this. They made the stance *adaptable*. The main goal was to feel grounded. You needed to feel present in *your* body. Whatever body you had. Sitting in a wheelchair and feeling grounded counted. Standing with a cane counted. The main ideas were always the same: Be stable. Be balanced. Breathe low. These ideas worked for everyone. No matter how their body was.

Pose's lessons connected to other things. They were like stage presence in PerformanceForge. They were like grounding yourself in DanceQuest. Dance and speaking both used your body in similar ways. It also linked to MindForge. That's about how your body and mind work together. And it was like FitQuest and ActiveForge. Those taught that any body shape could have good presence.

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## Voice register

Careful-flamingo-tween. Pose is grounded + balanced; speaks in stance-checks + breath-low + body-teaches-the-voice.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

No-real-orator-mascotization + anti-perfectionism + body-adaptable gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

**Wheelchair-grounded counts; cane-stand counts; whatever body the speaker has is the body that does the craft.**

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## Cultural-context note

Posture-and-presence pedagogy: foundational in classical rhetoric (Quintilian's *Institutes*), modern speech curriculum (Toastmasters), somatic-grounding (Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais), and CCSS ELA Speaking & Listening anchor standards.



# Truss

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\*TRUSS — \*claim. then proof. then why. that's the structure that holds.\*\*

Truss was a careful kid. She loved to build things. Not with wood or metal, but with ideas. She wore a special vest with many pockets. Inside, she kept her argument-card and a structure-tracker. Truss was small, but her brain was always busy. She liked things to be neat and strong.

Her favorite colors were cool blue and soft brown. She always paid close attention to how people talked. Especially when they tried to convince someone of something. "Claim. Then proof. Then why. That's the structure that holds," she'd often say. She drew every argument like a three-beam truss. One beam for the *claim*. That was the main idea. One for the *evidence*. That was the proof. And one for the *reasoning*. That was the "why" the proof mattered.

Truss called this *argument structure*. It was like building a bridge with words. A weak argument was just a *claim*. "School should start later," someone might say. That was it. Not very strong. It was like a single pole in the ground. It could fall over easily.

A medium argument had a *claim* and *evidence*. "School should start later because teenagers need more sleep." Better, Truss would nod. That was two poles. But they still wobbled. They weren't connected well. They might lean over in a strong wind.

A really strong argument needed all three parts. A *claim*, *evidence*, and *reasoning*. Truss would show them on her tracker. She used the school example. "School should start later," she'd say. That's the *claim*. "Studies show that teenagers' bodies want to stay up late. They need to sleep in later." That's the *evidence*. "So, if school starts when their brains are still sleepy, they won't learn as well. Starting later helps them learn better." That's the *reasoning*.

The reasoning beam connected the claim to the evidence. It made the argument strong. Without it, the evidence just floated there. It didn't hold up the claim. The whole thing would collapse. Just like a bridge with missing supports.

One afternoon, the group was getting ready. They had to give a big presentation. It was about changing a school rule. The rule was about starting school so early. Pitch was excited. He bounced on his toes. He loved talking. But sometimes his ideas were a bit... floaty. The other kids, like Bolt and Spark, were looking worried. They knew Pitch had good ideas. But they also knew he sometimes forgot the "why."

"Okay, my turn!" Pitch declared. He puffed out his chest. He grabbed a marker. He wrote "School Starts Later!" on the big whiteboard. "That's our main point!"

Truss held up her argument-card. She looked at Pitch. "That's just the *claim*," she said. Her voice was calm. "It's a good claim. But where's the *evidence*? And the *reasoning*?"

Pitch stopped bouncing. He blinked. He looked at the whiteboard. "Uh. Evidence?" He looked around the room. Bolt shrugged. Spark chewed on her lip. Pitch scratched his head. "Well, everyone knows teenagers are tired in the morning. I'm tired. You're tired. Even Resonance looks tired sometimes!"

Truss shook her head gently. "That's an idea, Pitch. It's what you feel. Not strong *evidence*." She tapped her structure-tracker. "Evidence needs to be something others can check. Something solid."

Pitch thought harder. He stared at the floor for a long time. His brow was furrowed. He tapped the marker against his chin. "Oh! I remember reading something!" he finally burst out. "Studies show teenagers need more sleep. Their bodies are just wired that way. They can't fall asleep early. So they need to wake up later."

Truss nodded slowly. She drew two beams on her tracker. "Good," she said. "That's *CLAIM* plus *EVIDENCE*. You have two beams now. Much better." She tapped the empty space for the third beam. "But where's the *REASONING*?"

Pitch frowned. He paced a small circle. He mumbled to himself. "Hmm. So... because teenagers need more sleep..." He trailed off. He looked at the ceiling. He looked at his shoes. He looked at Truss. "And school starts super early... before their bodies are ready..."

Truss waited. She watched him. She didn't rush him. She just held her tracker. The missing beam seemed to glow faintly.

"So," Pitch continued, his eyes widening as the idea clicked. "If school starts when teenagers are still tired, their brains aren't ready to learn. They're still in sleep mode. They just sit there. Not really taking things in." He snapped his fingers. "Starting later means their brains are awake! They can learn better! They'll get better grades!"

Truss beamed. She drew the third beam on her tracker. It looked strong and complete. "Yes!" she said. "Now you have a *TRUSS*! All three beams are there. It's a solid argument." She pointed to each part. "The audience can *follow* your argument easily. The *reasoning*

# About Spark & Anvil

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

## Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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