

Lesson 1 Speaking in Public

Logan's Speech

"The assignment is to write a speech about someone who you admire. It could be a historical figure, a celebrity, or even someone you personally know in your life," Ms. Harper told the class. My classmates began brainstorming a list of people they might pick — mostly athletes, singers, and actors. However, I knew right away who my speech was going to be about. Grandma is the person I admire the most. Writing a speech about her would be a piece of cake.

A few days later, Ms. Harper talked about how to deliver a good speech. This reminded me that it wasn't just a writing assignment, but a speech I would have to give in front of my classmates! The thought of standing in front of the entire class made my palms sweat. I'm too shy to raise my hand in class even when I know the answer. How on earth can I speak in front of everyone? I couldn't sleep at all that night.

The big day for the speech finally arrived, and I felt more anxious than ever. I had spent the previous week imagining how my classmates would react to my speech. I was still mostly thinking about what my classmates might think. I wasn't putting much thought into what I was actually going to say. I figured I could just speak off the top of my head. After all, I was going to talk about my grandmother. I didn't need any notes.

I was sweating as I walked up to the front of the class. My heart was racing so fast that I thought it might fly out of my chest. I could feel my face turning red. I didn't know where to look. I blanked out. I just stood there silently. Ms. Harper tried to help me out. "Start by telling us a bit about your grandmother, Logan." I spoke about what kind of work my grandmother used to do, but I quickly ran out of words to say. Then Ms. Harper said, "How about telling us a bit about why you admire her so much?" I barely managed to share a short story about her. After that, I just rushed to my seat and put my head in my hands. I knew I had messed up. I hadn't said all the things I wanted to say.

The next day, I met Ms. Harper after school to talk about the speech. I said, "I'm embarrassed about the speech. I must have looked like a fool. I know I could have done better."

"It's quite all right to fall short of your own expectations as long as you learn something from it," she said in a warm voice. "What was bothering you the most while you prepared for the speech?"

"I was afraid the other students would laugh at me if my speech wasn't good enough."

She replied, "You certainly can't control what others think about your speech. That means you should be focusing on the one thing you can control — how you give your speech." That woke me up from the depths of despair. Of course, that was it! I wouldn't have been able to make my classmates like what I wanted to say. I really should have focused on my performance.

A couple of weeks later, the class was given another speech assignment. I didn't want to drop the ball like the first time. So this time, I practiced delivering the speech. I stood in front of the mirror every day for a week and went over all the things I wanted to say. I used cue cards which contained key phrases about important facts. I rehearsed how I would stand, how I would make eye contact with the audience, and even when I would pause.

I felt nervous again when the big day finally arrived. But when the teacher called my name, I noticed that my nerves had actually calmed down a bit. I felt way better than the last time, for sure! I walked up to the front of the class and looked out into the audience. My heart began to race, and I took a deep breath to calm it down. While my voice trembled from time to time, I managed to get my whole message across. When I was done, I felt so proud of myself that I barely noticed how loudly everyone was clapping for me!