



Speaking Up

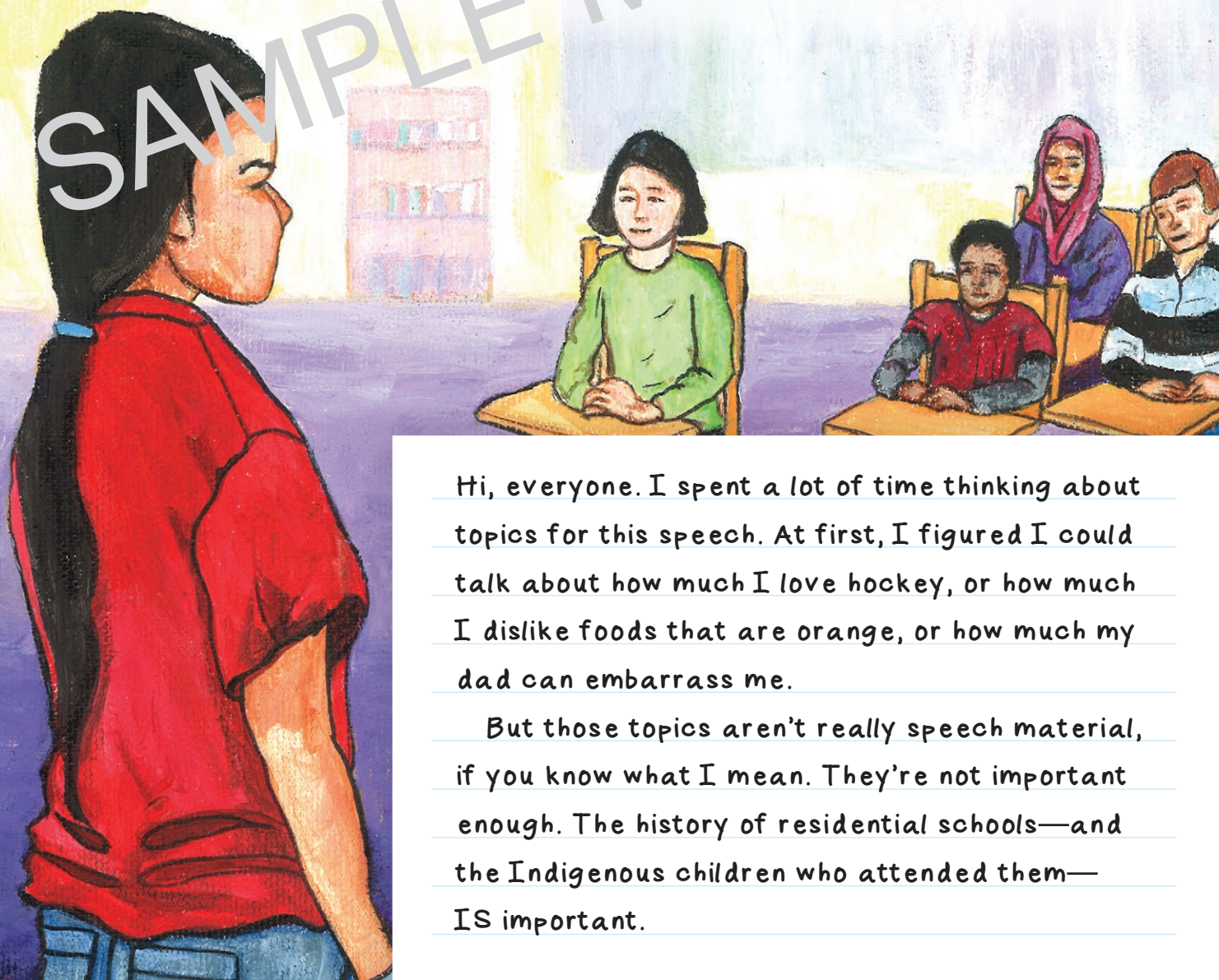
SAMPLE
MATERIAL
FOR
PREVIEW
ONLY

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I'm looking through my notes instead of staring at my classmates. A perfect way to put off actually starting my speech ... for about five seconds.

Public speaking isn't really my thing. Neither is telling everyone how I feel about a difficult topic, but whatever, I need to stop being afraid and do this for my great-grandmother—and for the thousands of other people just like her who were sent to residential schools as kids.



Hi, everyone. I spent a lot of time thinking about topics for this speech. At first, I figured I could talk about how much I love hockey, or how much I dislike foods that are orange, or how much my dad can embarrass me.

But those topics aren't really speech material, if you know what I mean. They're not important enough. The history of residential schools—and the Indigenous children who attended them—
IS important.

When I saw my ananaksaq (an-anak-sack)—that's my great-grandmother—last week, I was complaining about school, and especially this assignment. (Sorry, Mr. Irniq!) Usually, she lets me blab on, but this time, she stopped me. She said, "Enough talking. I'm going to tell you about what it was like at my school." Within seconds, I closed my laptop, all ears for one of her stories. I was super curious because she had never talked about her school days.

I knew a few things. I knew she had gone to a residential school. I knew that Indigenous children were supposed to learn how to read, write, and speak English and get an education in other subjects, too.

You know what actually happened, though? The Canadian government took kids away from their homes. Ananaksaq's mom packed her daughter a bag and Ananaksaq was sent away. Many children lost contact with their families. They lost their languages, and many were forced to forget about their traditional ways of life.





I knew most of this because I had read it in books and heard it from teachers. But it didn't affect me the way Ananaksag's story does.

She was only six when her parents were forced to send her to a residential school in the Northwest Territories.

When Ananaksag arrived at school, the people in charge took away everything, including her clothes. Next, they cut off her hair. That makes me so sad. And angry. If you don't know, hair is a part of our spirit and important to our identity. Ananaksag cried every night for weeks. Kids could go home for the summer if their family lived nearby. Hers didn't. She didn't see her parents again for 11 years.

And get this—Ananaksag's older brother was sent to the same school, but they weren't allowed to talk to each other. I can't imagine being in the same school as my brother or sister and never talking to them.

Ananaksag said that her school wasn't heated properly, so she was cold all the time. She slept in a room with 40 other girls and, every morning, she had to take a spoonful of something gross called cod-liver oil. She had to take the oil so she wouldn't get sick, but all of the girls used the same spoon. Talk about germs!



Instead of learning all day, kids had to do chores like laundry by hand, scrubbing floors, or gathering wood. There was never enough proper food. One time, the school got a shipment of beef and they didn't cook it. Ananaksaq ate frozen beef. Someone told her it was because teachers knew Inuit ate frozen fish and caribou meat. They assumed kids would eat frozen beef, too. Ananaksaq thought it was disgusting, but she didn't tell anyone.

When I asked Ananaksaq about the worst part, she said it was not being allowed to speak Inuktitut (in-UK-ti-tut). She had to speak English. If any kids spoke, sang, or prayed in their own language, they were punished.

For decades, Ananaksaq kept her story to herself. Today, more former students are speaking up. In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission started travelling across Canada to hear the stories of residential school attendees. The Commission listened to thousands of survivors tell about what happened to them. Sharing what happened at these schools is so important, not only for those telling the stories but for all of us.

Let's Talk

1. Why do you think it was important for the narrator to share Ananaksaq's story?
2. What important issue would you talk about if you were asked to give a speech?

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