



Learning Story from Canada: “Making a Speech” (about 10 minutes)



“Making a Speech”

“Vicky is 10 years old, small and very shy. In her school she almost never raises her hand, not because she doesn’t have an idea or hasn’t studied but just because she doesn’t like to speak in front of a lot of other people. But there is one exception: reading time. In Canadian schools, there are regular reading times, and Vicky is really good at that. She loves to read out loud and breathe life into the words with her voice. When roles are given to the students to read, she especially loves to read the part of the narrator. Then she can put the whole class into the right mood by using her voice. She can make a story interesting, sad, or really funny. When Mrs. Laskin, her English teacher, asked to talk to her after the lesson and asked whether she wanted to make the speech for Remembrance Day in 5 weeks, she was very excited because Mrs. Laskin knew how well she can read. When Mrs. Laskin said, though, that around 300 people will come, Vicky gulped. But then the teacher explained that she should do the opening speech and read a poem or a prayer, and she felt honoured. She hesitated for a moment but then she said yes because she knew: reading out loud is something she can always do.

But three weeks before the event she got a surprise: Mrs. Laskin mentioned in passing that the speeches aren’t going to be read, they’re supposed to be said without notes. Vicky started to panic. She can read but she can’t just speak. Would she really be able to do it? She took a deep breath: this was really going to be a challenge but it was also a very big honour. She thought about what she could do. One way would be to memorise something. If she was sure of every word, then she should be fine. In the next two weeks, she was always walking around with papers in her hand, quietly talking to herself. During breakfast, in the school bus, during recess and before going to bed she went through the words again and again. Even once the light was off she whispered the speech to herself until she fell asleep.

During the first week she kept needing to look at the paper but in the second week she could almost do without it. It was hard not to hold it in her hand and keep looking at it but every day it got a little easier. The more confident she felt, the better she was at letting her tone change here and there and making her speech more interesting with gestures and pauses. Then she decided to go a step further. She stood in front of a mirror without her paper in her hand. At the beginning it wasn’t easy, after just a few words she ran to her room to get the paper and read what she wanted to say. But every time she did it, it got a little easier. At the end, she really liked how she stood there and spoke.

On Monday, the week of the event, she met with her teacher. She could finally show how much she had practised. Vicky started her opening speech. She made it through the first sentence. She made it through the second sentence without stuttering and her voice was almost normal. She looked at Mrs. Laskin, who was listening attentively to every word and then it happened: all at once, her mind was empty. There were no words there, only a big blank spot. Her face got red and she started to panic. ‘How could that happen?’ she thought, ‘What will Mrs. Laskin think?’ The more Vicky doubted herself, the less she could remember the words. If she only had the paper - everything was written on it! Tears came to her eyes.

But to her surprise, Mrs. Laskin didn't seem angry or disappointed but looked at her with a nice smile. Sadly, Vicky admitted that she had forgotten everything and promised that she had really practised a lot.

With a calm voice, Mrs. Laskin explained that that was exactly the reason why we practise. Speaking in front of one person was just another step along the way to her speech. Vicky had never thought of it that way. She wanted to be perfect right away but of course she had also had to learn to ride a bike or swim and she felt more confident with it bit by bit. So she started her speech again, and this time the poem and prayer went pretty well. Then she started again and whenever she felt unsure and didn't really know what came next, she looked at Mrs. Laskin's smiling face. Her eyes were really very calming. And when Vicky felt calm, then she remembered the words again. They practised every day and each time Vicky felt more confident and better.

Then it was time - the day of the big celebration had come. Everyone was there - 300 people, and the honoured guests sat up front. Vicky was asked to come to the microphone. All eyes were on her as she took her place at the podium. She felt scared but then she remembered to look at Mrs. Laskin. Where was she? Her eyes looked desperately in the crowd for Mrs. Laskin until she finally saw her. But Mrs. Laskin sat in a group of students who were pushing each other and so she couldn't look at Vicky the whole time. Vicky needed her eyes. She took a deep breath and looked nervously at the floor. Then a miracle happened. She looked at the crowd, and all at once everyone's eyes became Mrs. Laskin's eyes. Vicky started her speech: she said the first sentence without a mistake and the second. The whole speech was a big success. Everyone in the audience was moved and cried with pride, especially when Vicky read the poem in her own unique way. And Vicky cried too. Happy tears."