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My First Speech

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“My First Speech,” by Kristen Sabo

Instructor’s Note

In “My First Speech,” Kristen Sabo depicts one of humanity’s greatest fears—public speaking. This Literacy Memoir describes and analyzes Kristen’s anticipation of her first college speech. Kristen uses transitions well to help her readers follow the narrative as it moves among different places and as it moves forward in time. What strategies does she use to make sure the essay is coherent? How might this Literacy Memoir be significant for a reader? What bigger themes does Kristen’s essay suggest?

Writer’s Biography

Kristen Sabo is a freshman Nursing major from Xenia, Ohio. She doesn’t consider herself a true writer. However, when she connects with the topic, writing comes easier and is enjoyable. When she is not studying, Kristen enjoys hanging out with friends and practicing her photography hobby.

My First Speech

Half asleep in class, I jerk awake at the sound of my name.

“Kristen Sabo, Garrison Reeves, Kara Starkey, and Derek Renner. You four will deliver your introduction speeches on Wednesday,” says Professor Wheeler.

My heart does a somersault inside my chest. Inside I am screaming. I have my very first speech this Wednesday. I need to throw something together in just two days. The introductory speech has to be about something that is unique only to me. *I am going to die*. I just know it. Finally 9:50 comes and class is over.

As we all pack our bags up, Professor Wheeler cheerfully sings out, “See you all on Wednesday! Can’t wait to hear your speeches!”

Her peppiness irritates me. I have no desire to make this speech and can wait just fine. *Just get through the rest of this day. You can do this.* For the rest of the day, I can hardly pay attention in my classes. My mind is frantically trying to think of a possible way out of this. Fight or flight mode has set in. And I'm leaning more towards flight. Being homeschooled has certainly not helped me be comfortable in front of an audience. I have never given a speech in my life! As I drive home, I blare some country music hoping to take my mind off this upcoming speech. But nothing works. When I get home at last, I tell my family about the speech I have to do, and they offer to help. I guess living at home during college does have its perks.

Tuesday flutters by in a blink. Before I know it, it is Tuesday evening and I haven't even begun working on my speech. I can start to feel my blood pressure rising and the nerves kicking in.

I manage to calm myself down enough to think clearly. *What can I say? What is something unique to only me?* I search my brain for a while for an answer but find nothing. So I trudge downstairs to ask my family. They are all crowded around the TV watching who knows what. All I can hear is the clashing of swords and men shouting. I march right in front of the TV and manage to tear their attention off the screen so we can talk.

"Alright, let's put our heads together and think," my Dad says.

"I have an idea," my older sister Katie suggests. "You could talk about how accident-prone you are!" Her eyes twinkle as she speaks.

I roll my eyes. But after thinking for a bit, I realize it's actually a good idea. She speaks the truth, despite the fact I don't like to admit it. I drag myself back to my room to think of what to say. I begin to write down the many, many incidents I have experienced and all the injuries that went along with it. Ran over by a horse, knee injury, torn ankle—the list when on and on. I pick a few of the most interesting and start to put my speech together. Nothing is coming out right. *How am I supposed to do this?!* My mind

is hopelessly trying to hold onto my sanity. The more I think about it, the worse I begin to feel. My stomach is already all in knots and I'm not even speaking until tomorrow! I attempt to eat dinner. The usually irresistible spaghetti meal looks unappealing to me now. Just the smell of the warm red sauce makes my stomach churn. I try to force a few bites down, but my stomach can hardly take it. The tangy flavor of the sauce doesn't taste like normal. I leave the table feeling even worse than before. I have to get this speech together. I only have to talk for one minute. How hard can it possibly be?

The old clock chimes ten o'clock when I finally finish writing my speech. Slightly elated but still exhausted, I bounce down the stairs to give my speech to my parents. I confidently deliver my speech and watch for their reaction. They smile and say it sounds great. My Dad suggests adding some humor. I'm afraid it won't come out very funny when I'm nervous. But I think it sounds like a good idea, so I throw it in anyways. Satisfied with my speech, I slip off to bed. I lie there in the dark trying to tell myself to calm down. *It's nothing to be nervous about...it's only one minute in front of twenty people. No big deal. You can do this.* Despite my own encouraging words, I cannot sleep. I toss and turn for hours, but still sleep avoids me. I flip the pillow back and forth to the cold side but my mind will not rest. Finally giving up, I rip the covers off and turn to look at the clock. I sigh deeply at those bright green numbers that read three o'clock. I slide out of bed and down to the kitchen for a glass of water. The cool water trickles down my throat. Hoping that will calm my stomach, I crawl back up to bed. A few more hours pass until I am completely exhausted and can no longer remain awake.

All too soon the sound of my iPod's cheerful alarm wakes me. I can smell crispy bacon, my favorite food. But the thought of eating makes my stomach groan in misery. Food is not an option this morning. I rush to get ready and go over my speech one more time. I quickly leave the house, leaving the bacon on the table where my Dad had set it out for me. The cool morning air helps to relieve me some. I rehearse my speech numerous times on my drive to

school. First I have to get through chemistry class and then to speech class. I'm fine for the first ten minutes of chemistry. Then the nerves really begin to set in. I can't focus on what my professor is saying. I feel sick to my stomach and a little light-headed. The next forty minutes tick by slowly, but at the same time, all too fast. My friends try to encourage me.

"You'll do fabulous, my dear!" Julie says. "Don't stress about it."

"God is with you and will give you strength to get through this," Ayana adds cheerfully.

Their words lift my spirits but only for a moment. I drag myself to speech class. My feet fight to run the other direction, but I force them to remain on track. I have to do this. I really don't have much choice. I pause outside of the classroom in an attempt to compose myself. Having no success, I slowly walk into the room and take my usual seat in the front row next to Mr. Crocks-with-socks. Even his attire doesn't amuse me today. I decide I will go second. I am definitely not going first, and not last because that is what everyone always remembers. I simply want to be forgotten in the midst of all the speeches. Mrs. Wheeler calls Kara first. Her bubbly personality catches everyone's attention immediately. I try to pay attention but I can't focus on her words. I try to recite my speech in my head but I can't remember it at all. I notice her speech coming to an end, and my whole body begins to tingle. I can hardly hear a thing as blood pounds in my ears. I think for sure everyone can hear the thundering of my heart. Everyone applauds for her and I wait for Professor Wheeler to ask for the next speaker.

"Next speaker may go on up now."

I hesitate for just a moment wishing somehow to skip over this terrifying experience I am about to endure. I look over to see Garrison smirking slightly as he stands to give his speech. *NOOOOOOOO!* I scream inside. He knew I wanted to go next. He knew! *I am going next no matter what*, I resolve. Before I know it, he is finished and now it's my turn. I stand up immediately, determined not to go

last. The front of the room seems so far away. I stumble along, praying my wobbly legs won't give out beneath me. By some miracle, I reach the front without falling and move behind the podium. I look out and to my horror see everyone staring at me. I feel my cheeks turning bright red as I look down to my single note card.

“You may begin now.”

I can not tell where the voice comes from, but it sounds far off. The room feels as if it is spinning through a tornado. My head is throbbing and my hands are sweating. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. My first word comes out as a squeak. *You got this. Just relax.* I pause to clear my throat and start again. My own voice sounds so strange. I don't even sound like myself. I can't make eye contact with anyone. I fear I'll freeze up if I do. My speech comes to a sudden halt when I hear muffled laughter. I look at the faces of my fellow classmates to see smiles on their faces. I then realize I've reached the humorous part of my speech, and I feel relief that it wasn't as dumb as I thought it would be. Only now I have lost my place. I lift my note card so I can read what I had scribbled onto it. My hand trembles and I immediately put them back on the coarse podium where they had been glued. But I have found my place and continue my speech in a rather hurried fashion. I want nothing more than to run away and hide. My final words come out and everyone applauds. I believe it's only out of courtesy. I know my speech had been terrible. I collapse into my seat feeling a wave of relief wash over me. I can breathe again. My muscles still twitch after being tense for so long. I listen to the final speech of the day and am able to understand it.

As class concludes, Professor Wheeler reminds a few of my classmates that they will be speaking on the next day. I smile though, because I can now relax and no longer worry about it. My smile falters when I think of what my grade might be. *Well, I am going to fail this class for sure.* I slowly start to walk out of class when the girl behind me stops me. I remember her name is Claire.

“Kristen, I just wanted to tell you that you did an excellent job up there. You looked so composed and at ease and you spoke clearly so that I could understand you.”

“Really?” I ask, astonished. “I was terrified! You couldn’t see me shaking?”

“Oh, no. Not at all! You did so well!” She flashes a smile and bounces away.

I can’t believe what I’ve just heard. *Maybe I’m not as bad as I think I am.* A smile creeps across my face.

I got this.