Why do you think I can’t do it?”

“You are not mature enough to talk about this. You don’t have that much knowledge about the topic.”

“So suggest how I can gain more knowledge about this topic.”

“No, I am telling you to choose something else. Something you learned from your school teachers.”

“But I like this topic.”

“Did you ever learn anything about human relationships at school?”

“No really.”

“So choose a topic that your teachers taught you in class.”

“No I want to talk about what I have chosen already.”

“Okay, it’s your decision. But let’s see what happens.”

To prepare herself, Tasmuva, a 13-year-old high school girl starts to read romantic novels by famous writers from home and abroad. She has to talk for a speech competition in her school. If she can do well, she will get more books as prizes. She has chosen a topic based on the relationship between her parents whom she loves. She wants to talk about love and human relationships. The day of the speech is approaching and her speech is already prepared. She practices almost every day. Her aunt Nusaiba, a university student, is trying to help her, but Tasmuva is not an easy person to give advice to.

It’s the day of the speech competition. Tasmuva is so excited; for the first time in her life she can wear one of her mother’s saris. How beautiful she looks! Her parents are so happy to see their daughter doing something with such excitement. Her friends and other people
in her class are giving her more **attention** today. She is in full bloom now, and she appears before them like a flower.

There are three English teachers who will judge the speeches; **Salma Miss**, the Literature teacher, **Amena Miss**, the Language teacher and **Farzana Miss Teaches**, who teaches Spoken English. All of them look very happy as she begins her speech.

She **delivers** her speech very nicely, but as she continues, she notices her teachers seem to be troubled as they listen to her. Now, she becomes **worried**. After the speakers leave the stage, the judges gather together to talk quietly about each speech. They seem to have a lot to say to each other.

**Tasnuva** comes directly to **Ruma**, who is rather a **lonely** girl in her class and sits beside her. “I really enjoyed your talk.” says **Ruma** with a smile. They wait together to find out the result of the speech competition.

Before declaring the winners and their prizes, **Salma Miss** gives her feedback on the students’ **performance**. She talks about the topic choice, language use, pronunciation, body language and eye **contact** of the speakers **during** the presentation. She mentions a lot of things, and when it is time to talk about **Tasnuva’s** speech she has some strong words to say.

“That was not a wise choice of topic **Tasnuva**”, she begins. “Your examples did not sound at all realistic. It was like something from a romantic novel.” says **Salma Miss**, and all the other teachers support her.
“I don’t understand.” thinks Tasnuva, “Why do they think that it doesn’t sound realistic? I thought it was pretty good!”

“You should have chosen something that you knew more about.” Says Salma Miss.

In the end, Tasnuva achieves 10th position among the ten finalists. She is in the last place and she is very upset. She leaves the hall with Ruma, who takes her to the school canteen. Ruma buys some singaras and two cups of coffee. Tasnuva observes Ruma all the while with her keen eyes. As she drinks her coffee Tasnuva breaks the silence,

“I noticed your tears from the stage, Ruma.”

“Oh! It’s nothing. Something you said touched me.”

“Do tell me.” says Tasnuva. “You don’t need to hide your feelings from me! I won’t tell anyone; I promise.”

A moment of silence passes, then Ruma speaks.

“Will you take me to your home one day?” Ruma expresses her wish in a weak voice.


“I’d like to meet your parents.”

“Why’s that?” Tasnuva finds Ruma’s request a little strange.

“Actually, while listening to your speech, I was unable to imagine such a family and such a home as the one you described, but it sounded so lovely.”

“You want to see our home? That’s great!”

“Every day I wake up to the sound of my parents fighting. They keep shouting at each other. My mother sometimes claims that father is having a relationship with another woman.”

“Oh my God! What are you talking about?” Tasnuva is very surprised.

“My aunts always tell my mom to leave him. But she can’t make that decision because of me.” Ruma’s eyes fill with tears and she starts to cry quietly.

“Don’t cry, dear! I’ll take you home to meet my parents. I am sure they will welcome you.”
“I can’t imagine such a wonderful home, where parents cook together, and give flowers to each other, and visit nice places with their children every weekend – it’s like a dream to me. You are so lucky.” says Ruma in a sad voice.

“Yes, I guess I am lucky.” says Tasnuva. “I didn’t realise that other families are not always like that. Maybe your parents need to see a psychologist.”

“Who has the courage to say that?” says Ruma bitterly.

“That’s really tough.” says Tasnuva.

From that day on, the two girls become much closer to each other, sharing their sadness, and trying, together, to find answers to their problems. Ruma visits Tasnuva’s home often and they have lunch or dinner together regularly. They have made her feel so welcome, she soon feels as if she has become the part of the family.

“Thank you for sharing your family with me.” says Ruma to Tasnuva. “Before I heard your speech, I had begun to doubt that it was possible to have a happy family, but now I know for sure that it is.”

“You’re welcome,” says Tasnuva, “and I am sure that one day you will have a happy family too.”

Ruma smiles. “Maybe I can. Now that I know what a really happy family looks like. I think Salma Miss was a bit too tough on you. Even if other people didn’t think it was a good topic, you described exactly what you knew about. It’s wasn’t unrealistic at all!”
Learning Activities

Vocabulary

1. Words from the second 1000 high frequency General Service Word List (GSL)

abroad a bit cook dinner guess lonely nice prizes sad / sadness upset
advice bitterly courage during hall a lot parents quietly shouting wake (up)
attention coffee cups exactly hide lucky performance regularly thank weak
aunt competition delivers excited/excitement imagine lunch practices request tough worried

2. Words from the Academic Word List (AWL)

achieves approaching contact mature psychologist topic

3. Comprehension Questions (These questions reflect the Lower Order Thinking (LOTS) skills described in Bloom’s new taxonomy)

1. **Remembering**: (Try answering this question without looking back at the reading).
   What place did Tasnuva achieve in the speech competition?
2. **Remembering**: Why did Tasnuva’s aunt suggest she should choose a different speech topic?
3. **Understanding**: What is a ‘psychologist’, and why do you think Tasnuva suggested that Ruma’s parents needed to see one?
4. **Understanding**: Why did Tasnuva’s teachers seem to be troubled as they listened to her speech?
5. **Understanding**: What did Ruma mean when she told Tasnuva that she had “described exactly what she knew about”?

4. Critical Thinking Questions (These questions reflect the Higher Order Thinking (HOTS) skills described in Bloom’s new taxonomy)

1. **Analysing**: List the words in the story that describe **negative** emotions or qualities. Do the same for **positive** emotions. Which list is longer? Can you make both lists equal in number by adding other words that you know of.
2. **Applying**: Have you ever taken part in a speech competition, or watched others do that? How do people feel before they take part? How do they feel afterwards (if they win, or if they do not win)? If you had to give a speech. Which topic would you choose and why? How will you know if it is a suitable topic or not?
3. **Evaluating:** Do you think *Tasnuva* should have changed her topic after hearing her aunt’s advice? Why or why not? When do you think it is better NOT to listen to someone’s advice?

4. **Creating:** Hold your own English speech competition. Each person should decide on their own topic and prepare a two/three-minute speech. Everyone in the class will judge the speeches. Use the guidelines below to help you give feedback and a score on each person’s speech. The information on the left tells you what to look and listen for.

1 = very weak > 5 = very strong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speakers Name:</th>
<th>My Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Topic Choice (The topic was interesting and the speaker seemed to know it well) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Language Use (The speech made sense to me and I did not notice many grammar or vocabulary mistakes) | |
| Pronunciation (The words were clear and I understand what the speaker said) | |
| Body Language (The speaker used body language in a natural way to emphasize important points) | |
| Eye Contact (The speaker looked at the audience while speaking and did not read directly from notes) | |

**Total Score = _____/25**
Extra Activity:

For fluency and pronunciation practice, work with a partner, and practise the dialogue sections of the story until you can say your lines without looking. Try to make it sound natural, by thinking about how each speaker is feeling as they speak. You could even turn the story into a short play, and perform it.