

"I'm Only a Child, but..." Speech Template

This template is based on the address given by Severn Cullis-Suzuki, age 12, to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 11, 1992. The speech was a collaboration with the ECO club: Morgan Geisler, Michelle Quigg, Vanessa Suttie and Tove Fenger.

Hello, I'm YOUR NAME, speaking from PLACE WHERE YOU ARE.

OPTIONAL: If you are part of a crew of people trying to make a difference, or a school, or some affiliation you want to mention, say it here! Something that can fit, like the original line: *We are a group of 12 and 13 year olds trying to make a difference: Vanessa Suttie, Morgan Geisler, Michelle Quigg and me.*

I'm standing in front of you today to tell you adults you must change your ways.

Speaking here today, I have no hidden agenda. I am fighting for my future. Losing my future is not like losing an election or a few points on the stock market. I am here to speak for all generations to come. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet, because they have nowhere left to go.

I am afraid of the floods, the droughts, the hurricanes, the extreme weather that is unfolding around the world.

I am afraid to breathe the air because I don't know what chemicals are in it.

Optional: a line about something you have experienced that makes you worried about the environment, like climate change for example... something like the original line: *I used to go fishing in Vancouver, my home, with my dad until just a few years ago we found the fish full of cancers.*

Today we hear of animals and plants going extinct every day, vanishing forever. In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see.

Did you have to worry of these things when you were my age? All this is happening before our eyes and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions. I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you! You don't know how to get the carbon out of the atmosphere. You don't know how to bring the salmon back up a dead stream. You don't know how to bring back an animal, now extinct, and you can't bring back the forests that once grew where there is now a desert.

If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it!

As adults, you might have a job, an official title - you might be delegates of your governments, or business people, or organizers, reporters, professionals, or politicians.

But really you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles – and all of you are someone's child.

I'm only a child yet I know we are all part of a family, 7.5 billion strong; in fact, 30 million species strong. And borders and governments will never change that. I'm only a child yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world towards one single goal.

In my anger, I am not blind, and in my fear, I am not afraid of telling the world how I feel. In my country, we make so much waste; we buy and throw away, buy and throw away. And yet northern countries will not share with the needy. Even when we have more than enough, we are afraid to share, we are afraid to let go of some of our wealth. In **YOUR COUNTRY HERE**, we live the privileged life, with plenty of food,

water, and shelter. We have watches, bicycles, computers, and television sets. The list could go on for two days.

When children from Canada visited kids living on the streets in Rio, Brazil, one child told the visitors: "I wish I was rich and if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes medicines, shelter, and love and affection."

If a child on the streets who has nothing, is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy? I can't stop thinking that these are children my own age; that it makes a tremendous difference where you are born; that I could be one of those children living in the favelas of Rio; I could be a child starving in Somalia, or a victim of war in the middle east, or a beggar in India.

I'm only a child yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on finding environmental answers, ending poverty, and finding treaties, what a wonderful place this earth would be! At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world.

You teach us how not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share and not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?

Do not forget the most important role of any generation of adults: to ensure that the INSERT YOUR HOPE HERE, for example, something like: the world is as safe/stable/hopeful/strong/beautiful, for the next generation that inherits it.

We are your own children. You are deciding what kind of world we are growing up in. Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying "everything's going to be alright," "it's not the end of the world" and "we're doing the best we can."

But I don't think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities? My insert who might say this: ie. dad always says "you are what you do, not what you say". Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown-ups say you love us. But I challenge you, please make your actions reflect your words.

Thank you.