

BRIEF: The moment I couldn't hold my sneeze! Write about that one unstoppable sneeze — the kind you tried to stop but couldn't. Make it dramatic, vivid, and hilarious. This challenge is about building tension, then letting it all out. Literally. Tips: Zoom in on the moment, use strong sensory detail, write with voice and humour, use sentence structure to build tension, show how others react, finish with a punchy ending.

YEAR 6 WINNER: Ryan Liyanage



One stage. One mic. One speech and one shot to become school leader. This was it. I stood tall in the crowded auditorium capturing glances of the young children and focused teachers, all eyes on me. The air was buzzing with excitement and hope. I knew inside that I had

prepared for this moment, the hours of recalling sentences before drifting off to sleep, times I had gently spoken to the mirror, which now felt like the actual audience. Even my Grandma, 'Queen Of Critique' had smiled after I had practiced, she was my biggest support throughout this entire process. Nonetheless I was solely heartedly determined. Surely nothing could go wrong.

Then something tickled.

Right at the edge of my nose, as if a soft feather had grazed it. I twitched.

This was the beginning of a nasal catastrophe.

My feet began impulsively tapping against the soft birch podium. Why now?

I froze for a second as if I was imagining things. A treacherous tingle. Barely there, but unmistakable. I paused. I blinked. Maybe I imagined it?

Nope.

It grew. It's there. Slowly but surely. It was menacing. A slow dreadful, tingling crawl up my sinuses. It was the kind that would make your face turn red no matter where you were. My brain screamed in agony. Not now, anything but now.

The itch deepened.

The unbearable pressure, my face tensed.

The year fours stared, noticing. A teacher glared at me, curious. A reception then began clapping as if I was delivering a magic trick. If any, I would be delivering the 'The Disappearing Dignity And Embarrassment Show'.

I tried one last method to stop that treacherous sneeze, holding it in with bated breath. I was so close to finishing, just two more sentences.

But the thought of my own joke made me crack up. Why?

Unfortunately, all this seemed too much to take in because...

"Ahhh ..."

The mic still hadn't caught it.

"Ahhhh!", that time it did.

Time slowed down my world. My shoulders rose. My mouth trembled. My eyes watered. The air charged in.

"CHOOOOO!"

The ferocious sneeze bounced off the walls like a cannon. My face went purple. The cue cards had flung away from the stage, some landing as far back as the second row. Sprays of green snot were flying through the air as the school looked on in horror. The projector screen flung back, I could capture deathly glances of my fellow candidates snickering on. Even the principal let out a shrieking scream.

It felt like my entire world had shrunk in an instant. Embarrassed. Desperate.

But I could hear my wise grandma; "if life gives you an obstacle, you need to overpower it the same way it did to you".

I owed her for that. I had to finish. In style!

I quickly ascended back to the podium, like a superhero returning to the scene.

I confidently grabbed the microphone before pouring my heart and soul into my next few words.

"In fact, I won't just win the vote ... I'll blow away the entire competition!"

The entire school erupted in laughter. Hope restored. The crowd roared as I left. "This one's for you, Grandma", I whispered to myself as I exited the stage.

BRIEF: *The moment the chair betrayed me.* You're in class. You might hear a creak or a crack, and in a matter of seconds, your chair gives out and you're falling to the ground. In this challenge, your job is to take an awkward, embarrassing classroom moment and make it unforgettable. Use detail and voice to turn a simple fall into a full-on story.

YEAR 5 WINNER: Evie Schutz



It was foolish of me not to get off that chair the second I heard the sound. It was a warning. But I didn't listen. I awoke that morning, clueless of the events ahead. I had no doubt in my mind that today was going to be ordinary.

I sat proudly in my usual spot at the front of the room, the Shortt Story Showdown had become a great success. Excited chatter danced in the air. The chairs were filling up. The drum of keyboards filled my ears. The day was going by flawlessly.

A soft creeeeeeeeeeak interrupted my thoughts.

Curious faces turned from their conversations to look at me.

My eyes grew wide.

The noise was coming from underneath me.

I shifted uncomfortably.

Creeeeeeeeeeek.

I froze.

Maybe if I remained motionless, the creaking would stop.

For a moment, everyone was silent.

Staring at me.

Creeeeeeeeeeek.

Panic hit me.

If I changed how I sat, would it silence the creak?

I edged forwards.

All eyes still focused on me.

Every expression was different. Confusion. Curiosity. Uncertainty.

I looked down, desperately searching for the source of the noise.

Creeeeeeeeeeek.

Muffled laughter. Whispers.

I broke into a nervous sweat.

My knuckles were white from clutching the sides of my chair.

I held my breath and froze.

My heart pounded against my chest.

CRACK!!

I was falling!

The walls grew higher.

I was in slow motion.

My arms flapping. Searching for something to take hold of.

Butt approaching the floor, my flailing torso coming down after.

Stomach jolting.

The chair crumbled to the floor.

Children gasped in horror.

Thump!

I was on the ground.

My long legs were sticking out at odd angles. Splintered chair pieces encircled me. My mouth hung open in a wide O shape. Eyes expressionless with shock. Surprised shrieks echoed around the room. My legs hurt from being in such unnatural positions. Pain shot up my spine.

I looked upwards to see a crowd of mixed emotions. Cheeks burning up, I searched for a gap in the forest of legs. Suddenly, all I wanted to do was crawl away and hide, never to come back. But I picked myself up, stepped over the nest of broken wood, and brightly thought, 'The Chair', this an exceptional topic for the Shortt Story Showdown!

BRIEF: The moment I dropped the lunch I was looking forward to!

Finally, lunch time has arrived. It's all you've been thinking of, and on this day, lunch was even more special than usual. Then, disaster. This challenge is all about turning a small, everyday disaster into something dramatic, detailed, and entertaining. Your goal is to stretch the moment out so we feel how crushing (or hilarious) it was.

Tips: Zoom in on the moment, use strong sensory detail, write with voice and humour, use sentence structure to build tension, show how others react, finish with a punchy ending.

YEAR 4 WINNER: Ava Crescitelli



Today my lunch was no ordinary meal- it was a masterpiece.

My lunchbox was steady in my hands - warm against my fingertips. It was the kind of lunch you looked forward to, the kind that can make even the most boring days feel way more exciting. My beautiful bento box dazzled in the sun like a diamond. I could not take my eyes off the chicken flavoured noodles, cucumber, soy sauce on the side and seaweed crisped to perfection. I carried my lunch, nearly drooling, picturing these long noodles soaked with delicious sauce. I headed towards my usual lunch spot, walking across the room with careful movements. My chair was waiting for me all this time – a golden queen's throne for me to enjoy my delightful lunch even more.

My eyes were glued to the noodles. The scent curled around me, it smelt like my grandma's Sunday cooking. Yum yum! What could go wrong?

I was still glaring at my lunch but then the impossible happened.

Disaster struck.

Silence.

My wrist tilted. My breath caught. One misplaced step. One nasty shoelace betraying me at the worst possible time, caused me to trip dramatically. I was mid-air, trying to catch my food. My perfect lunch had escaped from its confinement. The lunch box rotated through the air, tumbling. My noodles were spiralling like a windmill. They splattered on the floor, the last cucumber rolled away, disappearing beneath the closest table. A single sesame seed rolled lazily to a stop at my feet. The soy sauce leapt free and made a big mess. The fork clattered.

I could do nothing but watch my ruined lunch. My eyes widened. Gasps echoed around the room. A bystander whispered "uh oh." More rotten luck. Why now? I stood there, staring at the wreckage. My arms and legs froze. My hands became helpless spectators in this disaster as they lost grip. I wish I was a dog, so it would be perfectly fine to lick my food up from the floor.