Background information

Severn Suzuki was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. Thanks to the influence of her environmentalist father, Suzuki recognised from a young age that the environment was at risk, and at age nine started the Environmental Children’s Organisation, a group of friends committed to learning and teaching other kids about environmental issues. They were successful in several small projects. Then, in 1992, Suzuki and three members of the ECO raised money to go to the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where 12-year-old Severn delivered a powerful speech that garnered worldwide attention. Her speech to delegates had such an impact that she became a frequent invitee to U.N. conferences.

Hello, I'm Severn Suzuki from E.C.O., The Environmental Children's Organisation. We are a group of twelve and thirteen-year-olds from Canada trying to make a difference: Vanessa Suttie, Morgan Geisler, Michelle Quigg and me. We raised all the money ourselves to come six thousand miles to tell you adults you must change your ways.

Coming up 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 to go out in the sun now because of the holes in our ozone. I am afraid to breathe the air because I don't know what chemicals are in it. 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. And now 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. I want you to realize, neither do you. You don't know how to fix the holes in our ozone layer. 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 forest that once grew where there is now a desert.

If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it.
Here you may be delegates of your government, businesspeople, organizers, reporters or politicians. But really you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and all of you are someone's child. I am only a child, yet I know we are all part of a family 5 billion strong. In fact, 30 million species strong. And borders and governments will never change that. I am only a child, yet I know that we're 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, 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 Canada, 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. Two days ago here in Brazil, we were shocked when we spent time with some children living on the streets. This is what one child told us, "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 the 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 am only a child, yet I know that 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 to not fight with others. To work things out. To respect others. To clean up our mess. Not to hurt other creatures. To share, not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do? Do not forget why you are attending these conferences - who you are doing this for. 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 all right. 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 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.

Severn Suzuki, 1992
The Girl Who Silenced the World
Activity Sheet

Step one: First viewing
Watch the speech. Once you have finished, quietly reflect on your first impressions of the text.

Step two: Context, audience and purpose
After you have watched the speech, read the short biography of Severn Suzuki, which can be found in the box at the top of the speech transcript. Then, write the heading The Girl Who Silenced the World by Severn Suzuki in your workbook and answer the below questions in full sentences.

1. In what context was the speech delivered?
2. Who do you think is the target audience of the speech?
3. What do you think is the purpose of the speech?

Step three: Second reading
Reflect on the context, audience and purpose of the speech, then read the transcript. As you do, don’t be afraid to annotate the text.

Step four: Comprehension questions
Write the subheading ‘Comprehension questions’ and answer the questions below in full sentences. Feel free to discuss the speech with a partner, but please ensure your answers are your own.

1. What does the speaker claim she is fighting for?
2. Other than the Environmental Children’s Organisation, on whose behalf does the speaker claim she is speaking?
3. What three environmental changes has the speaker witnessed in recent years?
4. According to the speaker, who has the solution to the world’s problems?
5. Beyond being “delegates... business people, organisers, reporters or politicians,” who, according to the speaker, is the audience?

6. What does the speaker mean by “it makes a tremendous difference where you are born?” Do you agree with her statement?

7. What statement do you think the poet is trying to make about identity? List as many ideas as you can.

**Step five: Analytical paragraph**


**Step six: Definitions**

Add emotive language, inclusive language and repetition to your techniques glossary. Hint: look at the far right white board for the definitions.

**Step seven: Techniques chart**

Annotate the speech by labelling any language techniques that you notice. Once you have done this, select the three techniques that you believe most help to convey the thematic statement and complete a techniques chart. Glue it in your workbook once finished.

**Step eight: Submit book**

At the end of the lesson, hand in your work for grading.