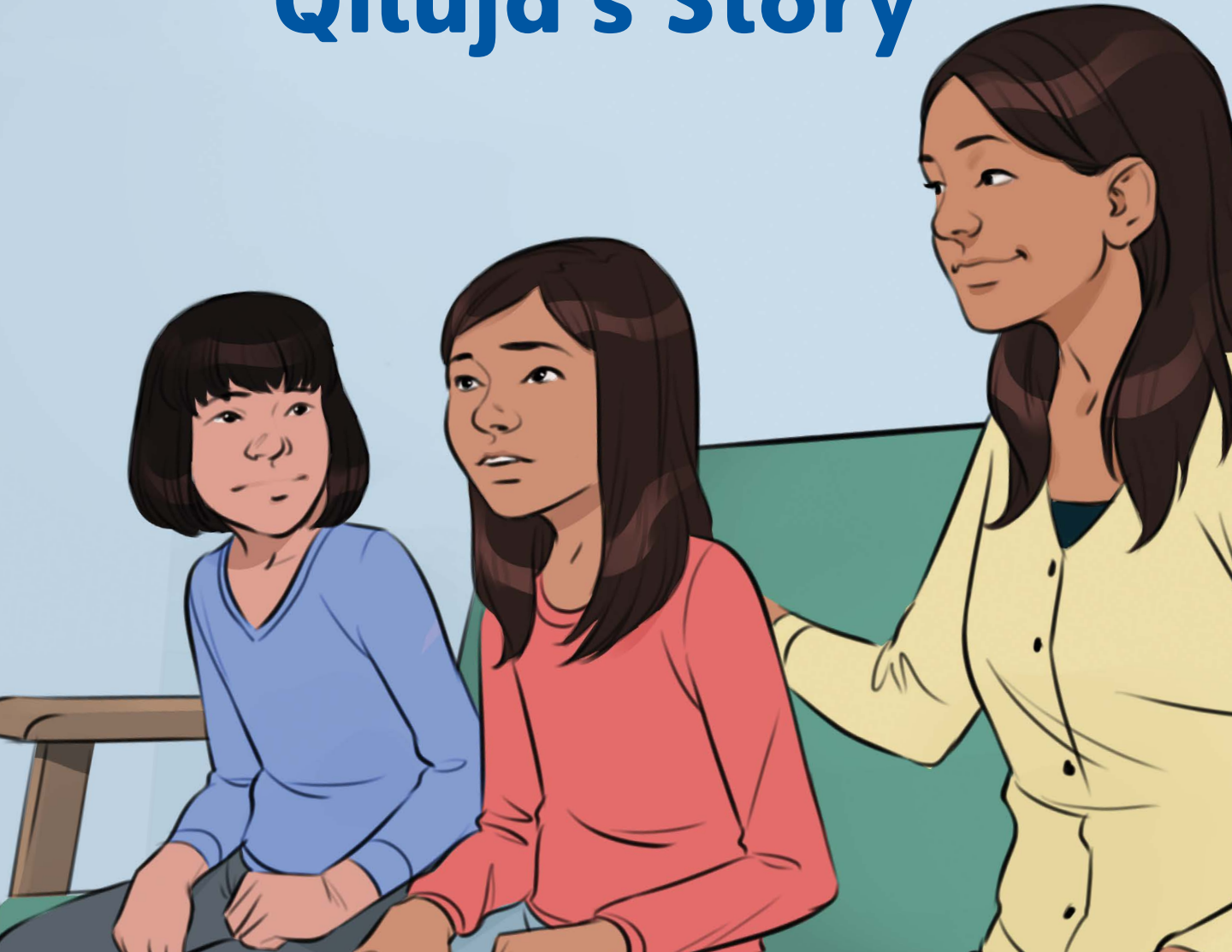


# Qiluja's Story



This book is part of the Inuutsiarniq Reading Series, developed by the Department of Health in Nunavut. The Inuutsiarniq Reading Series is a unique, Nunavut-developed literacy initiative that infuses Northern values of healthy living and self-care into a culturally appropriate reading program.

The Inuutsiarniq Reading Series was developed to support the reading level guidelines outlined in the Department of Education's Inuktut reading program, Uqalimaariuqsaniq. Uqalimaariuqsaniq is a sequential and progressive Inuktut reading program that supports students in their development as readers.

Healthy students are better learners and become healthy adults. For more information, visit [www.gov.nu.ca/health](http://www.gov.nu.ca/health) and your local Health Centre.

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### Book details

- Level:** 13
- Text type:** Fiction, realistic
- Subject/themes:** The long-term and short-term health risks of chewing tobacco; missing a loved one who has died; peer pressure; trying to encourage healthy habits; activism
- Key features:** 48 pages, past tense, dialogue, third-person point of view

# Qiluja's Story



Written by  
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Illustrated by  
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Qiluja was doodling nervously in her notebook. She was at the health centre with her class and her teacher. Qiluja's best friend, Sheba, was sitting next to her.

Qiluja had never been to this part of the health centre before. Whenever she came to see the dentist, she went into an examination room. Today, they were sitting in a room with big, comfortable chairs around a large table. The other students were spinning around in their chairs, laughing.





Sheba glanced over at Qiluja. She could tell her friend was nervous to be there because she had been very quiet all morning.

Qiluja's uncle had died last year from mouth cancer. He had chewed tobacco all his life, and it had made him very sick. Qiluja had been very close to her uncle, and Sheba knew that Qiluja was still very sad.

Just then, a woman came into the room. She looked around the room and smiled widely.

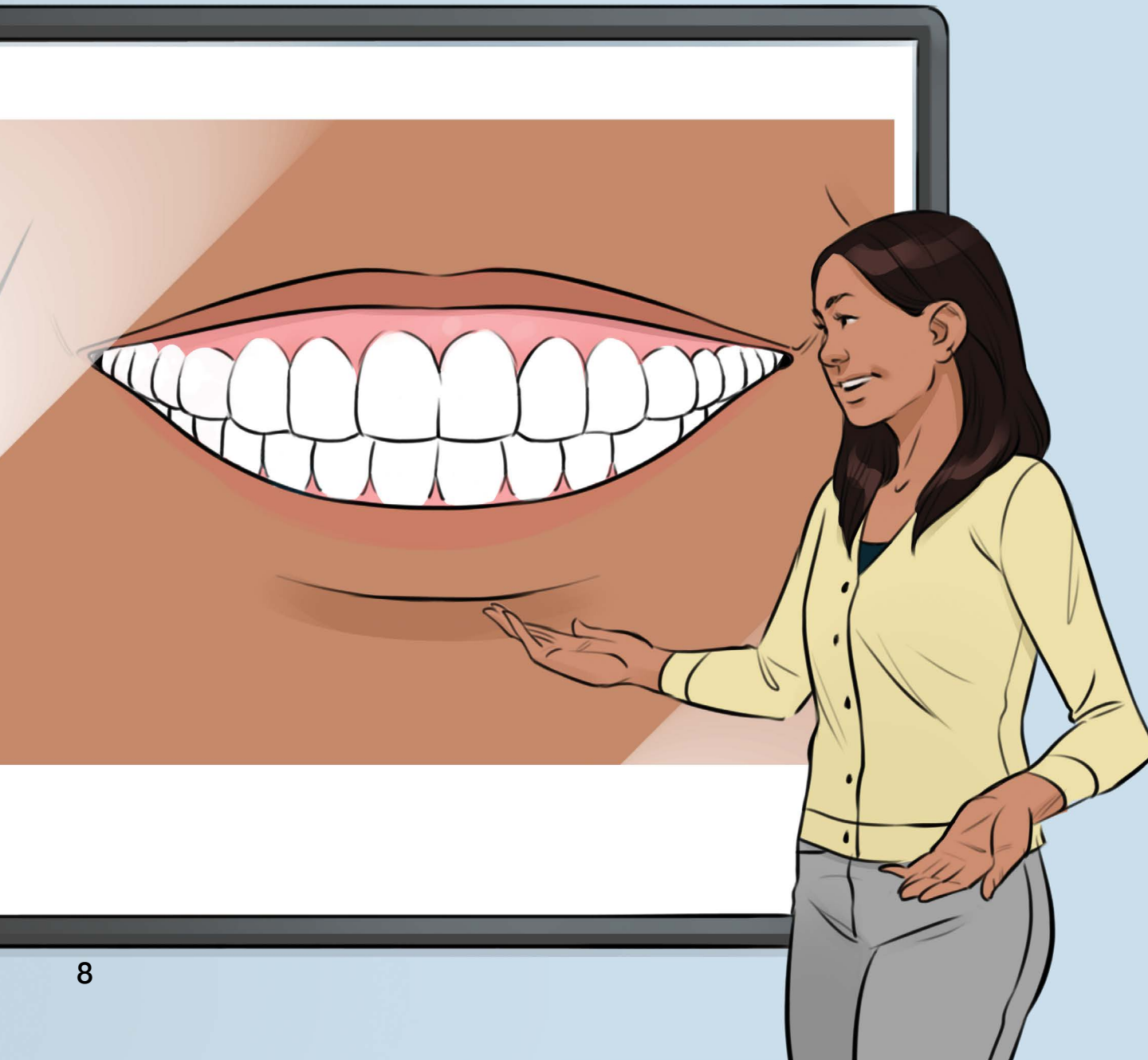
“Good morning, everyone,” the woman said. “For those of you who don’t know me, I’m Oopah. I’m a community health representative.” A few of the students smiled at her.

“Today, we are going to talk about one important way you can keep your mouth healthy,” Oopah continued. “Does anyone know why you are here today?”

The whole room was quiet for a moment.

Then Sheba raised her hand. “To talk about smoking,” Sheba said uncertainly.





“That’s right,” Oopah said. “In fact, we’re going to talk about all different kinds of tobacco and how they affect your mouth’s health. This is what we call oral health.”

There was a screen on the wall behind Oopah. On the screen, a picture appeared of a close-up of someone’s mouth. The mouth was smiling broadly and showing two rows of white teeth. The gums were pink.

Just then, the picture on the screen behind Oopah changed. It looked like the same mouth, but something was different.

In the picture, the teeth were stained yellow. It looked like a lot of gunk had built up around the teeth. The gums were red in some places.

Qiluja heard someone whisper, “That’s gross.” She turned and saw Jamesie, the newest student in their class, making a disgusted face.





Qiluja began to fidget.  
“This is the same mouth as in the last picture,” Oopah said. “Does anyone know why it looks different?”  
Qiluja raised her hand. “It’s not healthy anymore,” she said softly.  
“That’s right,” Oopah said. “Do you know why?”  
“It looks like the person started smoking,” Qiluja said.  
“Almost,” Oopah said. “This person started using chewing tobacco.”

“That’s from chewing tobacco?” Jamesie asked without raising his hand. Qiluja thought he sounded worried. She had seen him chewing tobacco after school.

“Yes, it is,” Oopah said. “Snuff, or chewing tobacco, is ground up tobacco leaves that people chew or suck. Chewing tobacco can be extremely harmful to your whole mouth. It can lead to cavities, and it can cause gum disease. Every tobacco product is harmful.”

Jamesie slumped down in his seat. “Whatever,” he muttered.





“Chewing tobacco also contains a lot of chemicals that can be very bad for the rest of your body,” Oopah said. “In fact, it has more than 25 different chemicals that can cause cancer.”

Qiluja suddenly felt even more nervous. She thought she knew what the next picture was going to look like. She squeezed her eyes shut.

“This next photo is not easy to look at,” Oopah said. “It might make some of you feel ill or want to look away. But the reason I’m showing it to you is because this is what could happen if you chew tobacco.”

Oopah changed the slide. This time, the picture was awful. There was a device holding the lips away from the teeth. The teeth were very yellow. The gums had yellow edges and black spots on them.

“Chewing tobacco can cause many different kinds of cancer,” Oopah said. “This is what your mouth could look like if you have oral cancer. Oral cancer can be fatal.”

Sheba put her arm around Qiluja and heard her friend start to cry.





Sheba looked around at her classmates. Everyone looked pale, as though they were going to be sick.

“Do you want to go out in the hall?” Sheba whispered to Qiluja. Qiluja sniffed and stood up with her friend.

“I’ll be right back,” Oopah said to the room, and she followed the girls into the hallway. “Girls, is everything okay? Why don’t you come with me into this office,” Oopah said.

Sheba and Qiluja followed Oopah into a smaller room. They sat down on a comfortable couch together.

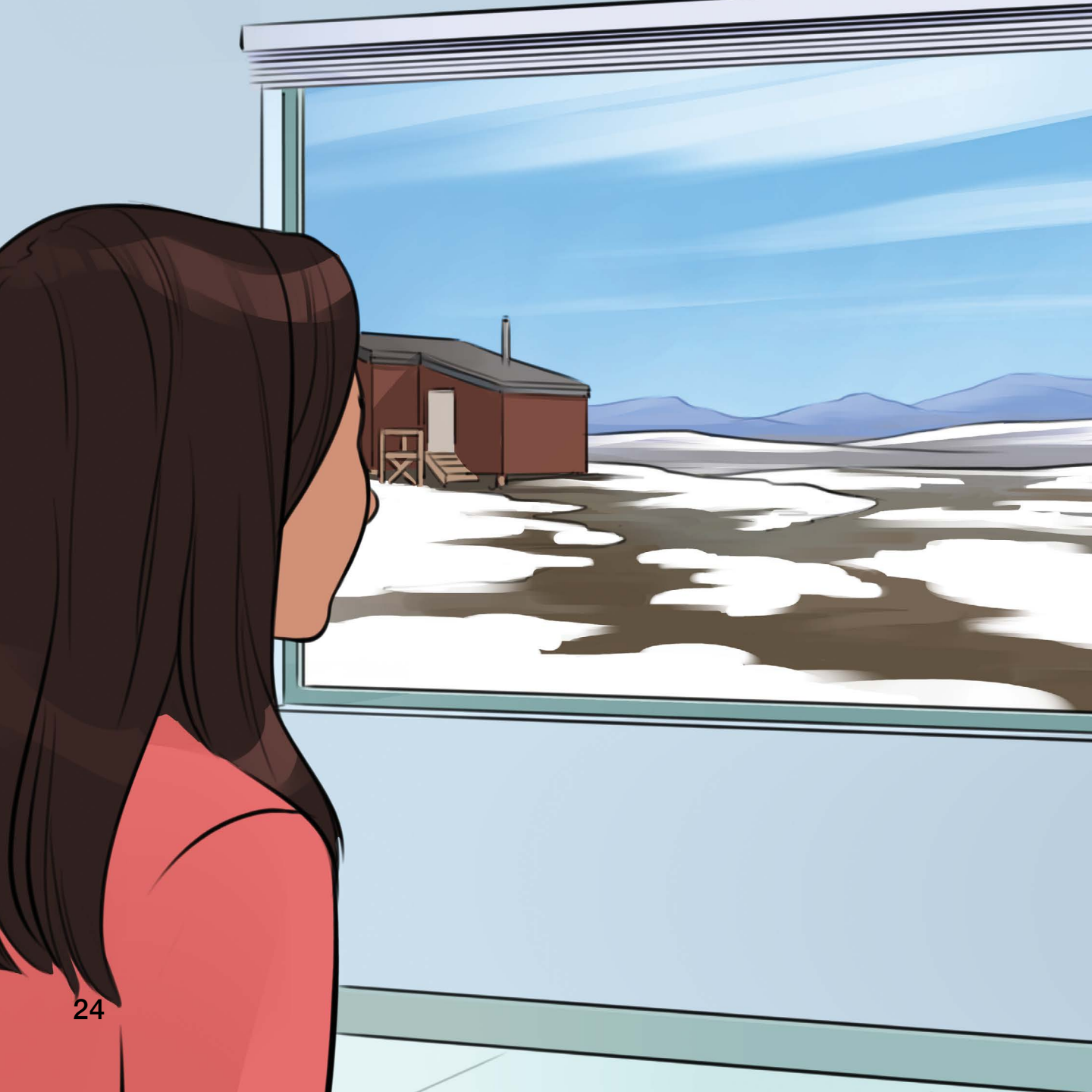
Oopah sat down next to them. Qiluja was still crying. She didn't want to talk about the picture. Sheba squeezed her hand.

"Oopah, Qiluja's uncle died from mouth cancer because of snuff," Sheba said. "Qiluja was very close to him. She was named after him."

Qiluja wiped her eyes.

"I'm so sorry to hear that," Oopah said. "I knew your uncle. He was a wonderful man. You were very brave to come to this presentation today."





Qiluja looked out the window. It was late spring. The snow was beginning to melt, and plants would soon be growing on the tundra again.

Qiluja loved the wildflowers that came out in the summer. She remembered going camping with her uncle before he got sick. He had made a small flower chain for her out of yellow and purple and white wildflowers.

Then, Qiluja thought about Jamesie. Jamesie had recently moved to their community. Qiluja had worked on a science project with him. He was really smart and knew so much about animals. Qiluja had really liked working with him.

Jamesie was also the best hockey player at her school. Qiluja had noticed that Jamesie hung out with the older boys on the hockey team. She knew that many boys on the hockey team chewed tobacco.

She wondered what would happen to Jamesie if he kept chewing tobacco.





“Oopah, I want to help people learn how to quit,” Qiluja said. “That’s why I came today.” Sheba looked surprised.

“I’m very happy to hear that,” Oopah said. “Do you have any ideas?”

“I’d like to tell my uncle’s story,” Qiluja said. “Can I share it with the other students here today?”

“Of course,” Oopah said.

Oopah and Sheba followed Qiluja back into the presentation room.

Qiluja stood at the front of the presentation room and began to share her uncle's story. As she was talking, she looked around the room. Everyone was watching and listening closely, except Jamesie. He was staring down at the floor.

"Thank you for sharing your story, Qiluja," Oopah said. "Does anyone else want to share a story about how tobacco has affected them or someone they love?"

The room was silent for a moment.





Then, Nancy raised her hand.  
“I know how you feel, Qiluja,” she said. “My anaanatsiaq told me she started chewing because tobacco was part of the packages her parents got from the Qallunaat traders. At first, she didn’t know it was bad for her. But then she was addicted, so she kept using it. She has lost many of her teeth. Now it’s hard for her to eat maktaaq and caribou because they are too tough to chew.”

Sheba raised her hand.  
“My dad always smoked in the house when I was really little,” Sheba said. “That’s why I have asthma. I never, ever want to smoke.”  
Qiluja smiled at her friend. She didn’t know that was why Sheba had asthma. She often saw her using an inhaler when they played outside at recess.





Then, Jamesie stood up. Qiluja was surprised. “I got bullied when I joined the hockey team because I didn’t want to chew tobacco,” Jamesie said. “But it was so hard to say no. My teammates told me it would make me more awake so I would be faster on the ice.” Jamesie looked down and said, “And now I don’t know how to stop. And I don’t want to get bullied again.” Oopah joined Qiluja at the front of the room. Qiluja smiled at Jamesie as he sat down. Jamesie smiled back.

“Thank you all for sharing these stories,” Oopah said. “I know it means a lot to Qiluja.”

Qiluja still felt sad, but hearing her classmates’ stories had made her feel better. She wasn’t alone. Tobacco was hurting many people in her community. Then, she had an idea.

“Oopah, what if we tell our stories to everyone in the community?” Qiluja said. “Maybe our stories can help people decide to quit.”





Sheba looked at Qiluja's notebook, which was sitting on the chair next to her. Qiluja had drawn a beautiful picture of a girl wearing a crown of wildflowers. The girl was standing next to a taller man, who was smiling widely.

"Maybe we can make posters and put them up around the community. What do you think?" Sheba said.

Qiluja thought this was a great idea. Since she loved to draw, she suggested, “I can draw the posters!”

“Will you come and see my anaanatsiaq, so you can draw a picture of her?” Nancy asked.

“That would be really nice,” Qiluja said.

“Hey, Qiluja,” Jamesie said hesitantly. “Can you do a poster with a hockey player on it?”





Qiluja felt so happy and hopeful. It seemed like Jamesie really wanted to change, and she really wanted to help him.

“Of course,” Qiluja replied, smiling. “Let’s work on it together.”

## You can quit!

Chewing tobacco is just as addictive as smoking cigarettes because tobacco contains nicotine. When you chew tobacco, nicotine gets into your blood quickly through the lining of your mouth. One tin of chewing tobacco has the same amount of nicotine as three packs of cigarettes.

But there are ways to quit! If you want to quit chewing tobacco, you can talk to a health care provider about nicotine patches or gum, or other medications.

You can visit [www.nuquits.ca](http://www.nuquits.ca) and also contact the Quit Line:

Toll free: 1-866-368-7848

Email: [tobacco@gov.nu.ca](mailto:tobacco@gov.nu.ca)



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