

Valedictory Address
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Good evening and welcome, to our Head of School Ms. Anderson, faculty, staff, parents, friends, and the Class of 2020.

Before I get started, I would like to thank my parents for encouraging me and all their help which has enabled me to stand before you today.

As I look around and reflect on the past four years, I am reminded of some of the funnier times. I'm sure each of us can remember when students have hit "reply all" on an email clearly intended just for one teacher, yet it was sent to the entire school community. Standing here, I also can't help but remember all the events that have taken place on this field. Some of my favorites were the impromptu Spikeball games, Frisbee passes, games of catch between classes, sporting matches, and group photos. And who could forget all the pillar team events, with many of us rushing to get to the dining hall in time on those early mornings. However, now, we sit on Sevigny Field for one final event: undoubtedly the most important of our high school careers.

If I didn't address the current state of the world and how we've come to gather here and now, I'd be disingenuous. While I'm sure none of us imagined that this day would come in the manner that it did, I hope you're all as happy as I am to be here. I have been doing quite a bit of thinking lately, as I'm sure many of you have as well, and I've come to a few conclusions that I would like to share with you all today.

It was March 13 that the President declared a National Emergency as a result of the coronavirus; but this was only the beginning. Within a week, schools were ordered to close, the flickering lights of Broadway were shut off, and even Disney closed its gates. As we began our journey into a worldwide pandemic, people decided it would be a good idea to start hoarding toilet paper and cleaning products while ignoring the CDC's recommendation of "social distancing". I understand, I mean, what could be harder than having life as we knew it turned upside down in the span of just a few days?

When all else fails, literature is a constant to which I can turn in order to make sense of the seemingly senseless. Two important concepts we all learned in Ms. Lynch's World Literature class sophomore year were that fictional works have a beginning, middle, and end, and characters are rarely static. Characters are continually evolving as they journey through their stories. All the best characters like Beowulf or Gatsby overcome major obstacles that help to shape them. But I have to say, as much as I love to read fiction, I never expected to feel like a character in a dystopian novel.

We're each just at the beginning of our own storylines, laying down the plot. We still have time to choose which character we want to be: whether we choose to be the unreliable narrator, a subversive side character, or a main character who turns out to be the hero. Living with the ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic will shape us, whether for better or worse. Will we learn to be flexible, and roll with the ever-changing guidelines and recommendations? Will we demonstrate leadership by following those guidelines? Will we choose to do the right thing when no one is looking, like wearing a mask and sanitizing? Your answers to these questions will tell you exactly what character you are now. In the current state of the world, it is the small acts such as these that distinguish the heroes from the villains.

As a generation, we must consider our place in this narrative because at every turn, we are faced with a choice. We can be like Beowulf and selflessly slay the evil monsters found in our world, even when it requires sacrifice. Or we can be like Macbeth, who only plots and plans for his own selfish benefit. As a generation, it's on our shoulders to prevent this pandemic from worsening. It's on our shoulders to fight climate change. It's on our shoulders to stop racial inequality and patriarchal oppression, among a whole host of other problems. While this may seem daunting, we must remember we are resilient. We are now graduates of Cheshire Academy, an institution that helped us become leaders. We are the heroes of our pandemic dystopian story. This pandemic has provided us with not only a wakeup call to issues such as these, but also an opportunity to fight them. We must recognize that each of us has a place and a purpose in this world and it is up to us to figure out how to restore balance to the imbalanced ways in which we've been living for so long.

While we can't know until years from now how this story will end or what historians will write about this time, we do know we can choose the character we want to be. We can imagine and hope for a happy ending to all of this, but that happy ending will not be written unless WE do something NOW.

Thank you.