



# High School Graduation

June 9, 2019

Speech by Katie Gibson, High School Principal

**[To audience]** The class of 2019 began the year running into the forum dressed as superheroes claiming to be saving the high school from Russell's evil plot to reinstate midterms and AP's.

**[To Seniors]** Seniors, I'm not sure you knew at the time that 2019 was shaping up to be the biggest year in history for Superhero movies.

I am admittedly not a huge superhero movie fan. I don't know all the characters from End Game (in fact I have not even seen End Game), and my 6-year-old knows more about comics than me; however, I do enjoy the synchronicity of your run in theme and what was a banner year for the genre. And it got me thinking about the connection between superhero films and your class.

I begin today by exploring a few standard plots.

## **Plot 1: The villain has some sort of fitting thematic connection to the hero.**

Can you think of a time in HS where something that you felt was a personal flaw was used against you by someone you knew? Or maybe you did that to someone else? I imagine you've all had a moment where you could cast yourself as the villain or hero in this scenario. It is often the people we are most connected to that have the ability to hurt us or save us. As you begin the next phase of your life, choose wisely who you let into your inner circle, into your heart. Surround yourself with people who would never use your weaknesses against you but instead will celebrate your full humanity. Maybe even more importantly, be someone who does that for others.

## **Plot 2: Someone the heroes really look up to and/or respect is in trouble.**

Whether in big or small ways, I have seen you come to the rescue of someone else you admire during a time of need. It could be the efforts to spread kindness through the school with little

notes of encouragement and positivity. Or it could be standing up for a classmate who was being treated poorly by your peers and making clear what the expectations are in our community. If there is anything I believe GDS has given you - it is a personal sense of integrity and justice and a willingness to put yourself out there to advocate for your beliefs at all costs. When each of you takes that gift to all of the places you go next in life and pays it forward, the collective impact will be heroic.

**Plot 3: An adversary starts making trouble for the protagonist based on a grave misunderstanding.**

The idea of a grave misunderstanding turning into an epic writing session worthy of a superhero movie is most epitomized by the all-school email chains.

Enough said.

**Plot 4: For whatever reason, the hero is forced to work with somebody they detest.**

If you made it through high school and never had a classmate, teammate, teacher, or administrator that you didn't see eye to eye with then you are one of the few. What I love about this plotline is how often the person that the hero initially dislikes turns out to be the exact character needed to save the world from destruction. Moral of the story.....working with people you don't like is inevitable. Whether you choose to suffer about it or potentially make the best out of a challenging situation is up to you. I suggest the latter. You'll be happier along the way - and maybe together, you'll save the world.

**Plot 5: A hero is betrayed by a boss or teammate.**

If this hasn't happened to you yet, it will. Perhaps you'll be blamed for someone else's mistake or not be given the resources needed to succeed. You might have every valid reason to be angry or frustrated. But what does a hero do in those moments? It is easy to be a good person when things are going your way. It is easy to have integrity when the choices are simple. It is easy to be kind when life is fair. But the real test of your humanity is how you react in the face of adversity. Can you remain calm and stay true to your principles through the storm? Will you choose the force over the dark side?

As I ventured down the rabbit hole of researching SuperHero movies, there was another recurring theme that warranted being talked about today.

The rise of popularity in superhero films is often tied to moments in time that are politically, economically, or socially challenging. For example, Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Captain America were all born during the period of the Great Depression and World War II. There was also a considerable uptick in superhero films post 9/11. Superhero movies provide both an escape from the harsh realities of the time and offer hope in the idea of a savior.

The identity of both the heroes and the villains has become more complex over time. It's not the same cliché stereotype from the earliest days of the genre. Some heroes wear capes and armor and literally swoop in to save the day. But we also see heroes in the form of regular people, not from Krypton, who are working to make a difference. Sometimes we even see the villain become the hero. While this genre provides an escape from reality, it also reinforces the idea that we are in this together and that we can all make a difference.

Films reflect the values of the time in which they are made. We can trace evolving ideas about gender, sexuality, war, religion, race, and class by looking at movies throughout the decades. While it was not technically a film in 2019, Black Panther is a superhero movie that stands out for the genre. This film was revolutionary in its ability to shift the narrative about who gets to be the hero and whose story is told. This movie alluded to some of the most profound concerns of our time. Perhaps one of the simplest but wisest lessons was expressed by T'Challa when he addressed the UN and stated: "In times of crisis, the wise build bridges while the foolish build barriers." More than ever, the gap between our beliefs is widening, and this quote is a powerful reminder of the need to work together, across differences, with compassion and respect.

In 25 years when we look back at the superhero films of 2019, what will they say about us?

Every day we wake up to headlines in the news that are deeply concerning. War, famine, poverty, corruption, the destruction of our climate...these headlines can feel terrifying, devastating, and paralyzing. But there is always hope. As long as young people such as you are heading out into this world, I, for one, remain optimistic about our future. You have been given the superpowers of a family, education, and community that enable you to make the change in

this world that you are called upon to make.

You have been armed to save us.

Look for goodness. Allow yourself to be inspired. Give yourself permission to breathe, to smile, and to reflect. When you care for yourself and allow yourself to grow into your most authentic expression, you will be in the best position to make the most significant difference. Without self-care, there is no ability to genuinely care for others.

As Uncle Ben said to Peter Parker: "With great power comes great responsibility."

How will you cultivate your power? How will you know if you're using it for good or evil? How will you measure your impact?

Class of 2019, we love you, we believe in you, we will miss you. Always know that GDS is your home. Come home to us and share your challenges and your triumphs. If one day a superhero movie is made about the class of 2019, I promise I will go see it on the big screen. I'm sure it will break box office records.

Thank you.