



High School Graduation

June 12, 2022

Speech by Katie Gibson, High School Principal

Good afternoon faculty, administration, families, honored guests, friends, and, most importantly, members of the class of 2022.

This is the 5th year I have addressed the graduating class as the GDS HS Principal, and it's my last. You're leaving GDS, and I'm leaving too. We are all leaving this place, and leave-taking always comes with a spectrum of emotions. It's daunting and exciting, sad and hopeful, energizing and enervating, and many in-betweens.

You have a fantastic lineup of speakers today who will stand before you to tell stories and offer you kernels of wisdom. What a gift! I want you to be fully present, listen deeply, and soak it all in. To that end, I am going to try to keep mine short.

Leaving a place that you love—the way that we (and I count myself in that "we") love GDS, a place that has taught us and shaped us and formed us into who we are here today— can feel like a loss. And that isn't the only loss that you, the class of 2022, have suffered. Half of your high school experience happened during a global pandemic. Half of your four years looked nothing like you had imagined or anticipated.

What I want to talk to you about today is how we frame our stories and how that framing affects our lived experience.

When I sat down to write on framing and reframing, I was reminded of a speech Russell gave when he addressed us at the start of this year. Or was it the start of last year? The pandemic years have become a blur, but at some moment, Russell stood before us and offered us some

thoughts. I am sourcing this from memory, so I apologize in advance if I am getting this a little wrong, Russell. I can't quote you, but I will try to paraphrase as accurately as I can muster.

Russell built his speech around a metaphor. He emphasized the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly and asked us to think about what it must have been like in the cocoon. We often tend to focus on the product over the process. We are in awe of the magical transformation of the ugly, squirming caterpillar into the beautiful, graceful butterfly. But we fail to stop and consider what the caterpillar had to endure to get there. The time spent in the cocoon--cramped, uncomfortable, and maybe even painful. I must admit that until Russell suggested this, I had never considered what that time in the cocoon might feel like. When he set up this metaphor for us --about enduring hardship and discomfort and pain in order to become what we are meant to be--that framing set a tone for our time together. I thought back to this framing often over the months that followed. When I have been forced to sit with pain and discomfort. When I have felt fearful of the uncertainty, we have been living through. I won't pretend that Russell's story has made it all better, but it did serve as a reminder that growth is often uncomfortable. Learning can hurt. But it's worth it.

Now, back to your loss. As we look back on your time in High School, it's easy to lament the "lost time." Today, I invite you to reframe the pandemic from being "lost time" to "found time." The world forced you to take the time to develop skills you will use for the rest of your lives. Transformative skills. Ones that you may not--in all honesty, despite our best efforts--have gained in a "normal" four years at GDS. Skills too numerous to list here. Grit and determination, resilience, and perseverance. You were forced to endure tremendous discomfort, disappointment, uncertainty, and fear. Things didn't go your way, and there was no way around but through, And you got through. The process was rough, but the product is beautiful. Just look at you all here today. Wow! What a transformation.

And finally, back to our leave-taking. Goodbyes are hard. It's scary to leave a place that has provided so much comfort and felt like a second home-- to strike out for the unknown. But it's time. We are leaving! And when we get where we're going--to the next stage in the journey-- we will look back, and it will all make sense--as if the path that had seemed so obscure had been clearly laid out for us all along. Let's reframe this goodbye not as an ending but as the beginning of a grand adventure.

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The late, great storyteller Toni Morrison famously said: "If there's a book you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." Some of you will become published authors and write those books that haven't been written yet. I can't wait to read them! You may not all publish your stories, but you all will tell your stories. You will tell them to yourselves and tell them in bits and pieces to those who cross your paths. Remember that the way you tell the stories matters. Tell them with care, with love, with intention—because the way you tell them will become true.

Class of 2022, I am so proud of you. I believe in you. I love you. Farewell.

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