



## 2024 Valedictory Address: Jessica Elkin

Good evening everyone. It's an honor to stand before you today as your Class of 2024 valedictorian. To be perfectly honest, I never imagined I'd be the one y'all are forced to listen to this evening, and I'll do my best to not bore you over the next 30 minutes, ha ha.

These last four years have been anything but boring for the Class of 2024. In the space of 1,460 days, please don't check my math, it's not my strong suit (despite all of Mr. Goldman's hard work), there's hardly anything we haven't seen. We began masked up, hidden behind foggy plastic desk shields, and 6 feet apart, trying to social distance ourselves- while still trying to be social. We witnessed the transformation of the Upper School campus so that it is almost unrecognizable from the day we started high school. The Charles Gay Library has been replaced by Mingledorff Hall, Minis and Livingston have experienced major facelifts, and trekking out to the double wides affectionately known as "the modulars" has become all but a distant memory. Truth be told, I don't think any of us are mourning the loss of the old, crusty Minis bathrooms.

We've changed and grown alongside one another (and our campus), and I think for the better. We haven't done it alone, it has taken the entire SCDS Village. First and foremost I'd like to say thank you to all of our teachers, for all they've done as I don't think they get enough recognition. Thank you for your patience in dealing with us, thank you for guiding us through this stage of our life, thank you for your encouragement of our passions and interests, and for teaching us both inside and outside the classroom. I wish I had time to recognize each of you individually, but I promised I would keep this brief.

Second, the administration, while I'm not exactly sure what goes on behind the curtain, the entire student body is grateful for all you did to keep the school open and thriving during the pandemic & beyond!

Further, thank you to facilities and maintenance, not only for the fantastic job they've done in turning a basketball court into a beautiful garden for our ceremony and helping us convert the quad into a makeshift beach for our senior day/prank, but also for all they do to keep our campus looking gorgeous 24/7.

Next, to my fellow graduates, we've all spent the last four years challenging, supporting, and humoring one another. Now, it's all paid off, and we've finally made it. And thank you to my boyfriend, Lincoln, whose support has been invaluable, who lets me lean on him when I need it, and who always knows how to cheer me up.

Thank you to my grandparents and my Aunt for coming all the way down here and braving the Savannah heat to celebrate with us today. And to my brother, for helping me develop a thick skin through years of teasing and locking me out of the bathroom, but also for being there to help me when I really needed it.

Finally, I'd like to thank my parents, who've taught me to do my best and didn't give me too hard a time when I did my worst. You are always there for me.

As we began high school, we had hoped to launch our first year with Freshmen Weekend, except we didn't. Instead, we started as many other schools across the Country, on Zoom and with Hybrid schedules. Our faces were hidden from one another by masks, and connecting was hard. Fortunately, thanks to the hard work of administrators, faculty, and whoever else pulls those strings behind the curtain, we soon moved back into our classrooms and to having fun, albeit six feet apart.

One tradition that endured during that crazy first year was Homecoming week (even if there was no dance), and every year since we've had a great time and have taken the chance to show the other grades our dominance in every

class competition. All these victories have been 100% earned, unlike some previous classes. We've been the reigning champions of boys' beach volleyball these last two years, and crushed the other grades in the Powderpuff Flag Football game this year.

As I just mentioned, we haven't had the best track record with Homecoming dances. While our first highschool dance fell victim to COVID, Hurricane Ian rained on the parade junior year. It was postponed to January and dubbed the Winter Formal, which was such a success that a new Country Day tradition was born, no hurricane necessary.

Our junior year ended on a high note, with our win in Clash of Cans. The parents in the crowd may remember us pestering you for empty soda cans, but what I remember most is my classmates picking up littered cans around Savannah and bringing them in, inadvertently cleaning up our community. On any random day last April, I would walk onto campus where I could hear my classmates jumping on cans, flattening them into pancakes. Our determination was unmatched, and our legendary teamwork culminated in a well-earned victory- a true group effort for a promised pizza party.

Let's be real: These last four years haven't been easy. We've faced challenges from our teachers and from each other, but a once-every-100-years pandemic and several major hurricanes weren't enough to keep us down. Through it all, we've stuck together.

There was never a time when someone wouldn't share their notes from a class you missed or wouldn't send you a Quizlet they made, even if it was the night before the test. It didn't really matter who you asked and how close you were with them, they would do it. We caught one another when the inflatable slide fell over on the last day of school, we waited for one another at the buses on Grad Bash, and most of all, that morning we waited three hours together for a replacement bus- without a working AC. We never fail to celebrate each other's passions. We support our thespians at Cinderella and Bright Star with standing

ovations at the end, bringing flowers and gifts. We go to every senior night we can for as many sports as we can, we trek out to the Tennis Courts during lunch and we beg our teachers to let us watch our classmates play.

I am honored to have met and known all of you, as each of you bring a unique perspective to our class. At the end of the day (or I suppose 4 years), we've done our best to include others, and I think we've set a darn good example for the younger grades. Whether or not they choose to follow is still up to them.

Out of all the countless assignments I've had in high school, writing this speech was by far the most challenging. And not just because I had only 72 hours to compose it. It was because it means saying goodbye. Goodbye to the classmates I've had the privilege of knowing and getting close to, goodbye to the teachers who've supported all of us over the last four years, and goodbye to the school where I've spent 7 years of my life.

But this is a commencement ceremony, which Google told me marks the end of one era and the beginning of another, and while it's a little scary, and I don't have any advice to offer as a mere 17-year-old, I do know a few things. I know that we've come a long way, I know that we'll continue to bring others together, the way we've come together over the last year in particular, and I know that wherever we go, we'll succeed. I guess I have one last thing to say to the Class of 2024, as our dean Ms. Patton put it so well, #BeNice, #BeFun, #BeThere.

Thank you.