

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

One of my greatest fears is not knowing exactly the right thing to say at the right time. Trust me; this does not come from a place of inexperience.

So, here I am today, after having received the title that I have been striving for since I was a child, not knowing if what I have to say is the right thing to say at the right time.

This particular speech frightened me because it seems like all original thought has been molded by the graduates of yesterday. Those were the Van Goghs and Picassos and Rembrandts of valedictory speeches, and they have faced the test of time. And then it became my turn to be the artist. So, I've been staring at a blank canvas that I built from scratch. I have spent years nailing the wood of the frame, stretching the canvas, and sealing it with a layer of gesso only to realize I forgot to buy the paint. Could I ever truly inspire anyone in mere minutes?

The answer is: No. I have no advice to give, nor wisdom to share, because you are already wise beyond your years, prepared at your easel and determined to make your mark on the canvas. Your varying personalities and strengths represent the entire spectrum of humanity. A rainbow audience sits before me. I cannot advise you because we are all equal, sharing the same field today. Sweat and tears were shed by us all in the journey to get from the gymnasium during Freshman Orientation to our seats at graduation. The stress of the long days and long nights nearly incapacitated us. But only nearly. We have given, and we have received. And we, as a class, have conquered.

We have Skills USA medalists of all levels of competition sitting in our audience this evening, with ten students moving on to Nationals this summer. Some of us excelled at demonstrating talents honed in construction trades in various competitions. Members of the Literary Magazine have created flawless writing pieces and exquisite artwork, receiving national praise and earning respect of the highest regard. We have certified nursing assistants among us who can already perform those skills as well as, if not better than, college graduates. Ninety-one of us received the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship for our performance on the MCAS, a test that Dr. Kanellas has told us all countless times that we not only passed, but excelled at. All of you have done exceptionally well on your own. Nothing has held you back, and no one needs to define success for you. You have already achieved it.

As for those who have helped us along the way, take the chance to address those people personally who have made this possible and have made a difference in our lives. They knew the right things to say at the right time, and it shows in your integrity and character. My quartet of shop teachers, thank you for your mentorship, pushing me to my limits without holding back. Mrs. Doucette and Ms. McKee, thank you because without your words of wisdom, kindness, and occasional harsh reality, I'm not sure I would have found the words with which to speak. My parents, grandparents, and not-so little brother, thank you for being so supportive in all of my endeavors, encouraging me to pursue my wildest dreams while keeping me grounded. The Smiths, thank you for being my second family, doing everything my biological family does without being obligated to. My close circle of friends and those who I have had the pleasure of sharing memories with, thank you for being yourselves and

allowing me to be me. Thank you to all of those who have made a difference in our lives.

Now, it is time for us to make the difference.

Before I conclude, I would also just like to give a shout-out to Superintendent Charlie Lyons, who is retiring this coming year and has transformed Shawsheen into what it is today: a school that is highly competitive and one of the top vocational schools in the state. You told the Shawsheen Tech School Committee in your retirement announcement that you had the distinct pleasure of serving as Shawsheen's Superintendent Director since 1986. However, the pleasure truly lies in the students and faculty that have had the privilege to study under and work alongside you. You have been an integral part of this community, and it is with bittersweet sorrow that we see you go. Mr. Lyons told me at the Vocational Student Award dinner, in reference to this ceremony, that he controls the microphone. And I think that's a perfect metaphor to describe how he has shaped what we say and what we do in the halls of Shawsheen, allowing us the freedom to express our individuality but reigning us in if we use it to head down the wrong path. Thank you Mr. Lyons, for all that you've done.

Class of 2015, you are all so incredibly talented. In the next year, some of you will be working in the trade you are certified in and will be that much closer to securing a plentiful, exciting career. Some of you will be taking the opportunity to excel further academically, pursuing a degree in a field you are passionate about. Some of you will even be joining the military, protecting your country with honor and deserving respect from us all. Whatever your next step may be, all of you here today have proven that you have what it takes to make your life what you want it to be. Your painting is well on its way to completion.

As Markus Zusak worries in The Book Thief, "I have hated words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right." Shawsheen, I hope that I have found the right words today and that you will continue to use yours to succeed.

Raine Ferrin
Valedictory 2015

Thank you, Class of 2015.