

Madeleine Jensen's Valedictory Address 2008 Graduation

If I were Professor Dumbledore, I might greet you with something along the lines of “Oddment! Nitwit! Blubber! Tweak!” and we would all “tuck in” to a feast together. Alas, I am not Dumbledore, and I cannot offer you chocolate pudding or treacle tart, however I hope that I can leave you with some food for thought.

Welcome administrators, teachers, family, friends, distinguished guests, and graduates of the Class of 2008! A special happy birthday to Greg James and all of our other birthday celebrants. I am delighted that we can share this moment as we sit poised for the start of the next chapter of our lives.

Class of 2008, we made it. We made it through tests, athletic competitions, massive projects, and all-nighters; but more importantly, we made it through years of growth and change that have challenged us in new ways. Together we faced struggles and surpassed expectations. We are united by our experiences and will forever share the bonds that they have created. We have been made stronger by respecting and honoring our differences, which from all of my time spent in a science lab, brings to mind the components of a human cell.

We call cells the building blocks of life, but cells themselves rely on the interactions of molecules to achieve specific goals. Each protein, vitamin, and mineral is essential to the function of the cell and the effectiveness of the entire system. Like the proteins, we as individuals have worked together to achieve great things. Each of us has contributed a valuable perspective and innovative ideas to Huntington High School and the community we graduate from today.

When I leave for college in August, I will be parting from two families. The first includes my parents, my brother, and my extended family, without whom I would not be speaking to you here today. They have stood with me through every moment, when I was jubilant or distressed, and I cannot thank them enough. The

second is also of great importance, and it is the family that I have at Huntington High School. Here, I have a dad who has been a source of guidance and inspiration, a mom who exemplifies perseverance each and every day, and a twin sister who has always been there for me and whose friendship I truly appreciate. This is a large family, one with many relatives whose smiles, insights, and encouragement have helped me meet each challenge. These relatives are you, Class of 2008, and I will always remember and cherish my experiences with you at Huntington High School.

Class of 2008, as we journey into our next endeavors we are presented with a question: what will we do when we leave these grounds? Much like a science experiment, we form our hypotheses. We have a vision of our anticipated outcome and what our futures hold. For some the future may be perfectly defined and planned out. For others, it may be less clear. Whatever the case, we hold in our minds an “if...then...” scenario. We have gathered our data and explored a range of opportunities at Huntington High School. Now we begin the experiment. Our procedures may yield the expected result, but there are likely to be unforeseen challenges. We cannot possibly control all of the variables in our trials, so we must adapt; be flexible. Our hypotheses may change, our goals shift, but we will never give up on the experiment because in science, and in life, there is no such thing as failure. There is always learning. Each experiment teaches us something new. It eliminates an option, and at the same time expands our horizons by opening our minds to new possibilities. We revise our procedure based on the results of past experiences and we try again.

I learned invaluable lessons about redirection and trying again from sailing and as a member of the high school’s crew team. When you take the helm or sit in the coxswain’s seat to steer a boat, you take responsibility into your hands. You are in command of the path that your boat will follow. However, you are influenced by

the winds and tides. When we leave Huntington High School, we will be influenced by many things: by the choices our friends make, by people we regard highly, and by trends. But we ultimately have the strength to make our own decisions. We learn to work with the winds and tides of the world so that, instead of throwing us off course, they help move us forward toward attaining our dreams.

One phrase, one saying that I learned this year truly resonates with me. On the first day of Project Adventure this spring, Mrs. Damore told us about a student who began every day with the idea “Today is a great day to get better.” Class of 2008, each day is a new chance to try things that interest you, speak to people who motivate you, and create experiences that you will look back on with joy. In life, it is the people that you meet and the adventures you share that matter, not the accolades and wealth. Take advantage of the opportunities that come your way -- seek them out.

Class of 2008, I leave you with one final thought. Each protein in a cell, however small, can generate a notable impact. Never for a second doubt your ability to instigate and inspire change. Never doubt the impact that you can have. Gaston Berger said, “Tomorrow is less to be discovered than to be invented.” We alone shape our futures and determine our path. Congratulations Class of 2008. I wish you all the best of luck.

Shannon Lee Connors' Salutatory Address 2008 Graduation

Good evening family and friends, staff, administrators, members of the Board, and most importantly, Class of 2008. This day is the culmination of the last thirteen years and the tremendous work and accomplishment that has been poured into them. Here's "to days of inspiration, playing hooky, making something out of nothing, the need to express, to communicate, to going against the grain, going insane, going mad." These words, from Jonathan Larson's musical *RENT* embody the very best of what high school has been. Much of the last four years has been focused so intently on the future that we often lose sight of the present. What I have savored most during my time at Huntington High School has been the creativity and vitality of my classmates. A concert, game, or even the most informal classroom debates, these are the moments when our class has shined. In the face of an increasingly competitive educational environment our class has never lost sight of the importance of balancing the demands of coursework with the integral need to pause and simply enjoy being young. Though we may have had a reputation for relaxing a bit too much, it is this quality that I admire most in my classmates.

I've spent a lot of time over the last four years thinking about how different we all are, how little we appear to have in common. But that's not really true, is it? We've experienced the same trials and triumphs, heartbreaks and victories. What I've come to realize about our class is that for all of the things we don't have in common, all the complaining we do about one another, we are inextricably linked, and not just because of this building or the last thirteen years. There is energy and a determined spirit

that is unique to the Class of 2008, a fact to which our miraculous comeback at this year's Playfest can most certainly attest.

Now, the time has come to leave Huntington High School and move forward, expanding not only our experiences but also our perspectives. There is untold potential within this group of people and I have no doubt that there is much success in our collective future. At the same time, it is imperative that the desire for success in the eyes of others does not hinder the paths we take. The fear of failure can be debilitating, causing stagnation and missed opportunities. At these moments, take a note from *RENT* and remember, "there's only us, there's only this, forget regret or life is yours to miss. No other road, no other way, no day but today." Let us not hesitate or give in to feelings of uncertainty or inadequacy. Each person sitting here has the capacity to touch the lives of others, to make an unmatched contribution to the world around us.

If I have learned one thing from the last four years, it has been to trust myself and to not waste time doubting the path that I have chosen. My wish for our class is for each person to let go, to give fully of him or herself to whatever stirs their passions. Do not restrict yourself to what is familiar or what is expected. Take that same force that has brought our class to this point and use it to propel yourself further, past what you may see as your own limitations.

I know I speak for everyone watching this ceremony when I say how proud I am of our class and the people that we have become. Continue to grow and remain open to knowledge and opportunities. Congratulations Class of 2008!

Principal Carmela Leonardi's 2008 Graduation Speech

It is an honor for me to welcome students, parents, family members, our superintendent and members of the school board here tonight. Before I deliver my remarks this year, I would like to thank our two Assistants, Mr. Noce and Mr. Stein, for their tireless work and dedication. A word of thanks is extended to all district directors, chair people and coordinators for their continuing support and professionalism. A heartfelt thank you goes to Huntington High School teachers who continue to work hard for the success of every student and who take a personal interest in their academic and social development.

It is always a pleasure for me, on this memorable day, to take a few minutes to reflect on the strengths and qualities of the graduating class and to celebrate some of the many accomplishments students have achieved. The class of 2008 is very special because, as you heard from Shannon earlier, it is endowed with “energy and a determined spirit.” From her own work for the presidential campaign, to project Nicaragua, to the rebuilding of homes by the Habitat for Humanity club both here and in Louisiana, to the collection of hair to be used for wigs for cancer patients, this proved to be a philanthropic class.

These students know themselves both intellectually and morally. They have clear goals and know how hard they will need to work in order to be able to achieve. They are passionate about improving our future and show such a commitment through political involvement. They understand that in order to bring about change you have to commit your time and energy to what you believe in. This is also a faith oriented group that has

volunteered in churches, synagogues, and youth groups. They have strong minds, generous hearts and devoted souls. It is a source of pride for administrators and faculty alike to realize how interested and well informed members of this graduating class have been relative to what is going on in the world around them. They have been able to balance the world of school with the issues brought on by the world outside of school.

And now for some hard data to back up the praises you have heard thus far:

- Many of our seniors challenged themselves with Advanced Placement courses that have the potential of earning them college level credits. 81 of them took AP exams. 40 took 3 AP exams or more with three students taking six AP exams each for a collective total of 210 AP tests.
- For this senior class, the college center processed 1,368 college applications. This number is up from last year by 118.
- As of today, the class of 2008 received \$8,541,544 in scholarships. Again this amount is up by \$1,418,194 from last year.
- 92% of the students sitting here today will be going to college. 1% enlisted in the United States Military, 1% enrolled in college prep schools and 6% are beginning their working careers. The college bound students will be attending Columbia, Yale, Cornell and Brown. The list of acceptances includes all SUNY schools, NYU, Fordham, Barnard and reputed out of state colleges such as the University of Virginia, University of NC at Chapel Hill, Rutgers, College of William and Mary, Boston College, Boston University, Duke, John Hopkins, and George Washington University to name a few.

- Among the selected majors are: architecture, art history and art education, automotive technology, biochemistry, business, computer engineering, criminal justice, culinary arts, economics, education, environmental science, finance, fashion, merchandising, film and video production, graphic design, history, international relations, journalism, marine transportation, nursing, nutritional science, physics, physical therapy, political science, pre-veterinarian science, and psychology.

These college placements and career choices are not only impressive but also speak of the strength of purpose and energy we mentioned earlier.

For a closing thought I went back to Carol Bolt's Book of Answers, crossed my fingers and opened a random page hoping for relevance. The message on the page read, "It is worth the trouble." How true this statement is when it is applied to the hard work, the countless hours of study, the dedication to the arts and athletics that the members of the graduating class of 2008 have demonstrated over the last four years at HHS. Ability plus effort will yield great results every time. Was it worth the effort? Judging from the achievements of the class of 2008, the answer is a resounding yes. Congratulations to every member of the graduating class and their families, may you continue to experience great success in your future endeavors. Work hard because you already know that it is really worth the trouble.

Superintendent John J. Finello's Graduation Speech 2008

Good evening, thank you Kelsey Ferrari for your introduction. You were very kind. Welcome parents, relatives, friends, teachers, administrators, staff, and students of the Class of 2008.

Recognizing I am one of the last speakers before you are granted your diplomas, my words will be brief. I am here to congratulate you, to encourage you and to implore you to believe in yourself and your ability to succeed.

Today marks an ending and a beginning. A time to say goodbye to your childhood experiences and routines and a time to greet with great excitement the new challenges and opportunities that await you.

You are to be commended for your accomplishments and achievements. You have passed some of the most rigorous and demanding high school graduation requirements in our nation. Along the way, you created a treasure chest of memories that will remain happy reminders of the many good times you had throughout these 13 years of school.

George Bernard Shaw wrote, "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." The combination of your abilities, your experiences, your interactions, your interests, and your desires has collectively created the person you call: me. Make the most of what your experiences have taught you and pursue the interests that motivate you. Above all, strive to do your best. Identify and acknowledge your strengths, embrace them, nurture them, and treat them as building blocks toward success. Recognize your weaknesses and work to overcome them. Trusting yourself and knowing your abilities will help you set attainable goals.

Accept nothing less from yourself than what you are capable of achieving. Dare to reach beyond a comfortable grasp. Do not fear failure. It can only harm you if you allow it to overtake your desire to dream. Turn your dreams into action. Have faith in yourself. Opportunities will arise. Success will be achieved. Realize that happiness is found in the joy of accomplishment, in the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you have worked to reach your goals.

In whatever you do, in whatever you become, do not abandon who you are.

Show concern for others. Be understanding, tolerant, caring, and thoughtful. Thoughtful people find happiness by extending themselves for the sake of others. They live a generous life. They are able to look beyond those who act selfishly or carelessly.

Learn to think critically and carefully, maintain an open mind so that you can make informed and intelligent decisions, try not to be judgmental but try to understand the feelings and needs of others. Believe that what you do today is important and will effect tomorrow.

Our country has much to offer. Cherish the ideals we have inherited as its citizens. We enjoy the constitutional freedoms that make us the envy of the world. Value them. Defend them. Respect and honor them. They will keep open the doors of opportunity to all. Work to remove the racial, cultural and religious barriers and prejudices that divide. Affirm what is best in us; we are all Americans, one people pledging allegiance to the same flag. While we may not agree on issues, the fact that we can disagree and speak openly is a freedom to be appreciated, protected and preserved. Become knowledgeable of the global and national challenges we face today. Global warming, pollution, terrorism, the loss of natural resources, healthcare, immigration, and education are but a few examples. Be part of the solution and together we can work to avoid the consequences they pose to our future. Participate in the vision of hope and claim the promise of tomorrow.

Today is the first day of your senior summer, a time to feel free, to have fun and to enjoy your friends. Please be cautious, moderate and thoughtful in your actions and deeds. Remember how hard you have worked. Remember how much you mean to your family. Remember all the possibilities that await you.

Your contributions to our District are many and varied and I thank you for the many gifts and talents you have shared with us over the years.

Congratulations and good luck to the Huntington High School Class of 2008.