

Good evening, Ms. Williams, Mr. Barr, Mr. Murray, Mr. Tutt, Dr. Macpherson, staff, parents, and fellow graduates. Tonight, I have been given the privilege of revisiting the memories, the lessons, and the experiences we have shared throughout our four years together, and why this experience has been made more special, having attended Dundas Valley. What I cannot do, is explain to every single one of you, wearing identical caps and gowns, that individuality is the key to success. What I can do, however, is share the collective pride, excitement, and memories we all have of DVSS. Although we did not all have the exact same high school experience, we all shared the experience of high school.

These last couple years have been a wild ride, that's it, that's exactly what they've been. So many twists and turns, rights to lefts, and ups and downs, so, I'll start you with this simple analogy. In this theme park called Life, our four years here have been the largest, steepest, and fastest roller coaster any of us have ever seen. And this behemoth of a ride was called DVSS.

I remember taking my seat in this cart for the first time, sticking with the same group of friends from my middle school, as most of us did. The different middle school groups were so incredibly easy to identify. There were the Dundas kids, from SWO and Central, who consumed the majority of our class; and then there were the minorities of the Spencer Valley and Seaton kids. It's crazy to think about, when people used to tell me "you're going to meet so many new friends in high school," I would roll my eyes, I didn't really believe them. I was so incredibly comfortable with my group of friends that I had grown up with, there was no way I needed anyone else, I already knew everyone I needed to know. I was so wrong.

Our high school career kicked off with our four different feeder school carts, nobody could move from seat to seat, we were locked in, and were slowly moving forward. There were no twists and turns just yet, it was just a straight track. But yet, everything around us was so new and exciting, we reached out of our seats at the many opportunities that arose. Throughout our first year we joined sports teams, like football, hockey, and badminton and joined clubs like student council, and DECA. We watched as the older students served as our role models, raising money for charities in Global Connect, and winning championships in various sports. We watched as Mrs. Davidson and Mr. Davey coached our senior girls volleyball team to OFSAA, inspiring many of us to want to compete at that level. We soon became familiar with word 'exams,' and shortly after, dreaded hearing about them. But, at last, we finished our first semester, and started to realize "hey, maybe this high school thing isn't as scary as I thought." We felt invincible, as every grade 9 does after their first semester, we really thought we were "like that." Our carts continued to move forward, then, boom. Maintenance error. Our ride had stopped, and if you can believe it, summer was actually a little too long. I know, we have all heard way too much about Covid, and we have all heard about how we were put at a disadvantage and were not awarded the full 'high school experience.' So, we fast forward, and boom, suddenly we were sophomores.

Grade 10 came around and it moved even quicker than grade 9. The track finally ascended, and we got our first tastes of airtime. With grade 10, we got the sensation of butterflies making us feel like the Kings and Queens of the coaster. Although we were still young, we would come in

for those half days, and look down on the grade 9s and say, “I was never that loud,” or “I was never that short.” For most of us, truer words have never been spoken, and so we continued up and through this helix of new events and experiences.

As we went through the motions of being a grade ten, our cart rose up this helix. We twisted and turned, left and right, right and left, up and down, and down and up. We made a few new friends in our minimal time in class, and maybe lost some old ones too, but continued this ride of high school. As our second year came to an end, there were no longer ‘four different carts,’ well, maybe I wouldn’t go that far, but our carts were definitely closer together. As we had classes with each other, even if they were online, we became more familiar with everyone in the grade. We were just starting to really figure out what it meant to be a Gryphon, and just like that we were halfway there.

The next element of our ride would make most students shriek, but not us. Well, actually, maybe a couple of us. In front of us, was the dreaded loop-de-loop of high school, grade 11, and the speed of it was unbelievable. The gravity of adulthood had finally grabbed a hold of our still young, ambitious, hearts. We were faced with all sorts of new challenges and change was inevitable. New ideas, new experiments, and most importantly new pressures came with these challenges. Of course, I’m talking about the incredibly heavy weight of the future, more specifically, college, university, and the workplace, wherever that may be. Yea yea, I know, you’re only in grade 11, you still have two years to figure yourself out, you don’t need to worry about it now. Yet, if I could look back on my Grade 11 self and give him one piece of advice, it would be that time really does fly, especially when surrounded by your peers every day in class. Lectures were given by teachers, lectures were given by guidance counsellors, and the longest lectures were given by our parents. They all said the same thing “figure it out, figure out what you want to be.” Teachers, guidance counsellors, and especially parents, thank you for these lectures. I’m sure they were amazing, but being completely honest, not a single word was heard. We were still kids, and above all, procrastinators. We were only concerned about the present, and not worrying about the future. On top of this, we all tried to be superhero’s, balancing sports, academics, and a social life.

And with all of this speed, our carts quickly hit the peak of this ride. We were on the top of the coaster, three years behind us, one more to go. The end of the ride was insight. We knew what the end meant, but we didn’t want to acknowledge it, we were just now becoming accustomed to this experience of high school. We were finally at the top of the hill, we have waited years for this, but all we wanted was for the ride to slow down. This was it, we were finally in grade 12, and with that realization, our cart tipped over the edge. Life was ahead.

This year was our year, the year where all of our idealistic dreams of former selves were completed. We were the MVP’s, the prefects, the role models, the great friends, and the even better students we all wanted to become.

But away from our successes was our now, ten thousand ton reality. We still had all those sports teams to beat, all of those projects to do the night before, and all those tests to ace.

Grade 12 was a hectic year, it's impossible to discuss everything we achieved, but here's my best shot. We hosted VEE, and served as role models for those new grade 9s, we attended formals, and the coveted Prom. We were the leaders of the school, and even won city championships in girls and boys hockey, and senior football. Even more so, we had to make our decisions for next year, whether it be choosing a college, university, job, or coming back to experience one more year. Decisions were made, the next several years of our lives now determined, our ride was ending. This was the best ride we have ever known.

And now, we're on the final little bunny hill of the track; this is it, our last couple weeks of high school. Cherish it, this is really our last chances to be kids, we're growing up, and there's nothing we can do to stop it. Today is a day of full of excitement and gratification, as we graduate and enter this new chapter of our lives. A huge door is opening, yet I can't stop thinking about the small door that is closing behind us. People often suggest that high school is the best time your life, and now, I can see why. These last four years have been amazing, and I really can't imagine showing up to class next year without any of you around. It's a weird feeling, I wouldn't go as far as to say it's 'sad' or 'upsetting,' but it's definitely something. I'm really going to miss this place.

With all of us serving as role models for the past four years, the future of our school is in good hands. We are the first class to really be put through the blender, I can't think of another year that has had to face more diversity and challenges than us. It's pretty easy to see that the younger grades, even the 11's, acknowledge that, and look up to all of you. Most of us are leaving, but our impact will remain in the next three years of graduates.

Now, of course, some thanks are in order, starting with the technicians of this ride, our teachers. You were the ones who helped us solve that derivative in calculus class, write that English essay, or even taught us how to spike a volleyball, or shoot a basketball. You, the teachers, are the ones who guided us no matter what, whether it be social issues, or academics, you were always there. With the entire class by my side, I hope that we have enriched the staffs lives just as much as they enriched ours.

To our families, you have been everything we needed, and more. You were our rock, you were strong, sturdy, and often a heavy weight on our back pushing us forward. Raising a teenager is no easy task, yet, you have all done such an amazing job.

Finally, I am proudly left with a small part of our future in this world. Here in front of me are the next doctors, lawyers, fathers, mothers, teachers, police officers, and firemen; and in short, the citizens of tomorrow. Seated here tonight we have a thriving generation of athletes, intellectuals, artists and it is we who shall build the next theme parks for our children. Whether you come back for a fifth year, or move on from DVSS, I wish all of you great success in your future endeavours. I know all of you are destined to go on to do great things, and when I say this class is special, I really do mean it.

Thank you, fellow classmates, friends, and graduates; without you, I would not be here.

With that said, I thank all of you for being here tonight. I thank you for listening to our message, our experiences, and taking part in the ending of this ride.

Gryphons, this is it, this is our last night together, enjoy it, and I wish you all the best of luck in the future. Thank you.