

*Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc*

Good morning. Dr. Stimmel, Dr. Criscione, Mr. Hoffer, President Verdone, members of the Board of Education, administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, family, friends, and classmates... thank you and congratulations to the Class of 2019. I'm so glad the weather turned out alright for us today, and we can thank the class weatherman who happens to be allergic to peanut butter, Max Gallo for letting us all know in time. I'd like to give a special thanks to the kind, hard-working, and supremely talented teachers who have never ceased to inspire me, such as Mrs. Brown, Mr. Gittler, and Mrs. Thelian, to name a few. I'd also like to recognize Ms. Martorello --whose smile always brightens up my day, Cassie Duetsch--for editing all my essays, my amazing parents, who push me to become a

better man every single day, and all the other dedicated parents and guardians gathered here today. And I'd be foolish if I didn't extend my gratitude to my classmates, for years of love, support, and memories.

Today, my friends, is a turning point in our lives. Commencement symbolizes the liberation of the contemporary teenager into an adult world, a world marked by both responsibility and opportunity. And I think I speak on behalf of all my classmates when I say... I'm petrified.

Each one of us has changed substantially from our awkward middle school days. It seems like just days ago we were getting yelled at by our teachers for flipping every plastic water bottle in sight. For me, that actually was just a few days ago. (Sorry Mrs. P). Despite this, the school has chosen me to

bestow some perspective-altering advice that will thrust us into the next chapter of our lives. Clearly, I haven't had the life experiences of Steve Jobs or Michelle Obama, so all I believe I can offer **is to remind us of** a tale, a tale many of my classmates and I first heard at the beginning of the school year, before Karl discovered the miracles of the gym.

This tale, written thousands of years ago by a really smart guy who was juusssstttt about as old as Mr. Gittler, has helped me decipher the inner psychological workings of each and every one of us. It explains how we act in the face of both novelty and adversity, and has consequently helped me to get closer to understanding the social constructs that define all of human interaction.

Once upon a time, there was a group of prisoners who were confined in a cave since birth. They had no knowledge of their situation or of the outside world. They were chained facing a wall, unable to turn their heads, while a fire behind them gave off light. Objects would pass behind the prisoners, but all they ever saw were the resulting shadows; to the prisoners, these shadows were reality, because it was all they had ever experienced. One day, a prisoner is freed and makes the long, tiring journey to the outside world. When the prisoner emerges from the cave, he is blinded by the light of truth. When told that the things around him are real, and that the shadows in the cave were mere reflections, he is astonished. He learns that rabbits are alive, that grass is green, that the sun is the source of everything he sees. Elated by his findings, the prisoner returns to the cave to

share his discovery, but the other captives refuse to believe a single word he says, thinking that the trip to the outer world made him delusional. In fact, they are so threatened by his new understanding that they seek to kill him.

Now, upon reading this tale— Greek philosopher Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave— in English class at the beginning of the school year, I was like “Thanks Mr. Shaw, now not only do I know a useless 3,000 year old fictional story, but I’m also on the verge of falling asleep.” However, as the days passed, I couldn’t stop thinking about the end of the narrative, that none of the other prisoners were willing to give any merit to the enlightened prisoner’s unequivocal truth and wisdom. I kept thinking, kept pondering about the underlying messages Plato was trying to convey to his readers 3,000 years into the future

with such a melancholy ending... and realized that embedded in this complex tale are time-tested words of wisdom with a deep modern significance.

And this was the idea that we need to have insane amounts of confidence in ourselves and what we know to be true, even if the confidence isn't real. We must first have the courage and confidence to leave the comfort of the lives we know now, to leave our caves, as each of us will do when we embark on the next chapter of our lives. So yes Eric Gustafson, you might even have to leave your dad's audi. Nobody is going to force us up and pull us out of the cave, we have to drag ourselves out. And yes it will be hard to leave Sayville, to leave everything we have known since birth behind, to leave our caves. It might even be harder than getting out of bed for first period gym. But it will be

worth it. Only after being freed from the caves **will we be able to shine light on the shadows of our past beliefs.**

And after leaving the cave, we might learn that the things we once clung onto to as undeniable fact may be no more real than shadows, after all, common knowledge once held that the Earth was the center of the universe. People doubted Copernicus then, and they will doubt you now.

Similarly, for the past 13 years, we believed that the differences between us, the same differences that have created the cliques in our class, fabricating social boundaries that dictated who hung out with whom, where we sat in the cafeteria for lunch, when we were picked to be on a team in gym class, that these differences reigned supreme. But over the last few months, from Ben Scapaletti tearing up the dance floor at senior

banquet to signing yearbooks at senior picnic, I think it's safe to say that we discovered the undeniable truth that it doesn't matter if you're a football star, a physics genius, or a video game connoisseur, we have an unbreakable bond that overarches our differences and unites us all for decades to come: that we are all Sayville High School's Class of 2019.

It is inevitable that we will discover the other truths that life has in store for each and every one of us, whether these truths are about our career, purpose, passions, family, religion, gender, sexuality, or if Payton Sweeny will ever be a good driver. We must have the courage and strength to follow our own truth, our own inner voice, and as Nick just put it, our own core values, no matter the obstacles because they somehow already know what's right for us. The point is, to quote the great modern day



philosopher.... oprah, *“You need to be your own cheerleader now, because there isn’t a room full of people waiting with pom-poms to tell you, “You did it!. ”*

I am grateful for finding this overly philosophical way of saying “trust yourself,” because it has shown me that the tools which will pave the road to our future lies in our hands. It is in that spirit that I titled this speech “Post hoc, ergo propter hoc,” which translated from latin, means “after this, therefore because of this.”.... “after this, therefore because of this.” ....

So, Class of 2019, I hope that what each of us pursues after today is a result of realizing which truths are merely shadows and finding our own truth. I wish you endless happiness in this journey and hope it is filled with family, friends, laughter, and success. Always remember to go confidently in the direction of

your dreams, even if you find yourself making a dangerous,  
difficult, and muddy climb up out of a cave. Once again, to the  
class of 2019, thank you and congratulations.