

Commencement Speech

Four years ago, we walked through these entrance doors squeezing our parent's hand with mixed feelings of anticipation, excitement and, most of all, fear. Fear of leaving the past behind and stepping into the unknown. Fear of having to write a new chapter in the book of life.

There were a lot of questions spinning around in our heads. Would we make friends? Would the teachers be really strict and mean? Would we be able to study in English? Would we get good grades? We were all very worried about these things and we probably wondered if we would ever make it out alive. But we did. And all of these concerns that we had in the beginning of sixth grade are now gone. The fact that we're leaving this school tomorrow is so surreal and many of us thought that this day would never come. But all good things come to an end, so here we are, stronger than ever, on this day where we have to say goodbye to what has been our life for the past four years.

Getting here has been a journey. First came sixth grade, the year that most of us probably just want to forget. This year was all about trying to adjust to the new environment. We were so afraid of making mistakes and getting a D, U or an L was the same as getting sentenced to life in prison. I remember many of us bringing our entire locker to every lesson, just to be safe. The panic that struck us when we realized that we, despite everything, had forgot something was so intense that to this day, many of us probably haven't gotten over it. If getting a letter was life in prison, getting sent to Mr. Elder was death. He was so terrifying when he walked through the hallways with determined steps and we figured it was best to lay low when he was around. Along with trying to follow the rules, we also tried really hard to dress to impress. Looking back, our fashion-choices were anything but impressive. At least we can say that we've learned from our mistakes.

After that came seventh grade and we weren't at the bottom of the food chain anymore. The new sixth graders had arrived to take our place. We watched them in the hallways and said things like "Naw, they're so cute. I remember when I was a sixth grader, I was *so* small", even though we actually were sixth graders a little less than two months before that. Another thing that changed was, to many people's despair, the classes. It was extremely rough in the beginning, having to get to know an entirely new group of people, and I know that many of us weren't happy at all with our new classes. But that changed too, and once we got to know them we realized that they weren't so bad after all. One event that brought us closer together was the trip to Åland where we got to spend three days together away from homework and parents. We had sold NewBody, candy, fika and other things that no one really wants to buy to raise the money. Those three days in Åland were filled with a lot of fun.

Eighth grade came, and we could proudly say that we had survived half of our time at IESJ. This was the year of preparation. We realized that maybe it was time to focus more on our school work, brace ourselves for what was yet to come in ninth grade. We worked harder, and many of us really improved our grades. We got more confident and started to socialize with people in other classes, thus making new friends.

This brings us to our final year, ninth grade. Where did this year go? It really feels like it has passed in the blink of an eye. This year has been so hectic with a lot of things to keep up with. We didn't even have time to get used to being back in school before we were buried in a sea of homework and projects. In addition to that, we also had to think about gymnasieival. This was extremely hard for some of us. There were so many different programs and schools that claimed to offer the best education for us, so how could we be able to choose? How could we possibly be able to make major decisions regarding the future when we still had the present to worry about? It was a struggle, but we got there in the end.

But there was something even harder than the gymnasieival. Something that every child when they

begin school. Something worse than the devil himself, the National Tests. We were absolutely terrified when we came back after the Christmas break and were about to take our first test. We imagined students having mental breakdowns, lying on the floor in fetal position with their eyes wide open and the teacher standing at the front with an evil smirk, feeding on our misery. In reality, it wasn't quite the way we imagined it. We were nervous, stressed and a few tears were shed here and there. But just like with everything else, we got through it, and we did really well.

The most exciting thing we've ever done during our four years at IESJ has to be the trip to Poland. However, raising all the money for the trip was not very exciting. With that said, if I show up at my neighbours' door trying to sell them something ever again they will probably murder me. The stay was very emotional. We felt sorrow as we visited the concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau, but we also felt extremely joyful for getting the opportunity to spend four days with our friends and we had so much fun. It was one of the best experiences in my entire life and it made me realize how precious freedom is and that we should not take it for granted. We should appreciate that fact that we get an education

Day after day, we've been walking these hallways thinking that nothing ever changes. But now when we look back, we see that everything is different. We are no longer the insecure and shy kids that we once were when we came here four years ago. We have grown. Physically and mentally. We are now strong enough to face the world on our own, stand up for what we think is right and, most importantly, stand up for ourselves. And this school has been a huge part of that development. This has always been a safe and caring environment where we haven't had to worry about people trying to pull us down, because there has always been absolutely no tolerance against any disrespectful behaviour of any kind. The only thing that has stopped us from being ourselves has, ironically, been ourselves.

That's where all of you, the teachers and the management at this school, come in. It's because of you that all of this has been made possible. We wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for you. You have always been there for us and seen us as individuals instead of as a whole group. The fact that you have always seen to every student's needs is what has enabled us to grow so much. No one has been forgotten. You have made us realize that we are all equally important. How many teachers put so much heart and soul into what they do? Most of us probably don't realize how fortunate we are to have been a part of this school and to have had teachers like all of you. We have hated you sometimes when you have refused to give us the grades we want but deep down, you are really important to us. Whether we want to admit it or not. Thank you for everything. We will never forget you.

A special thank you to Mr. Saphir who will be leaving this school for Internationella Engelska Skolan in Bromma next term, after 12 years here. It will be a great loss for us, but a huge victory for them. I don't think that we will ever have a better, more caring principal than you. I still remember how you called everyone by their name after only one week of school, when most principals don't even leave their office. Thank you for everything that you've done for this school.

Four years ago, we walked through these entrance doors squeezing our parent's hand with mixed feelings of anticipation, excitement and fear. Tomorrow, we will walk out through the very same doors, but this time, we won't have to squeeze our parent's hand. We will embrace each other, and the teachers which we never thought that we would want to embrace. Even scary Mr. Elder whom we've all come to realize is actually a real marshmallow inside. From walking in with only our parents by our side, each and every one of us here will be walking out together with 119 people. The chapter we began writing four years ago has come to an end, and let me tell you, it's been one hell of a chapter. The fear of having to start a new one is still present, but this time, we're ready. This is the moment that all of these four years have led up to. This is the moment when we're ready to

jump out of the nest to try our new wings. This is the moment, and we're finally ready to fly.

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