

In one of his most famous pieces titled *If*, virtuous poet Rudyard Kipling once said...

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

In his writing Kipling inspires others to hold their own and make great strides while doing so. Today, I encourage you, Class of 2019, to do the same. No matter who has done you wrong, no matter how many failures you've faced, no matter how many times you've had to pick yourself back up, keep pushing. You have proved in this moment that you are more than capable of achieving your dreams. Graduation is one of the first steps you'll take during your journey. Some

of us will become eloquent speakers who rally for change. Some of us will become hard working pioneers who make life changing discoveries. Some of us will become wise mentors who pass down important knowledge. No matter what you become, be sure that you're standing tall and holding your head high. Life will be full of splitting decisions and harsh consequences, but you must continue to push through. The twists, turns, and crossroads will test your strength. In those moments, put on your bravest face and tackle the challenge head on. Show compassion and kindness where there is hate and negativity. There will always be others who doubt you and your abilities. Prove them wrong by finishing what you have started by giving it your all. As my mother always says, be the change you want to see in the world. Give back to those around you. You will always get back what you put out into the world. Continue to better yourself by learning from past mistakes while being thankful for them. The hardships you face will shape you into the person you were meant to be. When you find out who that person is, live your truth honestly and openly. There will be plenty of opportunities given to you, but it is up to you to take them. Smile in hopes of the future and what it holds. As author Maya Angelou once said, "Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it." Never compromise your integrity or your character, always fight for what is right, and live your most honest you. I wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors. Congratulations, Class of 2019. You've earned it.