

Today is a special day for those of you on stage and in the audience. We celebrate our students' accomplishments and look forward to the aspirations of each individual in the Class of 2021. As they prepare to leave the confines of the Middle School and enter the Upper School, I hope to impart a small piece of wisdom this morning in the form of 3 important words:

- 1) Pack
- 2) More
- 3) Oranges

Pack. More. Oranges.

Let's take ourselves back to an 8th Grade class that I observed earlier in the winter. A simple yet complex question presented itself to the students: "Why aren't there more female leaders in the world?" There was a gentle but noticeable pause in the room that gave a clear indication that the room full of young women were thinking, pondering and wondering about this question. A student, let's call her, "Alice" finally broke the silence by offering a beautiful yet simple metaphor: "Imagine if you got an apple every day in your lunch box. The apple was good, and you came to expect it each time for lunch. Then all of the sudden you get an orange. It's not bad, but it's definitely different from what you normally expect. It just might take some time to get used to it. And you will eventually realize that the orange is just as good if not better than the apple." A straightforward question caused everyone in the room to really stop and think before it yielded a wonderful answer that everyone could understand and relate to.

What I loved about "Alice's" answer in that moment is that I could not come up with a better one myself. I began to think about how her answer could explain why so many people in our society are not ready for more female leaders both in the private and public sectors. There have not been enough women leaders for future generations to see, admire and emulate. As the students were moving onto their next activity, my attention fell right back to the 16 students in that very classroom. "Alice's" answer not only helped give me a different perspective of the world at large, but perhaps more importantly, for the 61 students in the Garrison Forest Class of 2021.

When this group entered the Middle School in 6th Grade, they were full of energy. Full of spunk. Full of determination. Full of noise. But perhaps most of all, full of endless spirit. Very little took place during that year without this group sharing their feedback or making suggestions of what should have happened. They were wide eyed, and their ideas were always strong. As they moved into 7th Grade, the class began to take on a different identity: a group of students who could do things. They began to take the ideas they had and actually apply them. Every kind of activity or challenge presented to the class was completed with creativity and precision. There are two examples of this.

In May of 7th Grade, they were tasked with decorating the Fine Arts Building for the upcoming 8th Grade Courtyard Dance. What should have been a 20 minute mundane activity turned into the ultimate challenge. Take a limited amount of resources in a limited amount of time and make something that others will appreciate. It was the quintessential exercise in design thinking. Students brainstormed, divided up duties and got to work. Students flocked to specific tasks instead of specific friends. The end product was the most wonderfully decorated Courtyard any teacher could remember. As the 8th Graders paraded in that evening, instead of being in awe and fawning over each other's dresses, they all immediately complimented the decorations. This story is now part of the infamous 2016 Courtyard Dance lore.

The other example comes from a key stroke of ingenuity. When in 7th Grade, the class began to make use of online study tools such as Quizlets and Kahoots before any major assessment. As students created their online materials for review, they began to share them with each other. The scale of sharing took on its own life when students decided to email the study reviews to the entire grade. Before you knew it, there was a tidal wave of Quizlets and Kahoots that crashed into students' inboxes before every quiz or test. A group of students then took it upon themselves to create a master list of all Quizlets and Kahoots for every subject so that there was a single point of reference for everyone in the grade. This very group went from start-up to crowdsourcing and making it a public offering in such a short amount of time, but the best part of their was that it was shared among them all. No one was left out. Anyone could create and contribute. But everyone benefited from the exercise of having additional study materials at their fingertips.

Beyond these two examples, it is clear that these students are mission-focused. Give them a job with an authentic audience, and they will shine. The students on stage have proven through and through that it is a class of believers and do-ers. The Class of 2021 has all the tools to pave the way for themselves and others as a true future generation of leaders. They have the ideas. They have the willpower. But the only way to ensure that this group in front of you becomes the next leaders in the fields of medicine, art, business, technology, education, policy and whatever else will exist in the future, they need to keep thinking, scheming and doing. Basically, they need to pack more oranges. You are already a group of young leaders who can do anything you put your mind to. You have proven that. But every one of you needs to be the new leaders that maybe others are not prepared for. You will have to be a trailblazer.

Be prepared to bring what is different. Be prepared to bring what is unexpected. Be prepared to bring what you need to make people realize that your potential is more than just potential, but it is real possibility. But this only happens if you prepare yourself to be the firsts to do many things. Always remember "Alice's" analogy: this success only happens if you pack more oranges.