

Tharun Veeraiah

Plainfield North High School Graduation

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Contribute Your Verse – Graduation Speech

Good morning everyone—faculty, families, friends, and most importantly, the graduating class. We made it. Our graduation caps are on, our diplomas are within reach... We've waited four years for this moment. Four years of early mornings, late nights, packed schedules, tough tests, and moments we'll carry with us forever. And while every class has its story, ours began a little differently.

Our freshman year was the year of masks in the hallway, hand sanitizer in every classroom, and learning to read emotions from eyes alone. It was awkward. It was new. And it was uncertain. And now—four years later—we're stepping into a world that, let's be honest, doesn't feel much more certain than when we entered high school.

We're graduating into a world that feels like it's shifting beneath our feet—technologies changing faster than we can understand them, economies transforming, the climate warming, politics polarizing. And in the middle of all of it... us.

Uncertainty has become the defining rhythm of our generation. And yet—maybe that's not a weakness. Maybe it's the point.

There's a principle in quantum physics—Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. It tells us that you can't simultaneously know both the position and the momentum of a particle with perfect accuracy. The more you pin down one aspect, the more uncertain the other becomes.

In many ways, our lives are a lot like those particles... We can try to map our lives down to every detail: the four-year plan, the admissions pipeline, the dream resume. But the more tightly we grip the idea of certainty, and the more we try to be fixed in our positions in life—the more we lose momentum. And it's that momentum—the willingness to move forward, even when we don't have all the answers—that will define us.

The poet Walt Whitman asked a question that feels hauntingly familiar today. In *O Me! O Life!* he writes:

“What good amid these, O me, O life?”

It's the question behind every moment of doubt. Every night you've asked if any of it matters. Every time you've wondered if your work is good enough, or if you are enough.

And Whitman answers this question—not with a solution, but with a truth:

“That you are here—that life exists [...]

That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.”

[repeat]...That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse...

That’s it. That’s the answer.

You are here. In all your uniqueness and uncertainty. And the world is not asking you to have it all figured out. It’s simply asking you to show up. And to contribute your verse.

So graduates, I implore you to ask yourself the question: what will your verse be?

There’s no one way to contribute. But there is a wrong way—and that’s to believe you have nothing to offer. Don’t let the size of the world, or the noise of it, convince you that your voice doesn’t matter. That’s the lie that silences too many.

We were never promised clarity. But we were promised the possibility.

So step into the unknown—not with fear, but with the fierce conviction that uncertainty is where life begins. It’s where the powerful play happens. It’s where you begin to write your verse, line by line, moment by moment, day by day.

To the class of 2025, I don’t know where you’ll all end up. But I know this:

You are here.

You made it.

The world is waiting.

And your verse—

It’s going to be unforgettable.

Congratulations.