

# Valedictory

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I would like to ask all my fellow graduates to look around at each other. Notice anything? We are all wearing the exact same outfit. The only distinction is between males and females. And it's not even comfortable. Does this make sense? No. And yet we do it anyway. Why? Because until now we've been treated as children.

We've been told what's right and what's wrong. We've been told what to think and what to do. We've been force-fed propaganda at every turn—whether from friends, family, teachers, or media. For our whole lives up to this point and beyond, outside forces have tried and will try to make us do what they want. But it is now time for us to think for ourselves and do what is right.

But there is no universal right or wrong. We are free individuals, and each and every one of us must decide for him- or herself what is right. As Jean-Paul Sartre said, “You're free, choose, that is, invent.” Once one chooses what is truly right for oneself, he or she will not be wrong. While we have been molded for eighteen or so years in many ways, we now have the opportunity to reinvent ourselves.

But we must do these things:

We must think. If we do not think for ourselves and make our own decisions, we are giving up our potential—even our right—to be individuals and find meaning in life.

We also must act. Thinking is necessary, but worthless unless something is done with the ideas. Sartre also said, “There is no reality except in action... dreams, expectations, and hopes warrant no more than to define a man as a disappointed dream, as miscarried hopes, as vain expectations.” Furthermore, if we think but don't act, then we are simply letting the thoughts and actions of others rule our world. And let's not get stuck in the mode of making excuses for our lack of action while allowing time to slip away. Sartre exaggerated this fault by writing “three o'clock is always too late or too early for anything you want to do.”

Now, I'm not suggesting that you not listen to anyone or act on every impulse, but that you consider all options and make your own choices. This is what I hope for each one of us in the Novato High graduating class of 2001: as we go out into the world and live our separate and distinct lives, we will each question everything given to us, thoroughly ponder all of our choices, and do what we think is right. More simply put: question authority, but assume responsibility. So go, live your life, and find your own, unique happiness.