

8th May 2022

Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, graduands.

Congratulations, graduands, on completing all the work it took to reach this point today – your graduation day. I hope you are proud of what you have achieved already and looking forward to what will come next in your careers.

I want to talk to you about what's important. Obviously, I have been reflecting on sharing with you something that has helped me to reach where I am now – Principal of a respected public secondary school - but it turns out I don't think that is so important. For the record, the way I have ended up where I am could not have been more conventional. My parents made sure I had the best education available, I went to university, found work and worked my way up through the ranks. I did not have to defy the system or fight injustice. I just worked hard, took good advice and made good decisions. Most importantly, I have loved my job. Incidentally, the first bit of good career advice I took was from my mum when I was 14 and choosing my subjects for Year 10. She said, "choose what you like and what you're good at, and you'll end up doing something that you like and that you're good at".

Instead, I thought I'd focus what does make me unique and, ironically, I think it's the same as what makes everyone else unique – the individual ways we connect with each other, which feeds directly into why I love my work. I am frequently amazed by the accidental feedback I receive that tells me what people like about me. As the boss, I am often asked for advice by members of staff and I clearly have some stock adages that appear regularly. One of them is, "you'll need to be the adult in this situation". In subsequent conversations these staff members will say to me, "I was being the adult like you said, Fleur." I'll be honest, even after thirty years, it still amazes me that people consider my advice worth listening to!

My relationships with young people, though, are the most important and wanting to be successful in that regard is, of course, why I became a teacher. I teach English and History and I read aloud a lot. My English lecturer throughout my Graduate Diploma made it very clear that reading should be a joy for young people and reading was not joyful if it was laborious, so he encouraged us to read aloud and demanded that we do so proficiently – we were even assessed on it. I took this advice to heart and I read to students – even in secondary school – sometimes just for pleasure and no other purpose. This is the one aspect of my work where students tell me I'm "really good". I don't even ask them and they volunteer this information – most unusual in adolescents who are a notoriously tough crowd. Reading aloud to students has now become an act of service, rather than a teaching tool, and I delight in it.

So far, my – I hope – sage pieces of advice are these: keep doing what you like and what you're good at; remember that people listen to everything you say, so be careful; and acts of service will bring you joy. The final one is this: remember where you came from and why you're doing what you're doing. When things are really difficult you'll need that certainty to come back to. Margaret Atwood explains this much better than I ever could in my favourite poem, so I'm going to read it aloud.

"You Begin" by Margaret Atwood from *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English*, edited by John Leonard

Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987.

**You Begin**

*Margaret Atwood*

You begin this way:  
this is your hand,  
this is your eye,  
that is a fish, blue and flat  
on the paper, almost  
the shape of an eye.  
This is your mouth, this is an O  
or a moon, whichever  
you like. This is yellow.

Outside the window  
is the rain, green  
because it is summer, and beyond that  
the trees and then the world,  
which is round and has only  
the colors of these nine crayons.

This is the world, which is fuller  
and more difficult to learn than I have said.  
You are right to smudge it that way  
with the red and then  
the orange: the world burns.

Once you have learned these words  
you will learn that there are more  
words than you can ever learn.  
The word hand floats above your hand  
like a small cloud over a lake.  
The word hand anchors

your hand to this table,  
your hand is a warm stone  
I hold between two words.

This is your hand, these are my hands, this is the world,  
which is round but not flat and has more colors  
than we can see.

It begins, it has an end,  
this is what you will  
come back to, this is your hand.

You will always need to know why you are doing what you are doing and my experience is that it feels better if what you are doing helps somebody else.

Congratulations again, and good luck.

Fleur Roachock  
Principal, Grant High School