

Class of 2021, I have a few minutes to speak to you as you reach this important milestone in your education. There's a song at the end of the musical *Hamilton* for George Washington called "One Last Time." This is my "One Last Time."

We've been through a lot together in your high school years: hurricanes, earthquakes, a pandemic and more. The past year has not been easy for anyone and it will take time for us to return to normal. You might not realize it now, but I am confident that you are better people as a result of the adversity you have experienced. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "Terrible afflictions and heavy sorrows are our educators." I believe the past few years will make you positive change-agents in the future.

The average person hears about some crisis or challenge in the news, but is only one news cycle away from forgetting about it. I believe that when you face a challenge in the future, you will feel it at a deeper level. You'll know it in your gut. The ability to identify and share in the struggles of others is called **empathy**. And research shows that empathy is a key element in successful leaders. Through tough experiences and the education you've had in a community of kindness at TASIS Dorado, you should have developed empathy.

What makes the mission and culture of the TASIS family of schools unique in Lugano, England, Portugal and Puerto Rico? In Switzerland, above the doors of the TASIS library are the words "Verum, Bonum, Pulchrum" -- Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. These are called the "classical, transcendental virtues" for their importance. Aristotle's basic insight was that all humans have the capacity for excellence through repeated virtuous action. These virtues stand in contrast to the messages we receive constantly via the media and our society that life is about striving for money, fame, power, and status symbols.

In fact, when we speak of "Striving for Excellence in a Culture of Kindness" at TASIS Dorado, we are really making reference to these virtues. In your years with us, we have urged you to work hard, pursue wisdom and learn to love what is good. To seek good things for their own sake and to seek honors only when those honors are worth pursuing. Like Aristotle, we believe that true happiness is more attainable for those who pursue virtue. Our goal has been to develop excellence of mind and character in you, so that you go forth from TASIS Dorado as more fully human and free, with hearts of integrity and courage. Without virtue, there is no true success. Character is key! For a good and happy life, go out into the world strong in character!

In many neighborhoods in Puerto Rico, you can find roosters and chickens roaming about. It's a beautiful thing to watch how a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. They follow her everywhere and watch her every move. When they're tired or cold, they tuck themselves under her warm, comforting wings.

The view from an eagle's nest is very different. Eagles usually build their nests high up on a rocky ledge. As their chicks grow, they watch their parents soar off in search of food. When they are ready, the young eagles stand on the edge of the nest. The wide horizon stretches before them. Somehow, they gather the courage to jump and fly.

One of the major turning points for parents is when we realize we are raising not chickens, but eagles. Parents, let your tears flow as your children launch, but know that your fledglings are ready to soar!

Lastly, I want to remind you, students, that you are ambassadors. You represent your family, TASIS Dorado, and your island. Here's a story to explain what I mean.

Recently, I listened to a [TED Talk interview with Jon Chu](#), the director of "Crazy, Rich Asians" and the soon-to-be released "In the Heights," written by and starring Lin Manuel Miranda. Chu's mom came from Taiwan and his dad from mainland China. His parents dreamed of moving to America and came to the San Francisco Bay Area, where they started a restaurant called Chef Chu's in 1969, which is still there till to this day.

The interviewer asked Chu why he wanted to direct "In the Heights."

Chu answers, "I saw 'In the Heights' back in 2010. I didn't have a sense of purpose yet. But I was crying during that show on Broadway, because I saw my immigrant family. I came from a Chinese family, a working family that took care of each other. And that's what this show was about, this idea that every generation can see a little bit further than the generation before... I felt that... And it was about dreams. We were taught to dream really big when we were young. So I always thought that that's what I'm bringing... I understand I'm not Latino. I'm not from Washington Heights. I'm all California kid. But that core - I got it, and I could communicate that.

I'm so glad I did ["In the Heights"] after "Crazy Rich Asians" because it woke me up to seeing people watch a movie, realizing they're not alone in that struggle and that Asian identity crisis, and then going out to eat afterwards the same food you just saw in the movie. To me, that was so powerful to experience.

So going into making "In The Heights," I protected those things. Like, all right, you tell me, what are the [Latino] traditions? What are the sauces I need to have on this table? Where is everyone sitting? Making "Crazy Rich Asians" gave me the experience to know, make room, and make time to have those conversations."

Chu's parents experienced prejudice and anti-Asian vitriol in their new country. Chu continues: "[Growing up], when I would see someone treat my dad poorly and he would treat them nice right back at the restaurant, feeding them food. I would be like, Dad, they can't talk to you like that. And, you know - my dad would say, you are representing - we represent. That is probably the first time those people know a Chinese family intimately. And my responsibility is to treat them kindly and fill their stomachs, so next time they see another Chinese family, they won't treat them like that."

"My mom and my dad did what they could to give us safety, to give us confidence, to give us things they didn't have, to build the America that maybe wasn't, but what they really wanted it to be, what it had to be for them to survive. America is the idea of what we're making. It's not what we are. It's what we all want it to be. Every generation has to keep getting us closer. That's what I want my stories to tell. I want you to come to the movies and come out of it feeling hopeful, not naive, but hopeful that if we all do our little piece, that we can meet this moment that is begging us to meet."

Graduates, you, too, are representatives. You will encounter good-hearted people and ignorant people as you venture out. You will meet people who have no idea where Puerto Rico is. How will YOU respond? As a TESIS Dorado graduate with a strong identity, we want you to have confidence, empathy, the ability to forgive, and the strength to build bridges. Some day, after graduating from college, in your place of work you may be setting the table for others. Who will enter that space and will they think, "Wow! Not only do they welcome me, but they have already thought about me!" Will the disabled person, the one in a wheelchair, or the blind person, feel welcome? Will the marginalized, immigrant person? How about the person who doesn't look like you? If you build bridges and cross barriers, you have the opportunity to lead by developing true diversity and inclusion. In relationships, when people are truly seen and heard--when we take time to listen to one another's stories--our hearts open up and we make the world a better place.

In the words of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, and the Gospels, the most important thing of all is to love your Creator with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Class of 2021, we are so proud of you! We wish you a virtuous life of true success! Be an ambassador! Congratulations and all the best to you! God bless you and God bless TASIS Dorado!

Ladies and gentlemen, another round of applause for our graduates, please!