

2026 Senior Address

by Daniel Shew and Hanna Tomiyama

INTRODUCTION

Parents, Faculty, Students, Family, and the One and Only Class of 2026, Good evening.

We are here to celebrate an incredible milestone. Along with the laughs, tears, and unforgettable moments that we have shared together, we have also experienced a deeper truth: our time together has been defined not by predictable paths we planned, but by the unexpected moments that broke those plans open – unexpected moments that demanded not just our endurance, but shaped our growth.

Looking at this podium, you may have noticed the non-traditional number of people delivering this speech. It is not one voice speaking to you tonight, but two! Unexpected isn't it? But that's exactly why Daniel and I chose to do this. Together, we wanted to show you all a snippet of the class of 2026's unexpectedness.

As we look back, there are so many moments that shaped us. The unexpected, everlasting Kyoto Trip Legacy. The unexpected pandemic that tested our integrity & character. The unexpected losses and hardships that tested our strength. And the unexpected moments that shaped into memories created together – memories that will remain a constant reminder of who we were, who we are, and who we will become.

GRATITUDE

We would like to take a moment to thank our parents and all the parents in this room for their sacrifice and love. I know there are moments that we can drive you crazy but, truly we would not be standing here without your support and love. Thank you. Let's give a round of applause to all the parents.

In addition, as this class steps into new paths tomorrow leaving behind our textbooks and classrooms, we will NOT be leaving behind the lessons and the values that all our beloved teachers and CAJ staff have instilled in us. We are forever grateful for your sacrifice and love as well. And with that in mind let's give a round of applause to all CAJ faculty.

THE JOURNEY

What a journey it has been!

Starting from middle school, we all entered the locker filled hallways with hopes and high expectations. But that was the year that the unexpected hit: the Covid-19 pandemic.

We were in sixth grade when the whiteboards turned into our computers, the pens turned into the keyboard mouse, and the classroom turned into our bedrooms. Have we TRULY recovered from the TikTok/YouTube doom scrolling habit that engulfed all of us.. NO NOT REALLY, but coming back and seeing everyone grow 10 cm taller, with voices lower, and hairstyles changed is one of the moments I will never forget. And yet, even after distance learning we somehow picked up our class dynamic right where we left off. That next year we shared a moment that we all laugh about even to this day when we hear this five letter word: KYOTO. How we can forget our beloved, iconic, Kyoto Trip of 2022 that forever changed our class image.

Then came high school. What a time.

Dealing with the demanding, gruesome preparation of AP exams, injuries coming to the knees left and right – literally, but also with the reality that the day we will be leaving each other and this community is approaching real soon. Every year our realization progressed. As sophomores we thought “We've still got time.” Then as Juniors, we were all like “GUYS we are taking APs in a few months, あと one more year.” And now, we look at each other and ask ourselves: “How are WE the ones standing at the podium tonight?”

THE PIVOT

And now, having lived through our final year as high schoolers, we've realized that graduation isn't just one big day: it's the culmination of hundreds of untold goodbyes and “last times”.

Senior year, as we've all now experienced (look at the class), is full of these “last times”: the last time in a certain classroom, the last time running up the stairs to avoid being tardy, or the last time going to 100 Lawson before it got taken down; I know, that one was a shocker for me too... but a realization I had was that in an eerie way, important moments in times like these are rarely announced to us. There's no grandiose reveal, no spirit in your ear to remind you, nor a notification on your phone saying, “HEY, just a reality check, but this is the last time you'll ever be doing this.”

I still remember my realization of this fact like yesterday. It was the last practice with my volleyball team, and as my fellow teammates and I talked about

how crazy of a feeling it was, we decided to step on the baseline of the court we've played countless hours on and bow one last time.

We've grown accustomed to the flow of time, but it's pretty terrifying once you think about it for a moment. Even as you all sit here listening to us, seconds that you can NEVER regain are ticking by. And after my realization that time is continuous, it felt like every precious moment was constantly slipping through my fingers. I obsessed over time management, idolized productivity, and rushed through every minute to optimize for the "least time wasted"—whatever that meant. This striving for perfection, however, didn't make me feel secure at all. In fact, it made me increasingly paranoid and stressed, and led me to push people away. As I sat alone in front of my monitor with a perfectly time-blocked week on Google Calendar, I honestly felt emptier than ever.

THE THESIS

We still find ourselves treating time like a currency that we have to hoard, protecting out of the paranoia that we'd do something we would regret. We treat our lives like a checklist of milestones, hoping that the "next big thing" we have our eyes on will finally bring us true fulfillment. But here's the truth: True fulfillment cannot be hoarded or scheduled. It is found in the moments we did not plan—in the shared life of this community. The unexpected moments that defined our class are not disruptions to our lives; they were the moments that made them all the more meaningful.

Fulfillment doesn't come from how much time you can protect, but from how much you're willing to share. We can even see this in the unexpected moments that make this class so special. We never planned to make the friends we did, experience the moments we've had, and mature into the people we are now. And yet, when we look back, we can acknowledge that the small moments that grew into meaningful ones are exactly what our TIME here at CAJ so, so precious.

It's the moments like these— when funny chants for the Thailand color teams such as "Paku Paku Pakuchii" or "Ao Ao AOWW"— fired up our competitive spirit and made the memory significant.

And it's the moments during our class events such as the Junior Year Bonfire Event where we got to vent our school stress, burn our chemistry packets, and toast our

marshmallows while sharing silly stories and creating lasting bonds with each other.

It's the moments in the airport lobbies where we killed time by playing card games, dancing, and having meaningful conversations with classmates we'd otherwise never have the chance to talk to.

It is the moments during the preparation of the senior talent show where we showed class solidarity: standing up for our classmate in the midst of pure chaos—too much tardiness, lack of attention, and hearing lots of Mr. Lindsey's "Where is SO & SO?"— all for our hard work to pay off in the end with THE BEST senior talent show this school has ever seen... right guys??

CONCLUSION

Class, look up, down, side to side and look where we are right now. The final day has arrived. We have finally managed to sit in our blue cap & gowns and are ready to move that tassel to the left side of our cap. We are now able to sit back and look back not only on the big moments of our year— such as wins, accomplishments, and acceptances— but also the small, intimate moments together that will hopefully make us giggle to ourselves and earn the stares of strangers and our future classmates.

Even now, here on this stage, it feels surreal for us to tell you all that there won't be many more of these memories to be made with you all. A part of us wishes to have one more year, month, or day together as a whole class and appreciate what we've taken for granted while we've been at CAJ. But now, we've earned our independence, and are ready to spread our wings and scatter across the globe, changing the world in our own ways. But as we tread our own paths, aiming to live a life where we could look back on our journey and say with confidence that we experienced each moment to its fullest, remember that just as how our moments as a class showed, the most valuable memories will be made through the **unexpected**, only found through a willing heart and a present mind.

And with that being said, we'd like to finish as we've started and express our gratitude to you all one last time:

To each and every one of you all: Thank you all for giving me the courage and faith that I couldn't find in myself, motivating me to put myself out there even when I didn't feel worthy to.

Thank you for the ヤッホー's and quick hallway conversations that turned ordinary school days into something worth remembering.

Thank you for looking past my worst, seeing me in my best, and pushing me when I needed it most.

Thank you for transforming my own simple only-child life, into an interesting one that I could share with 41 siblings.

Every one of you made our high school experience as precious, dynamic, and clip-worthy as it was, and we wouldn't have wanted to experience it with anybody else.

Congratulations, Class of 2026! Thank you, and good night!

2026 Graduation Address

by Yukiko Howard

Knights of 2026,

If I were to write a letter of recommendation for you, it would begin like this:

Dear admissions office,

It has been my greatest honor to serve this class as their Academic Counselor. They have, to say the least, kept me on my toes.

I first met this class in 8th grade, through the infamous case we all now call "the Kyoto trip." Throughout the ordeal, one thing I saw very clearly was this class' intense loyalty to one another. At the time, I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But over the years, I have realized that their loyalty comes from their ability to truly see each other for who they are.

This class has continued to baffle me. But when I have questioned their behaviors, most often one of them would say to me, "Nah, Mrs. Howard. You just don't know them. They really have a good heart".

And I agree. I have seen their heart. In fact, this class has taught me what it means to see.

So, class of 2026, today I want to talk about how I see you, then how God sees you, and lastly how he will continue to watch over you.

First, how do I see you?

I have seen you face your fears and your difficult tomorrows with courage.

I've seen you make mistakes... I've also seen you get back up, even when your future seemed uncertain.

You've shown us all why life is worth living by reflecting Christ's love, his strength, and his creativity – even if you didn't recognize it. You are scholars, musicians, athletes, leaders...and sometimes clowns. You've served your community, led teams, created, and competed.

You've made me laugh, made me cry — and, yes, given me a few gray hairs along the way.

I've seen you grow.

I've seen how your identity as a wrestler was stripped away by injury, but you limped through our hallways with your head held high. And you used your elevator pass to give your friends free rides to the third floor.

I've seen you discover yourself behind your drum kit, exploring the unique rhythms of your personality in your drum solos.

I've seen you step onto the court in your first Varsity games: your excitement and your fear. And I've seen you become team captains.

I've seen you cry over bombed tests, because the score didn't reflect your hard work. And I've seen you refuse to give up.

I've seen your smile when you took the time to look up from your book and share the pictures you took of the birds in Thailand. I've felt your warmth.

I've seen your character being questioned. And I've seen you stay true to yourself and to God, finding your security in him — as he gives you the strength to rise up and become a great leader.

I've seen your heart breaking as life outside of school wore you down, but you still stepped up for the people who needed you here.

I have seen you go through all of this. And I see you now. But not only do I see you. More importantly, God sees you.

So, next, let's talk about how God sees you.

God sees the parts of your story no one else does — your inner struggles, your strongest doubts, your quiet victories.

He sees your deepest hurts and wounds. But for Jesus, seeing means so much more. As a man, he feels your wounds. And as God, he heals your wounds — if you will let him.

On the cross he bore your wounds. He carried those wounds to the grave. Oh, but this isn't just a story

about sacrifice. That wasn't the end. On the third day, he rose! He is alive, and through his wounds you are healed. This healing can begin now. He sees you. He's waiting for you.

Hagar from the Bible described her God, your God, as El Roi — “the God who sees me.” She was caught in the middle of high key drama and did not know what would become of her life. But God showed up and spoke into her fears. Relieved, she exclaimed the name El Roi.

Just like God saw Hagar, God sees you. And just like Hagar, you can take heart because he will continue to watch over you. As the excitement of graduation fades and the challenges of adulthood rise up to meet you, know that you are not alone. El Roi will watch over you.

So, lastly, let's talk about what it means for God to watch over you.

There is a Native American rite of passage into adulthood where a boy is led into the woods in the middle of the night and left alone in the darkness. It is a test of courage and grit. Some call it a “vision quest,” a moment meant to force a young man to look deeply into his own soul.

Imagine that boy. It is a dark night in a lonely forest. There in the silence, he sits hungry and alone. He hears nothing but his own heartbeat interrupted by the snapping of branches in the distance. Every sound feels like a threat. Even the brush of grass against his skin makes him shake with fear. Surrounded by the unknown, he is convinced he is completely alone.

But when dawn finally comes, he notices a figure, and sees that he is not alone. His father is standing nearby with a bow in hand. And the boy realizes that his father had been watching over him the entire night, ready to rescue him.

Oh the relief that boy must have felt to see his father standing tall and strong above him. Ready.

Like this boy, you are not alone. In whatever dark forest you find yourself lost, remember, your heavenly father sees you — he feels your fears and he knows the chaos closing in around you. But he watches over you through it all. Ready to protect you.

And if you find yourself lost in the forests of life, if you lose track of time, remember it's always Knight time. You are a Knight serving the ever-watching King. Because of him you can be courageous, devoted, and unwavering in loyalty. You are a knight. You will always be gold and BLUE.

You made me say "blue". Hold on, a little throwback to Thailand. Parents and guests, please allow me to give a little context. During our senior trip to Thailand, the seniors were organized into color teams. And each senior was given a number. Then, to ensure the safety of our teams throughout our adventure, before and during EVERY activity, our teams counted off.

And our head counts sounded like this: BLUE TEAM, are you ready?! Zero!
Tyrone calls Green Team
Ryan calls Red Team
Morris calls Yellow Team

Daigo, will you do the honors. All the knights, current and alumni, in the audience, I want to hear you.

Knight time chant

Remember, it's always Knight time. You are a Knight serving the ever-watching King. Because of him you can be courageous, devoted, and unwavering in loyalty. You are knights.

Seniors, as you walk across the stage, we will count you off one last time. We will see you and recognize your achievements. One last time.

Tonight – and for the rest of your lives – know that El Roi is watching over you.

To help you hold onto him during the trials and triumphs of your life, I want you to remember one image, one kanji. In Japanese, the word 見る (miru), "to see," carries the idea that eyes don't just observe. Picture the kanji: it is 目 (eyes) – with legs.

Your eyes, they move. They lead you.

What you choose to see will determine where you go.

What will you fix your eyes on? And where will you go?

My prayer is that you fix your eyes on God, who saw your wounds, who bore your wounds on his hands, and

who stretches out his arms to say, "I got you". Go after him.

Dear CAJ community – I wholeheartedly give the class of 2026 my highest recommendation.