

Isabel Shelby  
Valedictorian Address

Weeki Wachee High School, Class of 2025

Good morning class of 2025, family, friends, of the community and thank you for taking the time to be here with us today. For four years I dreaded giving this speech. I had no idea what to write about who I wanted to include or even what mattered the most to me. However, we sit here today at the culmination of years of hard work late-night study sessions and countless memories made within Weeki Wachee's halls. As we prepare to embark on a new adventure, I want to take a moment to reflect on something fundamental to our journey: words.

Words are the building blocks of our understanding, the currency of our communication and the very essence of our thoughts, they have the power to inspire to heal to unite and yes to divide. Throughout our academic careers we have dissected them in literature, constructed them in essays, and debated their meanings in classrooms, but words are more than just tools for academic exercise they are the lifeblood of our interactions and the architects of our realities

Consider the power of a simple thank you, thank you to our teachers, staff, custodians, coaches, school resource officers, club sponsors, and principals for this day would not be possible without you. Thank you to Coaches Al and Kelly, Coach Johnson, Coach Croyle, Coach Hughes, Coach Clarke, Mrs. Ullven, Mrs. Cornillow, Mr. Gomez, Mrs. Krienes, Mrs. Ross, Mrs. Bouchard, and of course Mrs. Stacy, you all been the best mentors I could have asked for. Thank you to Mrs. Braden, as you have taught me so much in the past three years. I wouldn't be half of the graduate I am today without you. Thank you for introducing me to new creative outlets and always allowing me to interrupt your lunch hour.

Thank you to my family Nicole, Brett, Lynne, Emily, Abigail, and most importantly Alexis. Em and Abby plug your ears for this part. It was never a doubt that Alexis is my best friend. Alexis, I love you and your ability to keep me humble, thank you for sticking by my side even when times get tough. I know as your older sister I'm supposed to be a role model however I feel as though roles are reversed you have grown into the most caring and beautiful young lady, and I am so proud to call you my little sister. I love you and PS thanks for always letting me borrow your clothes.

Izzy and Kolbi, thank you, words simply cannot express how much I needed you two and you never left my side. Thank you for welcoming me into your families and teaching me what true friendship is. You are the two most selfless friends I've ever had the honor of having and I can't wait to see what we cook up next.

Daddy since I was a little girl all I wanted to do was impress you, yet even when I fell short you never let me forget how loved I am. You taught me that it's okay to accept help and that

I don't have to fight my battles alone. Thank you for everything you have and continue to sacrifice for me. I love you.

Mommy, thank you for giving me the world literally and figuratively. I'm so blessed to have a mother who wants to experience everything and give me the opportunity to do so as well. My mother is the smartest most determined woman I've ever met, she never gave me any idea that I couldn't do anything I put my mind to. You have always put my needs above your own and this award is as much mine as it is yours.

With all that being said you truly never know what others are going through. Life moves fast, someone right now is on the way to the hospital to say hello to life and others are on their way to say goodbye. It is important through all of this that we don't forget the most important thing: each other. It was recently when I realized the most important message, I could put in my speech was gratitude. The power of a simple thank you, the recognition that you're not alone, and while change may be quick and scary everyone is collectively going through it.

Now this may be getting long and boring and we all just want to hurry up and get our diplomas already but that's the beauty, we're all in this moment together and no man can ever enter the same river twice. Enjoy this moment and the anticipation being in the moment, because you get to.

Now listen you don't have to do anything, but you get to do everything. You don't have to be here at graduation, you get to. And you don't have to go to class, you get to. And you don't have to go to work, you get to. And you don't have to wake up in the morning, but you get to. Life isn't about having to do things, because you don't have to do anything, you get to. Someone in a hospital bed, different country, or a different situation is praying to do the things you get to do. For four years I dreaded giving this speech, from choosing the topic, to not making it too long, to keeping everyone engaged, I dreaded it. This year however I learned that I don't have to give this speech I get to. thank you for your time and good luck.