Good afternoon family, staff, faculty, and the graduating class of 2016,

Here we are once again. When I was informed that it was time for me to begin writing my valedictorian speech, my heart dropped. I didn’t know what to say or how to say it, being that my bashful demeanor has been my trademark since arriving here in eighth grade. And when I first met you all, I thought that everyone was so stuck up and mean. Nobody talked to me and instead of asking my name, people would walk right by and the ask the person behind me “Who is the new girl”. But as the years passed, I realized that it wasn't arrogance, but yet, it was the confidence that all you possessed. This is probably the most you've heard me talk and I assure you all, it was not by choice.

But to solve my original dilemma on what to speak about, I did as any other student would and asked Google. What do you say in a valedictorian speech? As I looked through the different search results, I was still stumped. I couldn’t really find anything that would be worthy enough to instill in you all today. Because honestly, what does having the highest GPA in our small class really qualify me to preach about? Grades don’t equal life experience. In my 17 years, I don’t think that I have experienced life enough to give you all a few words of wisdom. And when it all boils down, I am in the same position that you all are in. We’re young and just beginning to take those first baby steps off into the real world. So in place of giving advice, I will just give a few hopes for our futures.

I hope that the lessons we’ve learned throughout high school, and not just those from the textbooks, serve us well. With all of the projects, assignments, and papers we’ve had over the years, I think we’ve all realized that procrastination is not your friend. And some of the people around you that you call friends aren’t really your friends either. I think we've also learned that
you can't really depend anybody else to make things happen for you. It's your responsibility to handle business for yourself.

I hope that if you all go to college, you take it seriously. Admittedly, college is not for everyone but I hope that you all use your time there wisely. While college is supposed to be exciting, at the end of the day, it is still school. Expensive school at that. I don't think any of us have that kind of money to let go to waste.

I hope that those that choose to go to the armed forces or straight into the workforce, serve our country well and enjoy your time there.

I hope that if you have a God, you serve him.

I hope that when you all leave from this place, you don’t leave behind the people that matter the most to you. The ones that check on you often, or ask you little things like are you okay, are the ones that really care.

I hope that when you all change as you grow up, you change for the better, and for yourself. Not for your peers, or others around you. Never lose sight of yourself. And always remember that no one is holding you back -- you are the only one that can limit yourself.

And lastly, I hope that you all get what you want out of life. During our time here, I think most of us have become masters of persuasion. I remember sophomore year when I watched as a classmate turned his failing test grade into a passing one, by explaining his answers, and then ultimately lowering someone else’s. But I’m not sure if that’s a good or a bad thing. I hope that you all use it for good.

The group of seniors that I am looking at a today, are the survivors in a sense. We've been through the good times, and not so good times of change. In these four years of high school
at Thea Bowman Leadership Academy, we've been through three different principals, and majority, if not all of our the teachers that taught us when we first entered into the high school side, no longer work here. There have even been some changes in school policy. But as these changes took place within the school, we did not sit idly by, we changed with the school as well. Many of our classmates decided to leave but we did not. I know many of us talk about how much we hate the school and how at the end of every school year, there was always talk about transferring, but look at where we are now -- graduating seniors. As I stand here today and look into the crowd, I see future doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs.

Not everyone has a master plan for what happens after this part, but I wish that you all reach your own interpretations of success and happiness. They say that high school is the best years of your life, but don’t let that statement hold true. Go out and create more memorable moments. Life is uncertain and ever changing but the moments we create will last a lifetime. Make every moment count, and live your lives with no regrets. Be willing to try new things, regardless of fear of failure. Life is bigger than a new pair of shoes, life if bigger than having the best weave, life is bigger than knowing if little Johnny or little Susie like you. Life is about achieving the impossible and leaving your mark on society. Go embark on a new journey and don't forget to thank the family members, teachers, friends, and other influences that have helped bring you thus far.

I would like to give a special thank you to my mother for supporting me all of these years, and a special thank you to Ms. Guydon and Mrs. Johnson for constantly encouraging me and reminding of what I am capable of.

In closing I would like to say, congratulations to the class of 2016. You made it.