

**Graduation Commencement Speech**  
**May 7, 2016**

**By Michael N. Couick**

Thank you President McConnell, Chairman Padgett, Trustees, graduates and other friends.

When President McConnell asked me to speak to you, I asked a favor. Please let me talk to my people. I want to talk to those brave souls who put their chips down on a degree like history, philosophy, or anthropology. Those brave enough to follow their own dreams rather than to just lease out their lifetime. You are my people, and I stand before you with my degree in English Literature—with a fondness for the wit of Jonathan Swift and a passion for the poetry of Robert Browning—to say:

1. You can both make ends meet and make a difference
2. Knowledge is never wasted, and
3. Each of you has a purpose.

The Cistern Yard is beautiful. It has to be the most beautiful graduation venue in America. And why not! It is in America's most beautiful and historic city. Oh, to be 21 again for just today. I'd have a hard time choosing between listening to Runaway Gin or BYOG at The Pour House, or kiteboarding on a northeasterly breeze at Breach Inlet. Probably both — with a burger from Poe's sandwiched in between.

Take two trips with me this afternoon. Let's leave the "here and now" for at least a few minutes.

For our first trip, start by looking up at these majestic Live Oaks. Think of all they have witnessed. From acorn to gnarled giants. Close your eyes. (Really. Just for a minute.) Focus on your breathing. Relax. Breathe.

Now. Capture a mental snapshot of the answer to this question: "Where are you from?"

Yes, where are you from? What do you see? What do you feel? Some good, some maybe not so good.

Open your eyes.

Let me share my mental snapshot: I am nine years old. Laying on my back. In the middle of a pasture near Clover, South Carolina. Green grass, white-head cows grazing around me. I hear the call of a bobwhite. I smell wild onions and grass clipped by a mower. I watch the reds, the pinks, and the oranges of the celestial crayon box melt to form a sunset. All is good. All is well. I

# Elementary Valedictorian Speech Ideas

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