

Good morning everyone, and thank you for inviting me to speak at this National Honor Society induction ceremony for Southern High School. It is an honor and pleasure to be here.

I thought for a long time about what I wanted to say today, and I decided that rather than spend all my time telling you what I think about the topics I've chosen, I'd like to just ask you questions, and I want you to think honestly about what it means to you to be members of the National Honor Society. Feel free to chime in at any time – I've prepared the speech, but we can go off the script whenever we like.

So: what does it mean to you to be a member of the National Honor Society? Does it only mean another line for your college resume? Does it mean prestige among your peers, approval by your parents and teachers? Does it merely mean that you have met a certain grade point average and fulfilled the scholarship requirement for Honor Society membership?

Or does it signify something about the values you uphold? Take scholarship, for example. What does that mean to you? Does it signify anything about the way you *think*? Do you think more deeply than merely memorizing to make the grade? Do you think more critically than simply believing everything you read and hear? What else does scholarship mean?

What about service? Is it only a task you perform for a certain number of hours because you are required to do so, or have you thought deeply and do you care about the projects you have chosen? Have you been paying attention to the needs of your community – your family, your school, your neighborhood, your island, your planet – and have you done your part to help? What else does service mean?

And leadership – what does leadership mean to you? Does it mean that people follow you simply because you are domineering? Does leadership only mean that you have a special title after your name? Or does it mean that you empower the people around you to share in your vision, and that

you earn respect with your humility and commitment? What else does leadership mean?

As for citizenship – what is a good citizen? Have you noticed what dire straits our islands are in? Have you paid attention to our struggling schools, our failing utilities, our overstrained hospital, our dying economy? Are you willing to stand up and fight for your island? And I don't mean fight for it “when you're old enough” or “when you're done with school.” I mean fight for it now, in any honest and civic-minded way that you choose. You become good citizens as soon as you open your eyes and realize you have no choice but to act to save your community. What else does citizenship mean?

Character. Do you know what it means to be true to yourself? Do you know who you are? You can to a great extent choose the kind of person you want to be. I personally don't believe that we are destined to be one thing or another. We might be born with certain gifts, but we always have choices, and we are responsible for each choice we make – for everything we do or fail to do, for the way we treat other people, and for the values we uphold. Do you know what you stand for? Do you know what's important to you, and what you would be willing to fight for? Do you actually live by your values? There is a word for that: it's called integrity. What else does character mean?

The people who embody these qualities – scholarship, service, leadership, citizenship, and character – are, to my mind, the best hope for our Commonwealth. My challenge to you is to not wait until you are old enough, educated enough, or ready enough to do something good and significant to help your community. If your heart is in the right place, and especially if you are a scholar, leader, and good citizen of character who is dedicated to serving your community, who you are at this moment in time is enough, and we need more of you to act now.

Look around your school, your neighborhoods, your island. Figure out what you do best, and put your talents to good use in the service of your community and the issues you care about. Are you a good writer? Write

letters to the editor, start a blog, start a school newspaper, petition your government. Are you a good public speaker? Hold forums and debates among your peers – you don't need a lot of money to organize, and you certainly don't need anyone's permission to assemble. Are you artistic? Paint murals at your school, cover up graffiti at the bus stops and pavilions, teach art to younger children, write music or poetry that will raise people's consciousness. Good with your hands? Build something useful and beautiful for your school, your family, your village, or your island. Got a green thumb? Plant trees and flowers in your village and schools or start a community garden. What else can you do?

Do any or all of these things, or do something totally different, but don't do nothing with the talents that you have. And in all cases, do your research, ask good questions, don't be afraid to ask for help, and have fun.

The Commonwealth needs you. We all need you to care enough about this place to do something for it now and start thinking now about your plans for the future. Get the best education that you can while you're here, go wherever you need to go to get the training and experience that you need for the things you want to do in the future, but keep this community in your heart and mind and come back.

Congratulations to the new members of the National Honor Society, and my thanks to all of you once again for inviting me to speak.