

SPEECH BY MS ASHLEY HO (delivered by Mr Tristan Ho)
PRIME MINISTER'S VALEDICTORIAN AWARDEE
SOTA AWARDS 2018
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SOTA CONCERT HALL

It was the 26th of May 2017. In the groggy excitement of a Tuesday morning class party, Tanler, Megan, and I decided that we were going to be parents. We asked the fruit stall auntie for a cup, a satay stick, and an avocado, and @therealcharlietheavocado was born. We held a tiny hope that he would grow into a small avocado tree before we graduated. In the months of TLC that followed, his roots extended slowly into the water, and a small green shoot peeked out. This was until all further growth ceased in mid-September and the shoot turned brown.

The 6th of October—our last day in school—arrived too soon. We pronounced Charlie dead, and attempted to cremate him with a lighter and stray pieces of streamers. When that failed, we cracked him in half to find a puny green shoot staring back. But we'd already murdered him, and we had to bury him.

This is not supposed to be a eulogy for Charlie; this is a celebration of the Class of 2017, and a huge thank you to those who continued to believe in us, even during the times we appeared unsalvageable. Thank you, for not attempting to cremate us, and then break us in half.

We admit – we were an infuriating bunch. We really took our time—to get our work submitted, to settle down in the LT, to appear– but we always managed to pull through at the last second, in one way or another. It was probably also infuriating

how we managed to land ourselves in tragicomical situations on a regular basis, like when Raj, Tejas, and Zack caused a tap to explode because they were trying to fix it. But I guess bad things just happen to good people.

We were infuriating because we stood up for what we believed in – for the things we trusted we, and others deserved. We were sometimes foolish, and got ourselves into trouble, but this brand of tenacity is what we'll need to survive, to make a change. I'm sure some of our teachers are secretly proud that we speak up for ourselves, too, even if we were a cumbersome bunch. We know this kind of support is rare in many institutions.

Six years in this one, and it's still hard to pinpoint exactly what it is about "the SOTA experience" that makes it unique. But having arrived at the other end, we know there is a point to this school. My world has been changed by my cohort-mates, who've shared their idiosyncrasies and accepted mine, and continually inspire me with their work. I'm grateful to the teachers who believed in us enough to show us the world as it is, who trusted us enough to let us flail and fail.

In this way, we've been empowered to make things, to make things happen, and to be okay with being a little messy. By the end of our journey, splashing whatever we could with colour had settled into the everyday. Naturally, our goodbye to the school meant adorning the discussion booths with kids' party decor, and throwing a dance party in a cramped classroom just before Farewell Assembly.

While we laugh about these moments and at ourselves, we also know that trying to stay afloat during the 6 years was hard. Fortunately, the difference between Charlie's parents and those who've been supporting us, is that somehow, they saw the green sprout buried beneath apparent stagnancy. I'm grateful to my teachers—especially those who have been and are in the dance faculty—, my parents for their patience, my brother, my awesome friends, and everyone who's been part of this journey together. We might be cynical people, but we secretly love one another and the school, and we are thankful.

To the Class of 2017 and our juniors, here are some things I've learned in the past few months that I hope may inspire you:

One: SOTA and IB were stressful and emotional, but real life is even worse.

Two: Even if we don't know what to do with ourselves yet, at least we know there are some things we can do – and these things are pretty unique when we step out of school.

And lastly: This experience can never be recreated.

Let's keep the fire that has carried us to where we are now. From the Year 1 kids who spontaneously harmonised the national anthem—even if a large part of us lack musical prowess—, we've expanded into an array of projects and collectives we're proud of one another for. Regardless of where we're headed, there is no doubt that we are all already cultural producers. We'll create, share, and support one another in our practices.

And don't just take it from me – here's something that might mean more than all these words. This is how we bumbled around our six years in SOTA, or less, or more, hiccupping the whole way. This is *The last thing we make together for now*.