Alex Ning

Good morning, teachers, parents, guests, and the Class of 2026. When people say that challenges make you stronger, it sounds simple. However, when you are actually going through a challenge, it does not feel very simple at all. It can feel scary, stressful, and sometimes even overwhelming. My name is Alex Ning, and during my time at Clairbourn, I learned that challenges do not magically make us stronger just because they happen. Challenges strengthen us because hard things teach us how to become stronger.

For me, one of the biggest challenges at Clairbourn was adjusting to the rigorous classes and high expectations. Spanish tests, English projects, and even this speech pushed me in new ways. I remember sitting at my desk with pages of vocabulary words and grammar rules before a big Spanish test, feeling unsure if I could remember everything. I often worried about how to prepare best and felt nervous under pressure.

But those moments taught me something important. I learned that studying is not just about sitting down with my notes and hoping that the information stays in my brain. I had to figure out what actually worked for me. I had to learn my own study habits. That took time, and it did not happen all at once. Sometimes I had to try something, realize it did not work, and then change how I prepared for the next time. Over time, I discovered that facing difficulties and challenges helped me understand myself and how to grow.

This realization reminds me of Clairbourn's Code of Ethics, especially responsibility. Responsibility is easy to talk about, but harder to actually practice. It means doing the work, even when it feels annoying. It means actually preparing for a test instead of pretending that it will be fine. It means trying again when your first attempt is not good enough. At Clairbourn, I

learned that responsibility is not something that you suddenly possess; it is something that you build through small choices, learning, and improving each time.

More than anything, responsibility felt easier when I wasn't alone. My friends helped me in simple yet meaningful ways. Once, when an English book report overwhelmed me, my friends called and worked alongside me, easing my stress with their support. Sometimes, just having people who understood my situation helped make school feel better, even during hard work.

My time at Clairbourn was not just about classes, tests, and projects. It was also about everyday moments with classmates and friends. Those small moments matter because they are what make a school feel like a community. They remind us that growing up is not something we do entirely on our own, but alongside our friends.

James Baldwin once said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." This quote connects to what I learned at Clairbourn. Challenges do not disappear just because we avoid them. A hard test does not get easier if we pretend it is not coming, and a difficult project does not finish itself. The only way to grow is to face what is in front of us, even when we feel nervous.

That is also part of what it means to be a "scholar and leader with heart." A scholar is not someone who already knows everything. A scholar is someone willing to learn, even when they are faced with challenges, and the learning feels difficult. A leader is not someone who never feels unsure. A leader is someone who keeps going, takes responsibility, and treats people with respect. Having heart means remembering that success is not only about grades or achievements. It is also about effort, kindness, and how we treat the people around us.

As I leave Clairbourn, I am grateful for the people who made this place meaningful. I am grateful for my friends, who made stressful days better and gave me memories I will carry with me. I am grateful for my teachers, who challenged me and helped me grow, even when the work was not easy. I am grateful to my family for supporting me through my time here.

What I will take away from Clairbourn is not just what I learned in class. I will take away the lesson that challenges can teach me about myself. I will take away the study habits I built, the responsibility I practiced, and the friendships that helped me along the way. I will also understand that feeling stressed or nervous does not mean I cannot handle something; it just means that I am being challenged.

Graduating from Clairbourn is another challenge in its own way. It means leaving something familiar and stepping into a new chapter. While this is exciting, it is also quite uncertain. I think that is part of growing up. We are not supposed to know exactly what the future holds. We must take what we have learned and move forward.

To the Class of 2026, as we leave Clairbourn, I hope we feel proud of how far we have come, thankful for the people who helped us, the lessons we have learned, the friendships we have built, and hopeful for the new chapter that lies ahead. I am confident that, together, we are ready to face whatever comes next with courage, heart, and determination. Because sometimes the most difficult challenges are the ones that shape us the most. Thank you, and congratulations.