5th Grade Promotion Speech
June 13, 2022

Good evening, and thank you SO MUCH for inviting me to speak. We're going to start by talking about some feelings–and if we're going to share feelings, we need to look each other in the eyes and really see each other. [There's 105 of them; this will take a minute.] Yes, I see you…and you…and you and you and you!

Right, so we're all leaving Rock View…you're headed to middle school and I'm headed to some different kinds of work, and we all have some pretty strong feelings.

Raise your hand if you're feeling…
excited?
nervous?
proud?
sad?
powerful?
ready for a change?
I feel excited AND nervous AND proud AND sad AND powerful AND ready for a change!

Every one of those feelings makes sense, and because of the pandemic, and online school, and all the other big things going on in the world, our feelings are probably more mixed up than usual. And you! Your brains and hearts have been growing and developing through all this. You see the world in a different way now that you're 11, 12.

That's science, you know. When you get to around 11, there's a big surge of growth in the part of your brain that sees logical connections and thinks through decisions. You also understand now that there are a lot of kinds of people in the world, AND that each person is unique, AND not one of us is perfect, AND that we all have to share this world. So tonight we're going to consider that little word--maybe one of the first words you learned to read—the word AND. Say it with me: AND.

The thing about you, and me, and all humans, is that we have a lot of AND built into us. We might want to eat vegetarian most of the time AND love a good chicken nugget once in a while. We might love playing an intense game of football AND enjoy working in the peaceful garden. In my case, I'm done being a classroom teacher AND I still want to teach my favorite thing ever: poetry.

I read poetry, I write poetry, and sometimes my poetry gets published in a book like this one: IMPERFECT II, Poems About Perspective. You probably know that "perspective" is like point of view. It means looking at something from a certain angle or with a particular attitude.

Here's an example: you're at the beach, which is made of sand. Most people LOVE sand because you can scoop it, dig it, mold it, build it, drip it, make it into the coolest castles; you can even bury your sister's whole body in sand. From the perspective of FUN at the beach, sand is AWESOME.

But when it's time to eat your picnic lunch, that fabulous sand becomes a little problematic: sand on your hands, sand stuck to your water bottle, sand in your sandwich, sand between your teeth. From the perspective of LUNCH at the beach, sand can be downright ANNOYING.

So hmmm: sand is fun AND annoying? sand is good AND bad? sand is beautiful AND terrible? Yes, it is. At the same time.

And now, can you use your bigger smarter brain to look at things from the sand's perspective? We're going to read my poem on page 12. Whenever I point to you, it's your job to say "AND". Just "AND," and I'll do the rest. Are you ready?

POEM

The Bigger Picture

i am one particle among
million**s and**
billion**s and**
trillions of us
each of us our own particular
grain**s and**
shape**s and**
three-dimensional
crystal**s and**
infinitely numerous
color**s and**
formed through unimaginable
eon**s and**
from uncountable
eruption**s and**
erosion**s and**
somehow we are all called
sand

See how the tiny particle of rock can see itself as part of the bigger picture of a whole beach full of sand? That's perspective! Thanks for speaking the poem with me. Round of applause please!

And now, 3 things to take away today:

First, remember than each of is just one tiny particle among millions of people on this Earth, AND each one of us matters to the bigger picture of humanity. I matter not because I'm a teacher or a poet or a mom; I matter just because I'm alive here on this planet, loving and being loved. You matter, not because you're tall or smart or strong or popular; you matter because you're alive here on this planet, loving and being loved— AND we are all here on this planet. We are all called humans.

The second thing I hope you'll take with you is this: the willingness to use your bigger smarter brain in middle school to think from different perspectives, to see a world where none of us is perfect AND we all matter.

The third thing to take with you is your very own copy of this book! A lot of friends who love me helped me buy one for every single kid. You'll find it [on the table at the back] at the end of the program; the name tag is actually a sticker that you can put inside your book and keep forever.

Good luck to you and you and you, go well, and remember that everyone at Rock View loves you.