

Mrs. Schultz

AP Language and Composition P4

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The Number Above My Head

Spring Final Exam- Speech

All of our lives, thus far, have been spent in school. From pre-school to kindergarten to elementary to junior high, and now high school, school has been right with us, and as it goes on, it continues to breathe down our necks more and more, grasping our throats, choking us, as the schooling itself becomes more stressful and overwhelming. And during this time, if you are like me, you often curl up in the fetal position crying every other night asking yourself why it has to be this way. Why do we do this? What is so important that makes us feel this way, that gives us anxiety and stress? Grades. Grades is why we feel this way, not the school itself. In fact, if you were to be unfamiliar with the idea of grades, you would find yourself going to school to actually learn, to actually try to learn from mistakes instead of simply seeing these mistakes and labeling them “Fs.” Grades have defined us. These are the numbers placed over our heads, that ultimately show our worth as a result from the years spent in school.

Many people, unfortunately, start to live by their value based off grades, just like I have. I constantly worry about test grades, homework assignments, and quiz grades because I have become conditioned to do as such. I constantly check infinite campus to see exactly where my grades stand, and to make sure no discrepancies occur. I constantly feel insecure when receiving

grades on my work, whenever others around me receive better scores, decreasing the number above my head, decreasing my “value.” This feeling, of competition, of insecurity, of overwhelming stress, is what needs to change in my life, and possibly yours. This stress is clearly unhealthy, so why is it worth it in this race to nowhere? Last semester, I received my first two Bs in a long time. I was very bummed about this, but as I look back, I should not be at all. Bs are good! This system of determining value has been so detrimental to my self-esteem and confidence, when that should not be the case. We are here to learn and expand our knowledge to prepare us for the obstacles that the real world put in front of us. The real world does not attach a number or letter to your name that determines your value- you work to make that value known to others.

This problem is not purely a contemporary one- it goes back many, many years, for judging value is a part of human nature, and in some form or another, has been used in all cultures and societies. In the 1920s for example, during a time of prosperity and wealth, this number that was shown above peoples’ heads was their value in monetary terms. This is seen in Scott Fitzgerald’s, *The Great Gatsby*, as the characters Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Myrtle, and many others are considered important and valuable because of their immense wealth, which is portrayed through their mansion-like homes and elaborate luxuries, not commonly used by the poorer class. This way of thinking needs to change- value should not be based on commodities or possessions, but off of grit, compassion, and true personality.

Our current system for determining value has it all wrong. Our importance should not be determined by our knowledge of mathematics, or our ability to write, or our ability to correctly titrate an acid with a base, or our ability to correctly identify specific dates from our history, or our ability to speak another language, or our ability to effectively give a speech. It should be

determined by who we are as individuals, as citizens, and as human beings. So, hopefully next time someone asks you what your GPA is or what grade you receive on an exam, you will answer with complete confidence: “Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn.”