

Kylan Thompson – Prefect (Arts & Culture)

Keynote Speech 2025

What ails thee?

Good Morning Mr Featherston, Dr Swann, Mr Angus, Miss White, teachers, my parents, sisters, Grandee, Lulu and boys.

What ails thee? This is a famous line from King Arthur on his journey to obtain the Holy Grail. Arthur must ask the wounded Fisher King, 'the correct question', to move on his quest and heal the land. Many before him have failed until Arthur asks this one question.

This question is posed to the Prefect cohort each year as a way to think about the change we need to instil in the groups we represent.

It encourages reflection on struggles and obstacles. But instead of focusing on problems and qualms, let us use this same question to uncover a more positive reflection. Let me pose the same question to you in a slightly different light. Now.

What ails thee?

What is it that keeps you up at night? Was it that poor SAC result- or was it that game-winning goal after the siren that replays in your head over and over, boys streaming onto the field, badge worn with pride.

What makes your stomach turn? Is it really about failure- or are you just afraid that singing in the limelight, smile gleaming, audience cheering, won't be appreciated by those you call your closest?

What makes you tear up? Could it be disappointment after being triumphed - or is it that moment of pure bliss, hard work paying off and achieving academic goals you had promised yourself quietly is all you ever wanted.

What. Is. Your. Passion.

To say you haven't passion is to say you aren't human. We are motivation-driven animals, all looking for our next fix of that pure euphoric feeling that comes when we entertain our passions.

My passion, to nobody's surprise, is the arts. The first full playthrough of a new song on the cello compares to nothing else. Three to four weeks of painstaking, slow moving sections - to finally put it all together and be able to feel proud of myself. The inexplicable feeling that I get as the final curtain closes, streamers falling from the roof, hands stretched out to the beams above as our closing night of the production concludes.

I am certainly not here to tell you what your passion is - only you will ever know the buzz that truly comes from passion.

Take a second now to think of what your passion might be. What is a moment where you felt as I so described. Where you felt proud, motivated - alive.

If you're sitting in the crowd right now, scratching your head, not thinking that you have felt so strongly about very much, then that is ok. What is more important is what you decide to do with this reflection. We all share such an amazing opportunity that is this incredible school. No where else provides a more diverse range of things to do and unfortunately many of us don't realise this until it's too late.

To the younger boys present today. Are you really not choosing to do Drama or Music or Art or a language for another year because you're better at Bus.Man? Or are you just too worried to admit that maybe you do find perfecting a self portrait engaging, you do find playing instruments as a group refreshing, or you do find satisfaction from watching a killer Drama performance.

I have many a friend who, even now in our final year of school, still tell me they regret abandoning that fun subject- The subject, any subject that really made it not feel like they were in a class... all in the pursuit of a conventional subject list.

Once you step out of the Quad for the final time, you become one of millions. There will be no one to encourage you to join choir, no one to suggest a certain club or sport that best suits you, no one to push you to try more things.

You'll hear it from me and a million times more. But time at school is fleeting. Please, please take opportunities and make the most of what we have here at BGS.

One day you will wake up-, whether it be a random morning during your third year of Uni or 10 years into your 9-5 life, and wish that you had taken that risk, wish you had done more with that thing, one thing that really motivated you.

You may very well only find your passion later in life. But no matter the stage we find our passion; we mustn't let it slip away.

Too many people cut down their own happiness just to conform to the norm, to make their parents happy, to protect themselves from judgment from their friends. They say, find a job that you love, and you'll never work a day in your life. Really, and I mean really, take that away with you. What is the point in wasting the little time we get as humans on something that isn't what we truly want?

If we are passionate about something, we will work on it, night and day.

The story about JK Rowling is one of both overcoming hardships and chasing passion.

Rowling experienced enough setbacks along her journey that the famed Harry Potter, arguably the most popular book series in modern history, almost never came to fruition.

After the death of her mother, escaping an abusive household and living as a single mum in poverty, the odds were stacked against her. But she didn't give up on writing, no. Shaping the Philosopher's Stone by hand on paper in a café whilst pushing her baby's stroller, she continued fuelling what drove her.

She was then rejected by 12 publishers. Failure seemed inevitable, but in true fashion of this keynote, she kept going, kept sharing her work, kept offering her passion. Until the small publisher, Bloomsbury, picked up her book, and the many, many bestseller awards.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood.

The moral: Passion mightn't be easy. Passion might belittle you, cut you down, make you break. But wouldn't you be proud of yourself to know that you really put effort into something that makes you hungry?

You don't even need to be amazing at that one thing in order for it to be worth it. I am by no means a talented Cellist, Eric Lu takes that title, or an angelic soprano, Philip Edselius has me beat every day. But it's the fact that I pursue these thirsts that means I'll never be anything less than contempt.

Boys. When you leave the Hall today, don't just simply discard all that I have said. I wish as a Year 7 boy, sitting in my 4th Secondary School assembly, I had heard about following my passion, and truly listened. True happiness comes from within. Only you will ever know what your passion is.

Comparison is the thief of joy. No one passion is better or worse than the other. But the man in life who follows his own passion will most certainly do better than the one who doesn't.

Thank you.