

CONFUSED: Be aware of details that don't fit with the meaning you are making. If necessary, stop reading, reread slowly, and adjust your thinking to match the author details.

For high school seniors, coronavirus brings a sad ending and unexpected lessons

In mid-March, on what turned out to be the last day of school, Annalisa D'Aguilar walked the hallways of her performing arts high school in Manhattan, New York. The subway had been mostly empty on the way to school that morning. Many of her fellow students had stopped showing up as fears of the novel coronavirus swept New York City, the hardest-hit area of the country so far. On that day, the school's typically packed halls were empty.

"It just felt insane to walk around and have no one there," D'Aguilar said in a phone interview from her Brooklyn home. "My friend said it felt like we were in a war. The next day they canceled school for everyone."

D'Aguilar is a senior at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. She's a drama major and had spent most of the year working on two productions that were set to stage in March and April. She'd learned her lines, hit her marks, knew every scene. Tickets were already sold.

One play included a choreographed dance to an instrumental version of the Lorde song "Royals." When she listened to the song on the weekend of March 27, she began to cry.

"I recognize that although these are all big things to me, it's small in comparison to what's going on in the world," she said.



Annalisa D'Aguilar, age 18, is a senior at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York City. Photo: Aisha D'Aguilar

Like many of the approximately 3.7 million high school seniors across the country, D'Aguilar has had the last stretch of school pulled out from under her by an invisible and unforgiving **menace**. Grades and final projects float in limbo. Close friendships have been socially distanced. And as the coronavirus cancels spring, it is leaving in its wake entire rites of passage of the ultimate year of America's K-12 schooling.

Prom dresses hang in closets maybe never to be worn. Senior trips have been canceled. Senior pranks abandoned. And at many schools, the graduation ceremony, high school's final triumphant act, is in jeopardy.

Students said they understand why the decisions have been made. Sacrifices are being asked of everyone, and making exceptions for them, they know, would only risk more damage. They're already seeing the cost up close. During the weekend of March 27, D'Aguilar learned her great-aunt tested positive for the coronavirus.

"It's easy to be really mad about something like this, but the only thing we can do to get rid of coronavirus is to give up some of these things," said 18-year-old Piper MacIntyre, a senior at Garfield High School in Seattle, Washington. "It's sad, but I don't feel cheated. It just feels unlucky."

In a sense, national trauma has accompanied members of this senior class all their lives. Most were born in the dark and often frightening year following the September 11, 2001 attacks. They were fifth-graders when a gunman killed 26, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. They were sophomores when another gunman killed 17 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The country has been at war externally since the members of this senior class were born and has been increasingly **riven** internally as they have come of age.

So perhaps seniors in this class have learned the hard way to be prepared for whatever is thrown at them.

"Everything is not promised to you," said Mia Jones, 18, a senior at KIPP DC College Preparatory, a charter school in Washington, D.C. "Things can be ripped from you at any minute. So you need to cherish everything."

Jones bought her prom dress last month but hasn't had it tailored. She's not sure she'll need to. She thinks the senior brunch at Union Market will be canceled, too. Few schools have said graduation ceremonies will be canceled, but many seniors are realizing it's a distinct possibility.

"That is what everybody has been working for all of our high school career," Jones said in a phone interview. "I would want that to stay the most. Even though it's just walking across the stage, it's a big deal. College isn't the path for all of us, and this is the last time we'll all be together."

At Lawton High School in Lawton, Oklahoma, Zac Shell and his friends have joked that they'll have to pick up their diplomas at a drive-through ceremony. But humor doesn't always work.

"We joke and try and make each other feel better, but I've had friends who have cried because they're so upset," Shell

said. "It's just all happened so quick. We're confused and dazed. For the rest of my life I'll remember this."

Shell said he asked a senior girl to the prom one day and school was canceled the next.

"We were just, like, well it was cute while it lasted," Shell said, chuckling.

For senior athletes, the shutdown of school brought with it the realization that their final spring season was over mostly before it started.

Joey Graham, a senior lacrosse player at the private Landon School in Bethesda, Maryland, said missing his final season at the school he has attended since fourth grade was crushing.

"I've always looked forward to being a senior, and a pretty large chunk of the year is being lost," he said. "And it's pretty heartbreaking."

But Graham, 18, took **solace** from an email his lacrosse coach sent to the players soon after the spring season was canceled, citing the team motto: "Be in control, be grateful and compete."

"He said, 'You guys need to carry these lessons with you no matter what you're doing. Be in control. Be grateful. Compete to keep your family safe and the older generation safe,'" Graham recalled. "It's a cool life lesson that through hard times you can get through by following those words."

Across the country, at Edison High School in Stockton, California, senior Dmetrio Cavens-Summers, a track athlete and football star, is also mourning the loss of spring sports. But he, too, has tried to keep everything in perspective.

Cavens-Summers lives with his brother and his mother. When his mother developed a cough a couple of weeks ago, he immediately thought the worst. "I'm not going to lie, I was scared," Cavens-Summers said. His mother recovered, but he continues to consume news about the coronavirus and post

updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on his Instagram account, trying to counter the wild rumors he has seen posted by others in his age group.

If prom and graduation are canceled, Cavens-Summers said, he'll roll with that. His focus now is trying to keep his wits about him.

"The world's going crazy. No one was prepared for this, but the best thing it has taught me is to be calm and be humble," he said. "I'm just keeping my mind focused on what I need to do and to stay calm for my teammates and my family."

While the disruption to these seminal high school events has been widespread, many seniors already recognize the historic sweep of this pandemic and how it will alter the world in ways big and small.

Seniors not planning on going to college will now enter a job market that has been devastated by the virus. Just weeks ago, the economy seemed to be humming along and help wanted signs were everywhere. That changed overnight.

There's uncertainty, too, for students planning to continue their education. Colleges and universities have been battered financially as well. Some seniors worry that their college career will be delayed. Others are waiting to hear if the financial aid they expected to receive is still going to come through.

Emma Dabelko, a senior at Athens High School in Athens, Ohio, is still deciding where to attend college this fall. But she knows what she wants to study — international development and global health — and is energized about next school year even as she mourns the loss of this one.

"Losing out on this American tradition and everything that comes along with that is really difficult," said Dabelko, 18. "It's definitely not always fun to be the people who have to live through a historical event like this, but it does happen. So in a way it's amazing to think about because this going to be such a major event that people will be taught about it and look back on it for a long time."

She said the pandemic could deliver lessons that might not have emerged in the classroom.

"It can be a learning moment for a lot of people to think about who we value and what we value in our everyday life," she said. "I know I'm going to value some of the small things that I hadn't before."

Write a 2-3 sentence summary of this article using the following vocabulary words.

mourn

seniors

value

miss

last

ORIGINAL CHOICE:

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Famous Speeches: Steve Jobs' Stanford University Commencement Speech



In this January 9, 2007, photo, Apple CEO Steve Jobs holds up an Apple iPhone at the MacWorld Conference in San Francisco, California. This was the day that the first iPhone was unveiled. AP

EXAMPLES FROM THE LESSON

graduation story live trust success

Steve Jobs delivered the commencement speech ~~to~~ at the Stanford Univ graduation. He conveyed that success requires trusting yourself while living out your passions. He delivered this message in three stories.

graduates drop out failure life heart

College drop out
Steve Jobs inspired Stanford Univ graduates to follow their hearts. He shared 3 personal stories about successes + failures in his own life.