

OUR KENTE EXPERIENCE

President Ruud, Mr. Ritter, Mr. Fenton, Provost Bland, Dr. Danford, faculty, staff, family and friends from far and near, fellow graduates, I am extremely humbled to be able to share in the intensity of emotions buzzing here today in this auditorium. Emotions like the love we are feeling around us, anxiety about not knowing what's next and the ecstatic joy for finally escaping 16 years of school, whew!! There's also sadness about the fact that ramen and 2am trips to Walmart will no longer be considered normal or that from after this point today, calling mom and dad to bail us out financially will no longer be "socially acceptable."

In this mixture of emotions, I am elated to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Class of 2018 and address this gathering on this momentous occasion.

It would be wrong of us to bask in the celebration and pomp of this event without acknowledging and thanking the tireless efforts of our parents, faculty and staff.

There is an African saying, "it takes a village to raise a child". Here we are, no longer children but adults who owe you a debt of gratitude. To our parents, guardians, relatives, faculty and staff for the love, time and energy vested into us; we say thank you!

Class of 2018, we made it!! Today we stand on the cusp of a time that will forever ring in our lives. Looking at the beautiful faces before me today, I cannot be more excited to be a part of this class and all the amazing things we have achieved. We must admit, we have quite a story. Ours is not a story to be told, but one intricately woven into the annals of Marietta College. Our story could be described as a beautiful tapestry; one made of multicolored threads of silk ready to be displayed for all to see. Our story reminds me of the KENTE CLOTH.

Now, if you know me you know I love everything about Ghana, my homeland. Whether you have had a taste of my cooking, seen my Facebook and Twitter pages painted red, gold, green and black or wondered why there is a guy who has a propped flag in his afro, you can tell it means a lot to me and as I reflect on our story, I am amazed at how symbolic a Ghanaian masterpiece is to our time here at Marietta and the meaning we can draw from the kente cloth.

As you can see, the fabric is a vibrant, colorful piece of art, woven together by very different strands of delicate threads to represent our varying backgrounds and the unique paths forged here at Marietta to arrive at this moment. Our cloth is peculiar and laced with experiences unique to our class. Surviving a flood our freshman year; Rest in Peace to all the cars we lost that night, witnessing a school protest, experiencing the loss of our exceptional friend, Joel, unite us to celebrate what a life worth living looks like.

The story of our experiences is important because despite all that is occurring around us in the world today, we see that beauty and victory can arise from a unity of differences. Here we are, staring at this garland of glory; our kente cloth.

The kente cloth does not only lace different experiences together; it is an experience in and of itself. Experiences that stand out and change the course of our lives. Moments that we would not change for anything in the world. For instance, finding treasure in a relationship with God, stumbling upon love for a significant other or better yet, discovering our life's purpose. For me a single moment stands out. The moment I found my deepest passion; one that satisfies me deeply and I am dedicating my life to. I was standing in the great room for an EXCEL community meeting looking around the room full of freshmen. Feeling fulfilled, I realized that the only thing I wanted to do for the rest of my life was help other people reach their potential. Fellow graduates, every single one of us has our own experiences, together making an incredible story.

Just like a light is not lit to be hidden under a table, so also our experiences should not be relished alone in the silence of our own soul. Class of 2018, today I invite you to join me in welcoming others to share in this experience. Making our kente cloth bigger than ourselves so that the influence of our story inspires others to create profound experiences of their own.

Another noteworthy fact about the kente cloth is that, no two are the same. Stripes, patterns, colors, textures, meanings and names. Our woven fabric is a testimonial to everything we have experienced. Today, the unveiling of our masterpiece to the world, is but a silent witness of a story unlike any other, one of victory, failure, stress, joy, friendship and love.

In addition, the kente cloth, although luxurious and intended for royalty, is made from a heavy fabric, and quite uncomfortable to wear. To bask in the glory it bestows, one must be willing to bear the weight of duty that comes with it. The kente cloth has, beauty with purpose.

Like each unique piece of cloth, no one has the same combination of talents, skills, passions, and Marietta experiences that we have. Each one of us has a specific role to play in the world. Like each strand, we hold up the work of art and together, our kente cloth is unlike any other, a tapestry ready to adorn the world with radiant beauty. Today we get to turn our individual and collective experiences into a relevant cloth of many colors.

Finally, each kente cloth has a name and a meaning attached. I choose to name ours, 'asem papa' which translates to good news. In an era, filled with bad news, may our kente flood the world with good news. Good news to paint a dull, colorless world with life and a multitude of colors. Good news to bring hope, hope to the destitute. Good news for all.

Class of 2018, as new paths open ahead of today, let us walk as PIONEERS with purpose, because we have an obligation to those who come after us. Our education will be meaningless

unless it radiates into the improvement in the quality of life of all around us. Armed with a liberal arts degree, we understand that this world cannot afford for us to live in a vacuum.

President Ruud, Mr. Fenton, Mr. Ritter, Provost Bland, Dr. Danford, faculty, staff, family, friends, fellow graduates, it has been an absolute delight to speak to you today on our last time together and I cannot wait to see, hear and partake of the kente experiences of the Class of 2018.

Baffour Paapa Nkrumah-Ababio