

How my Education at John Adams Academy Changed Me

When I was little I believed that money was the goal of life. That school was simply training for my future job, as well as how to be a good citizen. My parents migrated to America from Vietnam, taking with them the good and bad of Vietnamese culture. The good include the Vietnamese culture of respect to others, especially the elderly. This trait I hardly see in America today. However, alongside the good came the unquenching desire to gain material wealth, that I see many Vietnamese unhealthy strive for. Before I went to John Adams, I believed in material wealth being the end goal, now as I am about to enter the workforce I have a new end goal in mind, not to gain riches, but to better my soul.

Sixth grade was my first year going to John Adams; it was that year that introduced me to the classic books and mentors. Plato's allegory of the cave struck a deep hidden chord of truth within me, although I did not know it at the time. At this point I believed humans knew everything, not everything in the material world, like what's smaller than an atom, or every mathematical formula, but that we disproved all "superstitions". By superstitions I mean the non material forces of the world. That included God, the soul, objective reality, and virtue. I believed all these things were the primitive beliefs of ancient cultures, that humanity has thrown away all those false beliefs years ago, and can now focus on creating a utopian society, with reason not God as its center. So when I first read the allegory of the cave, I completely contorted the true meaning behind it to fit it with my worldview at the time. In the allegory, a man who lived his whole life in a dark cave, with no light except a fire, was brought out and taken to the real world. There, he realized that everything he saw in the cave was simply the shadow reflected from the

fire, and that only outside the cave was the true reality, that outside was a reality more true than in the cave. I believed that Plato was simply trying to tell us to live in the real world, that we shouldn't lock ourselves up in our houses like cocoons. I did not understand that Plato was trying to tell us to seek the truth of a higher reality, because I refused to believe in any reality higher than the one we are in. While I never admitted it, I believed in the saying that "seeing is believing". I wouldn't believe in any truth or God unless I could see it with my own eyes.

Another thing that struck me was the fact that we were reading books about heroes, who didn't seek power for themselves, but for a higher purpose. In the Trojan War, Achilles fought not for himself but for courage, and in A Tale of Two Cities, Sydney Carton sacrifices his life to save his friend. Both of these characters showed not just public virtue but also private virtue. I understood public virtue, to do good actions in front of others, but I never understood private virtue. Why should I be virtuous when no one is looking? There would be no benefit for me.

In the senior year, we read C.S Lewis's Abolition of Man. Lewis explains that the modern materialistic mindset will destroy humanity. That once men believe that men are mere elements, no different from monkeys, they will do unspeakable things to each other. They will use nature and science to dominate over other men, and will have no moral standard, because to them a moral standard is completely subjective, thus worthless. After reading this book, I realized that I was one of the men that Lewis talked about in his book. I saw humans as merely evolved animals, and that life was for gaining power and wealth for oneself. I realized that every book we read, every lesson on servant leadership, every core value, was taught not to imprison us in a set of harsh rules but to free our minds. For the first time ever, I believed that humankind was truly special, that there was an objective reality, that I was stuck in a cave of lies, and desperately needed to escape, and find the true reality. I finally understood that the 10 Core Values were

taught to us, not so we can be good members of society, which is a positive effect, but so we can practice them and improve our souls. Now I can admit that I know nothing. But as Socrates said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Even when I leave John Adams I will continue to follow the Core Values, continue to read the classics, continue to learn the art of servant leadership, not become rich, but to better my soul, which is a gift from my creator, that I shall never take for granted again.