

GUEST COLUMN: July 2026

Youths with opportunities they don't see Shekinah Bautista

Hello everyone, my name is Shekinah and I go to Samuel Ward Academy. I am standing up here today to talk about gratitude - specifically the lack of it when it comes to the opportunities we have every day.

Now, imagine this for a second.

What if your alarm didn't go off this morning? Not because your phone died, but because there is no electricity.

What if you wake up to cold air and rain dripping on your blanket, because the roof has been leaking?

What if your first thought of the day isn't "I can't be bothered to go to school" but it's "Where shall I find safety today?"

Now stop imagining. You are here, in this room, warm and dry. Surrounded by your classmates. That alone is more than what millions have.

So how does that feel? And when did we stop noticing?

I'm going to be completely honest with you. This morning, when my alarm went off, my first thought of the day was "It's too early, I'm tired, I don't want to get up for school." Maybe you felt the same thing.

But when there was an opportunity to create a speech about anything, I started thinking, and I couldn't stop thinking about the youth in other countries. Places where there is no school to walk to. Places where there is no roof, no safety, no guarantee of tomorrow. Young people our age who would do anything just to sit in a classroom. Just to hold a book. Just to have a teacher who shows up.

I was inspired to write this speech because I wrote about my own family. I was born and raised in the UK. But the rest of my family grew up in the Philippines without much. They didn't get to sit in a building like this. They couldn't even afford to think about school being difficult. But they worked, they sacrificed, so that I could.

I'm not saying you can't be tired, school can be hard, I understand.

I'm just asking, what if we looked at things differently? In a different perspective?

What if that exam stressing you, only exists because you have the opportunity to take it?

What if tomorrow morning, instead of complaining, we pause for a second and reflect.

What a privilege it is to have a childhood that isn't stolen by war or poverty.

What a privilege it is to fail an exam and be able to learn and retake it, not lose everything.

What a privilege it is to be you - right here. And not even know how blessed you are.

Maybe the real question isn't just "Am I lucky?" It's "What am I going to do with this day that someone else never got?" You don't have to be perfect; you don't have to love every lesson. Just don't waste it.

Someone out there is dreaming of this exact moment. The school you complained about walking to (probably this morning) is an education millions of kids our age will never have.

So, we're not just lucky. We are a part of a small fraction of young people on this planet who get to wake up and learn something. So tomorrow when your alarm goes off, don't ask yourself "Why so early?"

Ask yourself:

Did I wake up to another day?

Or did I wake up to something millions of people my age can only dream of?

Thank you.

The author is a Year 7 student at Samuel Ward Academy, part of Unity Schools Partnership. The trust runs an annual 'Keep Safe' month where engagement includes student representatives coming together for a day of collaborative learning. This year students delivered speeches to their peers, choosing topics of importance. It was a chance to truly listen and understand the lived experiences of our young people. We have so much to learn from children.

Toni Kittle, Education Director.