

Laura Smith

*It would be easy, and disingenuous to reduce our years at U-High to the many facts we have learned: like how to solve the square root of an imaginary number, the difference between ionic and covalent bonds and, according to Mr. Fitz, John Adams was the greatest man to ever live. In addition to these facts, we must include the life-lessons that we have learned at U-High. Such lessons include: perseverance, time-management, how to learn, and how to assume leadership.*

*Author H. J. Brown stated, "In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins--not through strength, but through perseverance." We have learned perseverance through both our classes and our extra-curricular sports and activity teams. U-High is where we matured enough to learn that it is not immediate success that lights the fire of a person's passion, but that true achievement is found in the strength to continue in difficult situations. Just over a year ago I was competing at a speech tournament - I was ill and all I wanted to do was go home. Alas, my coaches pushed me to finish the day and complete the tournament. I did not receive a tangible award for my efforts, but I achieved an intrinsic reward that day. That reward is the memory of that Saturday and the knowledge that I have more strength than I realized and could complete the task at hand. We have all had days such as these, where the desperation to quit is confounded by the acquisition of the strength to carry on. Perseverance is not glorious, it is not achieved in the short term and it is rarely acknowledged, but perseverance is the only means to reach a substantial goal. Through perseverance a person can fully understand the depth of strength that they possess.*

*Well-respected poet Maya Angelou said "since time is the one immaterial object which we cannot influence -- neither speed up nor slow down, add to nor diminish -- it is an imponderably valuable gift." Time stretches before us and, right now, seems endless, but if we are to achieve great things we must learn how to manage time and utilize it. Fortunately, at U-High we have been pushed to be involved in rigorous classes and extra-curricular activities. Through responsibilities outside the classroom, we at U-High have learned how to balance study time with social time, with time for sports, teams and clubs, and balance a demanding schedule with work. The ability to balance work and duty with a social life is a skill that applies for the rest of our lives. Life is about balance, and that is a lesson that we have learned in our years at U-High.*

*A popular misconception is that learning only takes place in the classroom. Learning also occurs through triumphs, failures, and actions. In triumphs one learns what produces a successful result. In failures, one learns how to dust themselves off and attempt the task again. It is through "doing" that we allow ourselves to become absorbed in the process, to learn by experience. At times we must stop and observe and become aware of our surroundings. We had the chance to "do" here at U-High, to learn something new here and in life every-day. The interesting thing is that this learning will continue to happen; we just may not realize it. So what should we take with us from our experience here at U-High? That the key to being a leader is to pay attention.*

*The role of a leader is not solely defined by the position that they hold. A leader is someone who assumes responsibility for a task and sees it through. At U-High we have all been given the opportunity to grow as leaders. In the classroom with projects and on teams and clubs with elected responsibilities we have been encouraged to assume the role of leadership. In every person is a leader in their own right, they can either achieve the goal that they aspire towards or they can sit in the shadows watching their goal fade into a memory of what could have been. We must be ever vigilant and focused on worthy goals.*

*With the lessons we have learned at U-High we will be able to achieve great things. And I thank all of those circumstances, people, and participants who allowed me to spend four years with all of you - the group that upsets the applecart of the soft bigotry of low expectations. Whether it is ionic or covalent, the bond we all share is from real learning in and out of classrooms. As I said in the beginning, it would be easy and disingenuous to reduce what we have learned to the facts. No matter how anxious we are of what comes next, because we are Pioneers, we are ready.*