

Sample essay on jk rowling speech to harvard graduates

[Experience](#), [Failure](#)



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English

Thesis and Introduction

Life can be quite monotonous and meaningless if one chooses not to take risks. Failures and Imagination can make us better persons, only if one knows how to use them positively. Everybody goes through a time in life when they face difficulties and failures and end up cursing their bad luck. However, if instead, they chose to examine the reason for their failure and used it as a yardstick to stop such mistakes from happening again, they will succeed. According to Seligman (2006, p. 25-26), “ those who display ‘ learned optimism,’ were most likely to see failure as being transitory and narrow in its effects. These optimistic individuals will on most counts treat failure as a challenge, transform problems into opportunities, attempt to adapt/develop skills, maintain confidence, rebound quickly from setbacks, and persist” (Seligman, 2006)

Analysis

Failures are part of life and every one is bound to experience it sometime in their life and when they do, they should take it “ as stripping away of their inessentials.” Speaking to the graduate students of Harvard, JK Rowling, author of the world famous Harry Potter series and a “ graduate from the University of Exeter with a BA in French and Classics” (Farr, 2012), spoke on her personal experiences in life and reflected on the two qualities that changed her life; Failure and Imagination. Would life be meaningful and content if one chose not to take risks in life? She says that she too chose to take risks in life when she was their age and the subsequent failures she had made her a better person. In saying, “ I have decided to talk to you about the benefits of failure. And as you stand on the threshold of what is sometimes called ‘ real life’, I want to extol the crucial importance of imagination,” Rowling wanted the graduate students to understand that despite their upbringing, they could have failures, and when they did, they shouldn’t get unduly perturbed by that and instead use it as springboard to achieve greater things. “ The fact that you are graduating from Harvard suggests that you are not very well-acquainted with failure, and you might be driven by a fear of failure quite as much as a desire for success,” therefore, it was up to them to use their power to transform failure into something constructive, using their imagination, just the way she did. On closer introspection, one sees her use of rhetorical appeals quite convincingly. Her thought-out use of ethos, logos and pathos enhanced the effectiveness of the presentation. She said that she always wanted to be a writer, but because her parents felt that this would not support her in future,

she had to strike an uneasy balance between the ambition she had for herself, and what her parents expected of her. A compromise was reached, and she studied Modern Languages. However, she couldn't let her imagination go to waste and so, she quickly turned to Classics. She had a terrible time after graduating as she had to face abject poverty as she had no job, as she says; " a mere seven years after my graduation day, I had failed on an epic scale. An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded, and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless. The fears that my parents had had for me, and that I had had for myself, had both come to pass, and by every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew." She says that she could have blamed her parents for her misery, which would have been the most obvious choice with most people, but she looked at it as an opportunity to follow her heart. In transforming her failure to her benefit, she " stopped pretending to herself that she was anything other than what she was, and began to direct all her energy into finishing the only work that mattered to her." She goes on to say that had she succeeded at anything else, she would never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena she believed she truly belonged to; writing. The failure had set her free as her greatest fear had been realized, and as she was still alive, and had a daughter whom she adored, she plunged into writing on a serious note. It is noteworthy to add at this point how many entrepreneurs perceive failure. What happens to entrepreneurs when their business fails? " Quite many of them who are highly successful entrepreneurs extol the virtues of failure as a valuable teacher," say Ucbasaran et al., (2012). This is precisely what she did;

Rowling was able to use the solid foundation of failure to rebuild her life. The fear had been overcome and there was only one direction she could go; forward. In her speech, Rowling said, " Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way. The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive. You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity." On imagination, Rowling says that she learned to value imagination. Imagination, she stressed, was not just the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation, but something that allows us to " empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared." She recollected an incident that she encountered when she ran into an African torture victim in office.

Conclusion

In juxtaposing her early years in college and her personal life that she claimed was tragic, to that of the graduate students of Harvard, Rowling was able to use her life as an example to educate these students on the need to follow their heart and even when they came across failure, not to let it derail them from pursuing their goal. Failure, she said, was a way to understand a mistake and learn from it rather than let it kill your goal. It was up to them to challenge themselves to achieve what they imagined for themselves, and with challenge failures were possible. Rowling was able to use her own life as an example to substantiate her view most emphatically.

References

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