NHS SPEECH: CHARACTER

FOR

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Good morning parents, guests, faculty, students, and inductees. It’s a real privilege to have this chance to speak to all of you today. To be a part of the National Honor Society has been an inspiration on many levels and the one that comes to my mind has to do with meaning-what it means to me to be a part of the NHS, the meaning of the mission of this organization, and how to clarify, even in my own mind, when different thoughts and phrases have more than one definition. Think of these three letters: s-e-t. The word spells quite simply "set." …Nothing special; nothing terribly unique; a gift on any first grade spelling test. So why am I bringing it up? Well that miniscule word “set” is actually quite special. "Set" holds the record for being the English word with the most definitions - 464. Now think about the word “character.” It may not have 400 plus definitions, but character does have many different meanings – both to Webster and every individual.

Character can be seen as the moral or ethical quality of a person; a reputation. It also means, “the collective features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing.” Helen Keller said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” Character is one of the most basic and important qualities that National Honor Society members possess. It isn't measured at one instant in time, but rather over all instances in time – it is who we really are and based on point of view, it is how society perceives us. Throughout my high school career, I have found my way to academic achievement by exploring what is important to me. I have learned to find the opportunity, give my word, face the challenge and do my best, and through the process, I believe positive aspects of my character have been built. That’s one aspect, and just how there can be many different definitions for character, we can all embody character in different ways. One person's character could be that really, really nice kid who you know you can always go to for help on a math problem while another person might demonstrate parts of his character by being the class clown. To peers, a class clown seems funny, amusing and laid back. However, to teachers, a class clown could be a nightmare! In that case, it would be about perception and reputation. Abraham Lincoln described the difference, “Character is like a tree and reputation is like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing,” In other words, we want to make sure the ways that we demonstrate our character are strong and “real” - not phony, because that is how people perceive us.

It’s hard to live a fulfilling life without being true to ourselves. If we aren’t true to ourselves, acknowledging our strengths and frailties, how can we expect others to know who we are? By being honest and personally truthful, we find the way to build strong character and learn to stand up for our beliefs, follow our conscience, live our lives with integrity no matter what others might say, and trust ourselves to try again if we don’t meet our goals. People of strong character live by their principles and learn from every crisis, adventure, and opportunity. People of strong character face their failures, learn from them, and become stronger as a result, and in the process find the way to support others who may not be strong enough on their own to meet life’s challenges- whether with family, school, social circles, and networks. In order to develop character we must first figure out who **we** are.

If we are true to ourselves and live by doing what is right, if we rely on our family and good friends, if we are open to learning and pray for strength during our moments of confusion and doubt, we will have the confidence and fortitude to exude the strong character we have built.

Thank you.