

How John Adams Academy Changed Me

To me, true education is not so much the content of the curriculum, but the ability to learn how to learn and incorporate the subject matter into your life in practical ways that gives it significance. My greatest takeaway from my years at John Adams is undoubtedly the mindset shift that the classical education model has gifted me with. My John Adams education started in 8th grade: my mindset change began years later, after returning to John Adams from a local public high school.

In my early years of attending JAA, I was rather uninterested in not only schoolwork but in activities as a whole, as I saw learning itself to be seemingly a waste of time. This isn't to say that the subject matter I was learning in 8th and 9th grade was useless; quite the opposite. The early years of secondary education at John Adams lay an important groundwork of American history and of classical values as scholars begin their high school years (and the words of Paul Revere's ride remain in my head to this day!) But my lack of interest in the coursework proved very damaging to my secondary education early on. Eager for a change, I transferred to a local public high school. However, it turned out that this larger campus wasn't quite what I believed it would be. During my first week at the new school, I realized exactly what it was that this school lacked that John Adams had in abundance: passion! Students and staff at the new school seemed incredibly uninterested in their educational duties, simply memorizing then forgetting information after the nearest test was complete. It was at this school that I realized the classical education I had taken for granted was sorely amiss. After only one semester, I begged my parents to return to John Adams.

Writing this essay, it occurred to me that any education, even the superior classical education provided by JAA, couldn't in itself invoke tangible change on one's mindset, without an engaged mental capacity to actually receive what was being taught! Returning to JAA for my second semester of sophomore year, this "abundance mentality" is exactly what I attempted to focus on. I leaped back into my new environment with an important mindset change. I was eager to no longer take my education for granted, and approached JAA with a newfound respect for classical education and the emphasis on the 10 core values that it emphasized. Without a set of guiding principles, I saw the quality of learning and quality of people in general sharply depreciate at public schools. I realized now that the core values I had once mocked actually stood as important principles both inside and outside of school for one to follow. The lack of reverence for the subject matter and indeed America itself stood out like a sore thumb at my former public school, and is exactly what set John Adams Academy apart. In addition to this, I had the blessing of being able to actually interact with a staff and faculty at John Adams that cared about me. Whereas at my public school I was seen as just a number, my JAA teachers genuinely became my mentors and friends. On multiple occasions, teachers would ask how my day was going, help me through challenging classwork, or surprise the class with snacks after a difficult test or final. I felt seen, valued, and genuinely cared for by my mentors and teachers, which in turn gave me a newfound sense of respect and willingness to focus on what they were saying. In addition to this, the Socratic Seminar settings of almost every class has allowed me to better interact with both the curriculum and my fellow scholars. My opinions and insights felt valued, and I actually enjoy participating in my classwork. While my opinions with classmates may have differed, I never felt judged or unappreciated in classes, and always feel my insight is worthwhile, a far cry from what I received at my previous school when questioning other's statements.

While my relations with classmates and faculty at JAA have been extremely impactful to me, the most significant change that my time here has taught me is to step out of my comfort zone. Especially this year, I have noticed the impact that my John Adams education has had on me, beginning to display itself in other aspects of my life. I have learned an arsenal of extremely beneficial life skills throughout my time here, including critical thinking (through texts like Plato's republic and the Abolition of Man), engaging in debate with opposition, and leadership. Senior Year at JAA has truly brought each of these skills to light, in unique ways. When the school year began I believe I speak for the majority of the seniors across every campus when I say the thesis sounded extremely overwhelming! But as I began to actually type out the proposal for my thesis topic, (discussing the importance of virtue in the American founding documents), I realized that my past years at JAA had already equipped me with the skills needed to take the thesis on. When talking with my parents, teachers, and thesis mentor Mr. Cope about my topic, I realized I was actually excited to present the culmination of my knowledge in the unique thesis structure. I was prepared to present and disprove counter arguments, and defend what I learned against my panel. I also gained the ability to reach beyond my comfort zone, practicing leadership through serving as Vice president and Volleyball captain, and becoming confident in discussing and defending the knowledge that cornerstone of JAA has built in me.

I cannot thank John Adams enough for the character growth, relationships, education, and life skills that my time here has built in me. Thank you for preparing me with the skills to truly be a leader and model in my daily life. Thank you for your consideration.