Viewpoints: Grads should display the Valley brand with pride

**(**Graduation Speech) Special to *The Bee* May. 26, 2013 By David Mas Masumoto

To the graduating class of 2013: You are now and forever part of this Valley. You have now earned your certificate of authenticity. You have successfully matriculated a Valley Diploma. Part of your life will always be grounded in the dirt here. Inside of all of you lies what is called a placed story; a seed has been planted, then germinated and grown into part of your personal history you cannot delete. Some will try denial, but you are part of this Valley forever.

For some of you, your diploma becomes your ticket to escape this Valley. You may be embarrassed by who we are. You can’t wait to depart and never look back. However, you are now here. I admit that I ran away and left for college. But it was too late; too much had happened inside of me. The Valley had left a mark, and I came back, forever. Over the years, life lessons from this place matured into memories that defined who I am. This place grows on you. Our life journey may only make sense later, when we can look back and connect the dots. Our Valley provides the perfect locale for transitions. For growing up. Finding love. Discovering hate. Standing up for what’s right. Feeling disappointment. Soaring with achievement. We have permission to make mistakes here and understand the capacity to forgive and be forgiven surrounded by family and community.

In this Valley, we are witnessing a revolution. The significance of our land and food, our culture and diversity cannot be overvalued. Our families and communities exemplify a society where people and place – and I cannot overestimate the power of food – all still matter.

You possess something too rare in today’s digital society. You have a treasure that’s lost in the virtual world. You now have a rooted identity and with your diploma, you are now officially part of the “other California.” The Valley is not Los Angeles or San Francisco. It’s a place sometimes lost between two mountain chains and in the shadow of urban centers. A place that’s beginning to define itself to the world, a place finding its own voice. Every one of you graduates contributes to that voice. Your diploma is your license to scream to the world: You matter because you are from somewhere.

In this Valley, we have a front seat to fundamental changes in our nation. Immigration reform, high-speed rail and the Affordable Care Act will change this place. We were once a rigid people, intolerant and narrow. I believe it’s different now.

We live in one of the most diverse places in America. Look at the faces gathering around you graduates. Look at the families and communities that honor you. You’ll see: Latinos, Asians, blacks and whites. Christians, non-Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, those with other religions and some with none. Gays, mixed races, blended families. Tall, short, wide, skinny. Old, young and those acting very young. Rich, middle class, poor, and we cannot forget the very, very poor. The face of the new world is upon us, and a power is granted to those who understand and have lived within this diversity. You have learned how to thrive with difference. Excel with inequalities. Take refuge in the distinctive. Find comfort in the mixed-up world.

Yes, mixed up. We are part of a changing world and emerging out of that mix will raise a beacon for innovation and creativity. We will not be satisfied with the status quo. You will hunger for more – that’s why you honor yourself and your family with a graduation. You possess the willingness to accept, adapt, adopt and excel. And now you add your face to the photo mosaic of this Valley.

For too long, our Valley has been quiet, part of the curse of the “other California.” But you have a passion: You have drive to accomplish something called graduation and receive a diploma.You are something special, and I implore you to find your voice. Shout. Scream. Demand to be heard. Fulfill the dream of your family and seize opportunity. With your diploma in hand, you now belong. And the future will be wonderfully messy. Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived.

Is there a Valley tattoo all graduates should wear proudly? What image or words capture the artistic expression on our own flesh? Because it’s our bodies, it must be personal. For me, my Valley tattoo would be a Japanese phrase that tells the story of immigrants in this Valley, a tale of our challenges here in this desert land that captures the spirit of the “other California.” My tattoo would read: *nana korobi na oki*: “Fall down seven times, get up eight.” My personal mantra for the Valley, a slogan of our daily lives, a destiny for our futures: Fall down seven times, get up eight.

You are now and forever part of the Valley, a place defined by those before you who understood – fall down seven times, get up eight. As you graduate and leap into the next part of your life’s journey, wear our Valley tattoo proudly. Carry our Valley spirit into the bright future. Fall down seven times, get up eight.

*David Mas Masumoto is an organic farmer near Fresno and award-winning author of books including “Epitaph for a Peach” and “Wisdom of the Last Farmer.”*

<http://www.masumoto.com/new-article-david-mas-masumoto-writes-graduation-speech/#more-829>

1. Unlike “Epitaph for a Peach,” this essay has both a specific audience—students graduating from high school in the Central Valley—and a larger audience, anyone reading the Sacramento Bee whose attention would be caught by the title. What do you think is **the writer’s main purpose** with the specific audience (the students)? How about the larger audience? (Note: I’m asking for purpose, not thesis, a related but different answer.)
2. Consider the **pathos appeal**: what values is Masumoto trying to appeal to? What emotions is he trying to stir up? Cite specific places where he does this. Do you think it is effective?
3. What is the **kairos** for this piece? How does the writer work it in? What else might he have done with it?
4. The **ethos appeal** is less central to this piece than to his “Epitaph for a Peach,” but it is still significant. What image of himself does he paint? What qualities help establish his credibility with the audience? Does it work with you? Why or why not?