

Impact Statement

Kenneth Choi, Grade 10.

A Heart Working Partner, 2023.

Digital art, 11 x 14 inches.

Bellevue International School, Bellevue, WA

Unsung Hero: Vivien Thomas

My unsung hero was Vivien Thomas. I had previously researched Blue Baby Syndrome months before for a scientific paper. However, during my research, my screen was filled with John Hopkins University's studies and had no clear focus on one person. After some more specific searches, I stumbled upon Vivien Thomas on a cardiology website. When competing in the Unsung Heroes competition, I was delighted to know that Vivien was a spotlighted hero. I see Vivien Thomas as a truly inspirational figure due to his consistent commitment to help children around the world be healthy despite unfortunate financial and social circumstances.

Vivien Thomas was born during the Jim Crow era, where racial discrimination against people of color was at a shocking high in the United States. Vivien Thomas lost nearly all of his savings due to the Great Depression and the high tuition for medical school meant he was unable pursue further education to become a doctor. Although Vivien was able to become a surgical research assistant at Vanderbilt University thanks to a friend, he was paid the same wages as a janitor. He was also one of the only African American doctors working at the University. Despite such hardships, Vivien was able to successfully discover and perform heart surgery on an eleven-year-old girl to cure her of blue baby disease. Even so, Vivien was given no credit for his work and his white coworkers were the only ones recognized. In my artwork, I hope to display the hardships Vivien endured in his life and how he continued to fight, not for himself or for fame, but rather for the health and safety of millions of children worldwide.

My artwork, *A Heart Working Partner*, depicts the various struggles Vivien Thomas had to endure during his life. From being unable to attend Johns Hopkins University due to the Great Depression, to having to work night shifts as a bartender in order to have enough money to make ends meet with his wife and daughter, Vivien faced many difficulties during his time as a doctor. However, *A Heart Working Partner* highlights Vivien Thomas' refusal to give up, shown in the artwork as a proud figure that is embracing the eleven-year-old girl he helped save through heart surgery. Vivien Thomas firmly believed that his efforts to save lives would pay better than money and thus pushed past racial and financial barriers. Vivien Thomas' perseverance and passion would save millions of children all around the world. The vision behind my artwork brings light to Vivien Thomas' heroic efforts to work for a healthier world. My artwork's background events used various different darker colors to match the gloomy atmosphere of Vivien's struggles. This is in contrast to the brighter colors of Vivien Thomas embracing his patient, showing that he was willing to pursue his path as a heart surgeon if it meant bringing safety and happiness to those around him.

Creating my art piece on Vivien Thomas has changed my view on life and true effort. Vivien has inspired me to not give up in the toughest of times and not limit myself to barriers that the world may set on me. I should use my potential to change the lives of the people around me as

motivation for my own hard work. A Heart Working Partner aims to inspire the many young people in the world who may be facing difficulties in life. A Heart Working Partner will be shared with my community through free exhibitions to show viewers how Vivien Thomas endured racial and economic struggles to leave a lasting impact on the world through extensive heart research and surgery.