

Impact Statement

Jinho Lee, Grade 10.

The Beauty of Mama Africa, 2023.

Digital art, 14 x 11 inches.

Lake Washington High School, Kirkland, WA

Unsung Hero: Miriam Makeba

I found my unsung hero, Miriam Makeba, by listening to various early 20th-century songs that address injustices. I first started listening to American Jazz songs, including Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" song. "Strange Fruit" is a jazz that exposed the horror of racism, especially the lynching of African Americans. This song is beautiful not only because of the melody, but also the various literary devices employed in the lyrics to convey a resounding message to a broad audience. As I became intrigued by the songs that address the globally pervasive problems, I found a song called "Aluta Continua," written by a South African songwriter and activist called Miriam Makeba. She deeply inspired me because she shared her perspectives on racism and apartheid by writing songs that have mellifluous melodies and cultural values.

To learn more about Miriam Makeba's accomplishments, I thoroughly researched the life of Miriam Makeba through reading various credible sources. Analyzing such sources, I found that her life was full of advocating for equality and the abolishment of apartheid. Not only did she write powerful songs to advocate for racial equality, but also directly contributed to ending the horrendous racial discrimination by participating in various events. For instance, in 1963, she gave a speech before the United Nations General Assembly to denounce the apartheid in South Africa. A year later, in light of her experiences as a professional singer, she sang her "freedom song" to United Nations committee members to emotionally connect with them and tell her story meaningfully. Since she dedicated her life to abolishing the apartheid and calling for the end of racial discrimination, I wanted to demonstrate her remarkable accomplishments by illustrating her important life milestones.

My artwork expresses Miriam Makeba through depicting symbols that can represent her identity and important events during her life as a singer and an activist. To demonstrate one of the significant moments in her life, in the upper left corner of the art, I drew a scene where she addressed her speech inside the UN building to pressure the South African government to ban apartheid. In the upper right corner, I illustrated Nelson Mandela to refer to a moment when Miriam Makeba received the Presidential Award from Nelson Mandela. In the bottom right corner of the picture, I portrayed South Africans and the beautiful landscape of South Africa to demonstrate her cultural identity and imply how her achievements brought hope to the people in her country. Lastly, at the center of the art, I deliberately drew Miriam Makeba wearing colorful garments using red, yellow, and green colors to represent her nationality and demonstrate her aesthetic beauty and South Africa's dignity. Additionally, I drew a microphone next to her because microphone best symbolizes her life not only as a great singer, but also as a powerful public speaker who made changes through expressing her opinions.

Creating this work profoundly impacted my perspectives and outlook on my life. Through thorough research and drawing, I not only learned more about the social and political

implications of apartheid, but also gained inspiration from Miriam Makeba since she brought unity and peace by emotionally connecting with others. Just like how Miriam Makeba advocated for equality through singing and actively organizing civil movements, as an artist, I decided to use my art skills to share my perspectives and improve our community. I am currently planning to hold an art exhibition at my local city hall with my peers to display our artworks and share our visions with the people in the community. Although the scale of the exhibition may be small, by planning and carrying out such activities consistently in the future, I firmly believe that I will be able to steadily make positive changes to my community.