

Impact Statement

Azucena Ortega, Grade 12.

The Shepherd of Youth, 2023.

Digital art, 14 x 20 inches.

Providence High School, Los Angeles, CA

Unsung Hero: Gene Shoemaker

I can recall writing an essay on one of Florence Kelley's many inspirational speeches in the 11th grade. I remember being so moved and wanting to learn more about her life. A year later I find myself researching her again through this art competition that my art teacher Mr. Freeman brought to my AP Art Class. I chose to draw her because of her endless perseverance and her many successes in her life. I paint, most protest art (examples are pictured in the additional artwork field), because I care about the world and want to help stop issues like global warming, sexism, racism, homophobia, and many more issues. I think Florence Kelley are alike in the ways that we want to make change in the world and make it a better place to live in for all people. I connected to her so much because she shares the same ideals in solving social issues.

Pictured is Florence Kelley holding hands with children, leading them out of a sweatshop of cruel and inhumane conditions. The three full children pictured don't only represent the many children that she saved, but they also symbolize her three children who she saved from her abusive husband. Kelley's top priority was to save children from all forms of toxic relationships and toxic environments, and I wanted to emphasize that. Kelley is also pictured with a baby in her arms. The baby symbolizes the new and free generations of children in the future. She liberated so many children from harsh working environments and I wanted to emphasize her impact and what it means now.

I didn't just do research on Florence Kelley, but I also did research on the time period this happened in. From the 1890s to the 1910s, when child labor was most common, more than 18% of children were employed. A tribute to that, I drew 18 paper people of different skin tones to also symbolize Kelley's work in fighting for the rights of people of all races. To finish my piece, I drew dark shadows coming from the side of the tenement sweatshop to symbolize the dark place children were coming out of at the time, and I drew rays of sunlight dawning on Kelley, symbolizing the bright future of freedom and safety for all children ahead.

The process of creating this work of art changed my outlook on life significantly. Doing my research of Florence Kelley has sparked my desire to fight for the rights of the voiceless even further. I like to use a lot of symbolism in my artwork, so doing the research and making it come to life was very fun. This has taught me to find the beauty in the smallest details and to analyze things carefully. I will share my artwork and experience with my community by entering in more competitions and art expos to get my voice out in the world even further. I fully plan on sharing this artwork and all my other artworks online and in person. This is crucial in my journey to inspire others and to motivate them to do the right thing and fight for the rights of all minority peoples, just like Florence Kelley did.