

## Impact Statement

Joan Bonasera, Grade 11.

**Jane Elliott**, 2022.

Digital art, 15 x 11 inches.

Hopewell Valley Central High School, Pennington, NJ

Unsung Hero: Jane Elliott

I had chosen Jane Elliott because I had thought that her story was very impactful. It was a great lesson to teach to kids of that age group because their views were most likely persuaded by their parents. This experiment taught them to understand what it is like to experience discrimination. At one point during the experiment, one of the kids says a racist slur that had most likely been used by his family. During the time that the experiment had been conducted, the families of the children had held predominantly stereotypical beliefs about people that were not white. This experience taught these students firsthand how it felt to be treated so differently for something that you had absolutely no control over.

Jane Eliot exposed a very important perspective to these children, that one can't control how they look and therefore shouldn't be judged by their looks. Skin color, and in this experiment, eye color, should not be the basis for judging someone. At the time her method of teaching racism was very controversial. Her critics thought her audience was too young to understand and absorb the hurt of the lesson. Simultaneously, white families felt it was unfair to make their children walk in the shoes of racism.

One part of my piece includes Ms. Elliott with a blue collar around her neck because she has blue eyes. This specific blue collar is very tight, and almost suffocating her. I had hoped to convey the message of racism "strangling" those who are affected by it. The kids wearing the collars on their assigned days showed disdain at the collar. During the last day of the experiment, one boy was seen biting into and attempting to tear his collar into pieces with his teeth.

Art for me is very much an outlet. It is an important part of my life and has consistently helped me get through certain rough times. There is something so rewarding about having an image in your mind and being able to transfer that image onto a canvas or a screen. I would not necessarily say that the creation of one specific piece of art has changed my outlook on life, but creating so many different works through years and years of practice has given me a feeling of accomplishment, especially after seeing the progress that can be made if you work hard enough. Art teaches you that if you consistently work hard and push yourself, the results will be worth it.

My piece attempts to show how confusing it was for Mrs. Elliott's young students to try to grasp the concept of racism. I would be curious to see how the children in her class were impacted in the long term. Did they become more compassionate or understanding of others as a result of the experiment? Or did they continue to see non-white people in a stereotypical light?

I hope that my piece illustrates the controversy of Ms. Elliott's work and opens a door for discussions about how to successfully teach race and bias to kids.