

## Impact Statement

Chloe Kim, Grade 10.  
***Will You Swim?***, 2022.  
Digital art, 16 x 12 Inches.  
The Overlake School, Redmond, WA  
Unsung Hero: Irena Sendler

After looking through numerous names and inspiring stories, I came across Irena Sendler. I knew I would pick her to be the unsung hero I memorialize because of the quote, "If you see someone drowning, you must jump in to save them, whether you can swim or not." As I read further about who she was and the children she saved, I pictured myself in the kid's shoes and appreciated her more and more. However, the most significant piece that convinced me to pick her was not because she saved over 2,500 children. But, because she had lived the remainder of her life in fear and regret, wondering if she had done enough. Irena Sendler's nightmares solidified my decision to depict her in my painting to thank her for her deeds and to tell her that she did more than enough.

My research first came from reading the summary written on the website, as it contained an excellent overview of her deeds and backstory. Preceding reading the synopsis, I wrote down focal points of her story I wanted to highlight, such as the jars of names, the children, and the quote that had first pulled me into reading her inspiring story. Once I had a picture of the elements I wanted to include in my painting in my head, I created many rough drafts to figure out how to incorporate all of these pieces without overcrowding the image. Finally, I realized that I had connected most with the quote and loved the meaning, especially the deeper backstory. Her dad, a doctor who devoted his life to helping poor Jewish people with a typhus epidemic, told her this quote. So I concluded with a symbolic painting in which Irena Sendler would be physically in the water, saving children in respect to this quote. After figuring out the rough composition of the piece, I dove deeper into logistical details, such as what buildings looked like in Poland during this period, what the clothing looked like, what the planes looked like, and more. Then, using all the information I gathered, I began to weave it together to create a sketch of what I wanted my painting to be. Once I finished the drawing, I added realistic details and color to the painting. This was one of the more intricate parts of the process, as Irena Sendler's pictures were mainly in black and white. First, however, I figured out which colors did not work, and which did, how the colors would reflect off various surfaces like the water, etc. I genuinely enjoy all the little details I put into the painting, like the 2500th name in the jar, or the church in the background (one of the ways she would smuggle children out of the ghetto), because it reflects the sincere appreciation I have for her heroic deeds.

As mentioned previously, I struggled a lot with the color choices as many reference pictures were in black and white or had to be modified to fit the reflective light and colors of the rest of the artwork. This kind of experimenting was not something I had dealt with in previous paintings, as I usually had a color picture to reference. However, this project allowed me to grow tremendously as an artist because of all the trials and errors from the experimenting until finally reaching the final color choices I picked. In addition to advancing technical art skills, I also learned about Irena Sendler's story. I was learning about World War II in my history class

simultaneous to working on this project. So, the background knowledge from school allowed me to envision her struggles and successes in a better way, but also in reverse, where her story gave me a deeper look into the broad history of WWII.

Additionally, I believe learning about tragedies that occurred in the past is critical in preventing similar situations from happening in the future like the Holocaust, but learning about inspiring stories like this is also essential as it influences those hearing it to take a step forward and perform a good deed as well. Which is why I titled this artwork "Will You Swim?" Firstly, it again references the quote, displaying an appreciation of her selflessness to jump in the murky waters to save all those kids despite putting her life in danger. But it also brings the viewer of the piece into the picture with the "you" and asks them to reflect on themselves according to the quote, just as I did when I first read it. Moreover, the title's wording does not shame the viewer into doing something right away. Instead, it keeps the question circulating in their head until the next time they see someone struggling, to do something for them, even if it may be something as simple as helping the person who has their hands full open the door.