

Impact Statement

Romayssae Saidi, Grade 7.

Irena's Jars of Hope, 2020.

Mixed media on canvas, 20 x 16 Inches.

Christa McAuliffe Elementary School PS #28, Jersey City, NJ

Unsung Hero: Irena Sendler

It started five years ago. I was really into books that tell people's jaw-dropping stories around the globe. I stumbled upon a children's book called "Jars of Hope" by Jennifer Roy. It immediately intrigued my interest. It was about a woman who rescued 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust. That woman is Irena Sendler. Irena did not once think about herself. Irena risked her life when she did not have to. When she saved that one girl on the street, she went back and saved more, that was beyond my thinking capability. I fell in love with the story. I would constantly read the story over and over again. It was the only book that I could not remove from my hands. Five years later, I surprisingly knew who I should do for this project. Irena Sendler's story was always on the back of my mind, and when the time came to unleash her story to the world, I was very prepared. The world needs to acknowledge this inspirational Unsung Hero. Her courage and kindness are very well needed right now.

During the Holocaust Irena Sendler risked her life to save 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto. She did have assistance from people that she could trust. She would write their real names, their new fake names, and the places where they live on a piece of paper. She would collect all of those papers and place them into milk jars. Jaga (one of the people that assisted her) and Irena would hide the jars in Jaga's backyard beneath the ground under an apple tree. They would dig up the ground after curfew and place the new lists in the jar. Irena Sendler then joined Zegota. Zegota was a secret group of Polish men and women that rescued and helped the Jews. There were many brave people that would take in the children as their family. There were foster families, Polish orphanages, and other places they could stay. Unfortunately, Irena Sendler was caught and put into Pawiak Prison. Irena would say nothing to the Gestapo policeman about Zegota. Since she did not want to spill the beans, Irena was lashed with a whip and strap almost every day on her legs and feet, until she could not stand up anymore. One hundred days later, Irena was free from prison. Zegota paid a lot of money for Irena to be freed from Pawiak Prison. After the war, Irena's list was given to an organization that helped the children connect with some of the families that survived.

So, the explanation behind my art piece is you have the apple tree where Irena and Jaga hid the jars underneath the tree. There are 2,500 leaves on the tree that represent all the Jewish children Irena saved from the Warsaw Ghetto. She kept her word on keeping Zegota and the lists safe, and because of that she was beaten up. That is what the roots of the apple tree stand for, even though she was beaten up, she stuck to her "roots" and did not say a word about anything. Surrounding and on the roots, there are all the names of the people that assisted Irena to save the Jewish children. To the left side of the roots, are the three jars. Irena and Jaga would dig up late at night to place the new names in the jar. All three of the jars light up, and are touching the roots, the jars are providing life, light, and hope to the darkness of the tree for the children. In the background are the destroyed buildings of Warsaw during World War II. The

moon is a waxing crescent, and it symbolizes a new beginning to a better future, and as the moon grows everything gets better and better.

There are a variety of ways I have spoken about Irena Sendler to the public. One way was I read a children's book called "Jars of Hope" by Jennifer Roy to a fourth-grade class, and they absolutely adored the book. I posted a video of myself reading the book on video discussion community for classrooms called Flipgrid. I have created a voiceover video about Irena Sendler's story and posted it on YouTube with a few other videos too. I have given the video to eighth grade teachers for their students to view and learn. I am utilizing Twitter to share the steps of action I have been taking. I am in contact with Paul Radensky, the president of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. We messaged back and forth with the project, and he was able to get me in contact with Rabbi Scheinberg, who owns a synagogue in Hoboken. He was going to hold a Holocaust Remembrance Day at a synagogue in Jersey City with Rabbi Mullin. Unfortunately, due to the conditions, it was on a Zoom call. I spoke about Irena Sendler's life, and about the symbolism of the painting at the event. Adam Frankel, Barack Obama's speechwriter was also on the Zoom call describing his grandparent's Holocaust experiences.

I have learned a lot from Irena Sendler. However, one of the things I have learned, and I will always utilize in my everyday life is to do a good deed without being awarded for it. You have to do something from the heart and expect not to receive something in return. Irena Sendler did not think of herself as a hero. She thought what she did was not extraordinary, but it was a normal thing to do. Irena did not do it to be well known or receive an award, she did it from the kindness of her heart. Unexpected kindness is the most powerful, and most underrated agent of human change.

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCypEJw1iYqnlhas7egQl2hw>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HindirRomayssae>