

Impact Statement

America Garcia, Grade 12.

Hiawatha: The Leader We Need, 2019.

Mixed media, 23 x 9 Inches.

Mill Creek High School, Hoschton, GA

Unsung Hero: Hiawatha

In a time where conflicts between groups of people are prevalent, I feel as though societies around the world have a lot to learn from Hiawatha, the Native American chief that undertook the mission to unite the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca tribes.

Hiawatha worked under the wing of another native known as the Great Peacemaker, the prophet who came up with the ideas and messages of uniting the tribes, though he was born with a speech impediment. He, guided by the Great Peacemaker, used his endowed speaking ability to unite the five tribes, bringing them together under the name Haudenosaunee, or the Iroquois Confederacy.

Hiawatha is a fervent example of the potential humanity has to come together— yet it feels as though we are doing the opposite. We are surrounded by war and tension all while this hostility could be combated through the willingness of one another to compromise and communicate. If we had more people like Hiawatha— people willing to take charge and help us take one step closer to that perfect world we are constantly striving for-- perhaps we would learn from our conflicts and unite against one common issue—the belligerent.

For my interpretation, I wanted to emphasize the importance of nature to the Iroquois people as well as Hiawatha himself. By placing Hiawatha in the dark outdoors, I would be able to bring attention to the moon (precisely the Great Peacemaker's face in the moon), thus demonstrating guidance and enlightenment. In other words, much like what the Great Peacemaker provided for Hiawatha. Another factor I attempted to incorporate in my piece was the unique Iroquois mythology. For example, in Iroquois mythology, the continent of North America rested on the shell of a turtle. Because of this, I decided to add a turtle with a flame on its back to represent a new hope in the world, a new beginning, and a new foundation for a brighter future. To finish this off, I added Hiawatha's belt, used as the flag for the Iroquois people, and made it a constellation in the sky in order to display the immortality of Hiawatha's synergy.

Initially, I shared my painting with those around me-- both intentionally and unintentionally. Because I became aware of the Unsung Hero project through my art class, I shared who my Unsung Hero was and his story with my classmates as we all shared who we picked. Additionally, as I walked through the halls at school and wove from classroom to classroom with my painting of Hiawatha's story, I found that a handful of students-- my friends and strangers alike-- would stop to ask me what the work was about, what my inspiration was. Ultimately, I shared with them the Unsung Hero project and the motivating factors behind it. Following up on this, I posted about Hiawatha on my social media and a blog that I have with friends all around the world. Here, I shared the significance of Hiawatha and why his journey stood out to me as an artist.