

## Impact Statement

Sophia Cabalfin, Grade 12.

***Blossoming of New Life***, 2024.

Watercolor on paper, 16 x 12 inches.

San Dimas High School, San Dimas, CA

Unsung Hero: Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga

Aiko Herzig Yoshinaga was a Japanese American woman who became an internee during World War II. After Executive Order 9742, Yoshinaga became involved in the civil rights organization, Asian Americans for Action, and helped in the efforts of the Redress Movement. Through my art teacher, Mr. Black, I was able to learn more about the Unsung Heroes Contest and saw the list of the numerous unsung heroes. As an Asian American, when I saw the name, Aiko Yoshinaga, I felt like I could deeply connect with her as I love learning about Asian cultures and their histories, which is why I chose Yoshinaga. Her efforts for the Redress Movement and her activism for Asian Americans are what I found the most inspiring about her story.

From her activism, Yoshinaga gained significance when she began to look into government agency records that were responsible for Japanese American incarceration. When she searched records, she found a document by Lieutenant General John L. De Witt that ultimately said that Japanese Americans posed no threat to U.S. Security in 1943 as it was “impossible” to differentiate the loyal from the disloyal, and a “positive determination” could not be made. Her efforts in finding this document contributed to the convictions of Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, and Minoru Yasui being overturned and the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which gave an apology and reparations to camp survivors or their heirs. In my artwork, I wanted to express Yoshinaga’s activism and pride in the Asian American Community through the red sun for the Japanese flag, and I wanted to express Yoshinaga’s efforts in finding the general’s document by displaying the general’s words and the document’s name. When researching Yoshinaga, she became a role model, and I found I admired her persistence and her wide-range involvement in the Asian American community.

My artwork contains character traits and heroic acts of Yoshinaga. The red sun portrays her Japanese heritage and her significance in Japanese American history. The words surrounding her portray the report of the Lieutenant that she found, which led to the Civil Liberties Act and the overturning of Japanese American cases. The cherry blossoms represent Yoshinaga’s vitality and the renewed hope that she gave people by finding the document, and the somber setting of the internment camp, Manzanar, portrays her strength during her internment. The vision behind the creative interpretation of this story is to portray Yoshinaga’s unrecognized acts in history and the persisting strength from her time in internment to her activism days during the Redress Movement.

The process of creating this work of art has significantly changed my outlook on life. It has changed my life by creating a stronger desire to learn the unknown of my culture and history as a Filipino American. Not only did it influence my desire to want to learn more about my culture, but it also influenced my desire to become more active in Asian American activism. I want to

share my artwork and experience with my community by posting my artwork of Yoshinaga online through social media and sharing it with my family and friends.