

Impact Statement

Katie Wong, Grade 7.

***Through the Lens to Freedom*, 2021.**

Acrylic, colored pencil, graphite, photography on canvas, 18 x 24 inches.

St. Mildred's-Lightbourn School, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Unsung Hero: Lewis Hine

Lewis Hine was a photographer in the 18th and 19th century, changing many young lives with his work. In 1874, when he was just eight years old his father passed away, leaving him the primary financial provider for his family. At a very young age, Lewis was introduced to child labor. He worked a 13-hour day, 6 times a week, only to earn \$4 a week. In the late 18 century, lacking child labor restrictions weren't uncommon, especially for younger children. He supported his family, and saved up for college, eventually going to the University of Chicago in 1900, then New York University, and Columbia University. He was hired to work at the Ethical Culture School in New York City, to work in nature study, geography and be the school's photographer. In 1904, he brought his class to Ellis Island to see the thousands of immigrant arrivals, eventually creating a collection of 200 images. He pursued photography on the side of his teaching position. Then in 1908, Lewis left his teaching position to be a photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). At this time, there were millions of children under the age of 15 working in the United States, without any laws or restrictions protecting them. For almost a decade, Lewis traveled around America, trying to photograph child labor abuses. As the owners of the industries didn't want their workplaces and conditions exposed, Lewis had to disguise himself to get into the places he wanted to uncover, which made his job very difficult and dangerous. Then, in 1916, The Keating-Owen Child Labor Act was created, putting restrictions on people who hired children under the age of 14. This was just the start of advocating for children's rights. He then moved onto photographing relief missions for the Red Cross during World War I, still always advocating for children's rights.

I found Lewis Hine very inspiring, as he dedicated a lot of his time to expose these terrible working conditions of child labor. He was one of the few who were advocating for children's rights, and I believe that it is very brave of him to support children's rights, a topic a lot of people didn't agree with. To stand up for children who didn't have a big voice, and to take on the responsibility of spreading the news of child labor around the country is very important, and something a lot of people at the time didn't care much about. I chose Lewis Hine as I felt that he had a very inspiring story, and that it needs to be told more.

I believe that Lewis showed the virtues of devotion, idealism and loyalty. I felt he devoted himself to exposing child labor, he was dedicated to showing the world what

some children are going through at such a young age. He had idealism when he persisted in trying to get into the industries with a lot of child abuse. He kept working toward exposing these violations of rights, even when it seemed unrealistic. He also showed loyalty by acting as the voice for millions of children around the US.

The aspects I wanted to incorporate in my Unsung Hero art piece, is that he photographed children working in terrible working conditions, in hopes of giving them freedom. I wanted to show how he exposed a lot of hidden truths about child labor, and the lives children were going through. I found this important because as a photographer, he played a huge role in showcasing the secrets that industries wanted to keep hidden. He helped pave the way for others to recognize that it's not just adults that deserve human rights, but children, too.

For my art piece, I did mixed media on a canvas. I wanted to showcase Hine's work and impact on the world through the view of his camera. The lens is made out of his many photos he took of children. The idea was that the outer rings were blurred, so more towards the middle the rings get clearer, showing the idea that he was "clearing" the image of child labor and showing the hidden truths about it. The camera was to show he was "zooming in" on child labor, truly focusing and exposing it. The image he is taking a photo of is of a boy, looking out at the sunset, after just finishing his long workday at the mines. The title of my piece is *Through the Lens to Freedom*, so the center image shows how this is the child's small bit of freedom, going home after a long day. The reason why the center is the only color in the piece, is to show the hope in giving children their human rights. The title also means how Lewis is taking photos of the children, in hopes of giving them the freedom they deserve.

This art project really helped me understand and see the different ways stories and ideas can be shown in art. Art isn't always just a picture but can hold a lot of meaning. Art can be interpreted differently, and each person can see something different in it. Like what this project has shown, art can show a whole person's impact on the world. Art can really be a visual representation of a story. My art piece and experience will be showcased in a community art show on May 29, 2024, as well as a web-based art show. This project has really shown me how to look at art differently, and the stories they can tell. I really enjoyed doing my project, as I felt really inspired by the work Lewis Hine has done. I hope that when people look at my piece, they can also appreciate just how much he changed all our childhood lives by the work he did.