

## Impact Statement

Emma Sumner, Grade 11

***Autherine***, 2024.

Colored pencil, graphite, watercolor, and marker on paper, 12 x 18 inches.

Haas Hall Academy, Fayetteville, AR

Unsung Hero: Autherine Lucy Foster

Take a moment to imagine the feeling of excelling in school, getting established for your intelligent mind, and being the first to get a teaching certificate in a family full of sharecroppers. Imagine getting into the college of your dreams and having the opportunity to make a name for yourself, only for it to be ripped away from you in an instant because of your skin color. This was the life that Dr. Autherine Lucy Foster experienced when she applied to the University of Alabama along with civil-rights activist Pollie Myers in September of 1952. When both women found out they were accepted into the college, they were overjoyed. However, when the college was informed of their ethnicity, they decided to revoke their admission acceptance. In hearing this news, both Foster and Myers challenged the University and the general educational system for racial discrimination. Foster's efforts were an inspiration for others facing unjust treatment to speak up and make way for a better and changed society. Personally, I find this very heroic because if it weren't for Foster's case, many other similar cases would have never come to light. In 1955, District Judge Harlan Grooms ruled in Foster's favor within 24 hours of the proceeding and granted her the freedom to attend classes at the University, with the exception of still using segregated dining halls and dormitories. Autherine's story reminded me of Ruby Bridges in a lot of ways, given they both came from similar backgrounds, and they faced severe discrimination while simply trying to attend school. Overall, both Foster and Bridges made a difference in how racism is taught in schools and how history reflects itself.

My main priority after hearing Foster's story was to capture her contributions to society and how her past affected her future. I found it truly challenging to fit her story on a single sheet of paper because Autherine Foster was so much more than anyone could ever interpret. Before even getting into this project, I knew I wanted to include as much symbolism and color as I could to better represent who Autherine Foster was and how her story should really be told. For example, I used more bold colors, like red, to show tense or key moments in her story, and I used more subtle, light colors to represent the more content times. I think the color also lets viewers learn about her personality as well because in a world where color was looked down upon, she fought to have it embraced. I wanted to include her accomplishments, such as her teaching work fresh out of high school at a local elementary school while juggling her own education, and how society gave back to her work by presenting her with monuments and statues in her name. Autherine Foster devoted so much of her time and care to making sure that later generations would have a fair chance at receiving a high education without the struggle and pressure of outside sources. That, to me, could be considered one of the most heroic acts in history.

In all honesty, I didn't expect to get much out of this project. However, after learning more about Autherine and going through the process of creating the portrait, I learned so much—more than I had anticipated—and it changed my outlook on my life and how I live it. I learned that under no circumstances should you take simple ideas like school for granted, because somewhere, somehow, there is someone who would give anything to be in your shoes. Autherine's story changed how I view academic achievers because I never realized what lengths people will go to in order to learn (and Autherine walked the greatest length). Sketching out her smile and radiant skin on one side and then sketching the slight smirk and wrinkled complexion on the other really resonated with me because it showed me that age has no limit when the goal is achievable. Foster didn't give up even at her last breath, as she kept influencing the younger as a final act for her ultimate cause. Even if I don't win this competition, or even place for that matter, I know that I still won in the end because I had the privilege of getting to learn about Autherine Foster and her impact today.

I hope that my work will accurately portray Autherine, and I would like to display it along with other portraits if deemed good enough by the experts. This is my first art competition, so I think another one of my main goals is to share my art style and use of media with my community and gain some feedback from those who have been practicing art for longer than I have. In the end, I hope my work makes a profound difference and, most importantly, brings attention to my chosen "Unsung Hero," Dr. Autherine Lucy Foster.