

Impact Statement

Jean Lee, Grade 9

***And He Still Taught*, 2024.**

Marker, pen, and watercolor on paper, 14 x 17 inches.

Marlborough School, Los Angeles, CA

Unsung Hero: Amos Bronson Alcott

Education is the foundation of modern humans since we learn through education, are shaped through education, and are divided by education. As an artist and student, I wondered during my lectures how school could have been different, especially back when literacy wasn't most people's concern. After reading inspiring biographies, I had a difficult choice. With further research, the decision became clearer; Amos Bronson Alcott and his belief in the educational system interested me. His ideas on how kids should be taught within the education system were a leading factor in why I chose him and with more research, Alcott's perseverance was what kept me awestruck. Alcott was a white male born in 1799 with progressive views on the education system and women's rights. He was a vegetarian, advocated for women's rights, and believed in discussion over memorization, all very uncommon during his time. When he started his own school, the school system traditionally included strict discipline, so instead, he taught students with empathy. He opened many schools during his lifetime, and though some closed due to his lack of finances, he persevered. He opened Temple School, which was later closed, but he continued to teach until he ran Concord School of Philosophy for nine years where he finally secured enough financial backing. At his schools, Alcott taught multiple subjects that often weren't taught such as music, art, nature, and movement, which allowed students to discover—and pursue—their passions. As a student from an illiterate family, Alcott didn't feel supported in his schooling and ultimately dropped out. To prevent a similar outcome, he wanted to ensure his students learned in a supportive environment. While continuing to espouse progressive views on both education and women's rights, he raised four daughters with his wife. One of those daughters, Louisa May Alcott, carried on his feminist ideals when she wrote the renowned American classic, *Little Women*. This book also continued to uphold the lessons Alcott taught his children, as the book was inspired by the Alcott family growing up.

My research began by reading the brief overview of his life on the ARTEFFECT website, then realized his familiar last name. His daughter, the author of *Little Women*, was inspired by Alcott's views on not only teaching children but nurturing them. I collected images of his past schools, especially Temple School, a discussion-based classroom he set up. To know more about his trailblazing views on teaching, I delved deeper into his life's story which brought clarity to Alcott's dedication to untraditional educational practices. I was most inspired by Alcott's perseverance in upholding his

perspectives, even if they weren't widely acknowledged. His belief that every child deserved a nurturing and uplifting education resonated deeply with me, particularly in today's world. It's almost two centuries later, and there is a whole new set of problems in the education system, yet his beliefs still apply—no matter how much time has passed, children still deserve nurturing.

My 14x17 inch artwork focuses on Amos Bronson Alcott using watercolor paper, incorporating collage, watercolor, Copic markers, and watercolor paint. Alcott has many achievements, more than just his establishment of schools. His face was essential to include to ensure the viewers recognize the face behind a significant impact on our current education system. To centralize Alcott's achievements, I surrounded him with the books he wrote and the Temple School's interior. The scattered images of the Temple School aim to provide glimpses into the discussion-based learning environment. To the right of Amos Bronson Alcott, the focus of the art piece, is the Temple School, where he sits on the stairs of his school, symbolizing his welcoming approach to education, stemming from his lack of support growing up. The green background on the bottom right corner resembles a chalkboard which was used in traditional educational settings, contrasting with Alcott's preference for interactive learning methods. Leaving the chalkboard blank was a choice I made as Alcott did not use a chalkboard while teaching, as that wasn't interactive. Alcott standing in front of the chalkboard signifies his departure from conventional teaching styles and his "stepping forward" to another. Overall, the collage and the use of strong colors and lines aim to convey Alcott's progressive ideas which go beyond conventional methods, reflecting him as a teacher and a nurturing figure.

Researching and working on the art piece changed my perspective on education as it gave me a chance to learn about a person I didn't know about and his impact. I remember when I was interviewing for my middle school (now high) one of the questions I asked was if the class was discussion-based. I hated sitting in a chair being talked at: The school day would continue while an adult spoke at me, instead of with me. I craved a more hands-on learning experience, which I'm thankful my current school provides. Compared to similar schools in Los Angeles, this "discussion-based" pedagogy is considered "weird" or "new," even though it was Alcott's idea centuries ago. His ideas weren't acknowledged at that time as they were considered unconventional, yet our modern education system incorporates many of his approaches including encouraging children to focus on and embrace their strengths. I introduced my parents to a person they didn't recognize. My research on Amos Bronson Alcott has also taught me more about perseverance and resilience, a core value within our family, giving validation and value to those who are "ahead of their time." This competition allowed me to realize that some people may view certain ideas as "weird" or "different" even if it's simply a step in the right direction. I am fortunate enough for Alcott's intellect to touch my life and education, allowing me to have discussion-based classes and pursue something that I'm passionate about—like art. And I hope that with this art piece, others will know more about someone like Amos Bronson Alcott, a resilient teacher who still taught.