

Impact Statement

Jinho (Jacob) Lee, Grade 11

***A Raisin in the Sun That Does Not Dry Up*, 2021.**

Acrylic on canvas board, 16 x 20 inches.

Lake Washington High School, Kirkland, WA

Unsung Hero: Lorraine Hansberry

“You are young, gifted, and black. In the year 1964, I, for one can think of no more dynamic combination that a person might be.” —Lorraine Hansberry

Recently, I have read a book called *Just Mercy* written by a famous American lawyer named Bryan Stevenson who dedicated his life to help the marginalized individuals unjustly discriminated and incarcerated. With his first-hand account, he expands on this intricate concept of “intersectionality,” which describes the ways in which various forms of disadvantages affect people. He pointed out the fact that that Black women face particular vulnerability arising from the intersection of gender and race. I was aware of the idea of inequality, but Stevenson’s demonstration of intersectionality and its societal presence shed new lights on how different forms of inequalities compound and oppress certain groups of individuals—especially Black women. This realization helped me understand the necessity of honoring the legacy of “unsung heroes” who have made remarkable contributions to society yet never received enough acknowledgements. As an artist who knows the potency of narrative and visual representation, I decided to honor one of the Black Women who pioneered the standard of American playwrighting: Lorraine Hansberry.

What makes Lorraine Hansberry inspirational was that she was a fearless and creative pioneer who made a huge contribution to her community. She worked tirelessly as a newspaper editor for Black newspaper called Freedom and advocated for Black’s rights and the importance of acknowledging Black history. Not only did she advocate for the rights of others, but she had the courage to advocate for her own. In a magazine called The Ladder, she claimed that she was a lesbian when addressing the feminism and homophobia. Considering the socio-political context of 1950s, being a lesbian created more discrimination that arose from the intersectionality of inequalities because being a lesbian deviated from the social norm. However, disregarding the criticism she faced, she continued to uphold her value, demonstrating that people should not be ashamed because of their identities. Moreover, what made her outstanding was that with her creativity, she wrote playwrights that not only brought joy to her community, but also showcased the talents of Black Americans to the public. One of the most famous plays she wrote was a play called *A Raisin in the Sun* that illustrated a struggle of a Black family in Chicago. This play was a huge success as it ran over 530 performances through next few years, and this became the first play produced on Broadway that was

written by an African American woman. Her journey to achieve this milestone was challenging considering the barriers of inequalities she had to break. Therefore, in my art piece, I wanted to contrast her early life and later life to demonstrate how she made a breakthrough.

My artwork illustrates how she kept her dream alive. The title of her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, was inspired by a poem written by Langston Hughes who describes about American Dream and compares it to raisin in the sun. In her play, she demonstrated how American Dream can be achieved through perseverance, and she showed that she was a raisin in the sun that never dried up and achieved American Dream. To show how she has changed over time, I drew a younger and an older version of Lorraine Hansberry next to each other. The younger version of Hansberry is depressed because when she was young, her family had to deal with the white neighbors who attempted to kick her family out of the neighborhood solely because they were black. For the house that she is living in, I used dark color schemes to show that the house is in a state of dilapidation. The stains and smudges do not indicate that she lived in poverty; the dilapidation rather symbolizes the pain and hardship of discrimination that Hansberry had to endure at her young age. In contrast, I used bright and vivid color schemes to add vibrancy to the Barrymore theater to symbolize the joy she will bring to her community later in her life. The older version of her is smiling and pointing at the Barrymore theater where *A Raisin in the Sun* was produced, telling her younger version of herself to have a hope and become a raisin in the sun that never dries up.

Creating this work profoundly impacted my outlook on life. Through thorough research and drawing, I not only learned about Hansberry's legacy and its impact on American playwright history, but also the need to support the marginalized community affected by the intersectionality. Similar to how Lorraine Hansberry used her creativity to produce plays that achieved her goal of providing joy and hope to the Black community, I realized that I have to give back to the community using my artistic talent. As of now, I have held several art exhibitions inside and outside my schools through gathering high school artists to showcase art pieces that my peers have worked on and fundraised for my school's art department and local art museums. By continuously planning community-boding activities and extending my reach to the community, I hope that I can become as influential as Lorraine Hansberry.