

Impact Statement

Bruce van Wingerden, Grade 8

A Glimpse of Unity, 2024.

Digital drawing and acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches.

Lakeside School, Edmonds, WA

Unsung Hero: Hiawatha

I came across Hiawatha upon browsing the list provided by the Lowell Milken Center. I considered many individuals, but Hiawatha held a viewpoint that stood out from the rest. Being a pre-colonial Native American Chief, his perspective and story is especially unique and rarely discussed. In school, I've learned a lot about Native Americans and the oppression they've faced after being colonized, but not so much about their lives before. I selected Hiawatha hoping to learn more about who he was, but also how his life differed from post-colonial Native American chiefs. Throughout his lifetime, he was a dedicated follower of "the Great Peacemaker", a man who preached of a united nation. Unfortunately, the peacemaker had a significant speech impediment, being a big issue in a culture where speech is key to communicate ideas. Thankfully, Hiawatha was a phenomenal storyteller and was able to be a voice for the peacemaker, preaching his ideas to other tribes. Eventually, his work resulted in the creation of the Iroquois Confederacy, a cultural and political union that united five Native American tribes: Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk. It is Hiawatha's kind, well-spoken, and peaceful qualities that make him such an admirable person to me.

In my piece, I wanted to express the influence that Hiawatha had on these tribes and nations, and how they've lasted throughout time. Hiawatha, pictured on the left, gazes across a tree, at different leaders from different time periods of the five tribes he united. This tree, called the Tree of Peace, which according to Iroquois tradition, had different tribes' weapons planted beneath it to signify their unity upon the creation of the Iroquois Confederacy. Surrounding the tree are many stars, and within that tree is the sun, setting behind a mountain range. The sun and stars have seen the Earth quite literally since day one, as well as the billions of people who have ever lived. It has guided millions, and been an integral part of many cultures, including that of the Iroquois people. The sun and stars have always united the people of the Earth, so I thought that it would be an important detail to include in my piece. The roots of the tree link Hiawatha to the other five leaders, stressing his importance. The reason the leaders are from different time periods is to express his impact; they are all looking at him with gratitude, thankful for all the work he did to unite them in the past. Even though they all come from time periods, they were still affected by his actions. The glowing effect outlining each individual highlights their spirituality, and importance. A heavier emphasis on their togetherness can be seen in the stars, where a constellation in the shape of the Wampum Belt can be found. This belt represents the importance of authority and

illustrates many different tribal stories. Hiawatha has helped me understand what it means to be a leader and the impact that I can have on the communities that I am a part of. Since first learning about Hiawatha in November, I've been an active member of my school's student council, working as a voice for the student body (similar to Hiawatha and the Great Peacemaker).

My hope is that people will look at my piece and wonder, "What's going on?", and will want to learn more. Through this piece, I hope to share Hiawatha's story with others, as well as a glance into his impact on Native American communities.