

Impact Statement

Isabelle Thom, Grade 9.

Freedom's Heart Song, 2018.

Acrylic, charcoal, ink on paper, 15 x 10 Inches.

Ambleside Schools International, Fredricksburg, TX

Unsung Hero: Sheyann Webb

Sheyann Webb was dubbed “The Smallest Freedom Fighter” by Martin Luther King Junior himself. Those who have heard her story have heard the honorary title. But why was she given it? She was young, at the time of the Selma to Montgomery march—too young to wield a club, or act in self-defense. She was just a little girl.

Sheyann’s fight was not one of blood. It was one of song.

She sang for freedom. She spurred a nation on to fight justice’s battle. She may not have been strong of body—but she was strong of heart. She gave her all, her best, for a world full of injustice. And in doing so, she taught us all an invaluable lesson:

No human is too old, too young, too feeble, too busy, too anything to stand up for goodness and justice in our world.

All around her, the nation was breaking. Men and women fell under the jaws of pride. Sheyann was bullied in her own school—where, of all places, she should have had equal rights in terms of education. She was mistreated. She was told by the world around her that she shouldn’t bother trying to win an impossible fight.

But she didn’t let those voices stop her. In the words of Dr. King, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” In the midst of all of her struggles, Sheyann did not remain silent, back down, hide, or even leave the situation to her elders to deal with—she embraced the battle wholeheartedly as her own, and became a voice for freedom: freedom’s heart song.

That is why Sheyann Webb will forever be an inspiration to us all.

My vision behind my piece is to creatively and truthfully display the impact of Sheyann’s choice to fight for freedom. Several factors contributed to this vision. Firstly, I chose to draw her figure in black and white charcoal and pencil—this is how much of America may have seen her. The background color is black, to symbolize the darkness of the time. In the darkness, we cannot see. Perhaps, for many of the men and women of the time, the future was unclear.

But in the darkness, the light shines all the brighter! I chose to paint the music notes in bright, vivid colors—reds, yellows, oranges, and white—to symbolize the light which Sheyann brought forth into the darkness—the light which came from her heart. The lighting at the time the photo was taken further contributed to the theme. Behind Sheyann’s figure the color is pitch black—

while the area to her right, behind the music notes, is slowly brightening. This symbolizes the impact her songs had on the community around her.

I felt that the best way to share Sheyann's story as widely as possible was through the internet, and social media. I have written an inspirational post dedicated to Sheyann's story on my blog and have shared this post and my painting on all of my social media outlets, including Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, and Teen Authors Journal, as well as by email to certain individuals. I have also enjoyed sharing her story with numerous friends and extended family. It's amazing to see how one seemingly insignificant little girl's life can inspire so many to keep the battle for justice raging! Sheyann Webb is truly a remarkable human being, and I believe that her story has the power to impact and inspire the world for the good of countless lives.

I'll end by saying this:

What would the world be like if we, with Sheyann, had a mindset that said:

"I'm gonna keep on walkin' Keep on talkin' Marchin' into freedom land." ?

The answer?

Sheyann knew. She saw it. She kept walking.

Can you?