

Impact Statement

Samantha Gonzalez, Grade 11.

Boxed Up, 2018.

Acrylic paint on wall, 78 x 24 Inches.

New Technology High School, Napa, CA

Unsung Hero: Sheyann Webb

Unsung hero. By definition, it refers to a person whose heroism or achievements are unacknowledged or little known. Our product was inspired by the life of an unsung hero, Sheyann Webb, who Dr. King named as the “Smallest Freedom Fighter”. Young, fierce, determined, and inspirational are just a few words to describe her. Sheyann was only 8 years old when she participated in the march from Selma to Montgomery, popularly known as “Bloody Sunday”. Though terrified of what could possibly happen, and without her parents’ consent to march, Webb was determined to participate and walk for their voting rights.

Before we talk about how she inspired us, let’s first talk about where Webb’s inspiration came from. Stumbling upon one of the civil rights activists’ meetings, Webb found her passion to fight for her right to vote on January 11, 1965. In this meeting, leaders spoke about a man named Martin Luther King Jr. and their right to vote as African Americans. During this time, although the Civil Rights Act was passed, segregation was still alive in places like Selma, Sheyann’s hometown. After attending the meeting for five hours, Webb started questioning her parents as to why they weren’t registered to vote. From then on, the 8-year-old regularly attended meetings and even skipped school for them. Dr. King asked her to sing the freedom song “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me Round” and since then, she’s led and motivated Brown Chapel AME church through her fierce, committed voice. From then on Sheyann became an activist and participated in marches to fight for their right to vote. These marches resulted in President Johnson signing the Voters Rights Act of 1965. Sheyann was able to watch her parents, along with 9,000 African American people register to vote. After the marches, Sheyann encountered challenges such as the death of Dr. King and being oppressed by her peers and school officials when she attended an all-white school. Despite these obstacles, Sheyann Webb, the smallest freedom fighter, didn’t let “nobody turn her around” and dedicated her life to fighting for peace, understanding, and justice.

Sheyann Webb has inspired us, and many others to never let anything or anyone push you back from your goals, whether it be age, power, or even the government. Sheyann exemplifies for youth, that with passion, commitment and determination, you will accomplish your goals. Her activism and her accomplishments are so important in our lives today. In today’s world, the issues Sheyann fought against seem to be coming back to life. For instance, there are states that are taking away the right to vote for other in discrete ways. In some states, voting is such a hassle that it discourages people to vote and sometimes even prevent them from voting. Showing proof of identification and registering are two of the main issues. Many people argue that it doesn’t have to be this complicated, and it never used to be complicated. These restrictions and limitations are subtly taking away and discriminating against some citizens’ right to vote. We are at a critical time where us, as the youth, has a big role to play that will impact

our future and the world's. Through Sheyann Webb, we can see that it is possible and we have the power to impact the world we live in and fight against these discriminating acts.

Sharing our piece to the community is the most important part and we were able to get it out to the community more than once. For the first time, we had to fundraise for our materials and had a bake sale downtown. Lots of people walked by and donated money while asking about the purpose of the bake sale. Through it, we were able to share our vision for our product and also tell them a little bit about our unsung hero. Then, we presented at a middle school once we completed our piece, which was our main goal. We envisioned to share it with the youth and inspire them using Sheyann Webb's story. We thought that it is only fitting to present it to the younger generation because Sheyann was 8 years old when she started making an impact. We are using our art piece as an instrument to motivate and open the eyes of many. We want them to realize that they have the power to make a change in their community or even in the world. And we want them to remember, just like Sheyann Webb said, "They truly matter."