

Impact Statement

Gordon Mallett, Grade 11.

We Know Not of the Future, 2017.

Plaster, 22 x 11 x 11.5 Inches.

Crossroads Charter Academy High School, Big Rapids, MI

Unsung Hero: Joshua L. Chamberlain

I studied Joshua Chamberlain after reading accounts of his bravery in several histories of the American Civil War. I was captivated by this college professor who had put down his books and bravely volunteered for service in the Union Army, taking up arms for the service of his country. I admired his selflessness in the face of hardships and wanted to know more about the man he was. When I saw that Chamberlain had been included in your list of unsung heroes, I knew that I had to create a work of art in honor of his life and accomplishments.

Before his service in the Union Army, Joshua Chamberlain was a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin College. He was by all accounts an excellent teacher, passing on to his students some of his own love for the beauty of language. He began his military career as lieutenant of the 20th Maine regiment, eventually being promoted to brigadier general. His service in the American Civil War earned him many distinguished medals, among them the Medal of Honor, given for his bravery during the battle of Gettysburg. At the end of the conflict, when it came time for the rebel forces to surrender to General Chamberlain, he ordered his troops to show respect their fallen foe, acknowledging the dignity of the Confederate troops despite being on different sides of the war that had divided America. Chamberlain left the military shortly after the end of the war, going on to serve as governor of Maine for four one-year terms. He also became president of Bowdoin College and spent his final years lecturing and writing about his service in the war.

For my sculpture, I chose to use plaster. In addition to being a sculptural medium which was used during Chamberlain's time, plaster is naturally white, representing the faultless nature of Chamberlain's service. His face is older than how he is normally portrayed: a man nearing the end of his life, rather than at his prime. I did this to symbolize that he led a long and fruitful life spanning several careers. He looks forward with a pensive, almost worried gaze, but his eyes still hold hope for the future that he helped to create. A book rests on his base, the book representing his academic life and his lifetime love of words and language. The book is closed, conveying what is done cannot be redone, only remembered. On the cover of the book is engraved a quote from Chamberlain himself: "We know not of the future and cannot plan for it much." This serves to reinforce the idea that deeds cannot be done again, only remembered. Although Joshua Chamberlain did not know what the future would bring, he acted as honorably as he did through a sense of duty to his country and his sense of what was right. We can all learn from his example and act based on our morals, not through a misguided sense of obligation or because it is what everyone else is doing.