

Impact Statement

Paige Reinfelder, Grade 10.

The Woman Who Can See All Colors, 2017.

Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 Inches.

Yarmouth High School, Yarmouth, ME

Unsung Hero: Jane Elliott

I consider myself to be an advocate for equality, and I am waiting for our world to join in on the want for better treatment of all genders, races, religions, and so on. So while searching for an unsung hero to portray in my artwork I found Jane Elliott. A brave teacher who stands up to racism, teaches students about discrimination, while also being a feminist and LGBT activist, many things that I am also very passionate about. The minute I read her short summary on the Unsung Hero's webpage I knew I wanted to tell more of her story to my classmates and others, because these issues are still sadly prevalent in our society today.

Though it was a bit of a challenge to sum up an incredible person and story into one single piece of art, I tried my best to summarize Elliott's story. Being a schoolteacher during the 1960's when racism was in full swing must have been challenging. But being a teacher opposed to racism must have been incredibly difficult. Elliott saw the discrimination and hatred towards students of minority and when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, she decided to act upon her observations and begin to teach children what it felt like to be bullied just because they looked different. She started this teaching through an exercise called "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes" where she split her classroom of young students up by eye color. She then had one group of students be the majority who could make the other group of minorities feel inferior. Her point of this exercise was to show the students what it felt like to be bullied and targeted just because of their skin color. Now this is a pretty deep and intense thing, so how could I show all of this? I decided to use symbolism to tell Elliott's story.

When looking at my piece the main focus point is Elliott herself in the center of the painting. I have drawn her at her current age to show her wisdom and determination to help people better understand racism even today. One of the first things you may notice about her face is that she has one blue eye and one brown eye. I have purposefully made this difference to symbolize what the title and idea of her teaching is. Along with eye color, she wears a blue collar around her neck to symbolize what she had her students wear during the experiment, her collar being blue since her eyes are blue in real life. Inside the collar I have also added the outline of Iowa where she taught and started her Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes exercise. As you can see this piece involves a lot of symbolism, and there is much more to come. I painted her shirt a red color in hopes of capturing her incredibly brave personality and ideas, and the background a purple color to show power. Elliott's character screams bravery and power to me, from her harsh yet extremely effective ways of teaching, to her ideas on equality. The two hands shaking in the foreground of the painting symbolize the want for racial equality both Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) and Jane Elliott strove and are striding for. Written on the hands is the date MLK passed away, a date that is incredibly important to our country and Elliot herself. I have also included a quote towards the top of the painting from MLK, that I think is very important in learning how to deal with equality in our world. One of the most important pieces of my painting is the quote

located on the bottom. "You must not tolerate the intolerable" from Jewish writer, political activist, and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel. This quote demonstrates Jane Elliott's driven actions to end racism and her incredible yearning for equality. This saying not only inspired Elliott to begin her teaching to end racism, but it also inspires me.

I believe that "you must not tolerate the intolerable" is an amazing way to sum up what this project has taught me. Before learning about Jane Elliott and her incredible story I was always ready to stand up for my beliefs and for the better of others, but after hearing what she has done I want to make even more of a change to make our society better for everyone. Elliott has taught me to not care what others may think of my opinions and actions, and to always do what I think is the right thing. Being able to watch some of her lectures online has furthered this learning, as I can observe how she deals with things that need change. From this project I have not only learned about an incredibly inspiring person, but also more about myself and the things I am ready to do for the things I believe are right.