

Impact Statement

Mairen O'Neill, Grade 10.

Smallest Freedom Fighter, 2017.

Acrylic, mixed media on board, 20 x 16 Inches.

Yarmouth High School, Yarmouth, ME

Unsung Hero: Sheyann Webb

In the beginning of the Unsung Hero project I was having a difficult time choosing a person to depict because each hero's story was so admirable. They all touched me in different ways but there was one person that inspired me more than others, Sheyann Webb. When I read Sheyann's story I was completely blown away by her courageous spirit, that I knew that I had to paint her and help share her story with others. Sheyann Webb grew up in Selma, Alabama where Jim Crow laws still haunted the town. Sheyann and her friend were on their way to school when they noticed black and white people talking, which was an unusual sight at the time. Curious, Webb followed the people into a church where she ended up spending many days listening to them talk about a man named Martin Luther King Jr., who was going to help change the segregation laws. Webb was only eight years old when she invested herself in changing society with the one and only Martin Luther King Jr.

My painting of Sheyann Webb portrays her like the strong independent girl she is. In my painting Webb's profile is the main part of the paint along with Martin Luther King Jr., who is next to her. This resembles that she has the same determination that King does. I also wanted to show how she not only sat in on the many meetings in the church, but Sheyann at eight years old, protested on "Bloody Sunday", and walked the 54 mile march in Selma, Alabama. To express this, I painted Sheyann and other protesters next to her, which is horizontal from Sheyann's profile. For the base coat of the painting I chose the color red for two reasons. First, I wanted red to be the background of the people protesting to resemble "Bloody Sunday". Secondly, the color red stands for strength and power, as well as determination and passion which are all characteristics that both Webb and the other people fighting the segregation laws possess. After painting a bigger version of Sheyann and her with the protesters I started to work on important details. First, I wanted to include a hand holding a vote pin on my painting because the freedom to vote is such an important concept that Webb strongly believed in. She even asked her parents to try and register to vote for her ninth birthday present. So, I painted a child hand holding a pin one would receive after voting. The second detail that I thought was important to add was Sheyann holding a banner that reads "The Smallest Freedom Fighter". This was something Sheyann was known for because Martin Luther King Jr. himself names her that. Webb is known to be the youngest protester marching in Selma and on "Bloody Sunday". In the middle of finishing up my painting I decided that I wanted to incorporate a jumble of words in the background of the people protesting but made sure some red was still showing through. In order to do this, I found a book and cut up a couple pages and then collaged them on. The words stood for how many voices made a difference in this world and also the power of the press. Lastly, I cut a few strips of white paper and wrote the main chorus of a chant the protesters would yell to show their motivation. The chant was: "We ain't goin' let nobody turn us around." Then glued it on in the corner of the painting. This was the cherry on top for my painting.

This project has changed my perspective of life in so many ways. I now have a better understanding of how many amazing people don't get recognized for their outstanding contribution to the world. This assignment makes me want to share these people's stories as much as I can and try to discover other unsung heroes this world has.