

Impact Statement

Monica Navarro, Grade 12.
Nuestros Derechos, 2016.
Colored pencil on paper, 19.5 x 19.5 Inches.
Wichita North High School, Wichita, KS
Unsung Hero: Sylvia Mendez

What I find inspirational about the unsung hero, Sylvia Mendez, is that she has been an activist almost her entire life. At age 8, Sylvia Mendez began making a difference for others. As a child, Sylvia helped to desegregate schools in California in the Mendez v. Westminster case. Sylvia was brave enough to be the first Hispanic to attend an all-white school in California, where she was bullied and teased. Mendez v. Westminster paved the way for Brown vs. Board of Education seven years later to end segregation for the whole country. Sylvia encourages students to stay in school and to continue their education. Sylvia has also received the 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom by Obama. As a Mexican-American student of immigrant parents, I feel a strong connection to Sylvia. If it wasn't for the brave actions of Sylvia, my education could have been extremely limited. My friends' and family's education could have been affected by segregation, as well. I don't want to live in a society where my skin color determines whether or not I am accepted into a school or not. Sylvia inspires me to support Hispanics to stay in school and pursue higher education to obtain a degree. Statistically, Hispanics have a high percentage of dropping out of high school and college. Although the percentage has lowered and more Hispanics are staying in school, there is still more work to be done to keep decreasing the percentage of Hispanics dropping out. Sylvia has helped create a pathway for me to receive a great education. I will graduate high school and attend college pursuing a degree in art education. Like Sylvia, I believe I can make a difference and inspire my future students and the generations to come.

My parents and I moved to the United States when I was three years old. They moved to escape poverty. Education is very important to my parents because they couldn't finish their education in Mexico. The schools they attended had very limited resources, just like schools Sylvia started at. They were also expected to learn with old supplies and outdated resources. My parents, like Sylvia's parents, wanted better education for their children. They wanted my siblings and I to have the opportunity to go to college and earn a degree. I have had struggles to overcome as a Mexican-American student; it has been difficult to communicate with my parents about my schoolwork. At school, I spoke and wrote in English, and at home spoke Spanish. I could never get help with homework from my parents. Now that I'm a senior, I struggle to get support from my parents because they don't know the process of going to college.

In my visual interpretation, I included the image of Sylvia as an adult and as a child because Sylvia continues to be a hero from age eight to today. They are holding a newspaper announcing the news of schools being desegregated in California as a symbol for what Sylvia's family has accomplished. The figures in my artwork are facing a path symbolizing the effort it took to desegregate schools. The path leads to a pencil, book and a cap symbolizing education. The mallet and scale symbolize justice. I centered the newspaper onto the contrasting red path to lead the viewer to focus on how important winning this case was for Sylvia and for students like me.