

Impact Statement

Lily Manoochehri Farr, Grade 7

***The Life of Mary Bickerdyke*, 2025**

Acrylic, pen, watercolor, marker on canvas, 24 x 36 inches

Bernardo Heights Middle School, San Diego, CA

Unsung Hero: Mary Ann Bickerdyke

The person I chose as my Unsung Hero is a woman named Mary A. Bickerdyke. Part of why I chose Mary to be my Unsung Hero was when I did research on her I saw all the amazing things she had done. I was surprised that I had never heard of her or learned about her in school. I found everything she did in her lifetime fascinating and inspirational. I decided to pick her as my Unsung Hero, just to sum up everything she did. She was a pioneering Civil War nurse, Mary also organized field hospitals, advocated for better sanitation, and supported veterans after the war. She also worked to set up over 300 field hospitals to improve the Union Army's conditions. What I admire about her is how hard she worked for others. Many things that she did were crucial to saving the lives of numerous soldiers during the war. By setting up over 300 field hospitals, she helped provide injured soldiers with better care and cleaner buildings to recover in.

Mary had a huge impact on injured soldiers and veterans. Even in retirement, she still advocated for veterans, trying her best to provide a comfortable lifestyle after the war. For the 300 field hospitals which she played a big part in building, she went through tons of paperwork. She also had to work closely with doctors and surgeons to ensure soldiers were in good hands. It must have been even more of a struggle for her seeing as she was working in a male-dominated field. When she was advocating for the lives of veterans, she didn't even have the right to vote.

As soon as I heard her life story, I knew exactly what I wanted to paint. I wanted to fill up the canvas with pictures and words. I decided that I would do one big image in the middle of the canvas, where you can see her holding the book that tells about her life story. I wanted there to be little images around her, alluding to what she did in her life. All around the paintings, you can see words going in circles around her and the smaller paintings. If you try reading what the words are saying, you might be confused when the story goes off the canvas and stops halfway through. That was intentional. I tried to express the significance of everything she did by having the words go off the canvas. What she did was bigger than this painting and influenced the lives of many others. I chose blue to represent how much she was able to do in a male-dominated industry. Since blue is mostly perceived as a "boy color" I wanted to visibly show the misogyny she must have faced, but she still tried her best to make life easier for soldiers.

After learning so much about Mary, I started feeling more determined to do things that would better my and others' days. Like picking up a pencil for somebody else or focusing in class so I wouldn't be confused later. The more I learn about Mary Bickerdyke, the more determined I feel. I hope that when other people see my artwork, they can read into the little details. I still find it shocking that we don't learn about Mary in school. I started bringing her up to my friends in relevant conversations and showing the finished product of my art to them. I hope that others feel as inspired as I felt when I first learned about her.