

## Impact Statement

Lilly Zagula, Grade 12

***Letters to Freedom***, 2025

Oil on canvas board, Caran-d'ache Neocolor II artist crayons 16 x 20 inches

Pleasure Ridge Park High School, Louisville, KY

Teacher: Denise Webb (AEA 2024-2025)

Unsung Hero: Irena Sendler

Irena Sendler, also referred to as Irena Sendlerowa in Poland, was a Polish humanitarian, social worker, and nurse who served in the Polish Underground Resistance during World War II in German-occupied Warsaw. I chose her as my unsung hero due to the inspiration I had felt when I first read her story. I related to her in many ways, including being a part of the Jewish race, and having inspirational fathers who were big attributes in the medical field. Growing up, her father passed during her youth, which I also heavily relate to. I also empathize with her dedication and devotion to helping those in need. She is truly a hero in my eyes and of many others, and I felt honored to have the opportunity to create a piece dedicated to her noble sacrifices.

She is primarily known for her heroic efforts to rescue Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. She smuggled over 2,500 children out of the ghetto and into hiding, often with forged identities and assistance from her network of volunteers. Irena Sendler's father, a physician named Stanisław Henryk Krzyżanowski, had a profound influence on her life. He instilled in her a strong moral compass, teaching her the importance of helping those in need, regardless of their background. Specifically, he taught her that people were either good or bad, and their nature was independent of race, religion, or nationality.

For my artwork, I tried to find ways to beautifully but subtly intertwine Irena's personal characteristics along with her impact on the world. I started by using a base focus of a typewriter and a bulletin board. I used a typewriter because the majority of her sacrifices pertained to typing up fake documents to help free the imprisoned people. In order to display this part of her story, the typewriter was a symbolic representation of her knowledge and wisdom of writing, as well as the documents she created. The jars located next to the typewriter pertain to the way she delivered information to the victims in this time period. She would crumple up the pieces of paper and bury them beneath a tree for them to be found. I incorporated the tree as an image pinned up on her bulletin board. I believe that the tree is a great symbol of her story because of the way it was used as a channel for her activism. I also have a necklace hung on the bulletin board with a Star of David pendant hanging down as a way to represent her religion. I believe a big part of her motivation and activism during this period closely aligned to her sympathy of which she had for the Jewish race as a whole. Lastly, I have a photograph

pinned to the bulletin board that displays buildings with a fence in front of hundreds of people, which symbolizes the entrapment of Jewish individuals during this time in history. My goal with this project is to raise awareness of her heroic sacrifices as well as educate students about the unknown story of Irena Sendler during the holocaust.

#### References:

“Irena Sendler: Life in a Jar.” *Lowell Milken Center*, 5 Feb. 2024,  
[www.lowellmilkencenter.org/programs/projects/view/life-in-a-jar](http://www.lowellmilkencenter.org/programs/projects/view/life-in-a-jar).

“Women of Valor.” *Irena Sendler | Stories of Women Who Rescued Jews During the Holocaust*, [www.yadvashem.org/YV/EN/EXHIBITIONS/RIGHTEOUS-WOMEN/sendler.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/YV/EN/EXHIBITIONS/RIGHTEOUS-WOMEN/sendler.asp).