



Impact Statement

Yiting Wang, Grade 10

She Stood Between, 2026

Acrylic, colored pencil, marker on paper, 12 x 9 inches

Yun Hua Fang Art Studio, Saratoga, CA

Unsung Hero: Lois Gibbs

My Unsung Hero is Lois Gibbs, an environmental activist who proved that real change does not always come from people in power, but from ordinary individuals who refuse to stay silent. She was a mother living in Love Canal, a neighborhood later discovered to be built on top of toxic chemical waste. When her child became sick and the government failed to act, she did not accept the situation. Instead, she began to investigate, organize, and speak out. What makes her an “unsung” hero is that she did not start as a scientist or politician—she became a leader through necessity, driven by responsibility and care for her community.

Lois Gibbs’s impact goes far beyond her own neighborhood. By gathering evidence, knocking on doors, and listening to other families, she turned individual suffering into collective awareness. She organized residents, led protests, and forced the issue into public attention. Because of her persistence, families were eventually relocated, and the government was pushed to acknowledge the danger. Her actions also contributed to the creation of environmental policies that address toxic waste cleanup. Her impact shows that change can begin with one person but grow into something that affects an entire country. More importantly, she gave a voice to people who were ignored, showing that community action can challenge even large systems of power.

In my artwork, I wanted to move beyond a simple portrait and instead capture the full meaning of her actions. I chose to place Lois Gibbs at the center of the composition, walking forward with confidence, holding a megaphone and documents. These objects symbolize her two main forms of power: speaking out and using evidence. Around her, I created a space that exists outside of normal time and reality. Different moments of her work—protesting, researching, and engaging with the community—appear at the same time, forming a circular flow around her. This represents how her efforts were continuous and interconnected rather than a single event.

The lower part of the composition reveals a fractured underground filled with toxic waste, barrels, and skull imagery. This represents the hidden danger beneath the surface of everyday life. I wanted to show that the threat was not immediately visible, which is why it was ignored for so long. By placing this beneath her, I emphasize that she is confronting something buried and unseen. The glowing, root-like lines extending from her figure connect the upper and lower parts of the image. These lines symbolize both energy and influence, suggesting that her actions reach into the community and expose what was hidden.

Another important visual choice is the toxic gas that surrounds her but does not harm her. This was intentional. Rather than showing her as physically overpowering the danger, I wanted to express a different kind of strength—moral and emotional resilience. The pollution represents fear, harm, and neglect, but it cannot overcome her purpose. This reflects the idea that true strength is not about physical power, but about persistence and conviction.

The child holding a teddy bear is placed within the affected ground to represent the people she was ultimately fighting for. This figure adds emotional weight to the piece, reminding the viewer that the issue was not abstract, but deeply human. It emphasizes innocence and vulnerability, which contrasts with the harshness of the toxic environment. Including this element helps explain why her actions mattered and what was at stake.

Through this artwork, I hope to change how people think about heroes. Many people imagine heroes as powerful or extraordinary from the beginning, but Lois Gibbs shows that heroism can come from ordinary circumstances. My goal was to create a piece that not only tells her story but also makes viewers reflect on their own ability to create change. By combining realism with symbolic elements, I aimed to create both an emotional and intellectual response.

Ultimately, this work is about visibility and courage. It is about revealing what is hidden and showing that one person's decision to act can have lasting impact. I hope that viewers leave with a stronger understanding of what it means to stand up for others, and the realization that being an "unsung hero" is something more people are capable of than they might think.