



Impact Statement

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The Shape of Growth, 2026

Acrylic on canvas board, 16 x 20 inches

Stratford High School, Houston, TX

Unsung Hero: Norman Borlaug

Before the world knew his name, there was only a field.

Wind moved through rows of wheat as Norman Borlaug worked with his hands in the soil, studying, testing, and trying again. There were no headlines marking those early moments, no sense of certainty about what his work would become. His story begins quietly, on a family farm near Cresco, Iowa, where he learned the values that would shape everything that followed.

As a child, Borlaug was raised on discipline, responsibility, and education. He completed farm chores from a young age and walked over a mile each day to attend a one-room schoolhouse. His grandfather, "Nels", had only a few years of formal schooling, yet he strongly believed in the power of learning. When Borlaug once hesitated to go to school, his grandfather told him, "Norm-boy, it's better to fill your head now, if you want to fill your belly later." It is simple, but that comment followed him into his work.

Initially, his work entailed developing a solution to the problem many farmers encountered, which was that of lodging wheat plants, a consequence of their being fertilized and becoming taller than what they were supposed to be. Such an occurrence would make it difficult to grow the wheat plants sufficiently, hence producing adequate food. With his knowledge in genetics from past education, he bred the high-yielding wheat plants with shorter and sturdier Japanese dwarf varieties to form a strain of wheat plants that could produce large quantities of grains without lodging. His experiments eventually transformed into the Green Revolution; an agricultural revolution that led to food security all over the world. In 1970, he received a Nobel Peace Prize for the same contribution to agriculture and food security, the act of feeding others would be considered a step towards promoting peace.

The scale of that impact is difficult to fully understand. His work reached countries such as Mexico, India, and Pakistan, significantly helping increase crop yields and prevent widespread famine. While statistics often describe his impact in terms of millions or even a billion lives saved, those numbers are difficult to fully grasp. I attempted to find a more meaningful way to scale it smaller in my work.

I chose to portray him not at the height of recognition, but in the middle of his work. In my painting, he focuses on the wheat in his hands, studying it carefully. I wanted to

make the moment feel more real, as if we were witnessing something private and important.

I intended to make the composition reflect the progression of his impact. On the left side, the tones are softer, and the crops appear taller, taking back to the early stages of experimentation of the tall wheat. As the painting moves to the right, the colors deepen into richer greens, representing growth and the expansion of his work during the Green Revolution. A vibrant blue sky opens the space, giving the field a sense of movement and the life of a field.

The papers in the painting became a way to show something I could not easily explain with Borlaug's impact on the world. At first, they appear as simple notes and records, grounded in the work itself. As they rise into the air, they begin to transform into newspapers. I wanted to show his ideas and private research transforming into being known around the world.

It was through creating this artwork that I came to have another understanding of what it means to make an impact. I previously thought that being Impactful meant being visible in some sense, but I learned that it is often much more subtle than that. The focus on education from his grandfather helped me consider my own life, especially the sacrifices that were made for me to prioritize learning and opportunity.

I intend to show this art piece around my school community and allow them to question who I painted and their impact. This way, they too will come to understand how important it is to value someone who does not necessarily receive recognition, but whose contributions are essential, nonetheless.

The individual in question in this story is Norman Borlaug.

His life is one of resilience, determination, and the idea that it is important to continue looking for solutions and pursue them, despite any challenges. The fact is that his work in the field of agriculture grew into something much bigger thanks to his dedication and education.

At times, it may be said that history is created through consistent action.

At times, history grows.