

Impact Statement

Amalia Ward, Grade 10

A Light Despite Darkness, 2026

Colored pencil on paper, 13 x 19.5 inches

Saint Joseph Academy, Cleveland, OH

Unsung Hero: Emma Darling Cushman

Emma Darling Cushman's courageous and generous characteristics displayed throughout her life inspired me to illustrate her story. She became a teacher, nurse, and representative of 17 foreign countries when it was still unusual for women to pursue an advanced career at all. However, her life took a turn during the Armenian Genocide of 1915 when she, along with her organization, began to help save the lives of over a thousand starving, homeless Armenian orphans on the streets by caring for them in orphanages and nursing them in hospitals that she helped build. Even when the Turkish government ordered her to return to New York, Emma Darling Cushman remained persistent in her service and showed courage in the face of intimidation as well as the dangers of simply living in a country under attack.

One of the most admirable aspects of her story is that she continued dedicating her entire life to serving orphans and others affected by the war crimes until she passed away in 1930. In all her photos, Emma appears to me as a very motherly figure, which is why I drew her with a nurturing and loving expression towards the children in her embrace. To show intense emotion in the subjects' faces, I used Prismacolor pencils to draw precise and detailed features. The figures are drawn and shaded in a way like paper puppets, which was a stylistic choice to emphasize the fact that art features young children. Even though the scene is intended to be positive, I did not want to be disrespectful towards the real victims of this event by portraying the children as jolly or unfazed.

One of the main goals of this piece was to show a delicate balance between displaying the real, poor conditions that children faced and the optimistic generosity that Emma offered to them. The spotlight against the tattered Armenian flag in the background symbolizes that despite the tragedies of the genocide, Emma Darling Cushman brought hope and joy to the most innocent victims' lives. Reading her story gave me more insight to global history—I'll admit that I hadn't even known the existence of the Armenian Genocide until I learned about her. It's important for everyone to remember that these war crimes are not just a figment of the past; they are extremely real and ongoing in the current world in multiple countries, and we all need to have the same amount of empathy and compassion for children in these areas as my Unsung Hero did if we want any positive change to happen. I realized that if one woman could save the lives of so many children, I can do my part to help kids in need too.

Although my efforts pale in comparison to Emma's story, I try to help as a student by volunteering at the Hope Center, which is a nonprofit organization where students can tutor and educate refugee families and their children to help them learn English better. This is one of the reasons why Emma Darling Cushman's story stood out to me, because I aspire to mirror her passion for creating peace amidst war throughout her life.