

Impact Statement

Marcus Ye, Grade 12

A Call to Action Ripples the Water's Surface, 2026

Acrylic, colored pencil on canvas, 24 x 17 inches

The Bronx High School of Science, Oakland Gardens, NY

Unsung Hero: Lois Gibbs

I was drawn to Lois Gibbs as my Unsung Hero for her major impact in environmental activism, something I hope to achieve one day. Growing up as a Taiwanese American child, the transition from the bustling streets of New York City to the quiet farms of Neipu, Taiwan has always been jarring.

In recent years, I have noticed a common issue rather than the differences between my two homes: a lack of care for the environment.

The streets of NYC are seeing more pollution than ever and the typhoons that tear down local communities rage at greater violence. Yet it seems these issues are rarely addressed, and when they are, action never seems to follow. Gibbs serves as an example to everyone that this doesn't have to be the case.

Lois Gibbs is a courageous leader that rallied her community to bring justice. However, her life had not always followed such a radical approach. Like many others who resided in Love Canal, Niagara Falls, New York, Gibbs led a peaceful and mundane life. As a mother of two children, her family was the only thing in her list of priorities. But soon, all the residents of the Love Canal joined too.

In 1978, Gibbs discovered the root of all her concerns: chemical waste that seeped all throughout her neighborhood. Love Canal was slowly being overtaken by the waste that caused issues such as sickness, miscarriages, and harm to local wildlife. Unexpectedly but courageously, Lois Gibbs took a call to action and began her journey from a local resident to a community leader.

Gibbs did not fight alone. She rallied her people and sent the early wake up calls on the greater issues that affected everybody in her community. She was able to advocate for 800+ families living in the Love Canal who were directly affected by chemical waste. Many residents were able to start their lives anew after Gibbs helped them evacuate and relocate.

In truth, the issues regarding chemical waste cleanup spanned further than just the Love Canal. Her work as an environmental activist eventually reached its way to the federal government. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Better known as "Superfund," CERCLA was an achievement and legacy that Gibbs could deem the product of her actions. Today, CERCLA

continues to serve as a major responder towards toxic waste cleanup. Although she is no longer in the frontlines of environmental activism, Gibbs herself continues to participate and mentor future leaders across the country.

In my artwork, I wanted to emphasize the importance of Gibbs' actions while connecting it to my personal resonance with her story. Acrylics were my medium of choice because of its ability to achieve bold and vibrant colors. I hoped my portrait would be striking and experimental. So, I combined the pop art style that I typically favor with a more realistic one. Gibbs image is based off a photograph of her holding a telephone in the midst of a call. This showed her acting as a messenger for a call to action in a more literal sense. I wanted to capture her stern and hardworking nature, the image of her that deserves to be remembered. However, I believed it was just as important to depict her beginnings as it was to show her role as a leader. In the newspapers scattered across the top of my artwork, I included a graphic of a mother on her phone with her children. I wanted this to act as visual storytelling for her journey—how she went from being a regular family member to an activist. As people view my work and learn about Gibbs' story, I hope they can also find the courage to become part of a bigger initiative and make change.

To pay homage to her work in helping countless residents relocate and start new lives, I painted lotus flowers going through their cycle of life. The transition from wilted flowers to vibrant blooming petals carry a subtle message of how Lois Gibbs saved the living situations of people in her community. I specifically chose lotus flowers for their representation of rebirth in the Buddhist culture that my family practices. In addition to this, lotus flowers are grown on my grandparent's farm in Taiwan and helped me further connect my story with Gibbs'. The ripples on the water's surface also represent Gibbs' impact. They scatter and flow towards the message that I found most important while working on this project.

"People need to demand change."

This statement holds more truth now than ever before. I realized the importance of taking courage to demand change. Without Lois Gibbs making the first move, her small ripples would have never amassed the great achievements that continue to impact the lives of Americans and our environment today. Behind this message is a faint outline of the map of Love Canal, as well as other important messages Lois Gibbs has made in her lifetime.

I hope to display my artwork in my school bulletin board and on social media. I couldn't feel more grateful for having the chance to create this artwork. For me, this is the first step in taking action. Using my passion for art to bring representation to stories that deserve to be in the spotlight is the beginning of the impact I hope to have. My wish is for people to learn about Lois Gibbs' story and feel inspired to follow in her footsteps.