



Impact Statement

Margherita Rescigno, Grade 11

Hiawatha: Voice of the Great Peace, 2026

Oil on canvas board, 48 x 60 inches

Germantown High School, Madison, MS

Unsung Hero: Hiawatha

This piece centers on Hiawatha, a leader and speaker who lived in the northeastern woodlands of North America, likely between the 12th and 15th centuries. He is remembered for his role in helping bring together the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, uniting the Five Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. His work was rooted in communication and the effort to end cycles of conflict, guiding nations toward living alongside one another in peace.

Hiawatha's impact comes from his role in helping establish a way of living based on balance, shared responsibility, and respect between nations. The Great Law of Peace reflects those ideas, forming a system that allowed different groups to remain distinct while still being connected. That kind of structure continues to matter, especially in times where division is common. The composition moves across a 48 by 60-inch canvas, showing Hiawatha in a dynamic moment as he crosses through water on a blue horse, his face set forward, looking into the distance where this new path leads. Both the figure and the horse are in motion, not still, carrying a sense of direction. The blue of the horse ties into the water itself, giving a feeling of continuity and flow. Other horses appear in the sky, formed from the clouds as they ride behind him. They move in the same direction, following with him in a shared motion. These horses stand for the Five Nations, present together and moving in harmony after the peace was formed.

The horse is marked by the Hiawatha Belt, carrying it not only on its body but through the sky as well. Its presence spreads into the clouds, blending into their color and surrounding the horses that ride within them, holding them together as they move in the same direction. The clouds stretch across the sky with purple and pink tones running through them. These colors connect back to the Hiawatha Belt, a wampum design that represents the unity of the Five Nations and the agreement that brought them together. Instead of just placing it in one fixed spot, its presence also carries through the sky.

In Hiawatha's hand is a ceremonial staff made from white pine, with pinecones and needles attached to it. The material connects to the Tree of Peace, a white pine that represents the founding of the confederacy. It is understood as a place where conflict was set aside, with its roots extending outward and its presence standing for unity that continues beyond a single moment. On the far-left side of the composition, a solar eclipse appears, referencing the Haudenosaunee tradition that an eclipse occurred during the time when the nations were brought together. The process of making the piece was not rushed. It built slowly, layer by layer,

allowing the image to develop over time. There was no fixed plan at the beginning, only a direction that continued forward. The size of the canvas allowed space for the movement of the water and sky while keeping the figure grounded within it.

This work does not try to fully explain Hiawatha or define his story. It stays with the movement and the act of bringing people together, keeping the focus there. The impact of the piece comes from the subject itself. Hiawatha's story continues to matter because the need for unity does not go away. The work holds that and leaves it open.

References:

Alamy Stock Photo – Native American dressed as Hiawatha.

"On his head his eagle feathers, / Round his waist his belt of wampum" from Hiawatha by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Kluger, Jeffrey. "The Beauty and Science of a Total Solar Eclipse." *The Times*.