



Impact Statement

Aliya Ekici, Grade 9

More Than Girl Talk: The Architect of the Abyss, 2026

Marker, watercolor on paper, 11 x 15 inches

Jessie's Art Studio, San Diego, CA

Unsung Hero: Marie Tharp

Back in the 1950s, people thought the ocean floor was just a giant, flat wasteland. My artwork is about Marie Tharp, the geologist who proved them all wrong. Since she was a woman, she wasn't even allowed on the research ships to collect data herself. She had to stay behind at a desk, manually plotting sonar numbers onto paper. When she found a massive rift valley in the middle of the Atlantic, her own colleague called it "girl talk" and dismissed it. She didn't back down, though. She kept at it until the evidence was undeniable, changing the way we look at our planet forever. It is incredibly inspiring to think that while men were out on the physical ocean, Marie was the one actually "seeing" it through numbers and math. I wanted my piece to capture the quiet strength she had to maintain while being excluded from the very places she was mapping.

Marie's work was the missing piece for the theory of plate tectonics. By mapping that rift valley, she proved the seafloor was spreading, which explained how continents move. Before her, that idea was basically treated like a joke in the science community. Her maps became the blueprint for modern geology. She didn't just draw lines on a page; she discovered the engine that moves the Earth. Her legacy is one of the most significant in the history of science because it gave us a unified theory of how our planet works. Without her maps, our knowledge of earthquakes, volcanoes, and the deep-sea would be decades behind where it is today. She truly changed how we define the world.

I wanted to show the contrast between how the world saw Marie and what she was actually seeing in her mind. I used watercolor because it's fluid and unpredictable, just like the ocean. For the portrait, I kept Marie in black and white. To me, this represents how she was sidelined and stuck in a "black and white" era where women's contributions were often kept in the shadows. As for the background, I used the map she made and did it in bright, saturated colors to show the revelation of her work. I layered the blues and yellows to create a sense of depth, almost as if the viewer is looking through the water and seeing the terrain for the first time. The transition from the grayscale portrait to the colorful map represents the light she shed on the dark corners of our planet. Lastly, I painted the "Contrary Map Maker" *New York Times* headline into the background to show the labels she had to fight against just to be taken seriously. By weaving the text into the art, I wanted to show that her personal struggle is inseparable from her scientific success.

I wish for this piece to fill the void between the map and the person who made it. Many of the things we take for granted today came from people who had to fight just to be heard. I hope Marie's story inspires anyone who has been told their ideas don't matter. Her legacy shows that even when you are excluded from the journey, your work can still change the destination. By sharing this through my art, I hope to give Marie Tharp the recognition she was denied during much of her career. I want people to walk away realizing that "girl talk" was the sound of a scientific revolution, and that history is full of unsung heroes just waiting to be mapped out.

References:

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