



Impact Statement

Eileen Tran, Grade 8

More Than Just a Drawing, 2026

Acrylic, watercolor on paper, 15 x 12 inches

DeKalb Early College Academy, Stone Mountain, GA

Unsung Hero: Jackie Ormes

My Unsung Hero is Jackie Ormes, the first African American woman cartoonist in the U.S. I chose her because she used art for more than just entertainment—she used it to challenge racism, sexism, and other stereotypes at a time when Black women had little recognition and representation in the media. What I admire most about her is how brave and creative she was about her comics. Instead of drawing African American characters in the exaggerated or disrespectful ways that were common back then, she created characters who were smart, confident, stylish, and outspoken. Her comics showed Black women as strong individuals with legitimate opinions and experiences. These take courage, especially during a time when racism was normalized and the norm for most people. She inspires me because she proved that art can be used to stand up for what's right.

Jackie Ormes's impact goes far beyond the comic strips she created. Through her hard work, including *Torchy Brown* and *Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger*, she showed readers portrayals of Black life as positive and realistic that were rarely seen in newspapers during that period. Her characters conversed about politics, racism, and everyday struggles, which helped people think differently about the world around them. One of her most significant contributions was one of her characters, *Patty-Jo*, who later inspired the *Patty-Jo Doll*. This doll was groundbreaking because it was one of the first mass-produced Black dolls that looked like a real African American child instead of a stereotype made by white people. At a time when many toys either ignored Black children or portrayed them negatively, *Patty-Jo* allowed them to see their reflections from the doll in a positive way. Representation matters, especially for kids, because it can shape confidence and identity. Although Ormes faced discrimination and political pressure throughout her career, she continued to create work that promoted dignity, awareness, and pride. Because of Ormes and her work, future artists, especially Black women, had more opportunities to enter the world of comics and illustration.

My artwork focuses on Ormes's creations rather than her actual face. This is because this allows her work to be recognized and allows viewers to realize that her true legacy is the work she left behind. Even if people do not recognize the name Jackie Ormes, her characters and ideas still speak for her. By leaving her out of the image, the viewer's attention goes straight to the cartoons themselves, which is where her impact really comes from. My drawing includes elements inspired by her comic style, like bold outlines, expressive poses, and simplified shapes that resemble newspaper cartoons. In addition, the *Patty-Jo* doll was referenced into my artwork to show how her influence went beyond comics and into everyday life. The empty space where

she would normally be also has symbolic meaning, it represents how she was often overlooked, even though her work was groundbreaking.

While creating this piece, I tried to stay true to the look of classic comic art while still making it my own. I used strong linework and construction so the characters would stand out clearly, like how newspaper comics were designed. I researched her original strips to understand how she drew facial expressions, clothing, and body language. This helped me create something that feels connected to her style while showing my interpretation of her work. My goal was to highlight themes of representation, voice, and empowerment. By putting her characters at the center, I wanted viewers to see how she used them to express important messages about society.