



Impact Statement

Sara Liu, Grade 8

The Beginning of a Cure, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches

The Bear Creek School, Redmond, WA

Unsung Hero: Dr. Maurice Hilleman

Unsung Heroes are often people whose work quietly changes the world without widespread recognition. One such individual is Dr. Maurice Hilleman, a scientist whose contributions to vaccine development have saved millions of lives. I chose Hilleman as my unsung hero because of his extraordinary impact on global health and his dedication to protecting future generations. As well as the fact that my family also has a lot of doctors, such as my cousins who work in cancer research. What I find most inspiring about him is not only his intelligence, but his persistence and sense of responsibility. He instead focused on solving the urgent problems and helping people on a massive scale.

Dr. Maurice Hilleman had a huge impact on history and medicine. He developed over 40 vaccines, including those for measles, mumps, hepatitis A and B, and meningitis. His work has been credited with saving more lives than that of any other medical scientist in the 20th century. One of his most remarkable achievements was creating the mumps vaccine using a strain he isolated from his own daughter. This moment can show both his resourcefulness and his urgency; he acted quickly to prevent further spread of disease. Because of his efforts, diseases that once caused widespread suffering and death are now preventable. In my research, I learned that his work continues to protect millions of children every year, even though many people do not know his name. This lasting impact is what defines him as a true hero. Even without the recognition he deserves.

My artistic vision was to capture Dr. Maurice Hilleman at a pivotal moment, an early moment in his career, when he was younger and just starting out with his first vaccine. This was when he was actively working in the lab and beginning to make discoveries that would change the world. In the painting, he is holding a test tube up which is emitting light, symbolizing both scientific discovery and hope. The glowing light surrounding him represents the life-saving impact of his work, almost like a halo, emphasizing that his contributions are heroic even if they are not widely celebrated. I chose warm, golden tones for the light to symbolize hope, healing, and human life, while the darker background reflects the uncertainty and danger of disease before vaccines were developed. His focused expression and upward gaze show determination, curiosity, and optimism. I used strong contrasts between light and shadow to highlight the importance of his work emerging from difficult circumstances. I depicted the background as almost a barn-like structure as Dr. Maurice Hilleman grew up on a farm and that was a main spark or inspiration for his interest in science. While the dramatic lighting adds emotional depth.

During the process I was paying careful attention to lighting, color, and composition. I used acrylic paint to build layers and create depth, especially in the glow and lighting around Dr. Maurice Hilleman. I also paid close attention to anatomy and posture to make his pose feel natural yet also powerful, this was to emphasize his role as a creator of life-saving solutions.

This project has influenced my own perspective by helping me recognize the importance of people who work behind the scenes. Dr. Maurice Hilleman's story reminds me that making a difference does not require recognition, but rather dedication and purpose. His work inspires me to value science, perseverance, and the impact one individual can have on the world. Moving forward, I hope to share this artwork with others to raise awareness about his contributions and the importance of vaccines that save many lives, up until today. By displaying this piece, I hope it encourages people to appreciate the individuals who protect public health and to better understand the role of science in everyday life.

I wish to honor Dr. Maurice Hilleman as an unsung hero whose legacy continues to save lives. He shows that true heroism often happens quietly, through hard work, innovation, and a commitment to helping others.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Vaccine History and Impact, World Health Organization (WHO) – Immunization and Global Health Data, National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Maurice Hilleman Biography, PBS Documentary: Hilleman: A Perilous Quest to Save the World's Children,

Maurice Hilleman, Encyclopaedia Britannica.