



Impact Statement

Ashley Park, Grade 11

***The Man Who Saved Millions, Silently*, 2026**

Gouache on paper, 15 x 11 inches

Chadwick International, Songdo, South Korea

Unsung Hero: Dr. Maurice Hilleman

The American microbiologist and vaccinologist Dr. Maurice Hilleman was a pioneer in his field. He was born in 1919 in Miles City, Montana. Growing up at a time when diseases such as measles and influenza caused a large number of deaths, he was motivated to pursue a career in science. After completing his doctoral studies in microbiology, he worked in both academia and the pharmaceutical industry, eventually becoming one of the most influential figures in modern medicine. Throughout his career, Hilleman developed more than 40 vaccines, including those for measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and meningitis. Among these, one of his most important achievements was the development of the combined measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine, which made immunization more efficient and accessible.

I chose Hilleman as my Unsung Hero because, despite saving millions of lives, he remains relatively unknown to the public. In a society where success is often associated with recognition, this contrast is particularly striking. He did not seek fame or attention but instead focused on protecting human life. His quiet yet consistent commitment to helping others is what I admire most and what makes him a meaningful role model. Hilleman's impact on global health is both significant and long-lasting. His vaccines have reduced the spread of dangerous diseases and lowered mortality rates, especially among children. Before the measles vaccine was introduced, millions of cases were reported each year, many of which led to serious illness or death. Today, due to widespread vaccination programs influenced by his work, measles-related deaths have decreased dramatically. In addition, his work on hepatitis vaccines has helped prevent long-term conditions such as liver disease and cancer. Through my research, I found that many vaccines included in routine immunization programs are directly connected to his work, yet his contributions are rarely recognized. This gap between impact and recognition became a key idea in my project and reinforced my view of him as an unsung hero.

In my artwork, I aimed to express the idea of an "unsung hero" through contrast, composition, and symbolism. I depicted Hilleman in grayscale to show how he is often overlooked, while using blue tones for the hands, syringe, and medical elements to highlight the ongoing impact of his work. The enlarged hands represent society and modern medicine continuing his legacy, suggesting that his influence extends beyond his lifetime. The syringe, placed prominently in the composition, represents both the act of vaccination and the broader idea of protection and prevention. I also included vaccine bottles, particularly referencing the MMR vaccine, to create a clear connection between the artwork and his contributions. In terms of process, I focused on

creating depth and visual hierarchy through scale and layering. By showing Hilleman as smaller in comparison to the surrounding medical elements, I emphasized how his contributions, despite their importance, are often placed in the background. The detailed rendering of his face highlights his humanity, while the more stylized medical elements represent the lasting impact of his work. I used a limited color palette to maintain visual consistency, allowing the blue tones to draw attention to key elements of the composition.

This project has influenced how I think about success, recognition, and impact. It made me realize that true success is not defined by fame, but by the positive difference one makes in the lives of others. Hilleman's story has encouraged me to value meaningful contributions, even when they are not widely recognized, and to think more carefully about how we define a "hero."

References:

"History of Vaccines." College of Physicians of Philadelphia, www.historyofvaccines.org.

"Immunization Coverage." World Health Organization, www.who.int.

Offit, Paul A. Vaccinated: One Man's Quest to Defeat the World's Deadliest Diseases. Smithsonian Books, 2007.

"Vaccines and Immunization." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov.