



Impact Statement

Cora Dooley, Grade 8

Wetland Grace, 2026

Colored pencil, graphite on canvas board, 12 x 18 inches

Andover Middle School, Andover, KS

Unsung Hero: Jacob Valentine II

"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."—Robert Swan, Explorer.

Jake Valentine II believed in and lived by this quote. As someone who has saved endangered species on the Gulf Coast, Jacob (Jake) Valentine II is an inspiring figure in wildlife conservation. Dubbed the "father" of the first wildlife refuge in Mississippi, this inspiring man practically lived on his refuge for 39 years, studying and protecting the endangered sandhill cranes, which numbered only 35 remaining at the time. However, Interstate 10, which ran from Florida to California, was beginning construction and would invade the crane's habitat. Jake was determined to save his birds. So, according to the Lowell Milken Center website, "He searched passionately for a solution, giving speeches, writing articles, and testifying on behalf of the cranes." Soon enough, Jake stopped construction from occurring to save the birds and the land for them. Not only did Valentine save sandhill cranes from extinction, but he also saved many other endangered species living in the same area. He soon founded the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, where 2,000 acres of land were set aside and designed for the protection of cranes. Overall, this man's actions were very inspiring and encouraged others to think with nature in mind.

This wildlife biologist is very inspiring to me because of his efforts to save the things he loves. Jake Valentine literally stopped the construction of a highway to rescue his wildlife refuge. I chose this hero because of his bravery and strength. His story also inspires me to never give up, even when it gets hard. This tells me that pursuing what I want can be worthwhile and that anything is possible.

My artwork was created using colored pencils and blending stumps. I've always enjoyed using colored pencils and creating realistic textures and intricate detail. It was easy to work with my colored pencils, allowing me to meet my deadlines and work more efficiently. The blending tool helped blend the colors into different parts of the drawing. My piece is titled *Wetland Grace*, symbolizing the life-giving nature of wetlands. When Valentine studied the wetlands, he found beauty in them, which gave him the passion to protect them and save the species that called them home. Even though Jake's claims were denied, he didn't give up and proved people wrong about wetland biomes and their overlooked characteristics. My artwork expresses my Unsung Hero's heroic actions by showcasing the beauty of sandhill cranes and Jake's visions to protect them.

Because of my Unsung Hero's actions and accomplishments, I now think differently about wildlife. This makes me realize how many endangered species are struggling to survive in the wild and across habitats worldwide. I'm encouraged to support conservation efforts, reduce pollution, and recycle more to help species in my area. I will display my artwork at the Andover Public Library from March 19th to April 16th, 2026, in hopes of inspiring others to help nature and follow Valentine's legacy.