

Impact Statement

Miranda Guzman de Moya, Grade 11

Tracing Life in Moving Waters, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 32 x 24 inches

Abraham Lincoln School, La Romana, Dominican Republic

Unsung Hero: Dr. Eugenie Clark

For my artwork in the Unsung Heroes project, I chose to represent the marine biologist Dr. Eugenie Clark, often known as “The Shark Lady.” I selected her because her work changed the way people perceive sharks, showing that these animals are intelligent and vital to ocean ecosystems. I feel personally connected to her story because ever since I was little, I’ve struggled with galeophobia, a deep-seated fear of sharks. This phobia is often fueled by media and pop culture; movies like *Jaws* and programs like *Shark Week* portray sharks as bloodthirsty monsters, powerful predators defined only by their sharp teeth and immense speed. This imagery triggers a primal fight or flight response and a fear of the unknown beneath the waves. However, learning about Eugenie Clark’s bravery inspired me to look at them in a new way. Just as her passion was sparked by visiting the New York Aquarium as a young girl, where she famously didn’t see monsters through the glass but saw only beauty, my own perspective has been shaped by growing up surrounded by the sea. She dedicated her life to protecting these magnificent creatures and educating the public that they are not monsters but are essential to the marine ecosystem.

Eugenie Clark’s impact on science and marine conservation is significant because she proved that sharks are far less dangerous than we imagine. During her career, she studied shark behavior and helped dismantle negative stereotypes, even proving they could be trained and possess high intelligence. One of her most interesting discoveries involved a fish named the Moses sole, which produces a natural chemical that repels sharks. In my artwork, I depicted her holding this fish to represent her scientific discoveries and how her research helped us better understand shark behavior. Her legacy continues to be recognized by the scientific community through the naming of a shark species in her honor: the *Squalus clarkae*, also known as Genie’s Dogfish. Discovered in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the western Atlantic, this shark lives in the same vast ecosystem that connects to the Caribbean. I included this specific shark in my piece to show how her contributions continue to be recognized and how her influence remains alive in the very waters she fought to protect.

My artistic vision was to create a composition that shows the different aspects of her life and research in harmony with the ocean. To achieve this, I used a cool color palette dominated by deep blues and aquatic tones. These colors unify the piece, placing Eugenie Clark directly in her element and reflecting the serenity of the underwater world she loved. The central portrait highlights her as the hero, while the surrounding scenes, such as her using a microscope and

exploring as a diver, show both the scientific and adventurous sides of her career. To create this piece, I used painting techniques that combine realism with storytelling. I used layering and detailed shading to give the portrait depth, allowing the cool-toned background to connect all the elements of the composition. I also added a variety of corals to illustrate that marine biology encompasses entire ecosystems. All living things are overlooked sometimes, so I used this palette to encourage every element of her world to stand out.

Through this artwork, I hope to share Eugenie Clark's story and help people move past their fears to understand why she is such an important hero. Growing up in the Dominican Republic, I have always been surrounded by the ocean, making marine life an essential part of everyday life. Knowing that she conducted groundbreaking research in places like Mexico, Florida, and the Bahamas makes her work feel incredibly personal to me. Her discovery of sleeping sharks in the caves of Mexico, just a short distance across the water from my home, proved that sharks are calm, evolved animals rather than relentless killers. To me, she is a guardian of our shared blue world. Her work wasn't just happening in a faraway land; it was happening in the same waters that reach our shores, protecting the creatures that live in my own oceans. This connection has deepened my appreciation for the sea and encouraged me to think seriously about how we can all contribute to the conservation of our shared waters.