



Impact Statement

Juyong Hong, Grade 10

Where Prejudice Begins: Blue and Brown, 2026

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12 inches

Canyon Crest Academy, San Diego, CA

Unsung Hero: Jane Elliott

"We don't need a melting pot in this country. We need a salad bowl. In a salad bowl, you put in the different things...You appreciate differences." These are the words from Jane Elliott, an educator and activist who stood firmly against racism. These words are truths we need to stand upon in our current society. Her dogged determination to criticize discrimination towards Black and African Americans despite it being an unacceptable act amongst the white community is truly inspirational. As a student who experiences social pressure to follow conventional beliefs, I struggle to advocate for alternative ideas that are against the norms. However, Elliott did not fear the possibility of becoming a target herself due to her heroic act to promote anti-racism. I find it admirable that she did not become the bystander of prejudice but initiated a teaching in her classroom to fix the wrongful attitudes towards various races. I believe that it is due to her work that the schools that we go to today embrace the different cultures that my peers come from. Without Elliott, the world that we find solace in would not have been as welcoming.

On the day of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, Jane Elliott was teaching at a school in Riceville. She felt deep sorrow for his death, but the sadness was soon interrupted by resentment when she heard racist comments on the news and among her colleagues at school. She decided to conduct an exercise called "Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes" in her classroom to bring awareness of racism in the community. On the first day of the lesson, children were told that students with brown eyes were smarter and cleaner and were given privileges such as extra time at recess. At lunchtime, Elliott observed that several of her brown eyed students were transformed into outgoing leaders and treated blue eyed students with unkind words. Moreover, blue-eyed students who were usually not prone to mistakes started to struggle as they felt their inferiority. On the next day, Jane reversed the roles of her students, and the blue-eyed children became better and smarter. Interestingly, the blue-eyed children treated the brown-eyed students with more respect because they were reminded of the distress they experienced the previous day. After the exercise, Jane discussed with her students how discrimination felt. The students wrote essays of their experiences, and they were published in the local newspaper, The Riceville Recorder. The "Brown eyes, Blue eyes" exercise taught the students how it feels to walk in Black people's shoes and how immortal prejudice is. When Elliott's advocacy was released to the world, numerous people sent letters saying her work outraged them, claiming the superiority of white students did not deserve this brief exposure to discrimination. People as well as her coworkers in Riceville started to treat Jane as an outcast. Her children became the target of harassment, calling the children with sickening names and

bullying them for their mother's heroic acts. However, these brutalities did not stop Elliott from persevering to spread anti-racism across the nation. Jane Elliot extended her "Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes" to other schools, colleges, companies, and government offices. Her lesson marked a pivotal impact of racism in the U.S., providing students as well as adults acknowledgment of how discrimination is inhumane. The 'Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes' is currently used as diversity training and a program for anti-bullying, promoting equity across the globe.

In the painting of my Unsung Hero, I aimed to clearly depict her "Brown eyes, Blue eyes" exercise to allow a universal grasp of her heroic legacy. The artwork is set in a classroom with students to represent Jane Elliott's first "Brown eyes, Blue eyes" exercise that was taught in her school at Riceville. Atop the hands are faces of the current generation's students of diverse races. The content smiles of these students reflect on Elliott's inspirational impacts on racism and how her continuation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy transformed the past, the current, as well as the future generation. I put effort into a detailed rendering of Jane Elliot to capture her ambition and celebrate her legacy as an activist. I also utilized gray tones of acrylic paint when working on the classroom scene to show the vintage aesthetics of the 1960s and therefore highlight that her advocacy was done despite the strong beliefs of white superiority amongst this era.

Jane Elliott's story influenced me to gain courage to rectify social injustices even if society is not accepting my advocacy. After learning about Elliott's works, I want to encourage myself and my community to confront discrimination rather than choosing neutralism. As racism is still present around the world, I want the audience to reflect on Elliott's "Brown Eyes, Blue eyes" and be reminded that racism is never appropriate to any extent. Our modern society favors beliefs to be uniform and categorize individuals that are behind on trends as outsiders. Through my artwork I hope it will deliver bravery to break away from this obsession and gain an audacity to point out the right and wrongs like Jane Elliott. When I showed my Unsung Hero Project to my friends and family, they asked about Jane Elliot, and I shared her story to my peers. I believe through ARTEFFECT's Unsung Hero Project, the artists around the world will continue the heroes' legacy and raise honor to the unsung heroes.

References:

Bloom, Stephen G. "Lesson of a Lifetime." Smithsonian, Smithsonian.com, Sept. 2005, www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/lesson-of-a-lifetime-72754306/.

Elliott, Jane. "Jane Elliott: Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes | about the Hero." Lowell Milken Center, 13 July 2018, www.lowellmilkencenter.org/programs/projects/view/brown-eyes-blue-eyes/hero.