

Impact Statement

Dante Matula, Grade 10
A Hero's Sacrifice, 2026

Digital Art

Del Lago Academy of Applied Science, Escondido, CA

Unsung Hero: James Braidwood

I chose James Braidwood initially due to the appearance of his beard. In comparison to the flat faces on what seemed like black and white photos, his beard created a visual contrast which drew me into his character. After obtaining knowledge about him through my rigorous research I admired his intelligent thinking and drive to always help others. I was inspired by his tragic death and the changes he made to firefighting. James Braidwood was strong and important to the people he influenced, which is something I wish to embody. James Braidwood has fostered a love for not only the people who partake in firefighting, but first responders as well. His story truly aids us in our understanding of how much they do for us.

James Braidwood was a Scottish fireman who made reforms to fire alarms, fire escapes, and the firefighting system. Before James Braidwood the firefighting system was very different. He organized the movements, technology and overall strategy of the firefighters. The work he has done in the firefighting field has saved millions of lives. Alongside all of that he died while saving his fellow firefighters. It's hard to truly describe Braidwood's impact on others' lives because of how much he has influenced them. He saved hundreds of people while he was alive and his reforms to the firefighting system saved thousands more. It's so admirable to think that Braidwood has changed the lives of almost every person alive. One of your ancestors would have most likely been injured or dead if it wasn't for James Braidwood, and that is so insane that he made that change. None of this is to take away from current firefighters however, as the work they do counts just as much in saving lives.

In my art, I strived to show the courage in James Braidwood's last moments and convey the genuine love he had for life. Each panel shows a different stage, but altogether it shows just how quickly a life can end. I wanted to show the impact he made and his attitude towards saving others in his last moments from a first-person perspective. First-person perspectives are something that I don't see a lot in comics and art in general, which is a shame because I think it is the best way to understand and feel a character. The first panel is made to show how comfortable James is in his job; he had been a firefighter for a long time and was well known. The second panel was meant to show how underestimated the fire was. I wanted the viewer to feel the size of the task, and to feel a pull when seeing the cries for help. The third panel is meant to convey the desperation to get to the people stuck. You see him shielding himself from the flames searching for where the voices are coming from. In the fourth panel he is holding up a wall that is about to fall. The firefighter helping him is one of the last people in the building. He is scared and so I wanted to show James Braidwood's courage in holding the wall by himself. I

wanted the reader to feel proud of themselves and in turn Braidwood for making such an honorable decision. But the fifth panel is where things take a turn. I wanted there to be a hard cut to his funeral to show how quickly life can end. I wanted the reader to feel shocked and upset at his death. I used cool but dark colors to convey a bottled-up sadness. It's something that you are coming to terms with but haven't quite realized. My final panel is dedicated to legacy. The statue of James Braidwood, behind it are the advancements to firefighter helmets throughout the years which show how his legacy carried into the modern era. The story and life of James Braidwood have helped me to understand how much first responders sacrifice for us. Braidwood's story shows us that one person can completely change the world. I genuinely appreciate the work firefighters do for us and think about it so much more.