Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

Impact Statement

Shravani Kale, Grade 11
Every Drop Matters, 2026
Acrylic, colored pencil, marker, paper, pen on canvas, 11 x 14 inches
Portola High School, Irvine, California, USA
Unsung Hero: Dr. Charles Drew

Doctor Charles Drew, an African American Medical researcher and pioneer of blood handling, immediately caught my eye for the competition. What particularly shocked me was that, in all my years of learning about WWII, his contributions to the medical field were never mentioned. His dedicated research into blood banking created groundbreaking revolutions that found ways to preserve blood and earned him the title "Father of Blood Banking". I decided to make my work about him, since oftentimes during medical emergencies, we credit a lot of the doctors and surgeons behind it and overlook the contributions of scientists and researchers who discover these life-saving methods.

Initially, Doctor Drew decided to go into medicine due to his sister's death in 1918, during the influenza pandemic. However, that soon turned into extensive research on how blood banking could be revolutionized. Dr. Drew's first big break came in the "Blood for Britain" campaign, which aimed to donate and collect blood for those injured in World War II. Many hospitals were in desperate need of blood; however, whole blood spoiled incredibly fast and required constant refrigeration, which was not ideal for long journeys. At this time, Dr. Drew completed a detailed doctoral thesis titled "Banked Blood: A Study on Blood Preservation," which made him a good candidate to lead this campaign. His thesis was able to prove that plasma, the liquid part of blood, could be separated from oxygen-carrying blood cells, helping it be more resistant to spoiling and making it accessible to any patient regardless of their blood type. He used this basic idea to perfect methods of dehydration, which made it possible to ship plasma to distant battlefields in WWII. Alongside this, to make large-scale collection efficient, Dr. Drew invented the blood mobile, which was essentially a refrigerated truck that travelled directly through communities to gather blood donations safely. This massively increased the volume at which blood was being donated, greatly aiding in war efforts; by the end of WWII, the Red Cross had collected over 13 million pints of blood. Just these two things alone were able to save countless lives, with much of his research being used today.

Beyond being a brilliant doctor, Dr. Drew was a principled man who stood fast to his beliefs. During the war, he served as the first director of the Red Cross's blood bank, overseeing the supply of plasma to the U.S. Army and Navy. But throughout my process of creating artwork, what stood out to me was his resignation from the organization. The

Red Cross had stated that African American blood should be segregated from white donors; however, Dr. Drew strongly opposed this, as there was no scientific correlation between blood and race. When the Red Cross continued this practice, he decided to leave and protest against it.

After gaining insight into his career, I began my piece intending to include all the most important aspects of his life into something that could be visually appealing. I began by drawing a portrait of Dr. Drew on a paper cutout, as it seemed the safest option for me to work on the piece when I wasn't sure what direction I wanted to take it. However, after brainstorming, I settled on experimenting with a black canvas where the yellow plasma would pop and capture people's attention. My vision was to have it come pouring from the back and act as almost a background. Even with these aspects, I struggled to include his other achievements, like the blood mobile, campaign, and resignation, so I created a flipbook-like newspaper which would then be glued on. The newspaper consisted of two pages, with the first being his role in WWII and the second foreshadowing his leave from the Red Cross due to racial discrimination. Making it on the second page allowed me to showcase the issue without making the discriminatory actions of others overpower his achievements. Alongside this, I wanted to emphasize my experimentation in these pieces, so I decided to add more dimension to the newspaper by folding the pages and adding a wire backing. This made the pages seem as though they were coming off the canvas and allowed for a really cool 3D effect.

Taking part in this competition hasn't just been a way to showcase my talent, but also a way to learn about hidden figures that have made huge contributions to society. Dr. Charles Drew is an incredible figure to look up to, pushing past racial barriers to put differences aside and work towards a cause that would save thousands of lives. My biggest takeaway from Dr. Drew is to always be curious and create little changes that may one day lead to a greater impact. He also reinforced the idea of always standing by your morals even when you, yourself, might not necessarily be affected by it. So when people look at my artwork, I hope they sit with it for a moment and take it into consideration the next time they donate blood.

References:

American Chemical Society, www.acs.org/explore/african-americans-in-sciences/charles-richard-drew.html. Accessed 15 September 2026.

Keith, Shanise. "Blood on the Battlefield: How World War II Revolutionized Transfusion Medicine." Center for Phlebotomy Education, 16 September 2025, https://www.phlebotomy.com/phlebotomyblog/blood-on-the-battlefield-how-world-war-ii-revolutionized-transfusion-medicine.html. Accessed 15 September 2026.