Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

Impact Statement

Chrysoula (Silia) Anastasilaki, Grade 11
Sylvia's Home, 2026
Colored pencil on paper, 27.5 x 19.5 inches
1st General Lyceum of Ampelokipi, Ampelokipi, GREECE
Unsung Hero: Dr. Sylvia Earle

I came across Dr. Sylvia Earle while looking for someone whose career and work had a direct impact in the protection of sea life. Among the experts in her field, Sylvia Earle stands out for her dedication and constant activity in the ocean exploration and conservation of the underwater world. She sincerely has inspired me by her long successful effort of fulfilling her lifelong ambition to save the 30% percent of the oceans globally. I recognize her as a "planetary guardian" admire her for sharing awareness and protecting the habitats that we are connected with every breath we take.
Dr. Sylvia Earle has claimed the ocean as her "home" since she was twelve, when her family moved to Florida. Back then she started developing the closest relationship a human could have with the sea, diving for over six decades. Except from this fact, her dedication to aquatic life could be confirmed by her experience as a marine biologist, oceanographer, explorer, writer and lecturer.

The knowledge in her field made her stand out from a young age and gave her the chance to be included in remarkable projects. In 1970 she took the leader position in the Tektite II project, which was the first all-female team. Through this project, five women got to live underwater for two weeks and investigate the marine wildlife and ecosystem as well. That way they broke gender barriers and proved that it is safe for scientists to dive in such circumstances. Later, in 1979 she changed the human's perception of the ocean by setting a world record for the deepest dive, taking place in the Pacific Ocean. The leadership qualifications she had were also recognized when she got the position as the Chief Scientist of the NOAA for two years and handled the world's largest oil spill in the Persian Gulf. Equally significant is the fact that she was the first woman in such a managerial position. Once again, two decades later, she helped with her invention, the Mission Blue Organization, in the Mexico Gulf where a huge oil spill took place. Summarizing, thanks to her capabilities the long-term ecological disaster was moderated.

"With every drop of water you drink, every breath you take, you're connected to the sea. No matter where on Earth you live", this is Dr. Sylvia's best-known quote, with the main intention of raising awareness. She also tries to change the perspective that people see sea life by releasing books, producing documentaries, and frequently talking to big crowds globally.

The last years she has totally committed herself to defending all sea creatures via her organization, Mission Blue. By establishing this foundation, a global network for the protection of places in the ocean, called "Hope Spots", is achieved. Those places are vital to biodiversity, resilience and life on Earth, so their championship by local leaders is of major importance. The main purpose of the establishment was to save whole ecosystems that were in danger of destruction. Specifically, she focused on saving large fish that were endangered of massive extinction, as well as smaller fish and coral reefs. The vision I had while drawing was about showing Dr. Sylvia Earle's deepest connection with the ocean. Especially I pursued to emphasize her career moments that drastically changed people's view of marine life and the way she positively affects the ecosystem, although sometimes it is impossible to control the negative interference of man in nature. Moments of her past are depicted at the bottom of the drawing such as the Tektite II project on the left and her thrilling dive with the JIM suit on the right. Additionally, in the upper left corner, an oil stain is visible, marking her past. I really tried for my artwork to present my Unsung Hero's main intention, which right now is to prevent the fishing of aqua animals that are in the edge of extinction. This idea was expressed when I drew her hesitant hand tending to touch a Hammerhead. Her attitude towards sharks shows the compassion for the species, which has suffered a 70% extinction. The same goes with rays that are migratory species, as shown in the drawing swimming away, and they get killed the moment they leave the Hope Spots. However, Sylvia, protects them by fighting for the complete ban on commercial and industrial fishing in international waters, whether it is with Bottom trawls or Pelagic longlines. This idea is represented while she lifts her right hand up to protect all the innocent sea creatures from the human activity.

The gold watch in her raised right hand comes with a message: "The clock is ticking. What we do in the next 10 years will matter more than what we have done in the last 10,000 years." Therefore, every step she takes for the salvation of the planet is important and interrelated with saving the marine fauna and flora. In her left hand, coralline algae, Galaxaura, and other algae are depicted, while on her right side, corals like Pocillopora, Sargassum, Kelp and Pavona clavus are shown, representing all the corals and algae that are threatened by climate change but protected in several hope spots. Also protected by the organization is the endangered species like the Hawksbill turtle and swordfish. In the background, sperm, fin, and blue whales are present, highlighting her battle to save them.

As for my drawing, I used colored pencils since I am mostly experienced in it and I mix the colours better than with other materials. Learning about Dr. Sylvia Earle made me reconsider my lifestyle and the ways I could help on my own to keep the ocean clean and limit my diet to certain fish species to support the reduction of overfishing. Simultaneously, I hope the world who sees this drawing to think how they can interact with the natural environment and enjoy the beauty in it instead of looking for profit out of it, just like Sylvia did.

References:

The Mission Blue Documentary

https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/sylvia-earle

https://www.ted.com/speakers/sylvia_earle https://missionblue.org/the-mission/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Earle