Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

# Impact Statement

Grace Chen, Grade 10
***What Lies Beneath,*** 2026
Colored pencil, graphite on paper, 15.5 x 20 inches
Taipei Wego Private Senior High School, Taipei, CHINA
Unsung Hero: Dr. Eugenie Clark

When you think of sharks, what is the first picture that comes to your mind? Dangerous? Aggressive predators? For a long time, this was also how I saw sharks. But the truth is different than how we imagine. These stereotypes often come from movies and social media, but in reality sharks do not see humans as their prey, and they also play an important role for keeping the ocean ecosystem balanced. I became obsessed with learning about sharks. As I started researching more about sharks, I came across a marine biologist named Eugenie Clark, also known as the “Shark Lady”. She was a Japanese American, born in New York City in 1922. She spent her whole life studying sharks. Her interest in sharks started when she was nine years old, her mom took her to the New York Aquarium. In her interview she said “I would stand on the railing so I could get my face close to the glass.” Instead of being scared of sharks, she was inquisitive and wanted to understand these creatures. This childhood interest became a lifelong research endeavor. Her mission was to help people better understand sharks and to break stereotypes. However, she encountered many obstacles during her lifetime. As a woman and a Japanese American working in science during that period, she faced barriers and was often underestimated. However, she did not let her gender or background limit what she wanted to achieve. Eugenie Clark used her actions to prove that your identity should not decide what you can or cannot achieve. This is what I admire most about her.

Eugenie Clark‘s years of research has left a lasting impact on our current understanding of sharks. Instead of only observing them, she designed an experiment to test how sharks think and behave. One of her most important investigations revealed that sharks could be trained to complete tasks in order to receive food. This provided evidence that sharks were able to learn and remember, which gave scientists more information about shark intelligence (Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium). Clark also completed hundreds of dives throughout her career, allowing her to study sharks closely in their natural environment. At the age of 92, she was still diving and studying the ocean, showing how deeply committed she was to her work (National Geographic). Her research also made a splash outside of the field of science. She shared what she learned through her books and lectures, so more people could understand sharks. In 1955, she started the Cape Haze Marine Laboratory, which later became Mote Marine

Laboratory. This place gave more scientists a chance to study sharks and the ocean (Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium). Her work also made more people care about shark conservation efforts. Even after she passed away, the research center she created is still in operation today. This is one of her biggest impacts because her work did not stop with her. She gave other scientists a chance to continue what she started.

For my artwork, I wanted to show two different sides of how people see sharks. On the left side, I drew a shark tooth, a shark jaw, and a skeleton. These are the images that people usually connect with danger and death, which represent the stereotype we often have about the animal. However, as the artwork moves toward the center, I showed sharks swimming in their natural habitat. I wanted this contrast to show the difference between what we imagine and what Eugenie Clark discovered through her research. I mainly used colored pencils and pencils to create this artwork. I used colored pencils because they allowed me to slowly build up different layers and details, especially for the sharks, water, and Clark's face. I also used pencils for the darker areas and stronger lines to create more contrast between different parts of the artwork. For the background, I used different shades of blue and green to create the feeling of being underwater. I placed Eugenie Clark on the right side wearing her diving equipment because I wanted her to look like she is actually part of the environment instead of only observing it from the outside. The shark in the center connects Clark with the other side of the artwork, almost like a bridge between fear and understanding. Through my choices of materials, details, and composition, I wanted to show that sometimes we fear something because we do not fully understand it, but learning more can completely change our point of view. Through researching Eugenie Clark's life and creating this artwork, I learned that we should not easily judge something based on what we see or hear from others.

Before I started this project, I also believed in many of the stereotypes about sharks. But after learning about Clark and her research, I realized that sometimes the things we fear are just the things we do not understand enough. This lesson can also connect to our daily life. People are often judged because of their gender, race, appearance, or background before others actually get to know them. Eugenie Clark's story showed me that we should have the courage to question these stereotypes instead of just following what everyone else believes. This project also made me think differently about the purpose of my own art. In the past, I focused more on how my artwork looked, but now I want my artwork to have a deeper meaning behind it. I hope to continue creating art that can tell stories about people who are not always noticed and bring attention to different social issues. I also plan to create an art Instagram account to share this artwork and my creation process, so more people can learn about Eugenie Clark's story. In the future, I hope to show my work in more competitions and exhibitions and become an artist who can use art to make people see something from a different point of view.