

Lalitha Murali Glen Hills Middle School Glendale, WI	Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes  ARTEFFECT	
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The ARTEFFECT Capstone Project is a student-centered, interdisciplinary learning experience designed to help students explore the concept of unsung heroes while developing research, artistic, and critical thinking skills. At Glen Hills Middle School, this project engaged approximately 100 students in grades 4–8 over eight weeks, integrating history, visual arts, and STEM in a meaningful and authentic way.

The project began with a whole-class discussion of the meanings of "heroes" and "unsung heroes". Students reflected on the qualities that define a hero and considered why some individuals who make significant contributions to society often go unrecognized. This discussion helped students build a foundational understanding of empathy, recognition, and the importance of diverse perspectives in history.

To deepen their conceptual understanding, students participated in a mini-lesson on the Hero's Journey. They explored the different stages of a hero's path, including challenges, perseverance, transformation, and impact. This framework allowed students to analyze the journeys of real-life individuals and recognize patterns of resilience and growth.

Students were then given time to freely sketch their favorite characters. This introductory activity encouraged creativity, built confidence in artistic expression, and helped students begin thinking visually about storytelling.

Following these foundational activities, students were introduced to the ARTEFFECT Unsung Heroes program. They explored the website and selected one unsung hero they personally connected with. This element of choice was critical in fostering student engagement and ownership of learning. Students then conducted research to learn about their hero's life, achievements, challenges, and contributions to society.

Over the course of the project, students synthesized their research into a comprehensive visual and written presentation. Each student created a poster board that included key information about their hero along with original illustrations. In addition, students designed and created a 3D model of their hero using 3D printing technology. This innovative component allowed students to bring their learning to life and create a tangible representation that they could display and reflect upon.

The project culminated in two major events. On April 7, 2026, students presented their work at a community showcase held at Glen Hills Middle School, sharing their learning with families and community members. On April 9, 2026, students transported their projects to the elementary school and presented them to K5–3rd grade students. This peer-teaching opportunity reinforced student understanding and allowed them to serve as role models for younger learners.

Five students have chosen to submit their projects to the ARTEFFECT competition, demonstrating exceptional initiative and a strong commitment to excellence.

Overall, this project empowered students to become confident, creative, and compassionate learners. By studying unsung heroes, students not only gained historical knowledge but also developed a deeper appreciation for the impact individuals can have on the world. The integration of art and STEM provided multiple pathways for expression, allowing all students to succeed and discover their strengths.

The ARTEFFECT Capstone successfully transitioned from a traditional research assignment to a transformative learning experience. By centering the curriculum on the "Unsung Hero," we bridged the gap between historical literacy and modern identity. The project met all primary learning objectives while fostering a high degree of student agency and community pride.

Narrative Scaffolding: Using the Hero's Journey as a cognitive framework allowed students to decode complex historical struggles. It moved the curriculum from rote memorization of "what" happened to a critical analysis of "how" individuals persevere through systemic or personal challenges.

The "Low-Stakes" Entry Point: Starting with free sketching proved essential. It validated artistic expression as a legitimate form of inquiry before introducing more rigid technical requirements like 3D design and formal bibliography.

Multimodal Fluency: The project allowed for differentiation by design. Students who were less proficient in written expression were able to demonstrate deep understanding through 3D modeling and visual symbolism, ensuring no student was left behind due to a single-mode assessment.

Cognitive & Technical Skills:

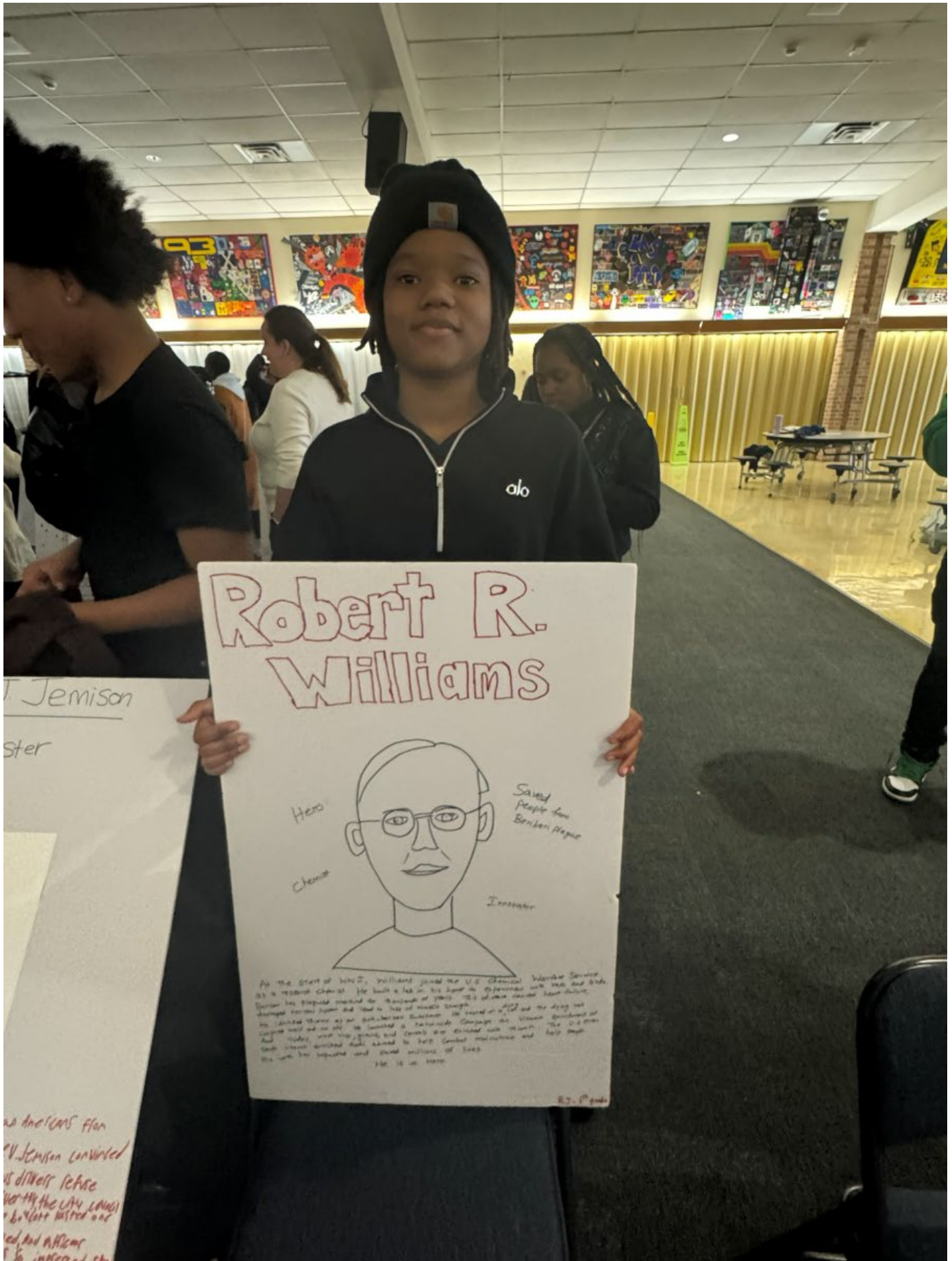
The integration of STEM (3D Printing) with the humanities forced a unique type of problem-solving. Students had to translate abstract concepts such as "courage" or "innovation" into physical, three-dimensional symbols. This required spatial reasoning and technical iterative design (trial and error with the printers), which mirrored the resilience of the heroes they studied.

Social-Emotional Development:

The most profound growth was observed in empathy. By researching individuals who worked without recognition, students reflected on their own capacity to do good without the need for immediate "likes" or external validation. This was particularly evident during the peer-teaching sessions with the elementary students, where middle schoolers stepped into the role of the "mentor" on the Hero's Journey.

September 2026





Robert R. Williams

Hero
Chemist



Saved
People from
Borden Plague

Innovator

At the start of 1955, Williams joined the U.S. Chemical Warfare Service as a research chemist. He built a lab in his home to experiment with virus and birds. Williams has played a major role in the development of the polio vaccine. He has helped to develop the vaccine and has been instrumental in the development of the vaccine. He has helped to develop the vaccine and has been instrumental in the development of the vaccine. He has helped to develop the vaccine and has been instrumental in the development of the vaccine.

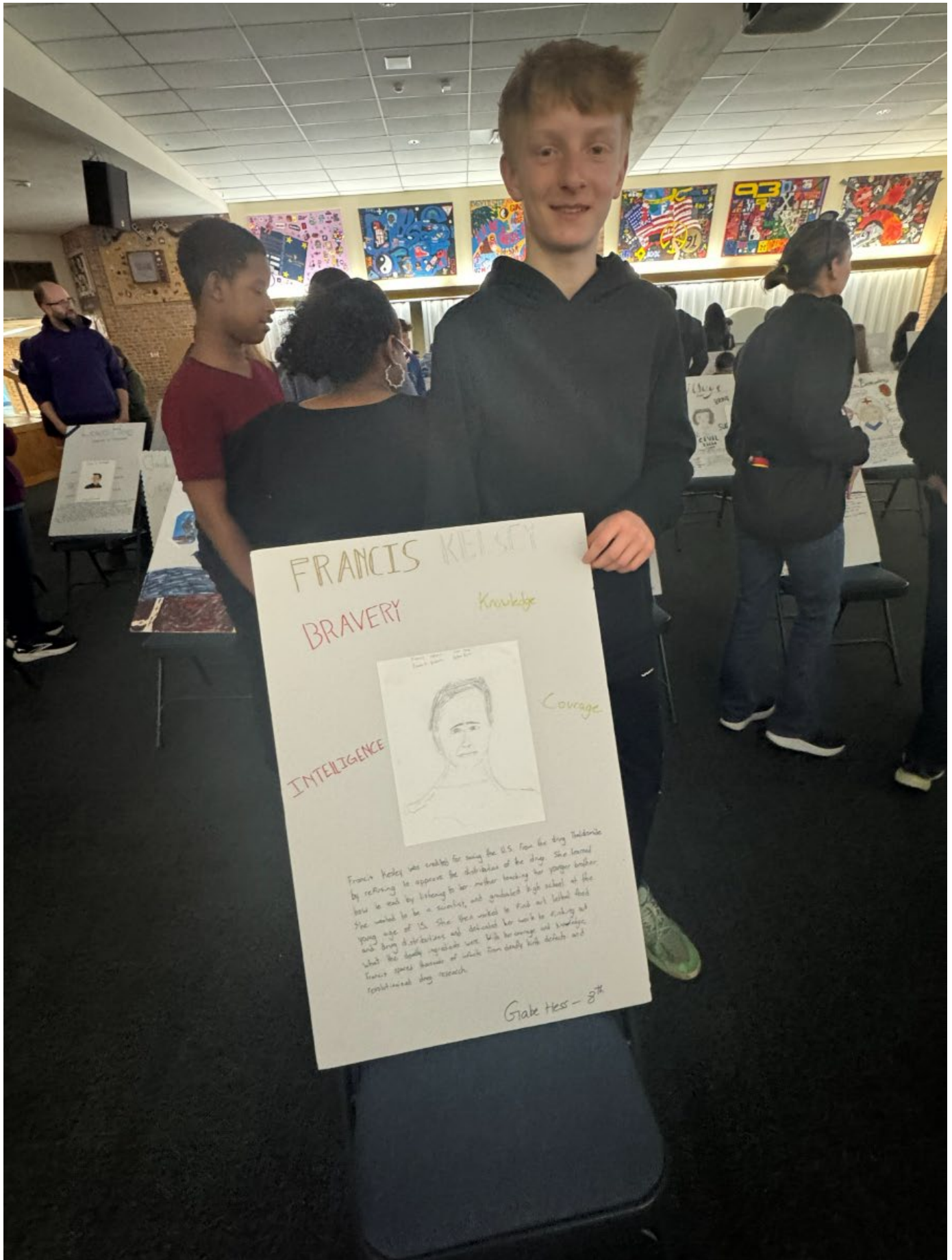
He is on stage

R.T. Ponds

Jemison

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an American flag
V. Jemison convicted
is diverse culture
worthy the city council
to be left intact and
red and African
to be integrated



FRANCIS KELSEY

BRAVERY

Knowledge

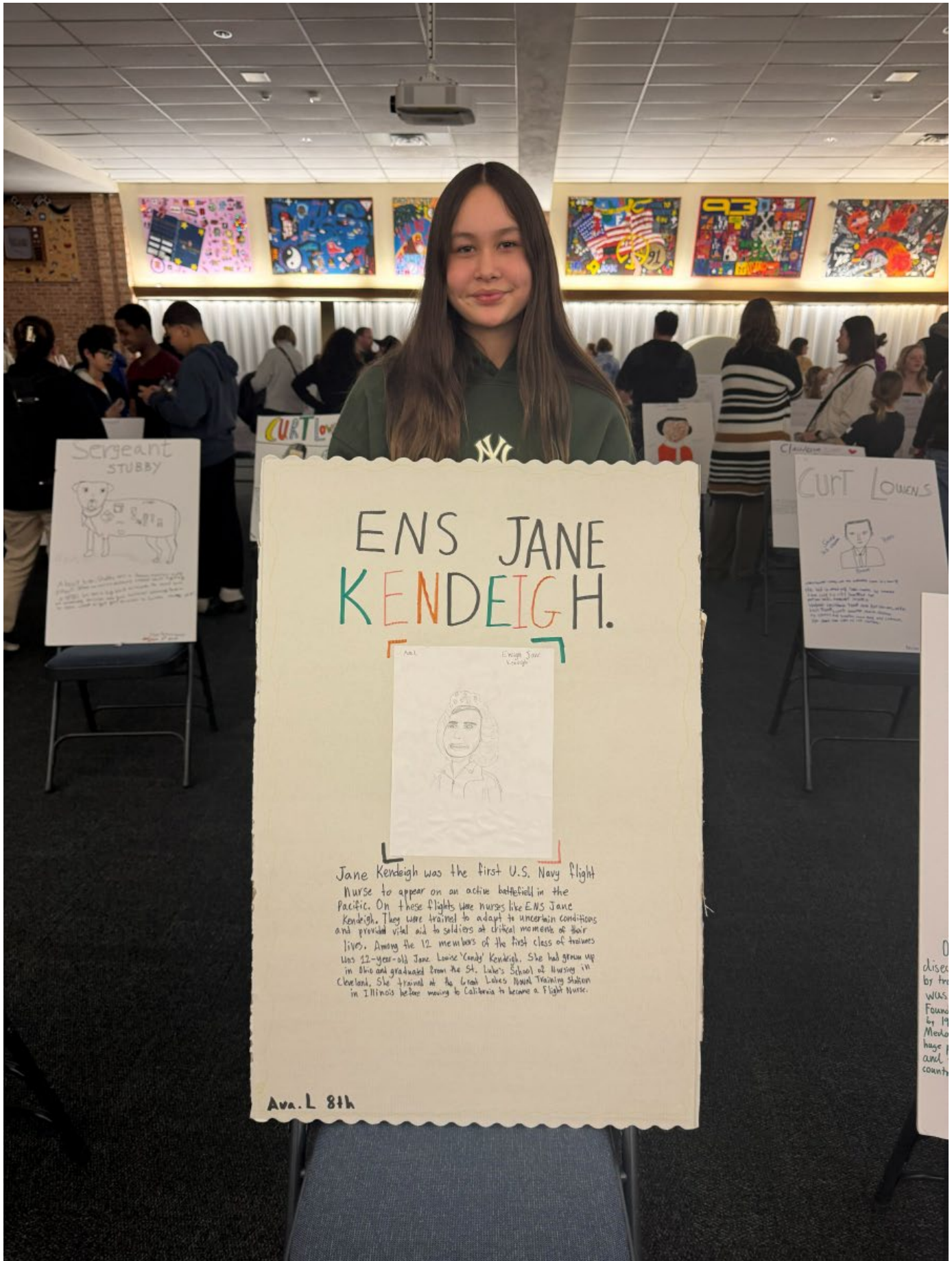
INTELLIGENCE

Courage



Francis Kelsey was credited for saving the U.S. from the drug trade by refusing to approve the distribution of the drug. She learned how to read by listening to her mother teaching her younger brother. She wanted to be a scientist, and graduated high school at the young age of 15. She then wanted to find out what kind of drug distributors and distributors were. With her courage and knowledge, what she found out was that there were many more distributors than she thought. She spent hours of work, and finally found out what she needed to know.

Gracie Hess - 8th



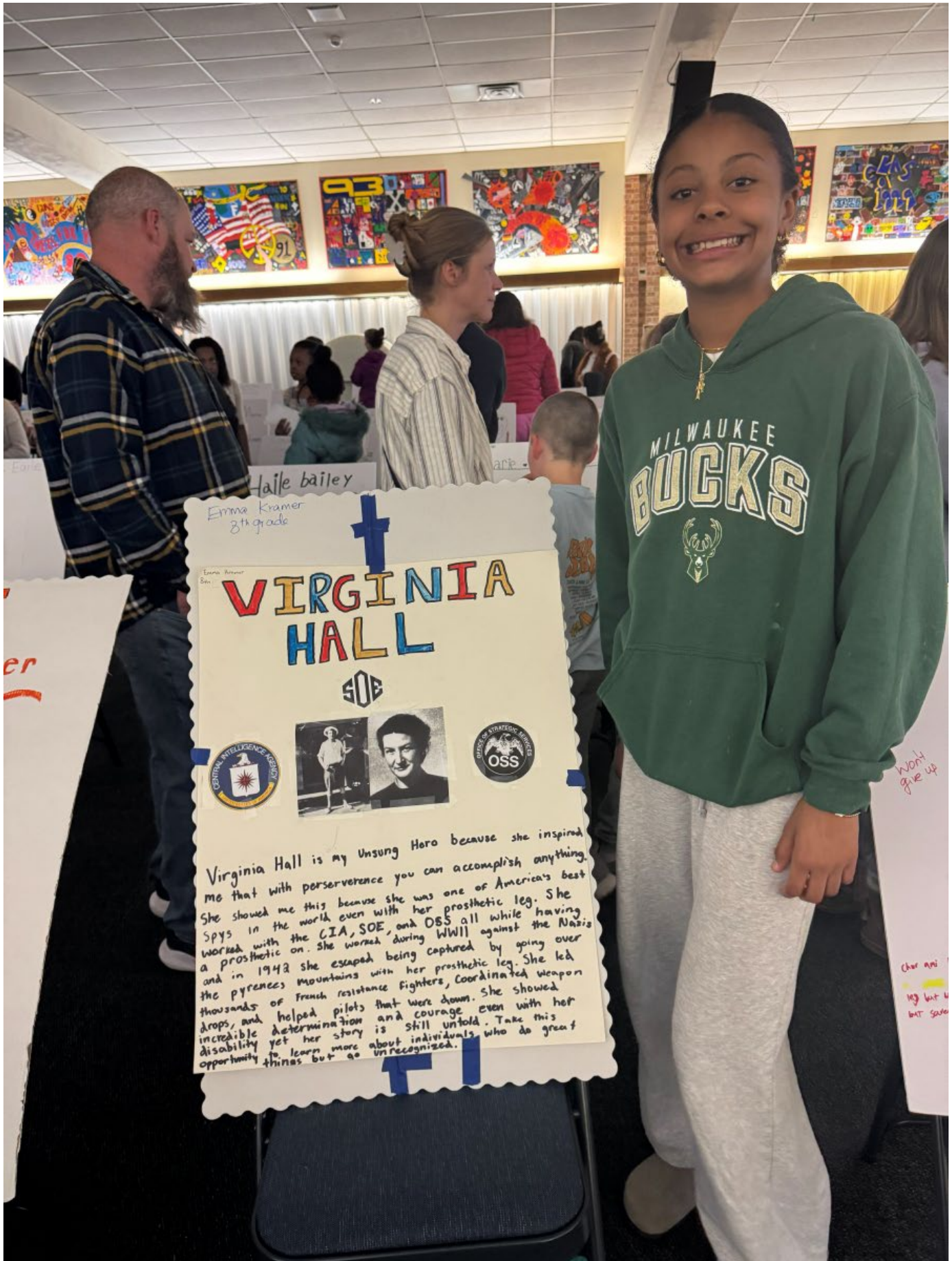
ENS JANE KENDEIGH.



Jane Kendeigh was the first U.S. Navy Flight Nurse to appear on an active battlefield in the Pacific. On these flights were nurses like ENS Jane Kendeigh. They were trained to adapt to uncertain conditions and provide vital aid to soldiers at critical moments of their lives. Among the 12 members of the first class of trainees was 22-year-old Jane Louise 'Candy' Kendeigh. She had grown up in Ohio and graduated from the St. Luke's School of Nursing in Cleveland. She trained at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois before moving to California to become a Flight Nurse.

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Emma Kramer
8th grade

VIRGINIA HALL



Virginia Hall is my Unsung Hero because she inspired me that with perseverance you can accomplish anything. She showed me this because she was one of America's best Spys in the world even with her prosthetic leg. She worked with the CIA, SOE, and OSS all while having a prosthetic on. She worked during WWII against the Nazis and in 1942 she escaped being captured by going over the pyrenees mountains with her prosthetic leg. She led thousands of French resistance fighters, coordinated weapons drops, and helped pilots that were down. She showed incredible determination and courage even with her disability yet her story is still untold. Take this opportunity to learn more about individuals who do great things but go unrecognized.

Don't give up

Don't give up
but save