



Bria Neff raises money to benefit endangered animals.



Artist for the Animals

By Robert Lerosé

Twelve-year-old Bria Neff loves art and animals. So she combines the two by creating paintings of animals that are endangered. With her mom's help, she sells the paintings or donates them to auctions—all to raise money for organizations that protect animals and their habitats. We asked Bria about her work.

You've done hundreds of animal paintings so far. How did you get started?

When I was eight, I entered an art contest run by the International Fund for Animal Welfare. I found out that there are thousands of endangered species, and I wanted to help. Since I love to draw and paint, I thought I could use my time and talents to showcase endangered species and their challenges.

How do you decide what to paint?

I do ones that really inspire me. I research the animals and read about them and study their biology and ecosystems. Sometimes, after researching them, I put their names into a jar and just pick one to paint.

How long does a painting take?

I complete a painting in one to two weeks. I start by looking up lots of pictures of the animal in its habitat. That gives me inspiration. Before I paint, I spend time sketching the animal and deciding what the background will look like or if there's going to be more than one animal.

What art supplies do you use?

I use mixed media, like watercolor and acrylics and sometimes pencil or markers. A lot of times I have to wait hours or even days to get to the next step because it's drying.

You created a coloring book for the Great Plains Zoo. How did that come about?

I just thought that maybe if I created a coloring book, other kids could learn about endangered species. So I set up a meeting with the zoo, and they liked the idea. All the proceeds go to support the endangered species at the zoo.

What's most rewarding about what you do?

Knowing that I'm making a difference for animals and their habitats and that I have inspired others to do the same.

What do you say to other kids who'd like to do something meaningful?

I want them to know that it doesn't matter how old you are. Do something you love, and you can make a difference. We just need to work together and believe we can do great things.



Photos by Amityshay.

Highlights is proud to know this Gallant Kid.