

Revised Sept. 2011

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES:

Faith Ringgold (b. 1930)

“Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles”, 1991
Acrylic on canvas, pieced fabric border
74” x 80”, Private Collection

Supplies Needed:

- * Framed print of “Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles” and framed “Tar Beach” print
- * Laminated examples of other works from supply box (3 total)
- **Tar Beach** by Faith Ringgold from supply box
- Quilt “sandwich” from supply box
- * Laminated “stitch reference” sheet from supply box
- * Needles and thread from supply box
- * 5” cross stitch squares (one per student) in the supply box
- * Students will need their markers and scissors
- * Project sample
- * **Faith Ringgold, A View from the Studio**, by Holton in the supply box for reference

Butterfield library books for reference:

Tar Beach, Dinner at Aunt Connie’s House, Aunt Harriet’s Underground Railroad In the Sky all by Faith Ringgold

**You may want to present this artist in February, so it coincides with Black History Month.*

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Please thread enough needles for each student with thread and knot the threads so you can hand them out to the students ready to use. Additionally, copy the stitch reference sheet and “Famous Artist Series” note to send home with the students.

Ask the students if anyone can define the word “quilt”. What is a quilt used for? Show them the piece of muslin and ask if it is a quilt – no, of course not. Now take the students to see the “Butterfield Millenium Quilt Project” quilt hanging at the front of the school. Ask them if they can tell what makes it a quilt. As they are looking at the quilt, describe the following:

For a textile to be considered a “quilt” the piece must include four important parts:

1. A top which could be a solid fabric or “pieced” from lots of fabric;
2. A “back” – the underside you cannot see when the quilt is on a bed or hanging on a wall;
3. A “middle” which quilters call “batting” – this is a fluffy substance which is used to add warmth and substance to the quilt;
4. The “quilting” which is the stitching used to hold the three layers together. Without “quilting”, the textile would not be a “quilt”, but could be called a comforter, duvet, blanket, coverlet, etc.

Have the students return to class and show them the sample “quilt sandwich” to see the batting between the two fabric layers.

Historically, quilts were made by women to decorate a bed and keep a sleeper warm. Many were made to be “fancy” – only for special guests or for display – and many were made to be used and worn out. Only very recently have quilts begun to be considered “art” – something meant to be hung on a wall like traditional paint-on-a-canvas “art”. This is called “fiber art” because quilts are made up of fabric, which is considered a “fiber”.

Faith Ringgold is a contemporary artist who uses quilts as her canvas. She was born in New York City in 1930, and has been an artist since the 1950’s. ***Present laminated picture of Faith Ringgold.*** Ringgold is best known for her painted story quilts – art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling.

Ringgold made her first quilt in 1980, learning to quilt from her mother. She was also inspired by African art, and experimented with soft sculpture forms and masks, mixing sewing and traditional fine art. Ringgold herself has said: “Like all artists and writers, I am both enriched and limited by what I know and have experienced. In other words my books and my art are based on my life’s experience. I am, as you know, a black woman in America”.

Present framed “Tar Beach” print and pass around laminated example of “Tar Beach” quilt as well as Tar Beach book.

“Tar Beach” is a story quilt Ringgold made in 1988. The quilt combines autobiography, story telling, painting, and quilting in one art form. The quilt is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The quilt depicts the fictional narrator, Cassie, lying on the rooftop of her apartment building, where she dreams of being free to go where ever she wants. She will achieve this by flying – with Cassie flying over the bridge

in the background. This theme echoes an African-American folk-tale motif of slaves “flying” to freedom as wish fulfillment or as a metaphor for escaping from slavery.

Ringgold published a children’s book Tar Beach which has been adapted from the text on the quilt. Ringgold also created new paintings for the book, using acrylic on canvas paper, similar to the canvas fabric she used in the original quilt painting. Ringgold was awarded a Caldecott Honor for her book, as well as the Coretta Scott King Award for illustration.

Present framed “Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles”

The art quilt “Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles” was a quilt Ringgold made in 1991. It depicts African American women who led the fight for civil rights sitting around a quilting frame in a garden in Arles, France.

Using the laminated picture as a guide, indicate who each woman is in the quilt. The French Impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) approaches them from the background carrying a painting of flowers. Ringgold noted that Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime and was never recognized for his work. He suffered from mental illness and committed suicide after a brief career.

Historically, women have joined together to help each other work on a quilt. These meetings are referred to as a “bee”. The comradery of the women working together was often a strong bond, particularly long ago when women lived further apart and didn’t have modern means of communicating. It was a special event to hold a “bee”, and women would travel to the “bee” location to enjoy the community of other women. Even today, women get together to quilt and enjoy each other’s company. For instance, even the Butterfield quilt was sewn together in a “bee”.

Ask the students what they think Ringgold is trying to say in the quilt.

Project:

For the project, the students will practice embroidering a square of cross-stitch fabric. Please hand out a square of fabric and threaded needle to each student. In addition, pass around the stitch reference pages for them to refer to. Ask them to please take out their markers. Showing the sample, tell them to draw an image on the fabric of something important to them. It should be somewhat simple (i.e. sport image, musical clef, house, heart, animal) as they will stitch around the image. If they cannot think of something, have them write their name instead.

Once they are all done, have them listen carefully as you describe the following steps:

- 1. Make sure there is a knot on the end of the thread. Have them make one if there is not.**
- 2. Have them push the needle up from underneath the fabric along the line of the image they drew.**
- 3. They can use the “back stitch” or “running stitch” to begin outlining their image. Please note the backstitch was used on the sample but the running stitch is easier. If they want, they may also experiment with the cross-stitch.**
- 4. If they run out of thread, they can cut another length and start again where they left off after they knot the back of the first piece of thread.**
- 5. The students may want to use their markers to color in their image.**

If the students do not finish they may keep the threaded needle but try to collect the needles from those who are done.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO LEAVE AT LEAST FIVE MINUTES AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION FOR THE STUDENTS TO PRESENT THEIR WORK TO THE CLASS.

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

Faith Ringgold

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of the contemporary American artist Faith Ringgold to your child's class. They learned about Ringgold's background, as well as made an art project in the style of her work. Ask your student about Ringgold's work – what makes her art unique? Do they remember what “fiber art” means?

Many of Ringgold's fiber art pieces are in museums, including the Guggenheim in New York. There is a work of hers on display at the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago. If you have access to the web, her web page is www.artincontext.org/artisit/ringgold.

In addition, Ms. Ringgold has written and illustrated a number of children's books, including Tar Beach which won a Caldecott Honor in 1991.

Sincerely yours,

Art Volunteer