

Faith Ringgold and Story Quilts

How are narrative artworks created?

Duration: 45 minutes

Grade Level: 1 to 4

Learning Objectives:

- Compare and contrast the styles that Faith Ringgold uses and identify differences and similarities between these styles
- Develop an understanding of how art can tell a story
- Compare and contrast Faith Ringgold's works with that of other artists that influenced her
- Think about ways you can use your imagination

Outcomes:

- Students will be exposed to and learn about an African-American woman artist
- Students will be introduced to soft sculpture with fabric, painting, the use of imagination, color, and telling a story
- Students will experience the use of several different art media and tools, through projects that encourage creativity, dexterity, and the creation of two-dimensional work

Associated Activities:

- Story Quilts, 60 minutes
- *Tar Beach* reading by Faith Ringgold, 10 minutes

Who is Faith Ringgold?



Faith Ringgold, born in 1930, is a painter, sculptor, performance artist, writer, teacher, and lecturer. Born in Harlem, New York, she has been creating art since she was a child.

Her home was in the center of the Harlem arts scene, surrounded by artists, musicians, and poets. This experience with the people of Harlem and its cultural influences left Ringgold with a strong connection to Harlem and the visual legacy of the Harlem Renaissance.

She received her B.S. and M.A. degrees in visual art from the City College of New York in 1955 and 1959, and later taught in the New York City Public Schools. In the 1960s, Ringgold traveled in Europe and was inspired to paint the American People Series.

She made her first quilt, *Echoes of Harlem*, in 1980, in collaboration with her mother, Madame Willi Posey. These paintings were not only bordered with fabric, but they were also quilted, creating a unique way of painting using quilts.

Ringgold's first story quilt *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?* was written in 1983 as a way of publishing her unedited words. The addition of text to her quilts has developed into a unique medium and style all her own. Faith Ringgold's first book, *Tar Beach*, was published in 1991.

Ringgold is best known for her painted story quilts but also creates sculptures, mosaics, performance art, and children's books. She has illustrated 17 children's books and written two other books.

Activity: Go online and listen to Faith Ringgold read her book, *Tar Beach*. See the link at the end of this lesson plan.

What is a story quilt?

A quilt is a covering that is made up of scraps of fabric, or other materials, that are sewn together. A story quilt is a type of quilt with pictures, sound, scents and textures that are used to tell a story. It can tell the story of a specific event, moment, or feeling in your life, or it can tell a story that you come up with in your imagination.

A person can make a story quilt by themselves or can make it with others. You can make it by hand or using a sewing machine. The stories on the quilt can be painted or sewn onto the quilt.

Think: Do you have any quilts at home? How is a quilt separate from a blanket? What story would you want to share with other people?



Maya's Quilt of Life, 1989, Acrylic on canvas, printed and dyed pieced fabric

Working Women

1996. Acrylic canvas with pieced fabric.



Questions for Viewing:

- What do you see?
- What colors are in this quilt? What about shapes? Patterns?
- What story do you think this is trying to tell?

Faith Ringgold at the Mattatuck Museum



Groovin' High, 1996, Silkscreen, signed and numbered 182/425

Faith Ringgold is represented in the Mattatuck Museum's collection with a silkscreened print of *Groovin' High*. The print of this quilt depicts a crowded dance hall bordered by quilted hand-dyed fabric. *Groovin' High* is evocative of Ringgold's memories of Sunday afternoon dances at the Savory and her connection to the African American communities of her native Harlem.

Activity: Create your own quilt out of paper! Follow along with the activity in your packet and create your own numbered edition.

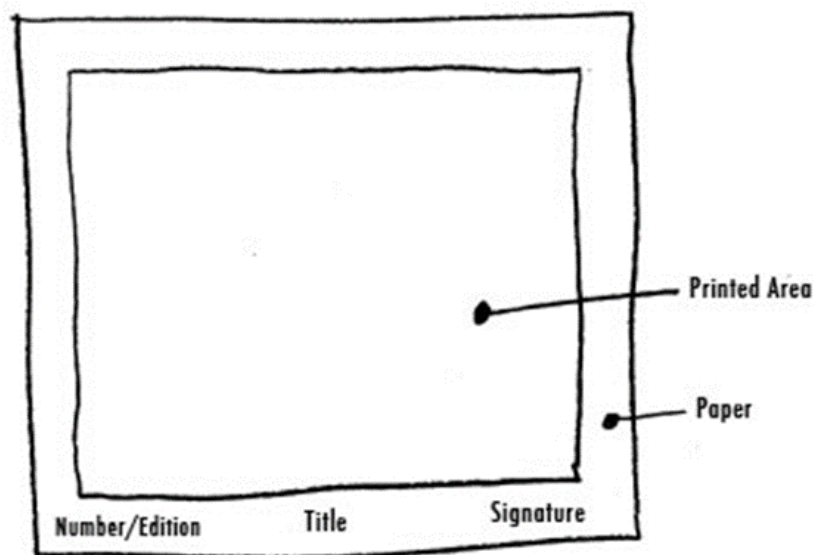
What is a silkscreen?

Silk-screening is a way to print an image onto paper or fabric. Ink is forced through a tightly stretch silk screen. A sealer is put on the areas of the image that will not be printed to keep the ink from passing through. The screen acts like a stencil. If there are multiple colors in the final product, you need a screen (or stencil) for each color.



How is a print labelled?

Groovin' High is a print of the original work. An artist can make several prints of their work in order to reach a larger audience. Pieces like this one have numbers and labels on the bottom of the work. In the middle, the artist writes the name of the artwork. To the right, they sign their name and the date it was printed. To the left, they write the number in the series the print is. A numbered edition in silkscreening or printmaking is showing the number of the print and the total number of prints in the edition. For example, 182/425 means that this was print number 182 that the artist made out of the total number of 425 prints.



The Harlem Renaissance

In *Groovin' High*, Ringgold's style, color, treatment of form, and perspective reflect the art produced during the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance is a time period of cultural expression from the 1910s to the 1930s united around the idea of what it meant to be black in America.

In the 1870s, after the end of the Civil War, African Americans moved from the south to the north in a period known as the Great Migration. Almost 175,000 of those people moved to Harlem. From unskilled laborers to an educated middle-class, Harlem became a destination for African Americans of all backgrounds. The Harlem Renaissance encompassed poetry and prose, painting and sculpture, jazz and swing, opera and dance.

The visual art that was produced during the Harlem Renaissance was largely an attempt to redefine and control the representation of African Americans. By using bold colors and forms related to folk art and African aesthetic traditions, artists began to develop a new black identity. Strong colors, bold shapes and human forms, and a slightly warped perspective identified the Harlem Renaissance and thusly influenced Ringgold's own style.



Jacob Lawrence, *The Library*, 1978, color screenprint, Mattatuck Museum.

Jazz Stories: Mama Can Sing, Papa Can Blow #1: Somebody Stole My Broken Heart

2004. Acrylic on canvas.



Questions for Viewing:

- What do you see?
- What do you think is the inspiration for this quilt?
- How does this quilt make you feel?
- What parts of these quilts make you think of things or places that you have seen?

Learn More:

Faith Ringgold: <https://www.faithringgold.com/>

Faith Ringgold Reads *Tar Beach*: <https://www.rif.org/literacy-central/material/author-faith-ringgold-reads-tar-beach>

EDSITEMENT Stories in Quilts: <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/stories-quilts>

The Harlem Renaissance: <https://www.nga.gov/education/teachers/lessons-activities/uncovering-america/harlem-renaissance.html>