



FAMILY STORY QUILTS INSPIRED BY FAITH RINGGOLD, AUTHOR, ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 5

LENGTH OF TIME: Three 45 –50 minute discussion and project sessions

GOAL

- To communicate an important aspect of their families lives visually.
- To create an art piece about their own family.
- To learn about their classmates' families through the story quilt squares and family memory stories.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will compose a one or two line family memory story.
- Students will visually depict a family memory or a hope or dream for their family drawn with detail.
- Students will learn about each other's unique families through the creation of a class story quilt.
- Students will learn about the work of artist Faith Ringgold.



ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.2: Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally. (Also SL.4.2 and 5.2)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace. (Also SL.4.4 and 5.4)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7: Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g. create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting). (Also RL.4.7 and 5.7)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

Creating a family quilt as a class can be a way for all children to connect with their own families, to share their family experience with others and to appreciate the diversity of families in the classroom and the larger community.

This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. Students will create a story quilt with a well-developed drawing based on a personal family memory or hope or dream for their family. Their finished work will also include a written family memory sentence that shares something unique about their family and a colorful pieced border.

Students study the work of artist, teacher, author and illustrator Faith Ringgold. Many students may choose to create a magical story in which they are flying, inspired by Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach*.

Creating a family quilt square can be a reassuring activity for students as they show how they are connected to the caring people in their world. This activity is designed to be inclusive for all; be sensitive to the individual needs of the students in your classroom.

The goal of the quilt is for all students in the class to find something they feel positive sharing with the class — it can be realistic or a hope or dream they have for themselves and their loved ones. A helpful phrase may be, "We are going to make a quilt square about a special memory with the people who love and take care of you."

Your students may have families with two moms or two dads; stepparents; a transgender parent; adoptive parents; or foster parents, it is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your school with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

Faith Ringgold and her brother can fly in *Tar Beach*. Let your students know that they can create a quilt square about something they wish for their family or loved ones to do. For example, Faith Ringgold wanted to fly over the Union Building and give it to her father because he had been forbidden to join the Union because of Jim Crow laws and racial segregation.

MATERIALS

- For memory sentence: white strips of paper large enough for two sentences, black permanent writing pen, pencils
- For memory drawing: pencils, black permanent markers, colored pencils, crayons or markers (make sure to have lots of good choices for skin tones and hair tones)
- For quilt backing and borders: assorted colors of construction paper, scissors, glue
- The book, *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold and/or the [Video of Faith Ringgold reading her book *Tar Beach*](#) (5 minutes)
- [Video: "Faith Ringgold: The Last Story Quilt"](#) (30 seconds)

OPTIONAL BOOKS AND RESOURCES

We Came To America by Faith Ringgold.

Image of the [original *Tar Beach* artwork](#) by Faith Ringgold.

[Faith Ringgold's website](#) for background information.

The Keeping Quilt. Patricia Polacco.

The Patchwork Quilt. Valerie Flournoy.

The Quiltmaker's Gift. Jeff Brumbeau.

EXPLORE FAITH RINGGOLD'S WORK, HER WRITING AND ART WITH YOUR STUDENTS

- Introduce Faith Ringgold to your students. Show the video [The Last Story Quilt](#) and read her first children's book called *Tar Beach* or show the video of her reading her book [Faith Ringgold reads Tar Beach](#). The book *Tar Beach* is based on her story quilt Tar Beach Quilt (you will share reproductions with students in the next step). Faith Ringgold was inspired by her mother, who was a seamstress and quilter.
- Show students some of the following reproductions of story quilts by Faith Ringgold.
 - Each of these quilts have pictures painted on cloth in the center and incorporate Faith Ringgold's stories about the scenes written on white cloth strips.
 - The painting and words are surrounded by pieces of fabric, and then the whole artwork is quilted.
 - Ask students to look closely at the structure of the quilts because their own quilt project will be similar.

Tar Beach. "Faith's friends and family often relaxed together on the roof of their apartment building. They enjoyed playing on this 'tar beach' and on the real beach in nearby New Jersey." – Robyn Montana Turner

The Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles. This quilt is another in the French series, which "tells the story of Willia at a meeting of an imaginary group called the National Sunflower Quilters Society of America. African-American women who changed history work here on a quilt of sunflowers. Standing in the sunflower field is Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh, who painted many still life images of sunflowers during his lifetime." – Robyn Montana Turner

Church Picnic. "Church Picnic tells and shows the story of an African-American gathering in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1909. The event takes place during the time of Willia's childhood, a time when southern African-Americans were hopeful about the future. The banner on the ground lets us know that this is a church picnic in the urban south." – Robyn Montana Turner

Matisse's Chapel. "Ringgold visited a chapel in France designed by Henri Matisse, a well-known French artist. Matisse's Chapel became a story quilt based on an imaginary gathering of Faith's own relatives in the chapel. In the story quilt, they are known as Willia's family." – Robyn Montana Turner

Dancing at the Louvre. This quilt is part of a series of story quilts that Faith Ringgold painted about a character she created named Willia Marie Simone. Willia did many things in the story quilts that Faith would have liked to have done herself. In this quilt, Willia and her friend take her three daughters to the Louvre, a historic museum in Paris. They dance in front of the *Mona Lisa*, a famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci.

PREPARING TO CREATE A QUILT PIECE

- **Brainstorming:** Help your students brainstorm ideas for their story quilt. Remind them that their story quilt can have magic realism. Faith Ringgold could not fly in real life, but her ability to fly in her story helped her make beautiful art about her hopes and dreams for her family. She also showed realistic things her family enjoyed doing together, such as eating and sleeping on Tar Beach. Let students know that they can draw themselves or their family member flying if they want that to be part of their story.
- **Quick Write of Their Idea:** Have students write one or two sentences on a piece of paper describing their memory or idea for their story quilt. This is a draft. Students will edit and write a final copy on a white paper strip to include on the story quilt. Let students know that as they are working, it is part of the creative process to possibly change or enhance their idea.

CREATING THE MAIN IMAGE FOR THE QUILT

- **Sketch of their idea:** Ask students to use pencil to draw their story idea. Ask: *Who was there? How will you draw each person? What was in the background? What kind of clothes are they wearing? What does their hair look like (if they have hair)? What details can you add to the picture so that we get a good idea of the setting (where you are)?*
- **Completing the drawing:** Once they have a drawing they like with lots of details, they can use a black permanent marker to outline parts of their picture, and they can color in their drawing with crayons or markers. Make sure to have a wide variety of skin tones and hair colors available in markers, colored pencils or crayons. The intention of this project is for the children to draw people that look like their family. Remind them that their drawing will be cut out and glued to a colored paper background.

WRITING ABOUT THEIR STORY QUILT

- Give students a clean white paper strip. Have them write their sentences about their story quilt in their best handwriting. Let them know that they will be gluing the story strip around the edge of their story quilt, just as Faith Ringgold writes her stories around the edges of her quilts.

PUTTING THE STORY QUILT TOGETHER

- Have your students glue their drawing and sentence strip onto a sheet of background paper. The background paper should be at least two inches bigger on all sides so that students have room to collage a beautiful border around their quilt square.
- The initial layout and gluing of the drawing and memory sentence strip on the background paper is very important because the pieced border fits around the drawing and sentence strip.
- Give your students lots of interesting colorful paper that they can cut up and glue down for their quilt border. Suggestions for paper might include origami paper, scrapbooking paper and colorful construction paper scraps.

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- Remind students to cut and lay out the entire border before gluing so they can move things around.
 - Glue border pieces to the background.
 - Optional idea: You may want to tie this portion of the lesson to geometry. Students can cut squares and triangles for their quilt border. They can make a symmetrical or asymmetrical border.

DISPLAY AND DISCUSSION

- Create a space in your classroom where all of your students' quilt squares can be put on display together as a big paper quilt.
- Take time with your students to admire the whole quilt and the diverse images within it! Remind students that there are many families and every family has unique qualities about them. Explain that this is an opportunity for students to share their squares and, therefore, their families with the class. It is important for each person to listen respectfully.
- Some children may hesitate to speak right away but may become eager to share as the lesson progresses. It is also okay for students to take a pass on verbally sharing about their art. After everyone who wants to has spoken, take a moment to appreciate the richness in the group.

EXTENSIONS

- Ask students to write a poem about their square.
- Have students write a short story about their quilt square.
- Display the quilt in the school hallway.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Have students demonstrate that they have been listening and understand the diversity and familiarity within the quilt. Have students get into pairs. Each student should choose one square in the quilt that is very familiar, a mirror of their own experience in some way, and another square that seems very unfamiliar, a window into an experience different from their own. Each child gets five minutes to talk about the squares they have chosen. This assessment can also be done in written form.

DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Children's Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Embracing Family Diversity School Resources](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Adapted from Faith Ringgold: Our Own Story Quilts developed by [Project ARTiculate](#) and the [Fairbanks North Star Borough School District](#), and Family Quilt: A Community Art Project developed by Emmy Howe ([nationalseedproject.org](#)) and the young people at CampOUT, Open View Farm Educational Center.