

Faith Ringgold

The Last Story Quilt

Time: 15 minutes

Study Guide

INTRODUCTION

Faith Ringgold, The Last Story Quilt, is more than a film about a famous African-American woman artist. It is an inspiring story about how Faith Ringgold achieved her dream of becoming an artist through perseverance, patience and education. Every obstacle she faced reinforced her determination to reach her goal. Students will see scenes of the artist's life showing the influences of her family, African-American heritage and growing up in Harlem. They will see her painting in her studio and share her creative discovery of "framing" her works with quilted fabric and their evolution into story quilts.

TO THE TEACHER:

This video is appropriate for students from upper elementary (Grade 3) to adult learners. However, the student guide is targeted for Grades 3 - 8. The objectives of the guide are to:

- stimulate active viewing that engages students' minds;
- provide questions for reflection;
- suggest experiential activities that involve many areas of the curriculum.

The intent is to give students an opportunity to interpret the artist's work, understand the social and historical context of the artist's life and to make connections to their own lives and learning.

SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARTIST

You may want to begin by sharing some information about the artist and her accomplishments with the students. Adapt the language to the appropriate age level of the class. Students may recognize the artist through her successful books, like *Tar Beach* and *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad Through the Sky*.

BIOGRAPHY

Faith Ringgold began her artistic career more than 35 years ago as a painter. Today, she is best known for her painted story quilts - art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling. She has exhibited in major museums in the United States, Europe, South America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. She is in the permanent collection of many museums, including the Studio Museum of Harlem,

the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art. In addition, her works are in private collections and shown in galleries like the ACA Gallery in New York.

She has received more than 75 awards, fellowships, citations and honors, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship for painting, two National Endowment for the Arts Awards and 11 honorary doctorates, one of which is from her alma mater, City College of New York. She taught art in the New York City public schools for over 18 years. Today she is a senior professor of art at the University of California in San Diego.

Her first book, *Tar Beach*, was a Caldecott Honor Book and winner of the Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration, among numerous other honors. She has written and illustrated five other children's books: *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*, *Dinner at Aunt Connie's House*, *Bonjour Lonnie*, *My Dream of Martin Luther King* and *The Invisible Princess*.

Books about Faith Ringgold include: *We Flew Over the Bridge, The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* by the artist and *Talking to Faith Ringgold* by Faith Ringgold, Linda Freeman and Nancy Roucher. *Faith Ringgold Paints Crown Heights* is the subject of another video created and produced by Linda Freeman.

For more information, visit the Faith Ringgold website at <http://www.artincontext.org/artist/ringgold/new.htm>.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Help students actively view the video by giving them things to watch for and questions to think about, as appropriate for their age and grade level.

- Throughout the video you will see Faith Ringgold painting. Watch how the painting she is working on changes. How does she begin the painting? Sketches) What does she add?
- Watch for scenes from Faith Ringgold's childhood. What was she like as a child?
- Watch for things that happened to Faith Ringgold that made her want to be an artist. What encouraged her? What discouraged her?
- Watch for an idea that Faith Ringgold had that made it possible for her to show her artwork. (the tanka)
- Watch for scenes that show how Faith Ringgold's family influenced her.
- Watch for scenes from Africa. What do they tell you about the artist?
- Watch for African art objects and how they influenced the artist.
- Watch for famous people.

- Watch for the subjects Faith Ringgold paints and how she uses color, size and words.
- Watch (and listen) for music. What is it and why is it important to the artist?
- Watch (and listen) for Faith Ringgold's ideas about succeeding.

QUESTION FOR STUDENTS

Begin by reviewing selected items from What to Watch For as preparation for interpretative questions about Faith Ringgold and her work.

- ? Faith Ringgold was described as a pioneer. How is she a pioneer?
- ? What motivated Faith Ringgold to become an artist?
- ? How does Faith Ringgold get her ideas?
- ? What is Faith Ringgold's work about?
- ? How do Faith Ringgold's quilts tell a story?
- ? Is Faith Ringgold an American artist, an African artist, an African American artist? Why?
- ? How did Faith Ringgold think of creating the "story quilt"?
- ? What does Faith Ringgold think is most important - talent or determination? Do you agree? Why?
- ? Is a quilt art? Why or why not?
- ? Freedom is a theme in Faith Ringgold's work. Can you think of one painting that is about freedom? Why do you think so?

? What can you learn from Faith Ringgold?

EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS

The following suggestions are designed to help students express ideas and interpretations about the meaning of Faith Ringgold's message and work to their own lives. Feel free to select from the curriculum applications that follow or adapt to meet the needs of your students and learning goals.

1. Faith Ringgold wanted to be an artist. What do you want to be? Think about what would help you and what could keep you from succeeding. Write about what you want to be and how you will fulfill your dream in a story or poem. Illustrate it.
2. One of Faith Ringgold's most famous artworks is *Tar Beach*, which shows a family having a picnic on a New York roof top. Part of this artwork is based on what actually happened to Faith Ringgold when she was a child; part of it she made up. Can you remember something that happened to you when you were with your family or friends? Draw about what really happened and add a dream (something you make up) to make it more interesting.
3. Faith Ringgold painted many famous people in the French Collection series. Research the lives of one of them in books or use the Internet and find out why the person is famous. Report to the class.
4. One of the ways Faith Ringgold learned to be an artist was to copy. Find an artwork that you can copy. Try to make your copy exactly like the original. Write about what you learn from copying.
5. Think about the African designs that Faith Ringgold used for her quilt borders. Make up your own using geometric shapes and colors in repeated patterns.
6. Make a story quilt based on the theme of change. Write a story about what you would change about yourself, or your family, school, community or in the world. Now make sketches to show the ideas in your story. Create a finished work on drawing paper using crayons, markers or paint. Mount the drawing on larger paper or poster board. Write your story on the border and make a quilted paper frame to finish your artwork. (The student squares can be assembled to create a class quilt.) This project can also be made from fabric to create a more "permanent" work of art .
7. Write a newspaper story about Faith Ringgold. Think of questions you want to ask her. Check her website to see if you can find some answers.
8. Look at a map of the world. Find the places that are either subjects or inspirations for Faith Ringgold's paintings. If you could take people to some place in the world like Faith Ringgold did when she did the French Collection, who would you take? What would you do? Draw your group in their setting and explain why they are there.

9. Study large reproductions of Faith Ringgold's artworks. Describe and analyze them in terms of subject matter, compositional elements and information about what was happening at the time. Discuss the meaning of the artworks in small groups and report your interpretation to the class.

10. Listen to jazz music and rap music. How are they alike? How are they different? Select one jazz piece by a famous musician (e. g. Duke Ellington) and play it for the class. Create a short rap piece about how you want to change and perform it for the class.

VIDEO SERIES

Faith Ringgold, The Last Story Quilt, created and produced by Linda Freeman, is one of a series of videos that provide an intimate look at both the lives and work of famous African American artists. Art history is being made on film, as the artists create right before our eyes. These documentaries profile the personal relationships, joys and struggles of these extraordinary human beings - and give them the recognition they richly deserve. The goal of the series is to teach students about the art-making process and to inspire them to reach their own life goals.

For more information about **Faith Ringgold, The Last Story Quilt** and the other videos, contact Linda Freeman at L & S Video, Inc., tel: 914-238-9366; fax: 914-238-6324.

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