

Faith Ringgold



Tar Beach, 1988
acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed,
pieced fabric border, 74 x 69,
Guggenheim Museum, New York



Faith Ringgold, 1976
oil on canvas,
Private Collection

The Artist

Faith Ringgold

Born New York City, New York, 1930

Faith Ringgold was born in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan. Her mother was a fashion designer and a seamstress who always encouraged Faith's creativity. Ringgold earned both her bachelor's degree (1955) and her master's degree (1959) from City College in New York City. Upon earning her bachelor's degree, Ringgold taught art in the New York City public schools. Her artwork in the mid-to-late 1960s carried a strong political message supporting civil-rights movements. As a feminist and a member of the civil-rights movement, Ringgold demonstrated against the exclusion of female and black artists at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1970, she began teaching college courses, which allowed her to quit teaching in the public schools to focus more on her artwork by 1973. The 1970s marked the time when Ringgold abandoned traditional painting and started playing with painted fabric borders surrounding unstretched acrylic paintings on canvas. Ringgold cofounded a group for African-American female artists, *Where We At*, in 1971. Her work is inspired by Africa and Tibetan *thangka*.

Ringgold has a very successful career so far in life. *Tar Beach* is a painted story quilt that she turned into a children's book, "Tar Beach." The children's book version received numerous awards including a Caldecott Honor. She has had the opportunity to exhibit in major museums all around the world. Ringgold wrote and illustrated twelve children books, and has received more than 75 awards. Some of these awards include the Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts in sculpture and painting, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and sixteen honorary doctorates. Ringgold worked as a professor of art at the University of California in San Diego, California from 1985 to 2002. She currently lives and works in La Jolla, California, and Englewood, New Jersey.

Art Movement

Story Quilting

Faith Ringgold is famous for her painted story quilts. These painted story quilts combine painting, quilted fabric, and storytelling. Many of these she has turned into illustrated children's books.

The Artwork

Tar Beach

In painted panels, sewn fabric, and text, the work depicts the fantasies of an eight-year-old heroine, Cassie Louise Lightfoot, who flies through the sky on a summer night in Harlem.

Discussion Suggestions

Talk about the story *Tar Beach*?

- *After reading the story, *Tar Beach*, what message do you think Faith Ringgold is trying to give to you as a reader?*
- *Do you relate to the main character Cassie at all? Why or why not?*

Talk about Ringgold's painted story quilts?

- *Do you like Ringgold's form of combining painting and quilting to tell a story? Why or why not?*
- *Why do you think Ringgold combines all these different forms of art into one?*

Activity Idea

Make your own painted story quilt:

- First, make a fabric border by gluing the fabric squares around the edge of your paper.
- Second, pick one of the following as a subject for your center drawing.
- Do you have a memory of something that happened when you were younger? Draw what happened, then add a fantasy dream element to change the story.
- Think about something that you really wanted to do, something that took a long time for you to accomplish. Show in a picture what you did and how you felt.
- Each person has their own individual background. Pick one part of your culture or history you would like to show.
- The last part of your project will be describing your subject, in your own words around the edges.

Materials Needed:

- Fabric Squares
- Glue
- Paper
- Pencils, paint, and paintbrushes