



FAITH RINGGOLD AUTHOR STUDY



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MEET THE AUTHOR

Not many artists pioneer a new art form, but Faith Ringgold did just that with her story quilts that combine painting, quilted fabric, and storytelling. These, in turn, inspired her outstanding children's books. Her book *Tar Beach* won the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award and a Caldecott Honor Award. Her story quilts are in the collections of major museums, including New York's Guggenheim and Whitney Museums. Ms. Ringgold grew up in Harlem and taught art in New York public schools, as well as the University of California at San Diego. She sums up her work like this: "I became an artist for the same reason I became a writer: I wanted to tell my story." This guide highlights books that tell her stories and the stories of important historical figures.

With your students, watch one or both of the short videos about the creation of *Tar Beach* on Craft in America's website. In the videos, Faith Ringgold talks about the process of making the quilt *Tar Beach*, and of writing *Tar Beach* and *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad*.

(www.craftinamerica.org/artists/faith-ringgold/)

On her own website, Faith Ringgold has an FAQ section with answers to questions your students may have, such as whether she has children and pets, where she gets her ideas, and where she lives. (www.faithringgold.com)

PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS FOR AN AUTHOR STUDY

Ringgold Round-Up

Create a display area about Faith Ringgold and her books in your classroom or library, adding to it as students read her work. Include a photograph of her and pictures of her book covers. Students can print their favorite quotes from the books on colorful paper, illustrate them, and add them to the display. In addition to or as a variation on this, dedicate a bulletin board to the author, her books, and student response projects.

Across the Books

An important form of critical thinking is learning to compare and contrast related material. Because Faith Ringgold's picture-story books share themes and even characters, they offer many opportunities to practice this skill. Have students use a graphic organizer to compare two or more books. They could each fill a Venn diagram with phrases that refer to similarities and differences between books. Another graphic organizer is a five-Ws chart with Who, What, Where, When, and Why columns to be filled in about two or more books.

The books share other features that would make good class discussions. For example, all the books have dedications. Have students find them in each book and write them on a blackboard or flip chart. Talk about the role of a dedication and how Ringgold dedicated each book.

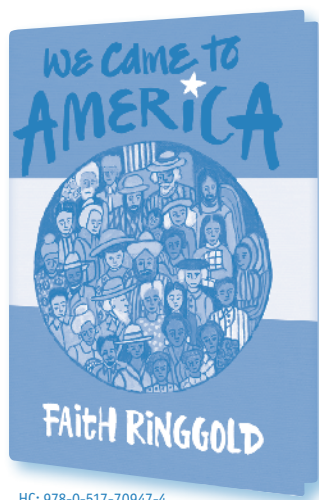
Time to Vote

After students have read all the books, combine literature, civics, and math by having them vote on their favorite book. Discuss the process of voting, the need to think carefully about their choices, and the importance of respecting different opinions. The vote can be open or secret. Individually or as a class, make a bar chart that shows how many votes each book received.

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee, and former youth librarian. She is the author of *Great Books for Girls*, *Great Books for Boys*, and *Great Books About Things Kids Love* (all published by Ballantine). She gives workshops on new books and the Common Core State Standards.



WE CAME TO AMERICA



HC: 978-0-517-70947-4
GLB: 978-0-517-70948-1
EL: 978-0-553-51257-1

ABOUT THE BOOK

Vibrant illustrations and lyrical words celebrate the rich diversity of America and the people who have come here from around the world, bringing their music, stories, dances, food, and fashion. Some people were already here, while others came in chains or fled from danger and injustice. But, as the book concludes, “We are all Americans, just the same.”

A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

We Came to America fits in well with curriculum units about immigration, emphasizing the reasons people came to this country and what they have contributed. At the same time, it speaks to the current world refugee crisis, which saw more than 900,000 people seeking refuge in Europe in 2015 alone. Depending on the age of your students, this could be a timely discussion topic that ties into *We Came to America*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. People have come to America from around the world for different reasons. Find reasons in the text and then add thoughts of your own on the topic.
2. What does the book show that people brought with them? If you were moving to another country, what would you want to take with you?
3. What forms of transportation are shown or mentioned? What are other ways people arrive in America? Share stories you’ve read or heard about immigrants and how they traveled here. If you moved to the United States from another country, how did you travel?
4. Some people were “brought in chains,/Losing our freedom and our names.” Who are these people? How did they lose their freedom and names? Compare them to others in the book who chose to move to America, and how each group might have felt.
5. Others “came running/From injustice, fear, and pain.” What is injustice? Why would it motivate people to leave their country? Share any examples you know of people who came to America because of problems in the country they left.

ACTIVITIES

Looking Closely

Assign pairs of students a two-page spread from the book to study closely. They should discuss or write down everything they can glean from the words and pictures, including details as basic as the colors and shapes used. Then have each pair report back to the class on what they observed.

Tell Me More

Have each student choose a page and compose a story about the person or people on the page, where they might be from, why they left, and what their new life is like.

From Around the World

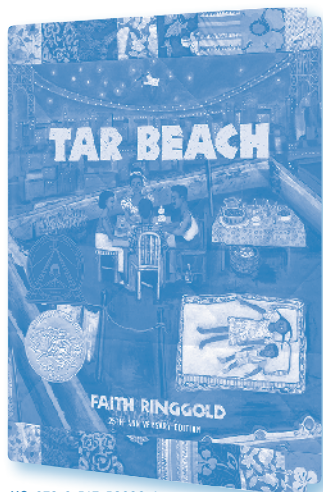
Have the class collect stories and songs from around the world. This could mean finding folktales and songs in the library or online, or bringing them from home, including family stories related to their heritage.

Endpaper Inspiration

Colorful decorations on the endpapers correspond to shapes found throughout the book. Have students find those connections, and then draw and color their own original decorations inspired by Faith Ringgold’s art. Use them to decorate a display or bulletin board about her books.



TAR BEACH



HC: 978-0-517-58030-1
PB: 978-0-517-88544-4

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cassie Louise Lightfoot can fly. Her flights take her above New York City and her favorite spot, the George Washington Bridge, which glitters with lights. Cassie's father worked on the bridge, but because he's black, it's hard to find a new job. Cassie hopes to change that with her magical powers. Join her at home and in the skies above Harlem in the 1930s in this award-winning book.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Cassie, using information and words from the story. What does she like to do? Talk about the members of her family and what they are like.
2. What is Tar Beach? What do Cassie and her family do on Tar Beach?
3. Cassie especially likes the George Washington Bridge. Why is it so important to her? How does she describe it?
4. What problems does Cassie's family face? What changes would make their lives better? Talk about how Cassie plans to help her family.
5. Compare Cassie's family with their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Honey. What do they have in common? How are they different?

ACTIVITIES

Picnic Time

Cassie's family and neighbors have a picnic on Tar Beach. As a class, make a list of the food at their picnic. Have students discuss their favorite food and what they would bring to a picnic. Each student should draw and color one or more foods to add to a Tar Beach picnic bulletin board.

A Gift for Cassie

Have students think about Cassie and what she wishes she had in her life. In writing or discussion, have each student describe a gift that they would like to give her and why they think it's a good choice. They can draw small pictures of the gift and add them to a class poster.

If You Could Fly

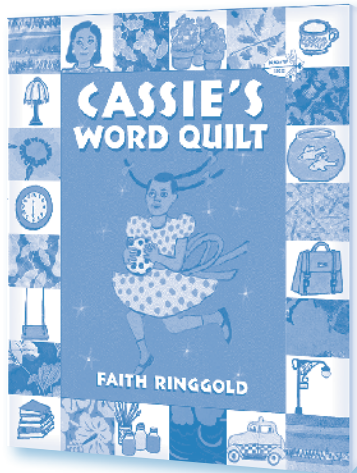
On a flip chart, print two of the last lines of the book: "I have told him it's very easy, anyone can fly. All you need is somewhere to go that you can't get to any other way." Have students brainstorm places that they'd like to fly to. Each student should choose a place, explain why they want to go there, and add it to the chart.

Digging Deeper

At the end of *Tar Beach*, a long note explains its origins and discusses Faith Ringgold. Read it aloud to the class, stopping after every paragraph to clarify and answer questions. Then have students study the picture of the quilt on the facing page and make connections between the long note and the quilt.



CASSIE'S WORD QUILT



PB: 978-0-553-11233-7

ABOUT THE BOOK

Visit Cassie Louise Lightfoot and Harlem in this word-oriented book. Explore her home, school, and neighborhood in lively pictures, starting with Tar Beach, the apartment rooftop where Cassie's family has picnics. Vivid colors and fabric borders illustrate the excitement of urban life in the 1930s.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Cassie's home and neighborhood. Compare it to your home and neighborhood. What's similar?
What's different? Which differences are related to the book's time period, the 1930s?
2. What can you tell about Cassie as a person from the illustrations? Do you think she is happy? What can you tell about her family?
3. Find different shapes on the pages, including squares, rectangles, triangles, diamond shapes, circles, and others. Identify shapes that look like they could be a piece of a quilt. Talk about the illustrations and how they relate to the text.
4. Discuss the book's format, which uses four pages to cover each topic. Why do you think the author arranged the book like this? How are the quilt-like pictures and the larger pictures similar?

ACTIVITIES

Your Own Word Quilt

After spending time with the book, have students create their own square to become a part of a class word quilt. They should pick a topic in their life to illustrate and label, either a topic in the book like school, or another one such as sports. Have students present their square, and then assemble the quilt to form your class word quilt.

Class Alphabet Book

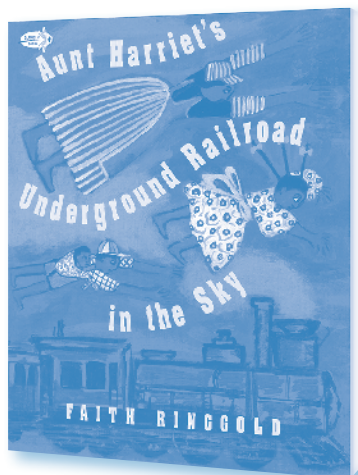
Make a class alphabet book with twenty-six large pages, one for each letter. Have students illustrate a word for each letter and add it to the book. Younger students can find words in *Cassie's Word Quilt* or other Faith Ringgold books. Older students can find harder words and add definitions in place of or in addition to pictures.

Comparing Cassie's Word Quilt and Tar Beach

Since these books have the same setting and characters, they lend themselves to comparison. First discuss the differences between the formats of the books. Then, to compare content, create a chart with two columns and as many rows as needed. In the first column, labeled *Cassie's Word Quilt*, have students list some or all of the words from the quilts. In the second column, labeled *Tar Beach*, have students put a checkmark if the person or item in the word quilt appears in *Tar Beach*. For example, both books have flowers in them but only *Cassie's Word Quilt* has a swing.



AUNT HARRIET'S UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN THE SKY



PB: 978-0-517-88543-7

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Cassie Louise Lightfoot and her younger brother, Be Be, are magically flying one day, they see an old train in the sky, and Be Be hops aboard just as it departs. Cassie chases after the train, and as she does, Harriet Tubman tells her about slavery and guides her along the slaves' escape route. Join Cassie on her dangerous journey as she tries to rescue Be Be and reach freedom in Canada.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Cassie follow Be Be, and how does that get her into danger? Describe her journey, the people who helped her, and how they helped.
2. What clues about Be Be does Cassie encounter along the way? Discuss the notes that he left her and what she learned from them.
3. Describe Harriet Tubman, what she does, and how she guides Cassie. Discuss what you learn about the Underground Railroad, citing specific parts of the story.
4. What do you learn about slavery in this book? What were some of the dangers that slaves faced when they tried to escape?
5. Why was it illegal for slaves to learn to read and write? How would reading and writing have helped them? Why couldn't slaves hold any kind of meeting, including preaching?

ACTIVITIES

Take a Picture Walk

Use a Picture Walk to help students become familiar with this complex book before reading it aloud. Start with the cover, asking simple questions like "What do you think the children are doing in this picture?" Respond to student answers in an open-ended way, such as "I can see why you'd say that," without giving away the plot. Continue this with the title page and the rest of the book. After the Picture Walk, read the text aloud, showing the pictures, and then lead a discussion comparing students' earlier comments with the book's content.

My Favorite Part

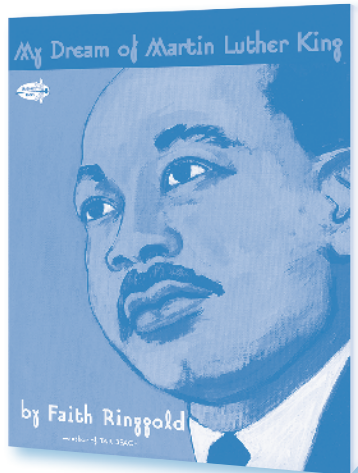
After reading the book aloud, have students spend some time rereading or looking through it again. Then have them write or dictate the answer to the prompt: "I like the part when _____ because _____." Have them share their answers in small groups and discuss the book in more detail.

Go Down, Moses

Share the lyrics of *Go Down, Moses* with your students and, if possible, listen to a recording of it. Children can easily sing along with the refrain. Then discuss the song lyrics, who Moses was, and why Harriet Tubman was called the Moses of her people.



MY DREAM OF MARTIN LUTHER KING



PB: 978-0-517-88577-2

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a dream, the narrator sees Martin Luther King as a child, who encounters racial prejudice but also joins civil rights protestors. The boy hears his father preach and has a vision of Mahatma Gandhi. Then the young Martin becomes the adult minister who changed the world with his leadership and speeches. Although he dies, his legacy lives on, as this picture book so vividly shows.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Martin Luther King as a child in this story. Talk about his family and how they interact with him.
2. Why is young Martin kept out of the white school, chased by the police, and told he can't get on the bus?
3. When Martin grows up, he becomes a minister like his father, as well as a civil rights leader. What does it mean to be a preacher? What does the book show about Dr. King as a civil rights leader? How are the two roles alike?
4. What does the story teach you about Mahatma Gandhi and Rosa Parks? Why do you think the author included them as part of the dream?
5. What do the bags at the beginning of the book stand for? Why do the people have them? What happens to the bags at the end, and why? Discuss how the bags relate to Dr. King and his work.

ACTIVITIES

I Have Been to the Mountaintop

Reread the final page of the book, which closes with Dr. King's speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Then watch the end of the powerful speech with your students online (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oehry1JC9Rk). Have students discuss what Dr. King meant by the quoted words, including "mountaintop" and "promised land." Ask students why they think the author ended the story with those quotes.

Freedom Songs

Have students discuss why the Civil Rights Movement used songs as part of protests. If possible, listen to the spirituals mentioned in the story: "Amazing Grace," "We Shall Overcome," and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round." Print out the lyrics (www.negrospirituais.com/songs/) and have students talk about what they mean.

The Language of Civil Rights

The story introduces words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. As a class, make a list of such words as *segregated*, *boycott*, *protesting*, *peaceful resistance*, *demonstrators*, *sit-ins*, and *voter registration*. Discuss what the words mean. Have students use the words to make signs like the protestors hold in the pictures and post them on a bulletin board.