

---

## Art Masterpiece: *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles, 1991* by Faith Ringgold

---

Pronounced: Faith RING-gold  
**Keywords:** Quilting, Repetition  
Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>  
Activity: Flower Quilt Block



### Meet the Artist:

- Faith Ringgold was born in Harlem, N.Y. in 1930. She grew up during the time of the Great Depression. As a child she had asthma so she didn't go to school until 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.
- Her mother taught her at home and took her to museums. She gave Faith paper & crayons to draw and bits of cloth, needle and thread to make little things. Her mother taught her to sew.
- While she was at college, Faith had a professor who didn't like her drawings and told her that he didn't think that she should be an artist.
- Faith Ringgold began her artistic career more than 35 years ago as a painter.
- Ringgold began quilted artworks in 1980; she quilted her stories in order to be heard, since at the time no one would publish her autobiography.
- Today, she is best known for her painted story quilts – art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling.
- When she started out, there were hardly any galleries that would show the work of black women. Today she has exhibited all over the world and has permanent collections in many museums in New York City. She has also written and illustrated over a dozen children's books.
- She has received more than 75 awards for painting and writing.

**Important lesson:** What is a quilt? Quilting is an art form. African-American women are credited with the beginning of quilt making in America. Making quilts was part of their duties as slaves. They made them for the plantation owner's family. Quilts were part of Faith Ringgold's family tradition.

A quilting bee is a gathering of friends and neighbors who come together to work on creating the squares to form a quilt. The original purpose was to get a quilt completed more quickly but it also served as a way to socialize and enjoy time together. The quilting bee gives the quilters opportunity to trade fabrics, techniques and stories. They may also trade completed quilt squares with one another.

*Sunflower Quilting Bee* tells a story. A group of famous 19th and 20th century African-American women are holding a quilting bee. Here in Arles, France, they meet the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh, who made paintings of sunflowers. The heroines pictured are: Madame C. J. Walker, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hamer, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethune and Ella Baker.

Today, quilts are often referred to as art quilts, as they are commonly hung on walls rather than used on a bed.

**Discussion Questions:**

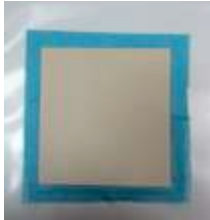
- Look closely at the quilt. Does this painting tell a story? (yes, Faith would weave stories into all of her quilts.)
- Where is the story? ( in the border with words but also in the image)
- Who is in the painting? (African women in Arles, France displaying their quilt with the famous Van Gogh standing in the background.)
- Is there repetition? (yes, the sunflowers)
- Why did Faith choose the sunflower? ( to pay tribute to Vincent Van Gogh who often painted sunflowers)
- Is each quilt block identical? (no)
- Do you know anyone who is a quilt-maker?
- What is worth remembering about this painting?

## Activity: A class Quilting Bee - a flower quilt block

**Materials Needed:** 5" squares of white or manila cardstock ( CUSD Warehouse), 8" squares of patterned scrapbook paper (or multi-colored card stock or construction paper), tissue paper in variety of colors, several glue sticks, and scissors.

### Process:

1. Hand-out one 5" square to each student.
2. Tissue paper will be our fabric today.
3. Students will need to choose a piece of tissue paper for their background fabric. Tell students to choose a light color for the best result. This piece of tissue must be larger than the square.
4. Once they select their background color they may need to trim the tissue paper so that is only slightly larger than the 5" square. \*\*\*Demonstrate using the doc camera how to lay the 5" square on top of the tissue paper and then trim. Next, with the 5" square laying on top of the tissue square take the glue stick and carefully run it along the edges of the cardstock. Now fold the tissue around the edge and press down. Do this on all four sides.



5. Flip over.
6. Next, they will choose smaller pieces of tissue to create their flower.
7. Encourage students to try several designs. Experiment with overlapping and contrasting colors. Colors layered over each other create new color!
8. Flowers should appear unique and individual. They do not have to be sunflowers.
9. Show students how some of the petals can extend past the edge of the 5" cardstock square.
10. Once they like their design they need to start assembling their quilt block by taking one piece at a time and gluing it into place.
11. Remind them that in building a quilt block it takes time and patience. If they are messy with the glue they will ruin their tissue petals. Just like Faith Ringgold and her friends they should work carefully and have pride in their work.
12. When their flower is completed they will glue their 5" flower square onto the larger 8" piece of cardstock. This will create a border.
13. Have students sign the back of their artwork.

**Optional:** The students individual quilt blocks can be assembled together onto a large sheet of butcher paper to make a large paper Art quilt. (We recommend taping with loops of tape instead of gluing to prevent damage when you disassemble.)

See Samples below.





Chandler Unified School District Art Masterpiece



## Parent Letter

### **Brief info about the artist : Faith Ringgold**

was born in Harlem, N.Y. in 1930. She grew up during the time of the Great Depression.

Faith Ringgold began her artistic career more than 35 years ago as a painter.

Ringgold began quilted artworks in 1980; she quilted her stories in order to be heard, since at the time no one would publish her autobiography.

Today, she is best known for her painted story quilts – art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling.

**Brief info about the project:** Students had their own quilting bee today each designing their own quilt block which was later assembled into a paper quilt.



*The Sunflower Quilting Bee*

### **Brief info about the artist : Faith Ringgold**

was born in Harlem, N.Y. in 1930. She grew up during the time of the Great Depression.

Faith Ringgold began her artistic career more than 35 years ago as a painter.

Ringgold began quilted artworks in 1980; she quilted her stories in order to be heard, since at the time no one would publish her autobiography.

Today, she is best known for her painted story quilts – art that combines painting, quilted fabric and storytelling.

**Brief info about the project:** Students had their own quilting bee today each designing their own quilt block which was later assembled into a paper quilt.



*The Sunflower Quilting Bee*