

## StoryQuilting

**Focus Question:** What is a quilt and why is it important?

Outcomes for the week:

- Students will design quilt squares out of construction paper that tell a personal story.
- Students will read *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold.
- Students will create a story quilt out of the individual quilt squares they design.

Resources for Teacher to build knowledge base:

- Uhuru Quilting Guild*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZteeTofqs>
- See attached bibliography of sources

**Estimated Facilitation Time:** 40 min- 1 hour (Early childhood educators teaching P-1<sup>st</sup> grade may consider breaking this lesson up to spread throughout the week. Teachers of 2nd-5<sup>th</sup> grade can present in a day or modify as appropriate as well.)

**Purpose:** This activity is designed to introduce students to quilting as an African American tradition and as a writing tool and art project.

Prep Time: Possibly 30 minutes

Pre-cut squares where there at least two per student. Square size is based on your judgement, but, you want them to be large enough to hole punch and connect with another student's square until the whole class forms a quilt with their squares. A modification is that you don't hole punch and string the squares together. Instead, you can paste them on posterboard or modify it in another way you see fit. Cut at least nine squares for yourself to use as a demo for students. Design six of the squares with words and pictures telling the story about your day at the beach with your family.

K-1 Facilitation Guide:

- Bring students together in a meeting area where they can all see you and the board you will use to post images.
- Literacy and Language Development:** Ask them have they ever heard of a quilt? Have a quilt on hand to show them example. Explain that quilts were made and used by different cultures. Women traditionally make quilts to carry a family's tradition. In the African-American tradition, quilts tell stories. "Let's look at this quilt that this artist made." Identify the elements of the quilt and ask the children what they think the story is about. Show another quilt or stills from this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz66Lv0vOoc&t=18s> Pause the video when a clear view of a quilt is seen and ask the children what they like about the quilt and what they think the story is that the quilt is sharing.
- Content Area:** Tell the students that you had a really nice break and you got to go to the beach with your family. Draw on one of your pre-cut squares a picture of a sun or another image you haven't already used on the other six squares you have already prepped. Then, write the word "sun" on one square and "beach" on the last square.

Show the children how you put them together to form a storyquilt. Tell them that we are going to tell a class story and create a class quilt. Each person is going to design two squares of their own that is going to be part of the class quilt. "Let's tell a story about how great recess time is after lunch. What are your favorite parts of recess?" Let some of them share their feedback. Find some of the words that they say and write the shorter words on the board such as:

Ball Tag  
Run Laugh  
Fun Play  
Yell Jump  
Swing Smiles

Tell them to try and draw a picture of their favorite part of recess and then write one word that reminds them of recess. Help them as necessary with words they may know but can't spell correctly yet. When they finish drawing and writing, help them connect their squares to the class quilt.

4. **Ask:** After everyone has added their squares to the quilt, ask them to take a look and point out some of the stories they see in the quilt. (5 min)
5. **Transition Activity:** Read Faith Ringgold's book "Tar Beach" and point out that the book is actually a quilt telling a story (10-15 minutes)

#### Materials

- a. Construction paper
- b. Glue sticks
- c. Scissors
- d. Ribbon to tie squares if you are not pasting
- e. Crayons
- f. Sample quilts with intricate stitching and imagery. If you don't have a quilt or the ability to get one, print off color copies for students to see the design and story on each quilt.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade Facilitation Guide:

1. Bring students together in a meeting area where they can all see you and the board you choose to post images. It is also ideal for them to have access to crayons, paper and the ability to draw while still listening and paying attention to you.
2. **Focusing Student Attention:** Tell them that today we are going to learn about the African-American tradition of quilting. Ask the to raise their hand if they saw the movie "Harriet". Ask the ones who saw it if they remember that Harriet was running through the woods at night to get her and her family to a place where they would not have to be slaves anymore. Explain that some of the ways that Black people shared their stories about which way to go to escape to freedom or how to contact someone on the underground railroad, they would hide it in the story on the quilt. So, you and I may not know that it has a secret message, but, Harriet may have put a message in the quilt that only she and the person who gets the quilt knows about. Now, I can't be sure that Harriet Tubman shared messages through quilts, but, many African American women did. Many African American women still quilt as a way to keep their heritage alive.

6. **Introductory and Developmental Conversation:** “Do you know what the word “heritage” means?” Shoot for answers like, “heritage means family” or “where I came from”. Explain that heritage means the people who came before you, like your grandmother, great-grandmother, great-grandfather and so on. They did certain things that passed down to you. Even if you never met them or don’t know them, there are certain things that are part of your heritage. African-American women chose to keep parts of their heritage alive by making quilts that were special. They may have been made with material from dresses that were worn during special occasion or coats that were worn by someone who passed away. Or, they may have sewed an image that looked like a dear family member who may not be living anymore and they wanted to remember them always. Quilts help you remember. What are some things you would want to sew into a quilt so that you would remember? A fun time at recess? A time you got help doing something? A great gift you got? How about a friend you don’t get to see much because they may go to a different school?” Let them answer and discuss. (10 min)
3. **Content-Based Reading, writing and art opportunity:** Pass out two squares per child. Tell them to think of something they would want to remember forever and draw a picture of it on one square. On the other square, write a few sentences about it. (modify based on reading and writing level of your group) After they design their two squares, tell them to connect them with the squares of three other students. There should be multiple mini quilts. Call each group up to share their quilt with the group. (modify this as appropriate) (15 min)
4. **Closing assessment Activity:** As students share their work, ask them questions about their quilts that they may not have included when they spoke. Ask what it felt like to make a story quilt. Make sure that they tell the whole story of the quilt, not just one person’s story in the quilt. Ask them how it feels to have your story on the same quilt with another story? What are the common themes of both stories?

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**Extensions:** Having a local quiltmaker come in to share their quilt would add a valuable dimension to this activity.