

## Keeping Us in Stitches: Story Quilt Activity

**Purpose:** to help students understand that some quilters can tell a story by using quilting and painting techniques on fabric.

**Grade Levels:** 2–6 as written.

**Time Required:** Four class sessions of sixty minutes each will be needed to complete the project.

**Day 1:** introduction to project, view video if available (or read the book), demonstrate, and begin work;

**Day 2:** student continue production, using fabric crayons (transfers will be done by teacher);

**Day 3:** students will transfer their sketch to cloth and then paint it with watercolors (teacher could sew three sides of backing, batting assembly);

**Day 4:** students will receive guided practice on a whip stitch, will close the fourth side, and tie knots at intervals for the quilting stage.



### Web Resources for this activity:

#### Illinois Quilts and Quilters: Keeping Us in Stitches:

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks.html>

pieced quilt block designs and Bertha Stenge appliqué quilt.

**Faith Ringgold's** Web site, "**any1canfly**," includes a biography, photos of the artist and many of her quilts, and a list of her books for children at <http://www.artincontext.org/artist/ringgold/>

**About.com quilting page** features an image and brief history of some traditional quilt block patterns, which can be used for ideas for borders. <http://miningco.com/hobbies/quilting/library/weekly/aa042797.htm>

**World Wide Quilting** Page of block patterns and instructions on how to make them. (again, for border ideas) <http://tsw.com/Blocks/AlphaBlockList.html>

### Objectives:

This lesson is organized on Discipline-Based Art Education methods, so there are four objectives, one for each of the art disciplines as outlined in the method.

**Art History:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the art of Faith Ringgold, African-American painter/quilter and Bertha Stenge, Illinois quilter, by creating a small quilt piece using the techniques and format they use.

**Art Criticism:** Students will study and compare the elements and principles of design in the quilts of Faith Ringgold and Bertha Stenge's *Quilting Party* and will implement a better understanding of the use of design, line, shape, color, and balance reflected in their design.

**Art Production:** Students will show increased proficiency with the tools and materials (needle and thread) and media (paint, fabric, and fabric crayon) used in this project, and use them safely.

**Aesthetics:** In a self-assessment and exhibit, students will judge the quality of their use of the elements and principles of design, using a given and practiced vocabulary.

**Vocabulary:**

batting  
border  
central image  
heat transfer process  
quilting  
quilt sandwich  
running stitch  
story quilt  
whip stitch

**Motivation on Day 1:** Students will

- view the appliqué quilt of Bertha Stenge, *Quilting Party*, and read the text about the quilt and about quilting parties or bees. [http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks\\_appliq.html#](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks_appliq.html#)
- view the painting from which Bertha took her design for the center medallion of this quilt: <http://www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Images/P/quilting.html> and list the elements of her quilt design; geometric border and narrative picture in the center.
- view the Faith Ringgold Web site at <http://www.artincontext.org/artist/ringgold> and, if possible, the video, *The Last Story Quilt*, about Faith Ringgold and list the techniques of her quilt design: geometric borders, written narrative, and narrative painting in the center.
- in comparing and contrasting Stenge's quilt with quilts by Ringgold, lead a discussion with students to come up with words to describe the mood, use of color, value, and movement created in the work. Look at concepts like balanced or unbalanced, traditional or contemporary, colorful or dull, full or empty, etc.
- summarize the techniques used in both quilts; sewing and painting.
- brainstorm what kinds of stories they could write and draw on their quilt. Bertha's quilt is about traditional customs in quilting. Faith's quilts are about the artist's life and African-American history and culture.
- The students could do a sketch of ideas assigned as homework if there is not enough time in class for sketching ideas.

**Materials:**

For each student:

15" × 15" paper  
16" × 16" white fabric (muslin, cotton)  
fabric crayons  
batting  
needle  
scissors  
18" ruler  
pencil  
permanent-ink fine-point pen

For class use:

examples of traditional quilt patterns (WWW or books)  
images of Faith Ringgold's story quilts (WWW or books)  
iron for teacher use  
sewing machine for teacher use  
white thread  
quilting pins (longer, with bead heads)  
printout of Stenge quilt and a Ringgold quilt  
watercolor paints, brushes, cups for water  
Faith Ringgold video, if possible

**Procedure:**

**Day 1: See motivation above.**

**Day 2: Drawing and Coloring Geometric Borders**

- Students measure a 2" border on their 15" square paper with a ruler. They section off the border into squares or rectangles, in which they draw geometric block shapes, such as triangles, diamonds, stripes, checkerboard, etc. (see photographs for examples.)
- Students color in the block designs with fabric crayons, being sure to press down hard to put down a heavy coat of wax on the paper. Do not worry about broken crayons; the heavier the color layer, the brighter it is when ironed onto cloth. A light coloring will iron on lightly with white areas.
- The teacher will have an ironing corner set up on a table with a dish towel over some newspapers or an ironing pad. As students finish their borders, they will bring them and their fabric square up to be ironed. This heat transfer process will transfer the fabric crayon drawing from paper to fabric.
- Iron with a dry iron on HOT (between wool and cotton), with a pressing cloth (piece of scrap muslin that can be frequently replaced). Keep the iron moving slowly over the surface of the fabric, following the edges of the borders. Check after one minute to see if wax has melted to produce a strong color. (It is suggested that the teacher try this out ahead of time). If more heat is needed, remove the pressing cloth and iron on the paper.



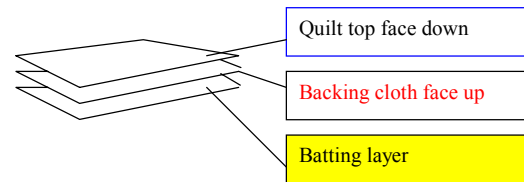
**Day 3: Painting the story (narrative)**

- Students bring a sketch of their idea for a central image to class, briefly have it checked with the teacher to discuss composition, completeness, etc.
- Students will then transfer their sketch to the center of their cloth with pencil, making it fit inside the borders and allowing at least a one or two inch band at the bottom for adding text.
- Students will use watercolor paint (dry-brush technique, not washes) and brushes to paint the image. Let dry.



During the week, the teacher (or quilter volunteer) will use the sewing machine assemble the quilt sandwich.

Directions: Hold the batting, backing, and the quilt top (turned face down) together and pin the edges. Sew around three sides. Clip off points of each corner. Turn inside out and press or finger press.



**Day 4:** A 1" to 2" horizontal band across the picture just above the lower border is used to hold the written story of the quilt. Students will use first a pencil and then a black permanent fine-point pen to copy the story of their image (see writing lesson).

They will use quilting pins to pin together the fourth side of the three layers to close the quilt. They will sew with needle and thread to whipstitch the backing layer to the top (see instructions). [http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks\\_tech\\_epp.html](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks_tech_epp.html) When they finish stitching, they will take three stitches in the same place and cut the thread.



#### Writing Lesson Suggestions:

- This part of the lesson can be taught in an integrated lesson by the art teacher, or in cooperation with the homeroom or language teacher. Students with special writing or language needs may want to write and edit in their language class and bring the final copy to art for copying.
- Each student should write a short (1 paragraph) story that describes the emotions, importance, essence, or characters and action of their narrative painting.
- Two to three full sentences will fill 1" to 2" area provided for their narrative.
- Students will discuss the directions, write a draft, edit it for content, then for form.

#### Assessment:

- Students will exhibit their work in class or in the school (see photograph).
- They will have a class discussion that centers on their use of the technical vocabulary listed above.
- Each student will decide which vocabulary words fit their project, not as judgments of good or bad, but as descriptions of the mood, use of color, value, and movement in each work. One quilt might be dull because it uses muted colors and has a quiet or sad mood. One composition may be full of details, while another may be more minimalist or empty.
- Each student should be able to state the main characteristics of a story quilt, as made by themselves, by Bertha Stenge, and by Faith Ringgold.

### **Lesson Extension: Quilting**

Students who want to quilt their borders with needle and thread can practice on scrap cloth making even running stitches. They would probably choose to follow the lines of their geometric pattern, which in traditional pieced quilting would be called "stitching in the ditch (the seamline)." See Quilting with Children <http://www.thecraftstudio.com/qwc/> and look under "Techniques and Resources" for helpful instructions.

### **Illinois Goals and Standards addressed:**

**Visual Art:** (early elementary and late elementary)

**Goal 25:** Know the Language of the Arts

**Standard A:** Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive qualities of the arts.

**Standard B:** Understand the similarities, distinctions, and connections in and among the arts.

**Goal 26:** Understand how works of art are produced through creating.

**Standard A:** Understand processes, traditional tools, and modern technologies in the arts.

**Standard B:** Apply skills and knowledge necessary to create in one of the arts.

**Goal 27:** Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

**Standard A:** Analyze how the arts function in history, society, and everyday life.

### **Language Arts: Writing**

**Goal 3:** Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

**Standard A:** Communicate ideas in writing.

**Standard B:** Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences. (One-paragraph story of the scene painted on the quilt top).

**Standard C:** Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and structure.



Quilt Exhibit at Butler School, Springfield, Illinois