

## **Tar Beach**

Written and illustrated by Faith Ringgold

**Sit back and listen to the story and enjoy the illustrations.**

**Introduce yourself and share your first impression of the book.**

*Tar Beach* is a fictional story, but it is based on Faith Ringgold's memories of her childhood in Harlem during the Depression. *Tar Beach* was named a Caldecott Honor Book in 1992.

During the 1960s, the United States was undergoing great change and, after studying art in college, Faith Ringgold began to tell her own stories through her painting and quilts. She also included concerns of the Civil Rights and feminist movements. She is most famous for her story quilts. *Tar Beach* is the first of five quilts in a series titled *Woman on a Bridge*. Ringgold works with acrylic paint on canvas and adds a pieced fabric border and words to make her quilts.

The words in the book first appeared on the *Tar Beach* quilt. The illustrations are original paintings for the book, but are similar to the story quilt.

**Read the book with your group.**

### **Discussion questions**

What is meant by "tar beach" in the title and story?

Do you have a favorite illustration?

What does flying symbolize for Cassie?

Historically, the idea of flying is common in African-American culture and appears in old folktales. What might flying have symbolized for people who were enslaved?

Last week, we read *Henry's Freedom Box*. What symbolized flying or freedom in that story?

Some people dream that they are flying. Have you ever had a flying dream? Did you think the dream had a special meaning?

Cassie says, "I have told him anyone can fly. All you need is somewhere to go that you can't get to any other way. The next thing you know, you're flying among the stars."  
What does this mean to you? Can you think of a time when you felt especially free, or free for the first time?

Why did Cassie want to own the George Washington Bridge?

Why did she fly over the union building? The ice cream factory?

What does Cassie want for her parents? What does she want for herself?

Cassie's father can't join the labor union because his father wasn't a member of the union. A "grandfather clause" is a part of a law that does not apply to certain people or things because of the way things were before the law was passed.

We use the term “grandfathered in” as a way to describe individuals or companies who get to keep doing things the same way when new rules are put in place.

For example, when I completed graduate school in Social Work, Texas did not require social workers to be licensed. A few years after I graduated, Texas passed a law that requires social workers to be licensed. Anyone who was already working as a social worker did not have to take the test required to be licensed. I was “grandfathered in.”

The grandfather clause was originally a way to prevent Black people from voting. When it became illegal to prevent a citizen from voting because of race, Southern states began to enforce new rules. They would require a literacy test or a test that was impossible to pass. They could claim that they were not discriminating because of race. But this caused a problem for poor and uneducated White people who would also not be able to pass the test. These states used a “grandfather clause” to determine who could vote. If your grandfather had the right to vote, that right was passed to the next generation.

In the story, Cassie’s father was not allowed to join the union. The union had a rule that only someone whose grandfather was a member of the union could be a member. Cassie’s grandfather had not been allowed to join the union, so her father was not allowed to join.

On the dedication page at the front of the book, Faith Ringgold says that her three grandchildren “are all strong readers and can fly.” What does she mean? How is reading related to flying?

She also says that her husband “keeps her feet on the ground.” What does she mean by that?