“TAR BEACH 2” QUILT

Faith Ringgold, who created this “story quilt,” is both an artist and author. This quilt tells the story of Cassie Louise Lightfoot, the protagonist in Ringgold’s children’s book, Tar Beach.

Several parts of the story are included in the picture. In the foreground, Cassie’s parents play cards with their friends on the tar roof (“tar beach”) of their apartment building in New York City. Cassie and her brother Bebe lie on a mattress nearby, looking up at the stars. A picnic dinner awaits them. Wet clothes and sheets hang to dry, flapping in the night wind. The George Washington Bridge stands tall behind the colorful buildings in the background.

In the book, Cassie dreams that she can fly and overcome any obstacle she faces. In the quilt, she appears twice in the sky, claiming the bridge for herself and giving her father the Union Building so that he won’t have to worry about employment. Ringgold included parts of the story in white writing in the purple sky.

To create Cassie’s story, Ringgold took inspiration from her own childhood in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City. Much of her art explores social and political themes and features powerful women, especially African American women. For example, Cassie’s ability to fly gives her freedom and power to achieve anything she sets her mind to. At the end of the book, Cassie proclaims that anyone can fly, stating, “All you need is somewhere to go you can’t get to any other way. The next thing you know, you’re flying among the stars.”