

**Sunflower Quilt Handout**

**Activity One: OPTIC<sup>1</sup>**

<b>O</b>	<p><b>O</b> is for <b>Overview</b>. Describe the main subject of the painting.</p>
	<p><i>Faith Ringgold painted a group of African American women holding a quilt of sunflowers after a quilting bee. Looking at the painting is Vincent Van Gogh, who painted sunflowers, and wanted to create a community of like-minded artists in Arles, France.</i></p>
<b>P</b>	<p><b>P</b> is for <b>Parts</b>. What parts, elements or details of the painting seem important?</p>
	<p><i>The women are Madam Walker, Sojourner Truth, Ida Wells, Fannie Lou Hammer, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ella Baker. The painting also includes Willia Marie Simone, who is a fictional character invented by the painter, and Van Gogh, a Dutch artist. The quilt is of sunflowers. The women's names are listed on the border of the quilt.</i></p>
<b>T</b>	<p><b>T</b> is for <b>Title</b>. What information does the title and caption add to the painting?</p>
	<p><i>The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles. The title alludes to the community of artists that Van Gogh wanted to create. This community of artists that Ringgold created is one made up of influential African American women.</i></p>
<b>I</b>	<p><b>I</b> is for <b>Interrelationships</b>. What connections or relationships can be made between the words in the title and caption and the individual parts of the painting?</p>
	<p><i>The sunflowers represent the sunflowers that were the subject of still life paintings created by Van Gogh. Arles is the place where Van Gogh wanted to create his community. The quilting bee is a nod to the legacy of women coming together and their connections to the common people.</i></p>
<b>C</b>	<p><b>C</b> is for <b>Conclusion</b>. What conclusion(s) can be drawn about the meaning of the art as a whole? Summarize the message in one or two sentences.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Pauk, W. (2000). *How to study in college* (7th ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

*The painting represents the group of African-American women who created a “quilt” with their contributions to their community, each bringing something different and equally beautiful to the piece.*

**Activity Two:** Symbolism is when a concrete thing, such as an object, person, or place, is meant to represent an abstract idea. Considering your observations about The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles by Ringgold, analyze the symbolism in “Everyday Use”.

Concrete Symbol	Abstract Idea it Represents
<i>Maggie’s scars</i>	<i>Maggie’s scars represent how she has been hurt by her lack of education and her life spent in poverty. These scars also represent the wider scars that have been left on all African Americans who have lived through slavery and segregation.</i>
<i>Dee’s Clothing</i>	<i>Dee’s clothes are bright and harsh to Mama’s eyes. They represent Dee’s concern for outward appearances and the opinion of the outside world. The clothing, bright dress, bangles, and Afro hairstyle, represent the uniform of some in the Black Power Movement, a philosophical idea to which some African Americans adhered, to abhor their past and focus on their ties to their African heritage.</i>
<i>Dee’s Boyfriend, Hakim-A-Barber</i>	<i>Hakim-A-Barber is also a symbol of the young people in the Black Power Movement. He says he is proud of his black culture, but also rejects the food that Mama cooks, a symbolic rejection of Mama.</i>
<i>The name “Dee”</i>	<i>Dee’s name has been passed down to her from her family for generations. Dee’s rejection of this name also represents her rejection of her family.</i>

<p>The name “Wangero”</p>	<p>The name Wangero is difficult for Mama to pronounce and represents a further divide between Dee and her family.</p>
<p>Quilts</p>	<p>The pieces of fabric come from the family’s clothes; it is a symbol of the family. Dee wants the quilts to show off where she came from, but she is ignorant of the tradition and skill that made the quilts possible. She wants to show off her family more than she wants to be apart of them.</p>

1. Reread the thematic statement you wrote in the previous lesson. How do the symbolic meaning of these objects contribute to the development of the themes in “Everyday Use”?

*In the short story, “Everyday Use” Alice Walker illustrates the theme of the importance of legacy in connecting with family, their struggles, and their stories. This theme is evident in the symbol of Dee’s name and the quilt, each showing how legacy can not be realized in a butter churn hung on the wall, but it is only fully realized when it is seeped in acceptance of family. The name Dee was passed on by Mama to her oldest daughter. It was a handle that was given from one generation to the next, from the time before the Civil War, Mama recollects in the story; however, Dee rejects the name and says that it was given by those “who oppressed” her. This is ironic, because the name was the only actual piece of legacy that she took with her when she left home for college. Now, Dee a.k.a. Wangero has come back to visit and is fascinated with everything in her home, wanting Mama to give up the benches at her table and butter churn that are still being used. Her focus is especially drawn to the quilts, which have pieces of fabric from her relatives clothing. These however are the one thing that Mama has promised to Dee. The quilts then become symbolic of the conflict between the two sisters. One, Dee, wants to show off her relatives by putting their objects on her wall, and the other, Maggie, connects these objects with the relatives that she remembers, has built relationships with. Mama has to choose between leaving her legacy to Dee to become a possession or to Maggie to remember her ancestors, both the good and bad times.*