



[art21.org/jordancasteel](http://art21.org/jordancasteel)



## Jordan Casteel

### ABOUT

#### Born

1989 (Denver, Colorado)

#### Education

BA, Agnes Scott College  
MFA, Yale University

#### Lives and Works

New York City

#### About the Artist

Long committed to social justice, Casteel was working as a teacher in Colorado and painting in the evenings when she realized that she needed to devote herself more seriously to her art practice. After completing her MFA at Yale University, Casteel moved to New York for a residency at The Studio Museum of Harlem, where she became inspired to address ideas of Black masculinity. Casteel began painting portraits of friends, family members, and classmates, posed in intimate settings and posed to look directly at the viewer. The effect is at once tender and powerful, forcing viewers to contend with their preconceived notions of masculinity and race. Through Casteel's larger-than-life paintings, this community of diverse men and women is represented on the walls of museums globally.

### TEACHING CONNECTIONS

#### Media and Materials

painting  
photography

#### Key Words and Ideas

community  
gaze  
history  
identity  
portraiture  
representation

social justice  
symbolism  
value  
voice  
vulnerability

#### Related Artists

Nick Cave  
Abigail DeVille  
LaToya Ruby Frazier  
Doreen Garner  
Graciela Iturbide  
Glenn Ligon  
Tala Madani  
Sally Mann  
Kerry James Marshall  
Zanele Muholi

Catherine Opie  
Elle Perez  
Collier Schorr  
Stephanie Syjuco  
Kara Walker  
Carrie Mae Weems  
Jack Whitten  
Fred Wilson  
Krzysztof Wodiczko

**"I've always had an inclination  
towards seeing people who might  
be easily unseen."** —Jordan Casteel

**How to Use This Guide**

Art21 encourages active engagement when teaching with our films. The questions and activities below are recommendations for incorporating Art21 films featuring Jordan Casteel into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

**NOTE:** Please view all films before sharing them with your students. In the film *Jordan Casteel Paints Her Community*, there are instances of strong language and suggestions of nudity.

**Before Viewing**

Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):

- ① What makes a community? How would you describe the different kinds of communities you interact with?
- ② How do you engage with these communities? What kinds of things do you do with the people who are part of those communities?
- ③ Why make a portrait? What purposes do portraits serve, beyond offering visual representations of a person or group?
- ④ What does a body convey that a landscape cannot? How can nudity break down stereotypes?

**While Viewing**

Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:

- ① How would you describe Casteel's community? List some words that may describe the communities that she engages with in the video(s).
- ② Taking photographs of strangers can be a very difficult thing to do. What does Casteel do to make the people she works with feel more at ease?
- ③ As you view the portraits featured in this video, what kinds of things strike you or resonate with you?
- ④ In Casteel's paintings, what do the bodies and gestures convey?

**After Viewing**

Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):

- ① How might Casteel's paintings affect the people and communities she depicts?
- ② Describe Casteel's process for creating a portrait.
- ③ How are these portraits different from others you have seen? What purposes do they serve beyond representations of Casteel's community?
- ④ Describe how Casteel's work relates to that of Kerry James Marshall, an artist featured in Season 1 of *Art in the Twenty-First Century*.
- ⑤ Describe and compare your reactions to Casteel's portraits of nude models and to those of clothed models. How does each set of portraits tell different stories?

**Related Activities**

Engaging in creative activities after watching Art21 films can reinforce learning and stimulate ideas. Art21 encourages educators to adapt these activities to their classrooms.

- ✓ Create a portrait of a member of your community who often goes "unseen." Alongside the drawing, painting, or photograph, describe in a statement why this member of the community should be seen.
- ✓ Take a series of at least 20 photographs featuring one person who is important to you. Photograph them in a place where you want to remember them. Then use these photos and the experience you had taking them to create a poem, song, or work of visual art that serves to honor them in some way.
- ✓ Ask your students to take photographs of people in communities that they value and to create artworks to capture them. Display the completed works in a gallery-like presentation, and invite those community members to a reception to see the final results.