Jordan Casteel

**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.

**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.

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.

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.

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- 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.

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.

Did you use this guide, Art21 films, or Art21-featured artists in your classroom? If so, tag Art21 on social media or email us at education@art21.org.