LaToya Ruby Frazier

About
Born 1982 (Braddock, Pennsylvania)

Education
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, BFA
Syracuse University, MFA

Lives and Works
Chicago, Illinois

About the Artist
An artist and activist, LaToya Ruby Frazier uses photography, video, and performance to document personal and social histories in the United States, specifically the industrial heartland. Having grown up in the shadow of the steel industry, Frazier has chronicled the healthcare inequities and environmental crises faced by her family and her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania. The artist employs a radically intimate, black-and-white documentary approach that captures the complexity, injustice, and simultaneous hope of the Black American experience, often utilizing her camera and the medium of photography as an agent for social change. Her 2016 *Flint is Family* project traces the lives of three generations of women living through the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

Media and Materials
photography
performance

Key Words and Ideas
activism
portraiture
documentary
power
environmental
racism
degradation
social commentary
injustice
storytelling

Related Artists
Robert Adams
Liz Magic Laser
Jordan Casteel
Sally Mann
Mel Chin
Kerry James Marshall
Abigail DeVille
Zanele Muholi
Olafur Eliasson
Catherine Opie
Theaster Gates
Elle Pérez
David Goldblatt
Pedro Reyes
Katy Grannan
Graciela Iturbide

“*The mind is the battleground for photography.*” —LaToya Ruby Frazier

art21.org/latoyarubyfrazier
# 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 LaToya Ruby Frazier into your teaching context. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

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

1. What is documentary photography, and why is it important?
2. Can portraiture be political? Can portraiture make social commentary? If so, how?
3. How do some artists involve their families in their works of art? If you were to ask a family member to help with making an artwork, who would you choose? Why? What would their role be?

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

1. Write down a series of ten words and phrases that come to mind while viewing Frazier’s *New York Close Up* episode(s).
2. Describe the kinds of things that drive Frazier’s work and process. How does she, through her work, engage with the issue of racism?
3. Make notes about the ways Frazier involves her family in one or more of the videos. What roles do they play?

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

1. What questions does Frazier provoke through her work?
2. What types of actions do you think Frazier might like viewers to take after experiencing her work? How might some of these actions affect the Black community?
3. How does Frazier’s family’s involvement affect the way you see and understand the work presented? How might the work be interpreted differently, if she had used actors or models instead of her family members?

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**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 performance that calls attention to a particular political or social issue. Share this work publicly. Ask for possible suggestions and community action to address the issue.
- Research a variety of artists who have used photography to illuminate different kinds of injustice. Curate a slideshow of works by these artists and describe how each artist approaches their work.

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**NOTE:** Please view all films before sharing them with your students. In the film *LaToya Ruby Frazier Makes Moving Pictures*, there are instances of nudity.