LaToya Ruby Frazier

**About**

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 American Rust Belt. 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
documentary
environmental
degradation
injustice

**Related Artists**

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

“The mind is the battleground for photography.”

—LaToya Ruby Frazier
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.

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<tr>
<th>Before Viewing</th>
<th>While Viewing</th>
<th>After Viewing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish key ideas, in anticipation of viewing the film(s):</td>
<td>Support active viewing, and pause the film to clarify particular ideas:</td>
<td>Follow-up on key ideas and synthesize information learned from the film(s):</td>
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<td>1. What is documentary photography, and why is it important?</td>
<td>1. Write down a series of ten words and phrases that come to mind while viewing Frazier’s New York Close Up episode(s).</td>
<td>1. What questions does Frazier provoke through her work?</td>
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<td>2. Can portraiture be political? Can portraiture make social commentary? If so, how?</td>
<td>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?</td>
<td>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?</td>
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<td>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?</td>
<td>3. Make notes about the ways Frazier involves her family in one or more of the videos. What roles do they play?</td>
<td>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?</td>
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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.

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.

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.