



Production still from the  
New York Close Up film,  
“LaToya Ruby Frazier  
Takes on Levi’s.”  
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[art21.org/latoyarubyfrazier](http://art21.org/latoyarubyfrazier)



## 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.

### TEACHING CONNECTIONS

#### Media and Materials

photography  
performance

#### Key Words and Ideas

activism  
documentary  
environmental  
degradation  
injustice

portraiture  
power  
racism  
social commentary  
storytelling

#### 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.

**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.

**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?

**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.