



art21.org/louisebourgeois

Louise Bourgeois

ABOUT

Born

1911 (Paris, France)

Education

Sorbonne University
École du Louvre
Académie des Beaux-Arts
Académie Julian
Atelier Fernand Léger

Lives and Works

New York, NY

About the Artist

Louise Bourgeois first studied mathematics at Sorbonne University before pursuing a degree in arts at various schools around Paris, including the École du Louvre, Académie des Beaux-Arts, Académie Julian, and Atelier Fernand Léger. In 1938, she immigrated to the United States, continued her studies at the Art Students League in New York, and began making sculptures on the roof of her apartment. Bourgeois' work, while deeply autobiographical, is universal in its focus on childhood, maternal love, and longing. Bourgeois lived in New York, where she passed away in May 2010.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

drawing
sculpture

Key Words and Idea

body	feminism
care	history
childhood	intimacy
connection	motherhood
family	past

Related Artists

Janine Antoni	Zanele Muholi
Tauba Auerbach	Howardena Pindell
Jes Fan	Hyeree Ro
Camille Henrot	Sin Wai Kin
Loie Hollowell	Kiki Smith
Hannah Levy	Song Dong
Sally Mann	Carrie Mae Weems

“A work of art doesn’t have to be explained.
If it doesn’t touch you, I have failed.”

— Louise Bourgeois

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 Louis Bourgeois into your classroom. Each class will likely require different adaptations for best results.

NOTE: Please view all films before sharing them with your students.

Before Viewing

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

- ① Is it necessary to understand the artist's meaning in a work of art in order to appreciate it? Why or why not?
- ② Develop a list of materials one might use for a sculpture. Compare and contrast the characteristics of each of these materials.
- ③ Why might an artist's family influence their artwork?

While Viewing

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

- ① What does Bourgeois say about the viewer's understanding of her artwork?
- ② Note the materials Bourgeois uses.
- ③ How does Bourgeois talk about her family?

After Viewing

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

- ① How does learning more about the meaning of Bourgeois work change your understanding of it?
- ② What was Bourgeois concern in putting her sculpture outside in a public setting? How did she resolve this issue?
- ③ Bourgeois states that it might be true that an artist has "something in them that either refuses or is unable to grow up." What do you think she means by this?

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.

- ✓ Pick a partner and study one another's hands. Create a drawing or three-dimensional artwork of your partner's hands that you think expresses their interests (an athlete might be holding a football, a dancer holding a pair of ballet shoes, etc.).
- ✓ Bourgeois says her childhood "never lost its magic." Consider something from your childhood that you loved. It could be an object, a memory, a place, or a person. Create an artwork in any medium to celebrate it.
- ✓ Bourgeois' family was in the textile business. While her mother did not want her to hold a needle and thread, from the segment it is clear that textiles, like crocheted pieces, bring Bourgeois joy. Experiment with needle and thread to create an artwork. It can be made of only textiles, or incorporate other materials like paper, canvas, paint, etc.