



art21.org/jamesturrell

James Turrell

ABOUT

Born

1943 (Los Angeles, CA)

Education

Pomona College, BA
Claremont Graduate School, MA

Lives and Works

Flagstaff, Arizona

About the Artist

Influenced by his Quaker upbringing, and interested in the relationship between light and space, the artist creates installations and architectural structures that use natural light and artificial color to manipulate the experience of seeing. In doing so, Turrell's art evokes feelings of transcendence and the sublime, encouraging viewers to practice contemplation, patience, and meditation.

Throughout his practice, Turrell plays with light and darkness, artificial color and natural light, and the indoors and outdoors to enhance and transform viewers' experiences of both natural phenomena and built environments.

TEACHING CONNECTIONS

Media and Materials

installation
land
sculpture

Key Words and Ideas

color
crater
Earth
experiential
land
light
nature
perspective

place
Quakerism
rotation
scale
space
spirituality
time
volcano

Related Artist

Olafur Eliasson
Jenny Holzer
Anish Kapoor
Maya Lin
Rafael Lozano-
Hemmer

Christian Marclay
Delcy Morelos
Catherine Opie
Tomás Saraceno
Anicka Yi
Andrea Zittel

"For me it was important people
value light." —James Turrell

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 James Turrell 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 Describe your favorite kind of light. Where does it occur? Is it indoors or outdoors? At what time of the day and at what time of the year does it occur?
- ② Is there a time limit on an artistic project? How long do you think it should take?
- ③ How are science and art connected?

While Viewing

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

- ① What kinds of light is Turrell interested in?
- ② How does Turrell describe his project Roden Crater? How long has it taken?
- ③ Note how science is connected to Turrell's artwork.

After Viewing

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

- ① Describe how the light in the room in which you are sitting affects you. How did you feel seeing the different types of light in Turrell's artwork?
- ② Turrell has spent more than fifty years working on Roden Crater. What do you think he is trying to achieve? How has this project affected his life? Do you think it is worth the time and money he put into it?
- ③ How is Turrell's artwork an example of interdisciplinary work?

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.

- ✓ Watch the sun come up one morning (or go down in the evening). Write a poem or create a piece of art that expresses the experience and describes the changes in the light.
- ✓ Design an architectural plan for your classroom, bedroom, or some other room that would provide you with an optimal viewing space for observing changes in outside light (e.g., covering some windows or creating pinholes to isolate the light).
- ✓ Compare the effects of different kinds of light (e.g., candlelight, fluorescent light, skylights, oil lamps, incandescent light) on a particular space. Write about it.
- ✓ Compare and contrast Turrell's approach and philosophies about light, architecture, the sun, and celestial events with the role of these ideas in such indigenous cultures as the Mayans and Aztecs and such locations as Chaco Canyon and Chichén Itzá. Research the monuments of other cultures that mark astronomical events.
- ✓ Make a preliminary drawing for a work of art in which you capture or utilize light as a basic element of your composition. Consider whether you are using light as a metaphor and, if so, what it represents.