

Activity Idea

LGBTQIA+ PRIDE MONTH VIRTUAL FILM FEST: *Watermelon Woman* (NR) Viewer's Guide

Not rated; parental guidance suggested. Recommended for ages 15 and up.

A video store clerk and fledgling filmmaker, Cheryl becomes obsessed with the "most beautiful mammy," a character she sees in a 1930s movie. Determined to find out who the actress she knows only as the "Watermelon Woman" was and make her the subject of a documentary, she starts researching and is bowled over to discover that not only was Fae Richards (Lisa Marie Bronson) a fellow Philadelphian but also a lesbian.

The project is not without drama as Cheryl's singular focus causes friction between her and her friend Tamara (Valarie Walker) and as she begins to see parallels between Fae's problematic relationship with a white director and her own budding romance with white Diana (fellow filmmaker Guinevere Turner).

Stream the film here on Kanopy: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/lacounty/video/13867559>

MOVIE RESOURCES:

- "The Watermelon Woman Shows the Power of Gay History" in *The New Republic*: <https://tinyurl.com/y9qls92y>
- "Director Cheryl Dunye on her groundbreaking LGBTQ film 'The Watermelon Woman,' 20 years later" in the LA Times: <https://tinyurl.com/yav4eafc>
- Interview with Cheryl Dunye on AfterBuzz Tv on YouTube: <https://tinyurl.com/yc3crevt>
- "Controversy over The Watermelon Woman: Filmmaker Cheryl Dunye Speaks" from *Sojourner* via the Archives of Sexuality and Gender: <https://tinyurl.com/ycokwozu>
- "Chasing Fae: *The Watermelon Woman* and Black Lesbian Possibility by Laura Sullivan in Callaloo via Project Muse: <https://tinyurl.com/yda85ktb>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe the film's protagonist, Cheryl? Does it change anything that she is also the writer and director of the film you are watching?
- Why do you think friction develops between Cheryl and her friend Tamara as the film progresses?
- What does the fact that the subject of Cheryl's documentary, Fae Richards, was credited in films as "The Watermelon Woman" say about how people of color were seen in the film industry?



- There are a few scenes in the movie that use humor to point out injustice, including one of Cheryl being arrested by cops who mistake her for a male and insult her. How else is humor used in *The Watermelon Woman* to identify difficult truths?
- Love and relationships is a theme that recurs throughout this movie. What are some words you would use to describe some of the relationships?

OTHER FILMS BY CHERYL DUNYE

- *The Early Works of Cheryl Dunye* on Kanopy: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/lacounty/video/14077256>
- *My Baby's Daddy* on Hoopla: <https://tinyurl.com/y98sc6mb>