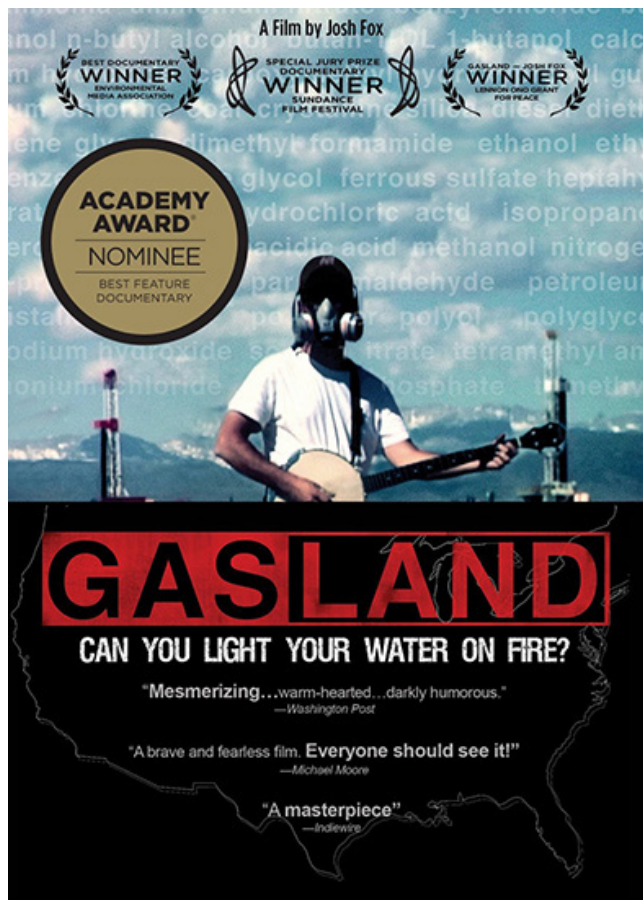


# INFLUENCE | FILM CLUB

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## Gasland Discussion Guide

Director: Josh Fox

Year: 2010

Time: 107 min

**You might know this director from:**

Gasland Part II (2013)

The Sky Is Pink (2012)

## FILM SUMMARY

GASLAND is an unflinching investigation into the relatively new, yet highly controversial drilling practice known as “fracking” which is used to extract natural gas from the ground. This road movie follows filmmaker Josh Fox who was offered \$100,000 for the natural gas drilling rights to his property on the border of New York and Pennsylvania but turned it down. Instead, he set off on a cross-country journey to see for himself the startling environmental and health risks faced by those who have agreed to sell the drilling rights on their land to the gas industry. In one highly memorable scene, a man who recently allowed fracking on his land is standing in his kitchen. As he lights a match under the running faucet, the water bursts into flames. This crazy occurrence is presumably the result of fracking.

Fox also shines a light on the power of big business over government policy in the U.S. by looking at the agenda of former Vice-President Dick Cheney. In 2005, Cheney’s Energy Task Force pushed through a provision to the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act that exempted corporations like Halliburton (where Cheney was once CEO) from revealing the chemicals used in fracking. This led to the largest domestic natural gas drilling boom in history. GASLAND has been embraced by those who consider fracking to be a serious health and environmental threat, and it’s sparked a debate in the U.S. and around the world about this new practice.

## FILM THEMES

GASLAND has been a lightning rod for debate about the controversial practice of hydraulic fracking. This newly discovered technique of natural gas extraction is being aggressively pursued without government oversight or scientific study, for short-term financial gains that may not justify the long-term risks to environmental and human health.

### **COST BENEFITS ANALYSIS**

Contamination of drinking water is a serious health threat and byproduct of fracking. Yet in economically-depressed communities, the financial benefits and potential jobs created by fracking often sway people to focus on the short-term gains rather than long-term consequences. However, environmental topics such as fracking often pit working-class people who are trying to pay the bills against environmental activists who are often more economically secure, better educated and have more job opportunities.

### **CORPORATE INFLUENCE**

Troubling, urgent questions arise about the power of major corporations that avoid governmental regulation and hold enormous influence in governmental policy. In our globalized economy, corporations can move operations and jobs to nations where people are paid less and have fewer environmental protections. Therefore, governments may be reluctant to instill policies they fear could make them less attractive to big business and the jobs they provide.

### **ENERGY INDEPENDENCE**

One of the arguments in favor of fracking is that it will lead to energy independence and reduce western nations' dependence on foreign oil imports. Yet many countries including Bulgaria and France have banned fracking fearing the environmental dangers associated with it. Nonetheless, both countries rely on nuclear power, another controversial power source, for a significant percentage of their energy. Many argue that the only sustainable way to achieve true energy independence is to use less of it, or find a way to make renewable energy, not fossil fuels.

### **FUELING THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE**

Beyond the specific practice of fracking, GASLAND challenges us to question our economic choices from here on out. Manufacturing and other traditional jobs that sustained the working and middle classes since the end of WWII have all but disappeared, so we must ask ourselves if we want to live in a society that forces people to make economic choices that may have disastrous consequences to their own well-being in exchange for a quick infusion of cash.

**“It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment.”**

Ansel Adams

**“I think what we all have to do is make this big leap towards renewables. And it has to be a solution where you're actually building the answer, and it has to be built faster than the natural gas industry can build their answer.”**

Josh Fox



## FILM FACTS:

- In the United States, the gas industry has been granted exemptions from parts of seven major environmental statutes and reporting programs, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.
- France and Bulgaria are the only countries to ban hydraulic fracturing (fracking), in 2011 and 2012, respectively. France relies on nuclear power for 75% of its energy, while 35% of Bulgaria's energy is from nuclear sources.
- German beer brewers warned Chancellor Angela Merkel's government that fracking might harm the country's beer industry—potentially breaking a 500-year-old industry rule on water purity. Germany now has a temporary ban on fracking.
- George P. Mitchell, petroleum industry spokesman and champion of fracking, died in 2013. He was worth \$2 billion dollars. According to the Economist, "few businesspeople have done as much to change the world as George Mitchell."
- In 2013, Chevron signed a 50-year agreement with the Ukrainian government to develop oil and gas in western Ukraine—an effort that will likely include fracking.
- The two largest oil-drilling states in the U.S.—Texas and North Dakota—do not have water-safety testing requirements.
- Mexico's 2013 energy "reform" is paving the way for fracking. President Enrique Peña Nieto wants to allow further private participation with powerful international energy corporations.
- Gas from fracking represents only 0.1% of the total energy supply in Europe, compared with 15% in the U.S. A decade ago, layers of shale lying deep underground supplied only 1% of America's natural gas. Today they provide 30%.
- A Duke University study found that methane levels in dozens of drinking-water wells within a kilometer of new fracking sites were 17 times higher than methane levels in wells farther away.
- GASLAND won the 2010 Sundance Special Jury Prize, and director Josh Fox won the 2011 Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for Nonfiction Programming. In 2013, Josh Fox released the sequel to GASLAND, Gasland Part II, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival.
- In 2013, filmmakers Phelim McAleer and Ann McElhinney released a documentary, FrackNation, in support of fracking which counters the claims made against it in GASLAND.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to learn and be affected by its story. Consider organizing a screening of GASLAND in your community, then have a post-screening conversation about fracking and other environmental concerns facing your community.
2. Ask local environmental advocates or elected officials if fracking is coming to a shale deposit near you, and if so, make your opinion known and your voice heard.
3. Target decision makers in your community who you can influence.
4. Build public support by sending an email, starting a website, or posting on Facebook. You can also reach out to the traditional media outlets by writing letters to the editors of publications you follow.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**