

Storm King Art Center Teacher Resource



Material Matters

Observe and experience a variety of sculptural materials at Storm King Art Center. Make connections between materials and ideas, and consider the processes and choices of artists as they combine, transform, and experiment with diverse mediums. Recommended for grades K-12.

Dear Teachers,

We are delighted to welcome you to Storm King Art Center, a 500-acre outdoor museum located in New York's Hudson Valley, where visitors experience large-scale sculpture and site-specific commissions under open sky.

This resource is designed to help you prepare to explore the theme of "Material Matters" with your students at Storm King. By approaching visits through a thematic lens, we hope to engage learners in focused close looking, activities, and conversation—providing a solid foundation as students construct connections throughout their experience.

Whether you have chosen a guided tour or will be facilitating your own visit, this resource offers pre-visit ideas to prepare for your trip, tips and tools for onsite engagement, and post-visit activity prompts for continued exploration.

During a guided visit, your educator might build the experience around a particular sub-theme related to Materials (ex: material and process, everyday objects, juxtaposing materials). Please be in touch at least two weeks before your visit if you have specific interests.

While you may not see all the artworks in this packet during a guided program, we invite you to visit additional artworks after your tour if time allows. The artworks in this packet are situated within one mile of the school group arrival area.

If you have additional questions about your upcoming visit, please contact us at:
groups@stormkingartcenter.org

We look forward to welcoming you and your students soon!

Sincerely,
The Storm King Learning and Engagement Team

Contents

Pre-Visit Ideas	3
Artwork Images and Information	4-7
During Your Visit: General Information	8-9
During Your Visit: Material Matters Artworks and Locations	10-12
During Your Visit: Tips and Techniques for Student Engagement	13
Post-Visit Ideas	14
Resources	15

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Cover Image: Martin Puryear, *Lookout*, 2023. Photo by Jeffrey Jenkins

Pre-Visit

INTRODUCTION TO STORM KING ART CENTER

Storm King Art Center is a 500-acre outdoor museum where visitors experience large-scale sculpture under open sky. **We strongly recommend you download our free digital guide on Bloomberg Connects**, via the QR code here. You'll find photos, videos, audio recordings, maps, suggested routes, activities for children and families, and more. Use the guide to plan your visit, then easily access helpful insights onsite. Afterward, use it in the classroom to dive deeper into your favorite works. You and your students can also learn more about Storm King's [environmental stewardship](#), collection, and community connections in this brief [video](#).



INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME “MATERIAL MATTERS”

A material is the substance from which something is made. For example, the sole of a shoe might be made of rubber, or a bottle might be made of glass or plastic. As you explore Storm King, you'll find sculptures created by artists who transform and combine a variety of materials.

For Younger Students: Invite students to work in small groups to identify various materials found around their classroom. How many materials can each group find? Ask students to list adjectives that describe each material and share some ideas that each material makes them think of.

For Older Students: Individually or in small groups, ask students to brainstorm what materials come to mind when they think of sculpture. Ask them to share materials that they think would be particularly interesting or surprising to discover in sculptures. As students share back, invite the class to consider different associations they have with each material they mention (textures, scents, experiences, etc.).

OBSERVE AND DISCUSS

Project or print an image of Chakaia Booker's sculpture [A Moment in Time](#) (page 6) for students to observe. Ask students what they notice. How would they describe the shapes and textures they see? What does the sculpture make them think of?

Share that Chakaia Booker created this sculpture out of rubber tires. What do you think she might have done to the tires to create these shapes and textures? What are some ideas that tires make students think of? Why do you think Booker might have chosen tires as a sculptural material?

For older students, add some more context about the artist (page 6). Ask students to talk with a partner and then share back: How do they think the artwork might relate to its title, *A Moment in Time*?

Share [archival images](#) of Booker's work at Storm King. Invite students to compare and describe multiple works. What are some different choices Booker made as she transformed rubber tires into art?

Artwork Images and Information



Dennis Oppenheim (American, 1938–2011). *Architectural Cactus #6*, 2008. Aluminum sheet, composite aluminum, diamond plate aluminum, colored corrugated aluminum, acrylic, fiberglass grating, galvanized steel base, stainless steel hardware, 9 ft. x 72 in. x 8 ft. (274.3 x 182.9 x 243.8 cm). Gift of The Watermill Center, New York, NY.

[Architectural Cactus #6 \(2008\) by Dennis Oppenheim](#)

Dennis Oppenheim's practice remained somewhat unpredictable over the course of his career, spanning performance, body art, Land art, large-scale sculpture, and site-specific sculpture—the latter of which are reflected prominently in Storm King's collection. A conceptual shift in sculpture in the late 1960s, according to Oppenheim, ushered in the idea of "sculpture as place . . . It was more a sense of activating real space outside the studio, real place, and this got art into the real world."

As evidenced in this work's title, *Architectural Cactus #6*, Oppenheim had a deep interest in both architecture and the environment. He once noted that he liked cacti because they were simultaneously soft and hard, grew into unpredictable shapes, and were prickly by nature. Oppenheim created eighteen sculptures in his Architectural Cactus series. The first six were produced as a public installation sited between a police station and forensic laboratory in the desert landscape of Scottsdale, Arizona. The surfaces of each sculpture are unique, designed in various colors and materials. This patchwork quality was inspired by the investigative work taking place within the nearby buildings and demonstrates the artist's frequently off-beat, humorous approach to his art.

Media: Audio recordings and photos available on our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects; [Exhibition website](#) for Storm King Art Center's 2016 exhibition *Dennis Oppenheim: Terrestrial Studio*, featuring images of [Architectural Cactus Grove, #1–6 \(2008\)](#) and Dennis Oppenheim's work on paper, [Cactus #6](#).



Rashid Johnson (American, b. 1977), *Stacked Heads*, 2020. Cast bronze with black patina, plants, 10 ft. x 48 in. x 48 in. (304.8 cm x 121.9 cm x 121.9 cm). Purchase, Anonymous, Cecilia Tay and Sam Kellie-Smith, and Ralph Segreti. © Rashid Johnson.

[Stacked Heads \(2020\) by Rashid Johnson](#)

The imposing totemic busts of Rashid Johnson's *Stacked Heads*, one balanced atop the other, are constructed from bronze coated in a glossy black patina. Johnson created the work's textured surface using incised marks, including expressive faces, recalling the artist's distinctive, sometimes violent manipulation of softer, more malleable materials such as shea butter, black soap, and wax. "I always think about sculpture as an opportunity to draw in space," Johnson has explained about his process. "My natural instinct is to put my hands in material."

Johnson works across media, from ceramic and paint to performance and film, to address themes of history, cultural identity, and the psychological impact and complexity of our current sociopolitical moment. Part of the artist's ongoing *Anxious Men* series (2015–), *Stacked Heads* speaks to a collective sense of uneasiness or apprehension. About the series, Johnson has said, "In a cathartic sense . . . I started making these characters that were real representations of my emotional state." During the growing season, grasses and ferns native to Storm King's ecosystem spring from cracks and crevices in the sculpture like abstracted facial features or leafy green hair. Johnson frequently uses plants in his work, creating a dialogue between human-made and organic elements so as to instill in viewers feelings of empathy. As he has said, "I always thought it was interesting to make something that people had to take care of."

Media: Audio recordings and photos available on our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects.



Chakaia Booker (American, b. 1953), *A Moment in Time*, 2004. Rubber tires, stainless steel, and steel, 10 ft. x 9 ft. 1 in. x 10 ft. 2 in. (304.8 x 276.9 x 309.9 cm). Gift of the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation

[A Moment in Time \(2004\) by Chakaia Booker](#)

Chakaia Booker works almost exclusively with recycled tires, slicing, twisting, stripping, weaving, and riveting rubber and radials to exaggerate and create the textures, prickled edges, and torqued forms of her radically refashioned sculptures. Whether creating small-scale wall reliefs resembling ballistic blowouts, suggestively hairy and ovoid pedestal sculptures, or colossal landscape-like tableaux, Booker transforms tires—iconic symbols of urban waste and blight—into extraordinary compositions of renewal.

A Moment in Time suggests multiple meanings that crisscross historical, social, political, and cultural contexts. Booker has stated, “Cultural diversity in this society is like the tire elements: tires that have been under an explosive moment may retain wonderful visual patterns that come about between the layering of metal treads and the rubber-gluing agents. Sometimes it’s rust stains; other times, it’s the textures, the treads that remain.” The varying tonalities of the rubber used, from brown- and blue- to green- and red-black, elicit different racial identities while simultaneously evoking the longstanding history of monochromatic black sculpture in modern art. The sculpture’s portal-like, bifurcated form encourages viewers’ passage through, and subsequent winding around, the piece’s contours.

As commercial objects, tires symbolize the rise and fall of industrial revolutions; the movement of populations across the landscape; the growth of the suburbs; and the decay of urban centers. Discarded and repurposed, Booker’s tires also serve as metaphors for the cycle of industrial manufacture and waste in our contemporary era of global expansion. *A Moment in Time* alludes not only to environmental degradation and decay but also to the possibility of transformation and redemption through the artist’s own brand of environmental sensitivity.

Media: Audio recording and photos available on our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects; [Archival images](#) of Chakaia’s Booker’s work at Storm King; [Exhibition website](#) for Storm King Art Center’s 2004 exhibition *Chakaia Booker*.



Martin Puryear (American, b. 1941) *Lookout*, 2023. Brick, concrete, and cobblestone. Made possible by generous major support from Janet Benton and David Schunter, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Roberta and Steven Denning, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans, Glenstone Foundation, Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, Ohnell Family Foundation, the Hazen Polsky Foundation, Thomas A. and Georgina T. Russo, and Margaret VB Wurtele. Lead support is provided by Agnes Gund, Barbara Bluhm-Kaul and Don Kaul, The Ronald and Jo Carole Lauder Foundation and Matthew Marks Gallery. Support is also provided by Robert Lehman Foundation and Sidney E. Frank Foundation and supported in part by Allison Berg, Jennifer Brorsen and Richard DeMartini, Andrew L. and Gayle Shaw Camden, Tommy and Dathel Coleman, Martha Gabbert, Debby and Rocco Landesman, and the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

[Lookout \(2023\) by Martin Puryear](#)

Martin Puryear's *Lookout*—Storm King's newest site-specific commission—is a structure created from layers of red clay bricks laid using thin-shell masonry techniques. Rather than straight lines and vertical walls, however, the work curves inward and upward, opening to allow entry from one side while producing a swelling form on the opposite end. The twenty-foot-tall sculpture is shaped by a series of nine segments: at the open end, the first of these segments emerges visually and structurally as an arch, set perpendicular to the ground plane. Each successive segment is set against its neighbor at an increasingly acute angle, sweeping upward until the bricks of the final segment are laid in the form of a dome at the summit of the artwork. *Lookout* marks the artist's first use brick as a material, recognizing brickmaking as a once-primary industry in the Hudson Valley and referencing the vernacular structures that dot the local landscape. The work emerges from Puryear's exploration of traditional masonry forms, including the daring techniques of Nubian vault-building without formwork that the artist witnessed in Mali; classical Roman arches and domes; the curved and tapered forms of bottle kilns at the ceramics factories of Stoke-on-Trent, in England; and the curved entablatures of the Squadron A Armory on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, which seem to defy gravity. To achieve this ambitious and unconventional use of the material, Puryear worked closely with several trusted collaborators, including structural engineers, architects specializing in Guastavino vaults, kiln-builders, and expert brick- and stonemasons.

Inside, Puryear uses the work's form and setting to encourage a heightened sense of presence. Facing southwest, the masonry arch frames a sweeping view of Storm King's landscape, with the contours of Schunnemunk Mountain in the far distance. The brick surface is punctuated by a constellation of ninety circular openings created by tubes of fiberglass-reinforced concrete in varying sizes. The tubes, or oculi, act as apertures, creating pinhole vignettes of the surrounding trees and sky. The "sweet spot," indicated by the paving pattern, enables visitors to see out of all of the oculi at once. Puryear describes the title of the work, *Lookout*, as simultaneously "a physical place, an invitation to observe and engage with the natural world, and a warning."

Media: Photos available on our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects; [Exhibition video](#) on the Storm King website; [Exhibition website](#) for Storm King Art Center's 2023 exhibition *Martin Puryear: Process and Scale*.

During Your Visit to Storm King

GENERAL INFORMATION

PLEASE FULLY READ YOUR GROUP CONFIRMATION LETTER for complete details about arrival, lunch, chaperones, trams, tours, and weather. Additional information about Group Visits can be found at <https://stormking.org/groups/> or by contacting groups@stormkingartcenter.org.

PREPARE TO BE OUTDOORS: Storm King is a 500-acre outdoor sculpture museum. Keep in mind that your group will be outside for your entire visit to Storm King, rain or shine. We recommend dressing in layers and wearing comfortable shoes for lots of walking. It's a good idea to bring a refillable water bottle, sunscreen, bug spray, and weather-appropriate attire.

HELP US PROTECT THE SCULPTURES: Touching, walking on, or climbing on most of the works of art at Storm King is prohibited. The sunscreen, hand lotion, bug spray, and even natural oils on your hands damage the surface of the sculptures. You might not think one touch matters but remember, about 200,000 people visit Storm King every year. Thousands of touches add up to lots of damage. Always refrain from climbing artworks for your own safety and the safety of others.



INTERACTIVE ARTWORKS: Artworks which visitors may touch are designated on the map and on the grounds with a hand icon, pictured at left.

RESPECT WILDLIFE: All kinds of animals and plants make their home at Storm King – be good guests by giving them plenty of space. Do not enter our long and native grass fields and please refrain from climbing trees.

TERRAIN: The Art Center's grounds comprise varied terrain including rolling meadows, hills, wooded areas, paved paths, and gravel paths. During guided tours, please be prepared to cover up to one mile on grass.

ACCESSIBILITY: Storm King Art Center is committed to offering a rich experience of art and landscape to every visitor. **Please let us know in advance if anyone in your group has accessibility needs.** Level, paved pathways traverse many parts of the Art Center; however, some areas may only be accessed via steep terrain, unpaved pathways, or mown grass. The visitor map indicates paved and unpaved paths and steep areas (where slope exceeds that of a wheelchair-accessible ramp, or 12.5%). [Learn more.](#)

TIME: We recommend planning at least 3 hours for your visit. Guided tours are usually 45-60 minutes. If your visit is self-guided, or you have time before or after your tour, you may have lunch at a designated picnic area and explore the grounds on your own.

MATERIALS: You may choose to bring pencils and sketchbooks or notebooks for students to draw and write during the self-guided portion of your visit. Check out the digital guide on Bloomberg Connects and the tips and techniques for onsite engagement document on p.13 for more inspiration.

MAP: Access an up-to-date map of Storm King on our [“Plan Your Visit” webpage](#), or pick up a map when you arrive at the Art Center. The digital guide on Bloomberg Connects features a live map.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Ball playing and other recreational items and sports are not permitted.
- Indoor galleries are located in the Museum Building on Museum Hill. We ask that you limit the number of students inside the galleries at one time to 10.
- Roadways are used by pedestrians and Storm King staff, trams, personal vehicles, and rented bicycles. Please use caution.
- Carry in, carry out. Be sure that all trash and recycling makes it into bins. If you have lunch at Storm King, tidy up after yourself to make sure the next hungry visitors can enjoy the area too.
- Storm King reserves the right to refuse entry or to eject any group for misconduct at any time. Groups that are asked to leave the site or that cause damage to the site may be prohibited from visiting in the future.

MATERIAL MATTERS

Continue exploring the theme of materials with your students at Storm King. If you are on a self-guided visit, or have time before or after your tour, walk the grounds. Try to identify and describe materials in each sculpture. What ideas does each sculpture inspire? Compare/contrast sculptures made of the same materials and sculptures made of different materials.

Visit some or all of the artworks featured in this resource packet:



Artwork: *Architectural Cactus #6* (2008)
by Dennis Oppenheim

Location: North Woods; see map on page 12

Engagement: Ask students to count how many different materials they find in this sculpture. Older students might read the material list on the nearby placard and try to identify each material in the work. What words would they use to describe the various parts of this sculpture? Challenge students to use a range of different marks to capture the work's textures in a drawing. What title might students give this artwork? How do they think the sculpture might relate to the artist's title, *Architectural Cactus #6*?



Artwork: *A Moment in Time* (2004) by Chakaia Booker

Location: Meadows; see map on page 12

Engagement: Walk around and through the sculpture. Ask students what they notice about the artwork in person that they did not notice when viewing a photo of it in class. Invite them to use their sense of smell. Ask younger students to recreate some of the larger and smaller shapes with their bodies. Invite older students to create a close-up sketch or photo of one area of the sculpture. Consider techniques the artist might have used to transform rubber tires into these shapes and textures. Revisit conversations about students' associations and ideas related to tires.



Artwork: *Stacked Heads* (2020) by Rashid Johnson

Location: North Woods; see map on page 12

Engagement: Invite students to explore the work from multiple angles and distances. What do they notice from close up that they might not notice from far away? Consider techniques the artist might have used to create the textures on the surface of the sculpture. Compare the plants used in the sculpture to the plants in the surrounding landscape. Rashid Johnson has said, “I always thought it was interesting to make something that people had to take care of.” What are some things you take care of? What feelings does this sculpture bring up for you?

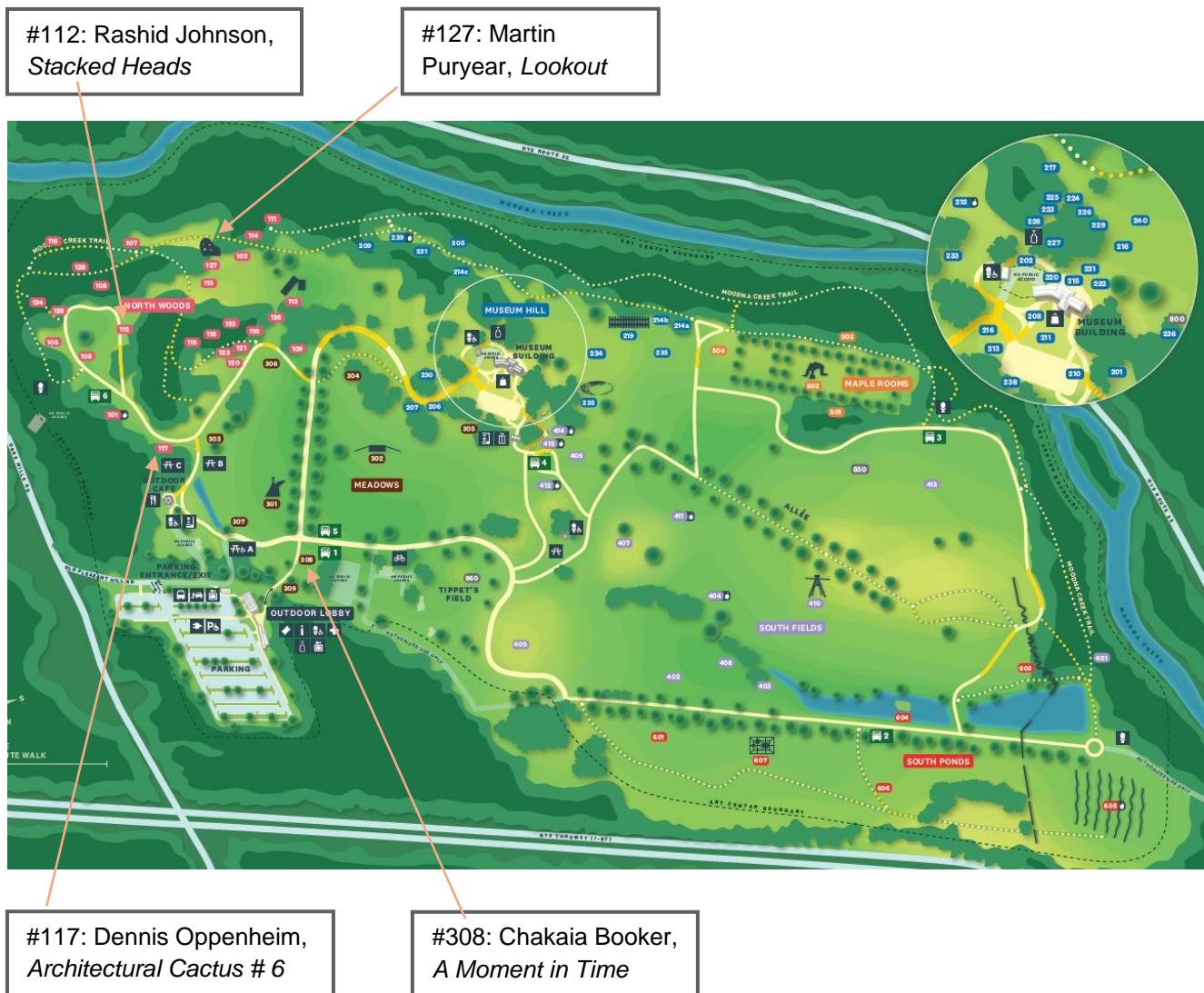


Artwork: *Lookout* (2023) by Martin Puryear

Location: North Woods; see map on page 12

Engagement: Ask students to walk around and enter the sculpture. Invite them to stand on the central stone circle and look up and around them. Compare this artwork with other brick structures students have experienced. How do they think this form might have been created? What does it make them think of? How is it similar to other sculptures they explored today? How is it different?

“MATERIAL MATTERS” ARTWORK LOCATIONS



Artworks featured in this resource packet are located within 1 mile of the main entrance.

This route includes paved paths, grass, and some steeper, unpaved paths.

For more information about accessibility, or to request alternative suggestions for this theme, please contact groups@stormkingartcenter.org.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT STORM KING

EXPLORE PERSPECTIVE. View sculptures and vistas from afar, close up, above, and below. Move around and through artworks to experience them from different angles. Invite students to create a rectangle with their hands to use as a viewfinder, “zooming in” on details and “cropping” views. Try photographing the same artwork or area from multiple perspectives. Ask students to imagine or draw what something might look like from a bird’s-eye view or a worm’s-eye view.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS. Engage students in conversation by asking open-ended questions such as: What do you notice? What does this make you think of? What do you wonder? What artworks or areas do you like the most? Why?

ENGAGE YOUR SENSES. Take the time to slow down and breathe deeply. What scents do you notice? What sounds do you hear? Invite students to create a six-word poem or story inspired by their sensory experiences. In addition to feeling the tickle of breezes and grass blades, we invite visitors to interact with sculptures marked on the map with a hand icon.

EMBRACE THE LANDSCAPE. Enjoy cloud gazing, downhill rolling, and creature and critter watching. Please engage with the land safely and respectfully.

SKETCH. Ask students to try capturing sculptures and vistas with single-line contour drawings, challenging them to create quick sketches without lifting their pencil from the page. Try drawing the same artwork or area from multiple angles. Zoom in on details. Experiment with mark making to capture different textures and create compositions featuring both sculpture and landscape.

GET MOVING! Encourage students to explore ideas with their bodies. They might physically recreate shapes they observe or respond to art and nature through dance and movement.

CONSIDER TITLES. The digital guide and Storm King [website](#) can provide additional information about each artwork, and many works have nearby placards listing the artist and title. You might add an additional layer to group conversations by considering how a title might relate to an artwork.

TUNE INTO THE AUDIO GUIDE. Accessible on Storm King’s digital guide on Bloomberg Connects. Make the most of your visit with audio and video commentary by artists and Storm King staff. Artwork lookup numbers can be found on the map and on the label next to each artwork. Access Bloomberg Connects via the QR code below.



Post-Visit

REFLECT

Ask students to individually journal or talk with a partner about their visit to Storm King. What are some materials they saw and ideas they discussed?

MATERIAL CHOICES

Single Material Focus: Consider works at Storm King that incorporate one primary material, such as rubber tires in Chakia Booker's [A Moment in Time](#) (page 6) and bricks in Martin Puryear's [Lookout](#) (page 7). Ask students why they think an artist might find it valuable to focus on one main material. Invite older students to list all of the actions that they think each artist might have performed to transform their material (ex: cut, stack, bend, etc). Invite younger students to act out the process of manipulating rubber tires by cutting, bending, and attaching, and to act out the process of making bricks and stacking them at an angle. You might show [this video](#) to share more about Puryear's process.

Material Juxtaposition: Sometimes, artists juxtapose--or combine and arrange--multiple materials in one artwork. View an image of Dennis Oppenheim's, *Architectural Cactus # 6* (page 4). Ask students why they think the artist might have chosen to combine multiple different types of metal and plastic, instead of using just one material. Revisit their thoughts about Rashid Johnson's *Stacked Heads* (page 5). What are some ideas they think of when they see this structure combined with living plants?

ART EXPLORATION

Prompt for Students: How will you create a sculpture using one or two familiar materials?

Gather simple materials for an art making exploration. Students might bring in recycled materials from home, or you might pull together materials in the classroom. Materials might include: newspaper, aluminum foil, pipe cleaners/wire, string, etc. You might also provide tape or glue for binding and scissors for cutting.

First, lead students in an inquiry with each material. What are different ways to transform paper (ex: roll, fold, tear, tab, etc.)? What are different ways to transform foil? Etc.

Then, ask students to choose whether they would like to experiment by focusing on just one material, or whether they would like to choose two materials to juxtapose.

Older students might consider ideas and associations that each material makes them think of, and they might begin by sketching an idea. Will their sculpture be abstract, exploring the properties of the materials? Will it be representational, relating to some ideas the materials make them think of?

After students have created their sculptures, provide an opportunity for them to share. Students might take turns sharing the title of their work and one choice that they made. Alternatively, students could create a label for their work and then do a "gallery walk" around the room to explore each other's work.

Ask older students to imagine their sculptures large-scale, and to draw or discuss where they might position it in an outdoor setting like Storm King.

Resources

Storm King Art Center Collection

<https://collections.stormking.org/index.php/About/collection>

John P. Stern Oral History

<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/oralhistory/4867>

Exhibition website for Storm King Art Center's 2016 exhibition *Dennis Oppenheim: Terrestrial Studio*

<https://stormking.org/exhibitions/oppenheim/ac6.html>

Exhibition website for Storm King Art Center's 2004 exhibition *Chakaia Booker*

<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/133>

Archival images of Chakia's Booker's work at Storm King

https://collections.stormking.org/Browse/archival/facet/rel_entity_facet/id/32

Martin Puryear Exhibition video

<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/204>

Exhibition website for Storm King Art Center's 2023 exhibition *Martin Puryear: Process and Scale*

<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/207>

Storm King Art Center Groups

<https://stormking.org/groups/>