

Outlooks: Saif Azzuz

Teacher Resource



Make connections between landscapes, waters, and Native American communities near and far with artist Saif Azzuz's sculpture of a giant sturgeon. Explore themes of materials, Indigenous histories, and preservation of endangered species through observation, writing, drawing, and movement.

Recommended for grades 4-12.

Welcome

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 exhibition *Outlooks: Saif Azzuz*, featuring the sculpture *weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet)*, with your students at Storm King. We hope to engage learners in focused close looking, hands-on activities, and conversation—providing a solid foundation as students construct connections throughout their experience.

If you have chosen a self-guided visit without a tour, this resource offers pre-visit ideas to prepare for an exploration of Azzuz's exhibition, tips and tools for onsite engagement, and post-visit activity prompts for continued exploration. If you have chosen a guided tour and would like to visit Azzuz's artwork during the tour, please be sure to request that in your group visit request form or in email communications with the Groups Coordinator. Please be in touch at least two weeks before your visit if you have specific interests.

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

Updated: April 21, 2026

Cover Image: Saif Azzuz, *weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet)* (2026). Photo by Jeffrey Jenkins.

Introduction

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Be attentive to what they see, hear, smell, and feel at Storm King by slowing down and engaging in close looking.
- Observe and describe the materials, color, form, and scale of the artwork. Consider the relationship between the sculpture and the environment in which it is sited. Ex: Why did the artist and curators choose to install the sculpture in this particular location?
- Engage with Yurok and Lenape stories of the past, present, and future, as well as Indigenous resilience under the impacts of colonization. Explore the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world.
- Make connections between the Yurok and Lenape Tribes.
- Learn about the preservation of sturgeon, an endangered species.

Connection to Educational Standards

Storm King Art Center's programming and resources support student learning under the standards set by the New York State Department of Education. This includes a focus on critical thinking, evidential reasoning, and public speaking. Here are a few ways in which this lesson plan connects to specific State standards. This list is not exhaustive.

K-12 Social Studies Key Ideas:

- 1.1: Language, beliefs, customs, and traditions help shape the identity and culture of a family and a community.
- 7.1 NATIVE AMERICANS: The physical environment and natural resources of North America influenced the development of the first human settlements and the culture of Native Americans. Native American societies varied across North America.
- 10.9 GLOBALIZATION AND A CHANGING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT (1990–PRESENT): Technological changes have resulted in a more interconnected world, affecting economic and political relations and in some cases leading to conflict and in others to efforts to cooperate. Globalization and population pressures have led to strains on the environment.

P-12 Science Learning Standards

- 5-ESS3-1. Obtain and combine information about ways individual communities use science ideas to protect Earth's resources and environment.
- MS-LS2-4. Construct an argument supported by empirical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations.
- MS-LS1-5. Construct a scientific explanation based on evidence for how environmental and genetic factors influence the growth of organisms.
- HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

Visual Arts:

- **Enduring Understanding 1.2:** Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.
- **Enduring Understanding 7.1:** Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.
- **Enduring Understanding 11.1:** Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

Featured Artwork



Saif Azzuz, weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet), (2026)

Location: Museum Hill | [#820 on our Map](#)

Saif Azzuz's *weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet)* (2026) takes the form of a giant sturgeon made of steel, aluminum, and salvaged car parts from the Hudson Valley, together with natural materials from the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2024, while working as an artist in residence at Storm King, Azzuz (Yurok, Karuk, Libyan, b. 1987) noticed that local signs designating the Hudson River Estuary are illustrated with a sturgeon, a fish familiar to him from the Klamath River, which runs through the Yurok Reservation in California. An enrolled member of the Yurok Tribe, Azzuz draws upon his community's deep connection with nature to create works that reflect the interdependence of all things. "Sturgeons are species that are millions of years old," the artist has said. "They hold so much of our stories and the stories of the land." The sturgeon is an important source of food and cultural tradition for many Native Americans. Despite being widely endangered around the globe—due to overfishing, pollution, and other threats to its habitat—the sturgeon endures. For Azzuz, the sturgeon symbolizes Indigenous survivance, a concept articulated by Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor that considers Native survival as an active, ongoing mode of resistance.

Etched into the skin of Azzuz's sturgeon are drawings of native plants, Yurok motifs, and text, on which the artist collaborated with his family and Storm King staff. Within the work, small sculpted forms made from reclaimed hardwood lie just beyond the viewer's reach, as do strings of beads and abalone shells, which move with passing winds. The artwork's title, written in Yurok and Lenape, connects the ancestral home of the Yurok in Humboldt County, California, with Lenapehoking, the home of the Lenape, the original, forcibly displaced, people of the Hudson Valley. Azzuz imbues his sculpture with shared stories of the land, its peoples, and the sturgeon, underscoring how nature's well-being is intimately connected with our own.

Storm King's Outlooks series offers emerging and mid-career artists the opportunity to present a large-scale project in the landscape. Azzuz held a residency at Storm King through the Shandaken: Storm King residency program.

Media: Audio recording and photos available on our digital guide on Bloomberg Connects and on Storm King's website.

Credit: Saif Azzuz (Yurok, Karuk, Libyan, b. 1987), *weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet)*, 2026. Mild steel, aluminum, stainless steel, rebar, car hoods, paint, abalone, wire hanger, beads, and walnut. Courtesy the artist, Anthony Meier, and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

Image Credit: 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](#).



Land Acknowledgement

Share Storm King Art Center's [Land Acknowledgement](#) with your students:

To be at Storm King Art Center is to experience the power of place. We acknowledge that this is Lenapehoking, the ancestral home of the Lenape, who were forced from this land through colonialism and genocide.

We honor the life held in its soil, reflected in its sky and waters. Grateful for this place which inspires our work, we recognize indigenous communities past, present, and future.

We humbly commit ourselves to the health and wholeness of this environment, to deepen and share the experience of a living, learning, and creating space for all.

Locate the Lands of the Yurok & Lenape Tribes, and Yourself!

Share with your students that Saif Azzuz is a Libyan-Yurok artist who incorporates images, symbols, and stories from Yurok and Arab culture in his artwork. [The Yurok](#) Tribe is a federally recognized Native American Nation with over 6,400 members today.

Use this [interactive Native Land map](#) to see Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages across the world.

Locate the land of the **Yurok Nation**, along the coast of what is now called Northern California. Notice the river that runs through. This is the **Klamath River**, and the Yurok are stewards of this river and the surrounding lands.

Locate the land where Storm King Art Center is located, **Lenapehoking**, the ancestral home of the Lenape. Storm King is located along the west of **Mahicantuck** (Hudson River) meaning "the river that flows both ways" in Lenape. While the Yurok largely reside on their ancestral lands, most Lenape people now live away from Lenapehoking, in other parts of the United States, as a result of colonialism and displacement.

There are hundreds of distinct Native American Nations with unique cultures, traditions, languages, and beliefs. Find the land where you live and learn about the tribes who call this land home. This [Indigenous Territories map](#) from the New York Geographic Information Gateway might also be helpful.

Watch

Screen this four minute [video](#), produced by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, in which Saif Azzuz discusses his influences and artmaking processes. Have students journal or talk with a partner about what they learned about his process. What themes stood out to them? How does Azzuz explore environmentalism and Yurok history and culture through his art? Ask students to share their ideas with the class.

Observe & Watch

1. Project or print images of the artwork (pages 1 & 5, and on the exhibition website) for students to observe.

- Have students sketch a detail of the artwork that interests them.
- Ask students what they notice.
- How would they describe the textures and forms they see?
- What does the sculpture make them think of?
- How might they connect the sculpture to what they learned about the artist in the video?



Green sturgeon

2. Share with students that the fish portrayed in the sculpture is the sturgeon, a species that has existed for about 150 million years. “Sturgeon” in Yurok is *kahkah* (green sturgeon) or *smeyes* (white sturgeon), and in Lenape is *kahpaha*. Sturgeon is a first food for both the Yurok and Lenape people. It is a traditional food for both Tribes, contributing to cultural and spiritual relationships with the land and the waters.

3. Share that Storm King Art Center hosts an artist residency, which gives artists an opportunity to move to Storm King for a few weeks to make art. In 2024, Azzuz participated in this residency. When he was here, he noticed the many Hudson River Estuary signs (pictured right) illustrated with the sturgeon. This is where the idea for the sculpture first came from.



Hudson River Estuary Sign featuring a sturgeon

Discuss

Sturgeon still inhabit the Hudson and Klamath Rivers. Knowing now that these fish are endangered, why do students think Saif Azzuz might have chosen this fish as the subject of his sculpture? How can we connect this new knowledge about sturgeon to Saif Azzuz’s interest in clean water, clear air, and climate change?

Lenape Center Curriculum

For more resources on Lenape culture and history, please visit [this curriculum](#) developed by the [Lenape Center](#) for grades PreK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Visiting Storm King

Continue exploring themes of **materials**, **Indigenous resilience**, and **preservation of endangered species** with your students during your visit. Ask students what they notice about the materials other artists choose to use, how artworks are sited in the landscape, and how moving their bodies around sculptures provides new perspectives.

Saif Azzuz's artwork is located within one mile of the main entrance, up a hill (on a paved path), and across grass.

Artwork Engagement

1. View the work from multiple angles. Encourage students to look closely at the artwork from many different perspectives. Have them look at the work from a distance and up close. Ask them to walk around the sculpture and examine its scale and details. Have students divide a sheet of paper into four sections and create quick, 1-2 minute sketches in each section. Each sketch should be drawn from a different perspective. Ask students what they notice about the artwork in person that they did not notice when viewing photos in the classroom.

2. Observe materials. The materials artists choose can provide additional layers of meaning to an artwork. Ask students to create a list of materials they notice within the sculpture. (Try to avoid having students read the materials listed on the artwork label.) What do these materials remind them of? What techniques might the artist have used to fabricate this sculpture?

If they have not already noticed, call students' attention to the small hardwood sculptures that are nestled beneath strings of bead, steel, and abalone within the artwork. Abalone are the colorful, shimmering shells of marine mollusks (or snails). Share with students that two of the seven species of abalone along California's coast are endangered, much like the sturgeon. Abalone is often used in Yurok clothing and jewelry, especially for ceremonial purposes.



Abalone

3. Discuss scale. What do students notice about the scale, or size, of this artwork in relation to the landscape around it? Share with students that this artwork is nearly 35 feet long. The average length of a sturgeon is about 6 feet, with the largest reaching about 20 feet. The size of sturgeon is a sign of the health of the individual fish, the species, and the water they live in. The cleaner the water, the longer the fish might live, and therefore, the bigger the fish may grow! Today, sturgeon rarely grow long, a result of pollution and overfishing. Amanda Higgs, a Fisheries Biologist at the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, has shared that the largest sturgeon she's seen in the Hudson River was 14 feet long.

Ask students why they think Saif Azzuz created his sculpture at this scale—larger than actual sturgeon. What might Azzuz's message be?

4. Experience sound and movement. Invite students to be silent and experience the sounds around them and within the artwork. What do they notice? Where do these sounds come from? Have students reflect individually or with a partner about the way slowing down and observing sound may have affected their experience of the work.

Share with your students that Saif Azzuz intended for the artwork to have a sound component, similar to how abalone is added to clothing to create sound when moving or dancing.

Divide students into partners or small groups. Have each group generate dances or movements that correspond to the sounds they hear within the artwork and in the environment around them. Are the movements fast or slow? Large or small? Sharp or fluid? Heavy or subtle? Random or coordinated?

Post-Visit

Reflect

Ask students to individually journal or talk with a partner about their visit to Storm King. What do they remember about the artwork and the landscape they experienced? What themes do they recall discussing at Saif Azzuz's artwork?

Explore the Artwork's Title

Share the artwork title with your students: *weych-pues / tàkhòne (where the rivers meet)*. In Yurok, *weych-pues* refers to Weitchpec, a village at the joining of the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. In Lenape, *tàkhòne* is the word for "where rivers join together."

In the pre-visit, we learned that sturgeon are traditional first foods for both the Yurok and Lenape Tribes, contributing to cultural and spiritual relationships to the waters. Considering this and the artwork's title, what do students think about the sculpture now?

Azzuz's work reflects on the interdependence and connections between all things. He links the different landscapes of Lenapehoking and the Yurok Reservation and different cultures connected to the sturgeon to explore bonds between humans and the natural world. Azzuz's work responds to the various impacts of colonization and uplifts the culture, ancestral knowledge, and resilience of Native American people.

Listen

On Storm King's guide on Bloomberg Connects, listen to Saif Azzuz speak about materials, mark-making, and creating outdoor sculpture for the first time. What stood out to students? What questions might they have for the artist?

Art Exploration

In this art exploration, students will consider Saif Azzuz's artistic process and materials while incorporating elements of their own families, cultures, and natural environments. An aluminum embossing video, linked in the resources on page 13, can provide an example of what this art exploration entails.

Materials: dull pencils, 36-gauge aluminum craft sheets (or heavy duty aluminum foil), soft backing material like paper towels or cloth towels. Make sure to fold in the edges on the aluminum materials to ensure there are no sharp edges.

Drafting prompt for students: With paper and pencils, take a class excursion to an outdoor area at your school or nearby. Have students observe the plants that live there and sketch at least two of these plants. Back in the classroom, prompt students to sketch any two objects that are significant for their family and/or culture (i.e. plant, food, symbol, craft, etc.)

Artwork creation: Distribute materials and have students emboss their plants and object drawings onto the aluminum.

Invite students to share some of their choices with the class or do a "gallery walk" around the room to explore students' artworks.



Example of floral embossing on aluminum foil

Vocabulary

- **Intuitive:** instinctive or based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning. Azzuz uses this word in the studio visit video to describe his painting process.
- **Pollution:** the introduction of substances or energy into the natural environment in amounts or concentrations that can be harmful for humans, animals, and plants.
- **Endangered:** (of a species) seriously at risk of extinction.
- **Regalia:** official and traditional clothes and/or decorations, especially those worn or carried in ceremonies.
- **Confluence:** the point where two or more flowing bodies of water join together to form a single channel.
- **Abalone:** the colorful, shimmering shells of marine mollusks (or snails). Two of the seven species of abalone along California's coast are endangered. Abalone is often used in Yurok clothing and jewelry, especially for ceremonial purposes.
- **First food:** traditional foods linked to bodily, cultural, and spiritual health, that Native Americans have hunted, fished, and gathered for thousands of years.

Resources

Saif Azzuz Exhibition Page

<https://collections.stormking.org/Detail/occurrences/224>

In the studio with artist Saif Azzuz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zU2X6eU63X4>

The Yurok Tribe Website

<https://www.yuroktribe.org/>

Native Land Digital Map

<https://native-land.ca/>

Indigenous Territories, New York Department of State

<https://opdqig.dos.ny.gov/datasets/NYSDOS::indigenous-territories-native-land-digital/explore?location=41.026964%2C-73.907776%2C9>

Sturgeon Lifecycle Animation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xbo0hYr0o_w

Lenape Center Website

<https://lenape.center/>

Lenape Center: Manahatta Curriculum

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1286f507-rKQfoaBKZLNth_pB1zclpVG8

Abalone Shell Story and Use, North Coast Redwoods District

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccNfgQGOa-0>

Aluminum Embossing, by Lura's Art Studio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdjGLM9exXU>

Storm King online exhibition *Site Ecology: Land, Leadership, Art*

https://collections.stormking.org/Featured/Theme/theme_id/275

About Storm King: Trailer Video

<https://vimeo.com/468974699>

Storm King Art Center Collection

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

Storm King Art Center Groups

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