

# Montana's Charlie Russell



## Russell on Indians Grade Level: 7–12

**Essential Understandings:** Art influences how we think about life. How we think about life influences the art we create. Stereotypes can be harmful.

**Activity Description:** Students will think about stereotypes, especially about Indians. They will examine several Russell paintings to see how he did and did not reinforce Indian stereotypes.

**Time:** 2 class periods

**Objectives:** Students will

- Analyze Charles M. Russell's paintings to uncover his relationship and attitudes toward Indians.
- Use evidence to support their claims.
- Be able to identify the difference between "facts" and "fiction" when considering stereotypes of Indians.

### Standards

#### Art Content Standards

1.5—Articulate meaning by describing and analyzing artistic choices in their own work and works of others (by grade 12).

5.1—Demonstrate how history/culture and the Arts influence each other (by grade 8).

#### Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

EU.6 History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller.

#### Common Core Standards

CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the

text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCRA.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

### Materials

Copies of paintings from the *Montana's Charlie Russell* packet:

- *Caught in the Act*
- *The Ambush*
- *Toll Collectors*
- *Inside the Lodge*
- *Untitled (Indian Talking to Beaver and Fox)*
- *Indian Hunters Return*
- *York*

Russell Images PowerPoint (on CD)

Projector

Russell on Indians Worksheet (below)

Charles M. Russell Quotes about Montana Indians Handout (below)

5–10 dry erase markers (optional, for Chalk Talk)

About Visual Thinking Strategies (see packet)

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## Pre-Lesson Preparation

### Part 1

- Review About Visual Thinking Strategies.
- Arrange to project *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole* (on Russell Images PowerPoint)
- Review the following information on *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole*:

This mural, which dominates the House chamber in the Montana Capitol, celebrates the fortuitous encounter between the Corps of Discovery and the Salish people on September 4, 1805. This encounter enabled the explorers to obtain fresh horses and receive the directions that enabled them to traverse the Bitterroot Mountains. Russell originally proposed painting an Indian attack on a wagon train, but those in charge of commissioning the piece rejected the topic, explaining that it did not seem to be “a suitable decoration for the House of Representatives.”

To create this mural, Russell had to raise the ceiling of his studio to accommodate the canvas's large size. He visited the Bitterroot Valley to ensure the accuracy of the mountain background, and he researched the event at the Great Falls Public Library. He also used his own large collection of Indian artifacts for visual reference (although not always correctly).

According to art historian Patricia M. Burnham, “*Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole* imagines the rituals enacted at that most significant encounter. In the right mid-ground, the Shoshone interpreter Old Toby communicates by sign language with a Salish leader (presumably Chief Three Eagles) while Lewis (left) and Clark (right) observe with care. In a gesture of lavish hospitality, a young warrior spreads white buffalo robes on the grass for the visitors. Sacagawea kneels at the right with her tiny son strapped to her back, watching attentively, while mounted warriors dash in from the encampment at the upper left.” Significantly, Russell did not put Lewis

and Clark in the foreground. Instead, he gave the most important part of the visual space to the Salish warriors, celebrating Montana's Indian presence. (Information taken from Kirby Lambert et al., *Montana's State Capitol: The People's House* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2002).

### Part 2

- Review information about Gallery Walks (<https://web.archive.org/web/20170201110537/https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/gallery-walk>) and set up your stations.
- Copy the Russell on Indians Worksheet.
- Copy or arrange to project the Russell quotes.

## Procedure

**Part 1: Analyzing *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole*/Exploring Stereotypes**

**Step 1:** Give students a few minutes to look at *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole*, then use VTS to lead students in a discussion of the painting.

**Step 2:** Ask students to spend a few minutes writing on the following prompt: “What's a stereotype? Has anyone ever had a stereotype about you? What was it? Was it true or false? How did it make you feel?” Have them pair/share.

**Step 3:** Share this definition of the word stereotype: “A conventional, formulaic, and usually oversimplified conception, opinion, or belief. A person, group, event, or issue considered to typify or conform to an unvarying pattern or manner, lacking any individuality.”

**Discuss:** How does this definition match or differ from the definitions that students came up with during their writing? How are stereotypes harmful?

**Step 4:** Write the word “Indian” on the

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blackboard. Have students generate a list of words/phrases that come to mind that are associated with the word “Indian.” (You may want to do this as a “Chalk Talk”: Chalk Talk is a technique in which the teacher writes an essential question on the board and then instructs students to silently respond by writing their comments on the same white/blackboard. The instructor must provide students with chalk or board markers so that five to ten students are writing on the board at any one time. If there is a shortage of markers, have the students who have finished their response hand off the marker to someone who has yet to reply. It is important that this part of the activity be done in silence. By clustering students at the board and having them write their answers pell-mell, a general anonymity exists as to the ownership of the answer. Students can even reply to someone else’s comment.)

**Step 5:** Call two students to the whiteboard. Have one write the word FACT and the other (in a different space) write the word FICTION. Have students look over the list and identify which words/phrases are fact and which are fiction or promote stereotypes. After the class has decided through discussion if a word/phrase is fact or fiction, have the students at the board add it to the appropriate list.

**Step 6:** Look again at *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross’ Hole*. Compare it the list of facts and fictions. Ask: Who is at the center of the painting? Where are Lewis and Clark? Why did Russell choose this composition? How unusual do you think this choice was for Russell’s time period? In other words, do you think other artists from that time would have made the same choice? Why? How about other artists from our time? Mention that Russell often—but not always—tried to represent Indian perspectives in his paintings. Ask which point of view this painting is representing (the Salish or Lewis and Clark)?

## Part 2: Gallery Walk

**Step 1:** Divide students into six groups and

have them do a “gallery walk” of the following paintings, set up in stations around the room using the Russell on Indians Worksheet: *Caught in the Act*, *The Ambush*, *Toll Collectors*, *Inside the Lodge*, *Indian Hunters Return*, and *York*.

**Step 2:** After visiting at least four stations, have students do a quick-write, answering one of the following questions (you may want to write these on the board):

- How did Russell use/propagate Indian stereotypes in his paintings? Was he right or wrong in doing this?
- How did Russell defy Indian stereotypes in his paintings?

**Step 3:** Discuss as a class. Then ask: Russell did not generally include modern life in his paintings. Does this choice in and of itself promote a stereotype or fiction about Indians? Russell also romanticized cowboys. Are romanticized images necessarily stereotypes? (Guide this discussion to help your students recognize the myth of the “vanishing Indian”/ noble savage. You may want to study up on this topic before leading this discussion. A good starting point is “American Indians: The Image of the Indian,” by Brian W. Dippie. (See link below.)

**Step 4:** Share with your students the examples of Russell’s writings on Indians. After examining the quotes from his letters, have students revisit (orally or in writing) what they wrote about Russell’s portrayals of Indians. Does this new information change or reinforce their conclusions? Discuss and/or collect as an assessment.

## Additional Resources

“American Indians: The Image of the Indian,” by Brian W. Dippie, on the National Humanities Center’s website TeacherServ: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntecoindian/essays/indimage.htm>.

# Russell on Indians Worksheet

As you tour the gallery, answer the following questions at each station.

Painting Name	Who are the main character(s)? What do you see that makes you say that?	What do you think they might be thinking?	Whose point of view do you think Russell is trying to represent in this painting? (Indian or non-Indian)	Look at the fact/fiction word list. Which ones do you think apply to this painting? Circle facts.



# Charles M. Russell Quotes about Montana Indians

Charles Russell joined efforts (led by Frank Bird Linderman and chiefs Little Bear and Rocky Boy) to secure a reservation for Montana's "landless Indians." Below are excerpts from three letters he wrote on behalf of this cause. All come from Brian Dippie, ed., *Charles M. Russell, Word Painter: Letters 1887–1926* (Fort Worth, TX, 1993).

"A friend of mine Frank Linderman has been trying to get a bill passed for a strip of land for the Chippaway and Cree Indians . . . These people have been on the verge of starvation for years and I think it no more than square for Uncle Sam, who has opened the west to all foreigners, to give these real Americans enough to live on."—Charles M. Russell to Senator Henry L. Myers, January 11, 1913

"This is the onley real American. He fought an died for his country. to day he has no vote, no country and is not a citizen but history will not forget him." Charles M. Russell to Charles N. Pray, January 5, 1914



Miss Montana, "Father I have thrown my lands open to the world. These are Americans, have I nothing for them?"

Uncle Sam, "No my child not as long as the land hog has control. He is the only animal known that lives without a heart." Charles M. Russell to Frank B. Linderman, ca. January 21, 1913