

# LESSON #10:

## THE COWBOY - Myth versus Reality

(Grade 11/US History)

Written by Kris McIntosh

**Summary:** In this lesson, students will investigate the myth versus the reality of the West by analyzing late 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings of cowboys by Charles Russell and Frederic Remington, and comparing these paintings with late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of cowboys. This activity is intended to be used with other Social Studies lessons and activities to provide students with a comprehensive study of the Gilded Age.

**Objective:** The student will

- Compare the lives and art of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists Frederic Remington and Charles Russell,
- Compare paintings of cowboys to photographs of cowboys, and
- Describe how a “myth of the West” was supported through art.

**TEKS:**

**(US 20) Culture.** The student understands the relationship between the arts and the times during which they were created.

**(US 20A) Culture.** The student is expected to describe how the characteristics and issues of various eras in U.S. history have been reflected in works of art, music, and literature.

**Time Required:** One class period

**Materials:**

Copies or projection of Sid Richardson Museum paintings *The Puncher*, *The Sentinel*, *The Cow Puncher*, and *Self Portrait on a Horse* by Frederic Remington

Copies or projection of SRM paintings *The Bucker*, *Cowpunching Sometimes Spells Trouble*, *When Cowboys Get in Trouble (The Mad Cow)*, *Roping the Renegade* and *Cowboy Sport – Roping a Wolf* by Charles M. Russell

Copies or projection of photographs: “Cowboys”, “Cowboys with bucking horse”, and “Round up”

Copies of the biographies of Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington

Venn Diagram

Census records relating to Charles M. Russell, Frederic Remington and Eva Remington

NARA Photo Analysis Sheet

## Procedure:

- Either in their notebooks or journals, ask students to describe their image of a cowboy. The teacher can lead a discussion asking for random words or descriptions, or the discussion can be organized, such as, “What does the cowboy wear (head to toe)? What tools does the cowboy use? What is his form of transportation? What equipment does the cowboy’s horse need? What type of work is done by the cowboy and horse?”
- Show the paintings of the cowboys, created by Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington. This may be done in small groups or with the class at large. Use the type of questions contained on the Photo Analysis Sheet. Compare the students’ descriptions of cowboys with images depicted in the paintings.
- Show the census records for Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington. Ask students, “What can we learn about these men from this source?”
- Pass out the biographies of Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington. Ask the students to read the biographies, and then compare the lives of the two artists, filling in a Venn Diagram as a class. Be sure that students note the differences in time each man spent in the West, as well as the colors used by the painters.
- Share the photographs of the cowboys. Analyze the photographs for cowboy clothes, jobs, horses, etc., (all those things the class listed in the beginning).
- Ask students to explain the difference between myth and reality. Compare the photographs with the paintings. “In what way/s do the paintings of Remington and Russell support the myth or reality of the West depicted in these photographs?”
- Ask students to write a paragraph describing how the images in these paintings might have encouraged people to move to the Great Plains.



*The Puncher*, by Frederic Remington, 1895, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*The Bucker*, by Charles M. Russell, 1904,  
Pencil, Watercolor, and Gouache on Paper  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*The Sentinel*, by Frederic Remington, 1889, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*Cowpunching Sometimes Spells Trouble*, by Charles M. Russell, 1889,  
Oil on Canvas,  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*When Cowboys Get in Trouble (The Mad Cow)*, by Charles Russell, 1899,  
Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*Roping the Renegade*, by Charles M. Russell, 1883,  
Pencil, Watercolor, and Gouache on Paper  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*The Cow Puncher*, Frederic Remington, 1901, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*Self Portrait on a Horse*, by Frederic Remington,  
c. 1890, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*Cowboy Sport---Roping a Wolf*, by Charles M. Russell, 1890, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



## Frederic Remington (1861-1909)



*Untitled Photo of Remington at his easel at Fort Robinson, Frederic Remington Art Museum, Ogdensburg, N.Y.*

During a career that spanned less than twenty-five years, Frederic Remington produced a huge body of work illustration, painting, sculpture, fiction and non-fiction - the vast majority of it centered on the West. His influence in shaping the West of the popular imagination cannot be overstated.

Remington was born in Canton in northern New York on October 4, 1861. His boyhood fostered a lifelong love of horses and the outdoors, while his father's tales of action as a cavalry officer in the Civil War inspired a passion for things military that found a western focus with the battle of the Little Bighorn during the nation's Centennial Year, 1876. At the age of fourteen Remington was smitten with the urge to go see the West for himself.

As a member of a prominent family, Remington was expected to graduate from college, prepared for a career in business, but spent only a year and a half at Yale University playing football and studying art. After his father's death, he traveled to Montana in 1881, and experienced his first impression of the West. In 1883, he moved to Kansas where he made an unsuccessful attempt at sheep ranching. The year he spent there was the only time he actually made the West his home, although he made many trips out West and occasionally accompanied the U.S. Cavalry on patrol along the Southwest frontier.

Frederic Remington's major paintings were tributes to the Wild West of fantasy. They drew on the artist's experiences for their sense of place and authentic details, but on his imagination for their subject matter. Remington's achievement was to fuse observation and imagination so seamlessly that his contemporaries assumed he had actually witnessed what he portrayed.

Remington had been exhibiting in major art shows since 1888, and was seeking recognition as not just an illustrator, but an artist in the recognized sense of the term. He made the breakthrough he was seeking in 1895 when he turned to sculpting, which he excelled at and which earned him the critical respect for his work that he strived for. He completed twenty-two sculptures, many which became the defining masterpieces of the Western art tradition.

By 1900 Remington had returned to painting and he began to experiment with impressionism. His technique evolved dramatically the last five years of his life as he rejected the crisp linear illustrator style to concentrate on mood, color and light - sunlight, moonlight, and firelight. His later oils are consistent with his conclusion that *his* West was dead. Remington painted impressionistic scenes in which the West, now entirely confined to memory, was invested with a poetry and mystery the present could not touch. He died at the age of 48, a victim of appendicitis.

Adapted from Sid Richardson Museum, online source available November 6, 2006 at:  
[http://www.sidrichardsonmuseum.org/nu\\_site/sid\\_richardson\\_museum.php/museum/remington](http://www.sidrichardsonmuseum.org/nu_site/sid_richardson_museum.php/museum/remington)



## Charles Russell (1864 – 1926)



*Charles Marion Russell in his studio in 1914 painting "When the Land Belonged to God", Photo attributed to North D. Stark, Sid Richardson Museum*

Charles M. Russell was born to moderate wealth. A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Russell first came to Montana as a boy of 16 with a dream of becoming a real cowboy. He was so captivated with the West he chose to stay and fulfill his childhood fantasy.

During those first years in Montana, Russell received great encouragement from Jake Hoover, a mountain man who befriended him and took him under his wing. Hoover often shared his cabin with the young Charlie, sometimes providing food and shelter for months at a time. This friendship allowed Russell to experience the ways of the frontier life he would later portray so vividly in his paintings.

In 1882 Charlie landed a job as a wrangler on a cattle drive. He wrangled for eleven years, and while he was not known for being a good roper or rider, Russell established a local reputation as the affable (some said bone lazy) cowboy who loved to draw and knew how to tell a great story. As a self-taught artist, his sketches were crude but reflected an observant eye, a feel for animal and human anatomy, a sense of humor and a flair for portraying action - all hallmarks of Russell's mature art.

Throughout his years on the range, he witnessed the changing of the West. He saw the bitter winter of 1886-87 end the cattleman's dominion on the northern plains. The days of free grass and unfenced range were ending and, for Russell, the cowboy life was over by 1893.

Prior to his marriage to Nancy Cooper in 1896, only a few of Russell's works had been reproduced nationally. Although he was unsure of his ability to earn a living with his art, Nancy recognized her husband's talent and promise, and provided the business sense and drive that eventually made him one of America's most popular artists. Success did not come easily. Montana offered few opportunities, which eventually led them to New York where contact was established with other artists interested in Western themes. At the very time Frederic Remington was getting out of illustration to concentrate on painting, Russell secured illustrating assignments and began to gain exposure through exhibitions and press coverage. His emergence in the art world came in 1911 with a one man show in New York, followed three years later by an exhibition in London.

Charles Russell felt deeply the passing of the West, the most evident theme of his art. This sense of loss touched him with an emotional immediacy. He was haunted by youthful fantasies, memories of what once was and by the evidence of change that surrounded him as an everyday reality. His work reflected the public demand for authenticity, but also the soul of a romantic.

Adapted from Sid Richardson Museum, online source available November 6, 2006 at:  
[http://www.sidrichardsonmuseum.org/nu\\_site/sid\\_richardson\\_museum.php/museum/russell](http://www.sidrichardsonmuseum.org/nu_site/sid_richardson_museum.php/museum/russell)



“Cowboys”, [between 1892 and 1908?], by H. S. Poley.  
Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library  
Online source on November 2, 2006, available at:  
<http://photoswest.org/cgi-bin/imager?00170216+P-216>





“Cowboys with bucking horse” [1901?], by John C. Hemment  
Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library  
Online source on November 2, 2006, available at:  
<http://photoswest.org/cgi-bin/imager?00105269+NS-269>



“Round up” [between 1900 and 1920], by Louis Charles McClure  
Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library  
Online source on November 2, 2006, available at:  
<http://photoswest.org/cgi-bin/imager?00071848+MCC-1848>

OCT 1870

SCHEDULE 1.—Inhabitants in the Town of Canton, in the County of Saint Lawrence, State of New York, enumerated by me on the 29th day of July, 1870.

Post Office: Marcy N.Y. Reuben H. Spencer, Asst Marshal.

1	2	3	4			7	8		10	11			14	15	16	17	18	19	20
			Age	Sex	Color		Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate		Foreign Birth	Married	Single							
186	186	Remington, Est. P.	36	M	W	White Plains, N.Y.	4500	7500	New York										
		— Robinson	53	F	W	Hempstead			"										
		— Smith	8	M	W				"										
187	187	Thompson, William	49	M	W	Brooklyn, N.Y.	1500	500	"										
		— Lewis	43	F	W	Hempstead			"										
		— Hillman	30	M	W	Brooklyn, N.Y.			"										
		— Erwin	19	M	W	" do "			"										
		— Billie	17	M	W	" do "			"										
		— Allen	15	M	W	" do "			"										
		— Lewis	9	F	W				"										
		— William	8	F	W				"										
		— Jenn	2	F	W				"										
189	189	Spaulding, Eliza	45	F	W	Hempstead	500	1500	"										
		— John	31	M	W	Hempstead			"										
		— Jenn	36	F	W				"										
190	190	Green, Edward	23	M	W	Brooklyn, N.Y.	1200		Brooklyn										
		— Jenn	39	F	W	Hempstead			"										
		— Ellen	14	F	W	At. John			Massachusetts										
		— Mary	12	F	W	do			"										
		— Alice	5	F	W				New York										
		— Jane	3	F	W				"										
		— John	14	M	W				"										
		— Catherine	1	F	W				"										
191	191	Conroy, John	25	M	W	Blacksmith			Brooklyn										
		— Hannah	22	F	W	Hempstead			New York										
		— Montgomery	30	F	W				Brooklyn										
192	192	Cornell, Bridget	38	F	W	Blacksmith			"										
		— Nancy	35	F	W	Hempstead			"										
		— Wallace	5	M	W				"										
		— Virginia	3	F	W				"										
193	193	Stone, Tom	32	M	W	Hempstead	500	300	"										
		— George	7	M	W				New York										
		— James	4	M	W				New York										
194	194	Roberts, Louis	33	M	W	Blacksmith	500	1500	Brooklyn										
		— Lucinda	27	F	W	Hempstead			New York										
		— Sophia	9	F	W				"										
		— Willie	4	F	W				"										
		— Clara	3	F	W				"										
		— Harriet	2	F	W				"										
		— Mary	58	F	W	Brooklyn			Brooklyn										

No. of dwellings, 8. No. of white females, 19. No. of males, foreign born, 1/16,500. 9,500. No. of houses, 8.

\* \* \* \* \*  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 \* \* \* \* \*

United States Federal Census Record, 1870; Canton, Saint Lawrence, New York; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593\_1097, Page 56; National Archives.







STATE: Montana COUNTY: Cascade TOWNSHIP OR OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY: Edwards Robert F. Prager 15 NAME OF INCORPORATED PLACE: Great Falls City ENUMERATED BY ME ON THE 16 DAY OF January 1920. Mrs Marie E. Peck ENUMERATOR

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 187 (91-771) SUPERVISOR'S DISTRICT NO. 2 SHEET NO. 81V 5201

FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1920—POPULATION

NAME OF INSTITUTION

FAMILY NO.	PERSON NO.	NAME	RELATIVE	SEX	AGE	MARRIAGE	CITIZENSHIP	EDUCATION	KNOWLEDGE AND SPEECH		OCCUPATION	KNOWLEDGE AND SPEECH		OCCUPATION
									READ	WRITE		READ	WRITE	
34	1	Clara M. Wood	Wife	F	34	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
34	2	Robert F. Wood	Husband	M	34	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	1	Robert F. Prager	Head	M	38	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	2	Barbara Prager	Wife	F	34	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	3	Richard Prager	Son	M	18	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	4	William Prager	Son	M	15	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	5	Joseph Prager	Son	M	12	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	6	John Prager	Son	M	10	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	7	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	8	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	8	William Prager	Son	M	6	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	9	John Prager	Son	M	4	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	10	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	2	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	11	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	12	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	13	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	14	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	15	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	16	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	17	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	18	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	19	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	20	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	21	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	22	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	23	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	24	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	25	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	26	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	27	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	28	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	29	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	30	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	31	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	32	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	33	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	34	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	35	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	36	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	37	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	38	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	39	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	40	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	41	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	42	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	43	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	44	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	45	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	46	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	47	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	48	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	49	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	50	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	51	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	52	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	53	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	54	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	55	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	56	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	57	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	58	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	59	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	60	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	61	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	62	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	63	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	64	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	65	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	66	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	67	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	68	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	69	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	70	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	71	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	72	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	73	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	74	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	75	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	76	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	77	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	78	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	79	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	80	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	81	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	82	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	83	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	84	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	85	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	86	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	87	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	88	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	89	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	90	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	91	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	92	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	93	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	94	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	95	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	96	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	97	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	98	William Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	99	John Prager	Son	M	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	
413	100	Elizabeth Prager	Daughter	F	1	1	U.S.	12	1	None	None	None	None	

United States Federal Census Record, 1920; Great Falls Ward 4, Cascade, Montana; National Archives Microfilm Publication T625\_968, Page 14A; National Archives.



