



## What Don't You See? The Historical Accuracy of Charles M. Russell Paintings

### Grade Level: 7-12

**Essential Understanding:** Russell and his art personify Montana's romantic perceptions of its past and continue to shape our image of Montana and what it means to be a Montanan.

**Activity Description:** Students will evaluate a Russell painting to decide how accurately it depicts Montana history. After examining what they do see, they will look for what elements Russell left out and hypothesize about why Russell made the choices he did about what to paint. Students will create a brief PowerPoint, comparing and contrasting one of Russell's historical paintings to the reality of the era that painting depicts, and present their findings to the class. After all students have presented, the class will discuss how well Russell's paintings capture Montana history, whether getting the details right is the same thing as painting an accurate picture of an era, and how Russell's depictions of the "Old West" have shaped our view of Montana history and what it means to be a Montanan.

**Time:** 5-7 class periods

**Objectives:** Students will

- Analyze Charles M. Russell's paintings.
- Review nineteenth-century Montana history.
- Develop a thesis.
- Use evidence to support claims.
- Discuss romanticism in western art.
- Create a persuasive PowerPoint presentation.

### Standards

#### Art Content Standards

1.5 Articulate meaning by describing and analyzing artistic choices . . . (by grade 12).

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

#### Common Core Standards

CCRA.R.1 Read closely . . . cite specific textual evidence . . . to support conclusions.

CCRA.R. 2 Determine central ideas or themes . . . summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media.

CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes.

CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently (7-8 grade only).

CCRA.W.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.

CCRA.W.8. Gather relevant information . . . assess the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence . . . to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCRA.SL.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations . . .

CCRA.SL.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats . . .

*(continued)*

## Montana's Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society

### What Don't You See? The Historical Accuracy of Charles M. Russell Paintings (continued)

CCRA.SL.4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence . . . appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays . . .

#### Materials

Images from the *Montana's Charlie Russell* packet or [Russell Images PowerPoint](#)

[Montana's Charlie Russell PowerPoint](#) and script

Textbook images (in a PDF on the packet CD and posted on the web here: <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/Russell/photos.pdf>)

Copies of *Montana: Stories of the Land* (or the ability for students to view the book online at <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/index4>.)

Computers

PowerPoint projector

Painting Analysis Worksheet and Group Instruction Sheets (below)

#### Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Print Group Instruction Sheets (below)
- Print *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole* Instruction Sheet (optional)
- Print Painting Analysis Worksheet (one per student plus eight copies)
- Gather textbooks (at least one book per group, but preferably one book per student)
- Review script and arrange to project [Montana's Charlie Russell PowerPoint](#)
- Arrange to project *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole* (in Russell Images PowerPoint)
- Review the Background Information (below)

**Teaching Note:** Group 2 is asked to do more reading than the other groups, so you may want to assign faster readers to that group.

#### Procedure

##### Part 1

**Step 1:** Present the [Montana's Charlie Russell PowerPoint](#).

**Step 2:** As a class, practice looking closely at a piece of art by using the Painting Analysis Worksheet to analyze *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole*.

**Step 3:** Explain the assignment to your students. Tell the class that they are going to work in groups to evaluate a Russell painting to decide how accurately it depicts Montana history. After examining what they do see, they will look for what elements Russell left out and hypothesize about why Russell made the choices he did about what to paint. They will create a brief PowerPoint, comparing and contrasting one of Russell's historical paintings to the reality of the era that painting depicts, and present their findings to the class.

Let students know that they will be comparing individual paintings to information they gather from the textbook *Montana: Stories of the Land*, particularly the chapter timelines and the images and captions in the book. Note that looking at images, image captions, the timeline, and chapter subheads is an efficient way to gather information without reading the entire chapter, and is a reading strategy worth remembering. Sometimes, of course, it is necessary to read parts of the text as well.

If you wish, model this technique using information from the timeline and images from *Montana: Stories of the Land*, Chapter 4: "Newcomers Explore the Region" (see *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole* Instruction Sheet).

(continued)

## Montana's Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society

### What Don't You See? The Historical Accuracy of Charles M. Russell Paintings (continued)

#### Part 2

**Step 1:** Review the assignment. Although each group's assignment is a little different, all groups will be creating PowerPoints that will answer questions such as:

- How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
- How well does the painting reflect people's actual lives in the period Russell was trying to show?
- What objects/issues/events common to the era does he NOT show in the painting? Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- Did Russell see the scene he painted? If it happened before he came to Montana, how did he decide what to paint? Does this gap in time affect the painting's accuracy?

Remind students that they are **not just analyzing and describing** a painting. They are trying to figure out how accurately it depicts Montana history and why Russell chose to paint some things and not others. Ask students why this matters. Point out that many people get their ideas about the West from painters like Charlie Russell. Was he promoting a myth? The reality? Or both?

**Step 2:** Divide students into seven groups of two to four students. (If you don't have enough students to make seven groups of at least two students, omit Group 5—*The Ambush*).

Give Group 1 the paintings *Indian Hunters Return* and *Inside the Lodge*, copies of the Group 1 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and two copies of the Painting Analysis Worksheet. (Note: This is the only group that will receive two paintings to analyze.)

Give Group 2 the painting *Free Trapper*, the Group 2 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

Give Group 3 the painting *Bronc to Breakfast*, the Group 3 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

Give Group 4 the painting *Toll Collectors*, the Group 4 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

Give Group 5 the painting *The Ambush*, the Group 5 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

Give Group 6 the painting *Laugh Kills Lonesome*, the Group 6 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

Give Group 7 the painting *Caught in the Act*, the Group 7 Instruction Sheet (one for each group member), and the Painting Analysis Worksheet.

**Note:** Information about each painting is provided on the back of the prints in the packet. If you are printing out images from the PowerPoint, make sure you separately print out the "Notes" field and distribute the written information with the packets.

**Step 3:** Have students

1. Analyze their painting (or, in the case of Group 1, paintings) using the Painting Analysis Worksheet.
2. Use the information on the back of the picture and in the textbook to answer the questions on their Group Instruction Sheets.

**Note:** While students DO need to discuss questions 3–5 (or 3–6 in the case of Group 2), they do NOT need to provide full written answers for each timeline item and/or photo caption (though they may wish to take notes). The purpose of these questions is to help them find and analyze evidence that they will use in their PowerPoint presentations.

#### Part 3

**Step 1:** Provide groups with time to create a three- to five-minute PowerPoint.

1. Remind students that the PowerPoint must discuss the accuracy and inclusivity of the historical painting they were assigned.

(continued)

## Montana's Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society

### What Don't You See? The Historical Accuracy of Charles M. Russell Paintings (continued)

2. Remind them that they need a clear thesis. (Sample thesis: "This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.") It would be a good idea to include a slide titled "Thesis" at the beginning of the PowerPoint.
3. Provide them with the URL to access the images from the textbook chapters. (To copy images from the PDF, students will need to *click* on a specific image and then *right click to copy*.) Remind students that these images (along with other information from the textbook) are to be used as evidence to support their thesis.
4. Let them know that they should **compare and contrast** the painting with this evidence to reach their conclusion, and that they should present at least some of these comparisons in their PowerPoint.

**Step 2:** Have each group present its PowerPoint to the class.

#### **Part 4**

**Hold a wrap-up discussion, using some of the following questions.**

- How well do Russell's paintings capture Montana history?
- Is getting the details right (e.g., accuracy in clothing, scenery, and gear) the same thing as painting an accurate picture of an era?
- Why did Russell choose to paint what he did?
- Why did he choose not to paint industrial, modern Montana (e.g., Butte, cars, etc.)?
- How have Russell's depictions of the "Old West" shaped our view of Montana history and what it means to be a Montanan? Are Russell's paintings "romantic," "realistic," or both?





## Group 1 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete Painting Analysis Worksheets for both *Indian Hunters Return* and *Inside the Lodge*.
2. *Indian Hunters Return* and *Inside the Lodge* are set between 1760 and 1860.
  - a. What year did Russell paint these paintings?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen these scenes?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 3 and 5. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in these images? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “Horses and trade goods reach Montana tribes” is represented in Russell’s art. The man in the center of *Indian Hunters Return* is riding a horse and carrying a gun across his back.
4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in these images? (In discussion, list and explain.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “First steamboat arrives in Fort Benton.” Although there is evidence of trade goods (like the iron pot in *Inside the Lodge*), there is no evidence of the transportation network that brought those trade goods to Montana.
5. Examine the following images from Chapters 3 and 5 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.8, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 5.1, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.19.
  - a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text.
  - b. Compare what you see in the images to Russell’s paintings, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on *Indian Hunters Return* and *Inside the Lodge*.
6. Use the original Russell images, relevant images from your textbook, the information from the timeline, and/or any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to the class. Your PowerPoint must
  - a. Include a **clearly stated thesis**. (Sample thesis: “These paintings are/ are not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - b. Address the following questions:
    - What are the paintings about? What time period do they show?
    - When did Russell paint these images? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the dates Russell created the paintings?
    - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE are *Indian Hunters Return* and *Inside the Lodge*?
      - Answer this by **comparing and contrasting** your paintings with the images and information from your textbook. Make sure you use evidence from both Chapters 3 and 5. (**Hint:** You can use the provided images as evidence in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side).

(continued)

- What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in these paintings? Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
  - Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- How well do the paintings reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)
- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scenes in the paintings and the dates Russell created them. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's pictures?



## Group 2 Instruction Sheet

- Complete a Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Free Trapper*.
- Free Trapper* is set around 1830 (between 1807 and 1860).
  - What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
- Read the following sections of *Montana: Stories of the Land* in Chapter 5 (divide this work up so each member of the group reads a different section. Briefly summarize each section to share with the group):
  - British Companies in Western Montana (p. 82–83)
  - Bridge Between Cultures: The Métis in the Fur Trade (p. 83)
  - Caption for Figure 5.7 (p. 84)
  - William Ashley and the Rocky Mountain Trapping System, 1822 (pp. 85–86)
  - The American Fur Company (pp. 86–87)
  - Steamboats Expand the Fur Trade (pp. 87–88)
  - The Trapping Way of Life (88)
  - Women Were Cultural Go-Betweens (p. 89)
  - From Beaver to Bison in Thirty Years (pp. 89–91)
  - The Impact of the Fur Trade on Montana's People (pp. 92–93)
  - Alcohol: Drug of the Century (pp. 93–94)
- As a group, discuss the events and topics described in each of these sections. Which

are represented in *Free Trapper*, and how?

**Example:** Caption 5.7 describes “capotes,” a type of coat worn by Métis men involved in the fur trade (p. 84). The central figure in *Free Trapper* is wearing a capote.

- What realities of this era are NOT represented in *Free Trapper*? (In discussion, list and explain.)

**Example:** “Many mountain men had Indian wives” (p. 88). No women are pictured in *Free Trapper*.

- Examine the following images from Chapter 5 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 5.1, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.19.
  - For each image, read the captions and skim the surrounding text.
  - Compare what you see in the images to *Free Trapper*, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on the Russell painting.
- Use *Free Trapper*, relevant images from your textbook (your teacher will have copies), the information from the timeline, and/or any other evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must
  - Include a **clearly stated thesis**.  
(Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - Address the following questions:
    - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?

(continued)

- When did Russell paint *Free Trapper*?  
Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
  - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
    - Answer this by **comparing and contrasting** your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (Hint: You can use the provided images as *evidence* in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.)
  - What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people who were in Montana at the time are not depicted in this painting?
- Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
  - Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
  - How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)
  - Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?





## Group 3 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete a Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Bronc to Breakfast*.
2. *Bronc to Breakfast* is set between 1850 and 1886.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 6 and 8. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Cattle ranching begins in western Montana” is represented in this painting. The men shown in *Bronc to Breakfast* are open-range cowboys.

4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “First steamboat arrives in Fort Benton.” There is no evidence of a transportation network like steamboats.
5. Examine the following images from Chapters 6 and 8 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.7, 6.11, 6.12, 6.15, 6.16, 6.19, 6.23, 6.24, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.14.

- a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text
- b. Compare what you see in the images to *Bronc to Breakfast*, asking, in each case, how it does, or does not, shed light on the artwork.

**Example: 8.3:** Picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows a well-developed farm with lot of buildings, train tracks, and irrigated fields. It looks very wealthy—the cowboys pictured in *Bronc to Breakfast* were part of a larger money-making project.

6. Use *Bronc to Breakfast*, relevant images from your textbook (your teacher will have copies), the information from the timeline, and/or any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must

- a. Include a **clearly stated thesis**.  
(Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
- b. Address the following questions:
  - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?
  - When did Russell paint *Bronc to Breakfast*? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
  - How **ACCURATE** and **INCLUSIVE** is the painting?
    - Answer this by **comparing and contrasting** your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (**Hint:** You can use the provided images as *evidence* in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side).

(continued)

- What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people, who were in Montana at the time, are not depicted in this painting?
  - Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)
- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?



## Group 4 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete a Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Toll Collectors*.
2. *Toll Collectors* is set between 1850 and 1886.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 7 and 8. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Cattle ranching begins in western Montana” is represented in this painting. *Toll Collectors* shows cowboys bringing cattle to Montana.

4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “Sheep brought to St. Mary’s Mission.” There is no evidence of sheep in the picture.
5. Examine the following images from Chapters 7 and 8 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.9, 7.12, 7.16, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.14.

- a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text.
- b. Compare what you see in the images to *Toll Collectors*, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on the artwork.

**Example:** 8.3: Picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows a well-developed farm with

lot of buildings, train tracks, and irrigated fields. It clearly shows how profitable the cattle industry was. Even if the Indians in *Toll Collectors* get their “toll,” the picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows who the ultimate “winner” was in the larger interaction between the tribes and the cattle barons.

6. Use *Toll Collectors*, relevant images from your textbook, the information from the timeline, and/or any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must
  - a. Include a clearly stated thesis. (Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - b. Address the following questions:
    - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?
    - When did Russell paint *Toll Collectors*? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
    - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
      - Answer this by comparing and contrasting your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (Hint: You can use the provided images as evidence in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.)

(continued)

- What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people who were in Montana at the time are not depicted in this painting?
  - Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)
- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?



## Group 5 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete a Painting Analysis Worksheet for *The Ambush*.
2. *The Ambush* is set between 1850 and 1876.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 7 and 8. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Red Cloud’s War 1866–68” could be represented in this painting. *The Ambush* shows Indians getting ready to attack unidentified white travelers.

4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “Sheep brought to St. Mary’s Mission.” There is no evidence of sheep in the picture.
5. Examine the following images from Chapters 7 and 8 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.9, 7.12, 7.16, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.14.
  - a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text.
  - b. Compare what you see in the images to *The Ambush*, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on the artwork.
 

**Example:** 8.3: Picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows a well-developed farm with

lot of buildings, train tracks, and irrigated fields. It shows what the settlers traveling in the wagon train hoped to achieve.

6. Use *The Ambush*, relevant images from your textbook, the information from the timeline, and any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must
  - a. Include a **clearly stated thesis**.  
(Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - b. Address the following questions:
    - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?
    - When did Russell paint *The Ambush*? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
    - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
      - Answer this by **comparing and contrasting** your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (Hint: You can use the provided images as *evidence* in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.)
    - What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people who were in Montana at the time are not depicted in this painting?

(continued)



- Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was

trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)

- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?



## Group 6 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete a Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Laugh Kills Lonesome*.
2. *Laugh Kills Lonesome* is set between 1860 and 1887.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 8 and 9. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Cattle ranching begins in western Montana” is represented in this painting. The men shown in *Laugh Kills Lonesome* are open-range cowboys.

4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)
- Example:** Timeline event: “Sheep brought to St. Mary’s Mission.” There is no evidence of sheep in the picture.
5. Examine the following images from Chapters 8 and 9 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.14, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.7, 9.9, 9.13, 9.14.

- a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text.
- b. Compare what you see in the images to *Laugh Kills Lonesome*, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on the artwork.

**Example:** 8.3: Picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows a well-developed farm with lot of buildings, train tracks, and

irrigated fields. It looks very wealthy—the cowboys pictured in *Laugh Kills Lonesome* were part of a larger money-making project.

6. Use *Laugh Kills Lonesome*, relevant images from your textbook, the information from the timeline, and/or any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must
  - a. Include a **clearly stated thesis**.  
(Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - b. Address the following questions:
    - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?
    - When did Russell paint *Laugh Kills Lonesome*? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
    - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
      - Answer this by **comparing and contrasting** your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (**Hint:** You can use the provided images as *evidence* in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.)
    - What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people who were in Montana at the time are not depicted in this painting?

(continued)

- Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show? (Hint: What is missing from the painting is as important as what is there.)
- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?



## Group 7 Instruction Sheet

1. Complete Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Caught in the Act*.
2. *Caught in the Act* is set between 1870 and 1887.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timelines in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapters 8 and 11. What Montana events listed on those timelines are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Cattle ranching begins in western Montana” is represented in this painting. The men shown on horseback in *Caught in the Act* are open-range cowboys.

4. What events listed on the timelines are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)
 

**Example:** Timeline event: “Sheep brought to St. Mary’s Mission.” There is no evidence of sheep in the picture.
5. Read the section “Starvation Winter” in *Montana: Stories of the Land*, Chapter 11 (p. 210). Then examine the following images from Chapters 8 and 11 of *Montana: Stories of the Land*: Figures 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.14, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4, 11.5, 11.7, 11.9.

- a. For each image, read the captions and surrounding text.
- b. Compare what you see in the images to *Caught in the Act*, asking, in each case, how it sheds light on the artwork.

**Example: 8.3:** Picture of Grant Kohrs Ranch shows a well-developed farm with lot of buildings, train tracks, and irrigated fields. It clearly shows how profitable the cattle industry was and provides a stark contrast to the starving Indians (and even the working cowboys) in *Caught in the Act*.

6. Use *Caught in the Act*, relevant images from your textbook, the information from the timeline, and/or any other relevant evidence from your textbook (for example, a pull-out quote) to create a PowerPoint to present to your class. Your PowerPoint must
  - a. Include a clearly stated thesis.  
(Sample thesis: “This painting is/is not an accurate portrayal of the time.”)
  - b. Address the following questions:
    - What is the painting about? What time period does it show?
    - When did Russell paint *Caught in the Act*? Approximately how many years elapsed between the time period Russell was trying to show and the date Russell created the painting?
    - How ACCURATE and INCLUSIVE is the painting?
      - Answer this by comparing and contrasting your painting with the images and information from your textbook. (Hint: You can use the provided images as *evidence* in your PowerPoint. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side).

(continued)

- What objects/issues/events common to the era are NOT shown in this painting? What types of people who were in Montana at the time are not depicted in this painting?
- Again, use images and or quotes or timeline events as specific evidence. You may wish to create two-column slides that show both the Russell painting and the textbook evidence side-by-side.
- Why do you think Russell chose not to paint these things?
- How well does the painting reflect the realities of the period Russell was trying to show?
- Earlier, you calculated the number of years between the scene imagined in the painting and the date Russell created it. How do you think this gap shaped Russell's picture?





## *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole* Instruction Sheet (to model for class)

(You do not need to do the exercise in full. Just look at one or two timeline events to show students how it is done.)

1. Complete Painting Analysis Worksheet for *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole*.
2. This painting is set in 1805.
  - a. What year did Russell paint this painting?
  - b. Charles M. Russell (1864–1926) arrived in Montana in 1880. Could he have seen this scene?
3. Look at the timeline in *Montana: Stories of the Land* for Chapter 4. What Montana events listed on the timeline are represented in this image? (In discussion, explain how they are represented.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Horses and guns reach Montana tribes.” Indians are shown riding horses.

4. What events listed on the timeline are NOT represented in this image? (In discussion, list and explain.)

**Example:** Timeline event: “Horses and guns reach Montana tribes.” Indians do not appear to have guns.

5. Examine image 4.6 from Chapter 4 of *Montana: Stories of the Land* and read the caption and surrounding text. Compare this image to *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole* and ask how it sheds light on the artwork. (Possible answer: This painting of the Louisiana Purchase ignores the fact that the land exchanged in the Louisiana Purchase was already occupied. Russell's painting makes it very clear that the area was inhabited by the tribes.)



## Background Information: A Few Ideas to Keep in Mind while Guiding Classroom Discussions

While primary documents—including artworks—provide invaluable information about life in the past, they must always be viewed through a critical lens that takes into account the biases and experiences of the documents' creators. While Russell can generally be given high marks for historical accuracy and authentic portrayals, remember:

- Russell was first and foremost an artist and freely employed artistic license to craft the best possible picture.
- Russell was a superb storyteller in both word and picture. As such, he was more than willing to sacrifice accuracy of detail for the sake of telling a better story.
- Russell was most accurate in portraying cowboy gear. He also maintained a collection of Native American artifacts in his studio from which he modeled the trappings illustrated in his paintings. While he reproduced these items faithfully as he saw them, this does not mean that the artifacts he was using were always accurate in terms of the tribe and era being depicted in his artworks.
- Equally, accuracy in detail does not guarantee that a history painting fully portrays the era in which it is set. As an artist, Russell chose what he wanted to portray. He mourned the passing of the pre-reservation lifeways of Montana Indians and the era of open-range cowboys, so he celebrated these topics in his

paintings while ignoring other aspects of modern life in the West, from industrial mining to corporate control of the cattle industry.

- Many fans maintained that Russell painted only what he knew from firsthand experience. While this is true for some of his paintings, others depict scenes that predated his arrival in the West, so he could not possibly have witnessed them. He was, however, an avid reader of historical accounts and an observant student of works of earlier artists who had personally witnessed such scenes.
- Russell's work became increasingly romantic and nostalgic as he grew older. The Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines *romantic* as being "marked by the imaginative or emotional appeal of what is heroic, adventurous, remote, mysterious, or idealized." Google defines *nostalgia* as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations."

A final thought: A reporter for the New York Times observed in 1911, "It is necessary to remember that historical documents in art mean the record not merely of facts and incidents but of the **spirit** of a vanishing time. Mr. Russell has preserved the spirit of the vanishing old West to a remarkable degree." Those who praised Russell most vocally for the accuracy of his detail were the fellow cowboys who shared his same idealistic vision of the "West That Has Passed."