

# ARTISTS OF THE AMERICAN WEST



## CHRONICLERS OF HISTORY

### SUBJECTS/GRADE LEVEL

Social Studies, Visual Arts

Grades 8-12



## OVERVIEW

Students will examine the influence of artists on society, perceptions of the West, and motivations for both settlement and conservation efforts. Often, students fail to perceive the role that artists have played in history, as well as the legacy of major art figures on today's image of the people, places, and events that forged the American West as a unique region. This lesson traces the roots of the Rocky Mountain school of artists, with a focused analysis of two of the more influential Cowboy artists who established both our modern visions and myths of the working cowboy.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will describe how artists can serve as primary sources through firsthand accounts of historical events, people, and the environment.
- Students will evaluate the lasting impact of major art movements on the growth and development of the American West.
- Students will be able to explain how artists reflect changing societal ideas and perspectives on progress and the conservation of natural resources.
- Students will critique major works of art of the American West, using multiple criteria.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- Why is it important for people to record their history?

### SUPPORTING QUESTIONS

- What role do artists play as chroniclers of history?
- To what extent did artists of the American West influence public policy and the views we hold today?

## OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

8.9.1 Examine the concept of Manifest Destiny as a motivation and justification for westward movement.

8.9.2 C. Compare the motivations and experiences of individuals and groups who seized opportunities of the West, including those engaged in the California Gold Rush, the settlement of Oregon, and the Mormon migration.

8.9.2 D. Describe the consequences of westward expansion, including the impact on American Indian culture, homelands, Tribal sovereignty, and the growing sectional tensions regarding the expansion of slavery in new territories.

OKH.3.2 C Examine the origins and changing perceptions of the American cowboy culture (e.g., dime novels, artwork, motion pictures) versus the reality of the profession and today's image of the West.

## OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

CHP.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

CHP.1.1 Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect cultural characteristics.

CHP.1.3 Describe basic ideas underlying major art movements and their historical periods and attribute works of art to specific artists, cultures, and movements.

ARCM.1 Perceive, analyze, interpret and evaluate artistic work.

## THE 5-E LESSON FORMAT

The five steps of a "5E lesson" are: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate. This model encourages active student learning by first sparking interest, then allowing student-centered exploration, followed by teacher-led explanation, further application of new understandings by students and finally assessment of understanding.

### ENGAGEMENT

*The "Engagement" phase is designed to capture students' attention with relevant questions, real-world scenarios or brief interactive experiences to activate prior knowledge and elicit curiosity about the topic.*

1. Introduce the lesson by posing two guiding questions for students to silently consider. (presentation slide 2).
2. Engage students in a brief analysis of Albert Bierstadt's *Emigrants Crossing the Plains* (slides 3-7) and using the "First Impressions" instructional strategy. (Strategy guidelines included in the lesson.)
3. Ask students to brainstorm observations, creating a class two-column chart of specific details from the painting that seem to reflect reality versus an unrealistic account of this

historic period. Conduct a brief discussion regarding the validity of using artwork as a primary source.

## **EXPLORATION**

*The “Exploration” phase provides students with opportunities to work collaboratively through hands-on investigations actively exploring a concept, gathering information data and making observations from evidence.*

1. Provide students with the “Take a Stand” handout. Share how each statement was made by a significant artist of the 19th century. Provide time for students to react to each statement, forming an opinion (i.e., Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and noting reasoning behind each of their opinions (slide 8).
2. Invite groups of 5-6 students to “take a stand” under the classroom signage that reflects their opinion toward the first statement. Encourage students to explain their reasoning to others. Their goal is to persuade fellow students to change their stance. Repeat the process for as many of the artists’ statements as desired.
3. Engage students in a brief discussion, asking them why artists might often be overlooked as chroniclers of history. Are there reasons to question their work as accurate accounts of the past? What insight might an artist have that the general public or a historian might lack?

## **EXPLANATION**

*During the “Explanation” phase, the teacher provides in-depth explanations and clarifies key concepts related to the topic, often incorporating student-generated observations from the exploration phase.*

1. Use the presentation to engage the class in a brief discussion of the origins of Western American art, including major movements, significant artists and medium (slides 9-45). Pay particular attention to the differences in the pre-Civil War Hudson River School movement and the second generation of Hudson River School artists from the post-war era. In what ways were the works of some artists considered more valid accounts or historical perspectives?
2. Continue to discuss with students about the changing character and image of the West, especially those images traceable to the working cowboy (slides 46-52). Using examples from Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, in what ways did “cowboy” artists impact the public’s perceptions of the West? To what extent can we rely upon their works of art as reliable historical accounts? How did they capture the adventure, challenges and opportunities of the West in ways that still influence our views today?

## **ELABORATION**

*Students during the “Elaboration” phase are expected to return to partnerships or group collaborations, as they apply their deeper understanding of the topic, making connections and formulating answers to essential and supporting questions.*

1. Inform students that they will be working collaboratively as pairs to analyze major works of both Remington and Russell. Each partner will become either a “Remington” expert or a “Russell” expert by dedicated study of two sculptures and two oil paintings by each artist.
2. Prior to beginning collaborative work, remind students of the Essential and Supporting Questions that will guide their investigations (slides 53, 54).
3. Discuss the tools to be used as guides for the analysis of oil paintings (i.e., AIDE strategy, slide 55) and sculpture (i.e., PIE strategy, slide 56).
4. Provide a given time (6-8 minutes) for each student to analyze the works of their assigned artist. Encourage students to make thorough notations of their observations for each piece of artwork.
5. Encourage partners to informally share their observations and conclusions with each other. To what extent do they think Remington and Russell should be considered “chroniclers” of history?

## EVALUATION

*The “Evaluation” phase assesses individual student learning, which can be achieved through multiple formats beyond traditional tests or quizzes. For example, questioning, discussion, creative products, etc. can be effectively used to gauge comprehension.*

1. Evaluate student understandings by asking each partnership to read the article “Remington and Russell Retold.” Using factual information from the article, as well as from their own investigations, ask partnerships to identify three significant ways in which each artist, their background, experiences or their work was unique. Challenge partners to identify two aspects about the artists’ personalities, backgrounds or work they shared in common.
2. Using the Venn diagram (sample on slide 57), ask partnerships to note their conclusions and share with the class. What did they discover about the influence artists can have on history and our modern views?
3. To close the lesson, conduct a classroom viewing of three short videoclips produced by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum (Links are provided in “Instructional Resources”). Ask students if they were producers of these videos, what would be one addition they would propose in order to answer the Essential and/or Supporting Questions.

## OPTIONAL EXTENSION

Return to the “Take a Stand” engagement activity. Invite volunteers to stand under appropriate classroom signage and justify their opinion. Did anyone’s opinion change? If so, what and why?

## INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- “Art of the American West: Chroniclers of History” PowerPoint
- First Impressions (teacher’s guide)
- Take a Stand (one copy per student)
- Classroom Signage; Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
- Set of photographs: Russell and Remington oil paintings and sculptures (one per pair of students)
- AIDE analysis form (one per student)
- PIE analysis form (one per student)
- *Remington and Russell Retold* article from the Sid Richardson Museum (one copy per student)
- Venn Diagram: Comparing the Masters of Western American Art (one copy per pair of students)
- Videoclips:
  - Emigrants Crossing the Plains. <https://youtu.be/sw53Mlg3H6k>
  - Frederic Remington the Sculpture [https://youtu.be/ulelBHKBq\\_A](https://youtu.be/ulelBHKBq_A)
  - The Cowboy Artist Charles Russell <https://youtu.be/dloq2pOelnk>

