LESSON PLAN

Pastels on the Range
Inspired by Charles Marion Russell’s Range Mother (A Serious Predicament)
Created by Carey Hernandez, artist/instructor at Joslyn Art Museum
Grade Level 5-12

Overview
Learn ways to work with pastels and create a western landscape with mesas, canyons, and gentle hills just like you might encounter out West.

Anticipatory Set
Show the reproduction of Range Mother (A Serious Predicament) by Charles Russell. Ask if anybody has traveled out West. How is the landscape different from the green hills of Iowa (reference Grant Woods, Stone City, Iowa)? What colors do you see in Range Mother? What textures do you notice? What action do you see? How much sky do you see?

Objectives
- Students will create a Western landscape using pastels.
- Students will gain knowledge about pastel techniques.
- Students will learn how to create perspective in a landscape and how to draw mesas, buttes, and canyons.

Resources
- Joslyn Art Museum's Charles Marion Russell teaching poster*
- Brian W. Dippie, Remington & Russell: The Sid Richardson Collection book*
- Peter H. Hassrick, Charles M. Russell book*
- Grant Wood, Stone City, Iowa reproduction or teaching poster*

Supplies
- Black 12” x 18” construction paper
- Pencils
- Black Oil Crayons
- Pastels (dry chalks)
- Baby Wipes
- Newsprint to transport artwork home
- Spray Fixative (optional, but needs to be done outside)

Vocabulary
- Scumbling
- Warm/Cool Colors
- Blending
- Perspective
- Foreground
- Middle Ground
- Background

Lesson Outline
1) Present students with some images of Western Landscapes. Have them point out features of the landscapes. Note the colors used in the land (warm) and colors for the sky (cool).

2) Hand out black paper and demonstrate how to draw the landscape with pencil. Start with a straight horizon line going across the upper third of the paper. Add another line just above the horizon line that will be bumpy; this line will be a mesa or butte off in the distance. Then add another bumpy line below the straight horizon line; this line can run across the whole paper or can be more c-shaped in one section. Add craggy vertical lines for details and scrubby plants and grasses.
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3) Go over all pencil lines with black oil crayon. This creates sections that are easy to blend and is a touch clue for the students to know when a section ends and blending should end.

4) Use pastels (dry chalks) to color in the landscape. Use mostly warm colors for the land and mostly cool colors for the sky. Encourage the use of 2–3 colors in each section to give depth. Demonstrate how to use just one finger to blend and not the whole hand. Use baby wipes to clean hands in-between colors.

5) After blending, demonstrate how to use line and scumbling to create details in the foreground.

6) Go back over black oil pastel again to create contrast.

7) (Optional) Use spray fixative to lightly coat each drawing to keep the pastels from smearing. Because of fumes, it is best to clip the drawings and spray outside or in an area with adequate ventilation. An alternative is to spray with cheap aerosol hairspray, but this is not archival.

Extensions

• This lesson can easily be adapted for younger grades by simply having the students create three wavy lines for the landscape and drawing a sun or moon in the sky. Use warm colors for the land and cool for the sky or vice versa.

• Add action to the landscape by drawing cowboys or animals and collaging these elements into the composition.

• Connect to the habitat of the land and use plants and animals one might find in the high plains or high desert.

Academic Standards
Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers [select Lesson Plans, then Art of the American West]

About the Artist

Charles Marion Russell was born March 19, 1864, in St Louis, Missouri. Rather than studying at school, the young artist daydreamed of the West. In 1880 Russell’s parents gave him permission to move to Montana to work on a sheep ranch, hoping that the experience would cure him of his obsession with the West. Russell was not fond of working with sheep but he was determined to stay in Montana. He found a new job as a night herder. With his watercolors and sketching supplies in a sock, he spent the daylight hours documenting life around him before working in the evenings.

During the harsh winter of 1886–1887, Russell worked on a ranch in central Montana’s Judith Basin. The owner wrote a letter to the ranch foreman asking how the cattle had fared in the devastating conditions. The foreman responded by sending a watercolor Russell created called Waiting for a Chinook (a warm front). The ranch owner, impressed by the postcard, showed it to acquaintances and it was displayed in a shop window in Helena. The artwork on view brought attention to Russell, who began to receive commissions at a steady rate.

Russell lacked a business sense and did not know how to promote his work, which resulted in working on small local commissions barely making enough money to live. In 1895 he met and, eleven months later, married Nancy Cooper, who served as his business manager and secured regular commissions to sustain the couple. In 1920, his health began to fail, and Russell died of a heart attack on October 24, 1926, at his home in Great Falls.

IMAGE: Charles Marion Russell, c. 1900, black and white photographic print, unidentified photographer, c. 1865–1957, Archives of American Art, aaa_charscrs_4343