

Frederic Remington (1861-1909)

Props	Costume
2 books 5 pictures Elements of Art poster Value of Line in a Drawing” poster	1. Cowboy Hat 2. Wear plaid shirt 3. Wear blue jeans

The artist in today’s lesson is an American who is credited with preserving the Old West in his illustrations, painting, sculptures, and fiction and non-fiction writings. His work is partly responsible for shaping how we imagine the Old West to have been.

Let’s use your imaginations now to picture yourself in the Old West. Are you a Native American scout surveying the surrounding plains from the back of a pony? Or are you a cowboy straining to maintain balance astride a bucking bronco? Can you imagine a herd of longhorn cattle stampeding across the plains? What about a regiment of cavalry pursuing a band of renegades? Life in the Old West was different from any place else in America.

Native Americans lived in North America first, thousand of years before the United States was established. In general, they were not war-like: rather, they lived in harmony with nature. They were nomadic, (which means they did not live in one place but moved around) following herds of buffalo, and when they killed a buffalo, they used all of it for food, tools, weapons, clothes and shelter.

Many people from Europe were coming to the US, and when they came they landed in the eastern part of the US. As the population increased, people began to move west. With the westward movement of this growing population, buffalo herds were killed for sport by the American hunters, destroying the Native American’s way of life. What do you think the normally peaceful Native Americans might have done when this happened? (They became aggressive and hostile, which resulted in increased conflicts between Native Americans and the pioneers.) The Native Americans were eventually outnumbered and could not survive as the buffalo populations almost disappeared. The Native Americans were forced onto limited areas of land called reservations set aside by the US Government for them.

The artist, who loved the Old West and chronicled the changes of “the last frontier”, was Frederic Remington. He was born in Canton, New York, in 1861, the year the Civil War began. His father was a newspaperman who was a cavalry officer during the war. After the war his father came home and trained horses. Fred grow up around horses and stories of cowboys and Indians and the cavalry.

Remington attended the art school at [Yale University](#), the only male in the freshman year. However, he found that football and boxing were more interesting than the formal art training, particularly drawing from casts and still life objects. He preferred action drawings. His father died in 1880, while he was at Yale. This gave him the excuse to leave school and seek the western adventures he had always dreamed of. At the age of 19 he wandered around the West, including Montana, Texas, the Dakotas and Indian Territory, and worked at different times as a cowboy, rancher, military scout, hunter and trapper, prospector, and saloon owner. None of these jobs was he very successful at.

He was also surprised on how tamed and settled parts of the West had become. Remington had images of huge herds of buffalo on the plains and tribes of proud, free Native Americans, planted in his mind from early childhood stories. When he discovered the frontier was vanishing he decided to preserve it through his art, create a record of the way of living that was dying out in the American West. He finally returned home in 1886 to study painting at the Art Student's League in New York.

His career began when Harper's Weekly commissioned him to illustrate a battle in the Indian War led by Geronimo (was a Native American, leader of the Apache people, who fought in the Indian War against the United States and Mexico, who wished to expand their territory into the Apache tribal lands.) His illustrations were published in most of the popular magazines in the late 1880's and 1890s. Most of his art he created for reproduction in books and magazines used black and white media: pen and ink, ink wash and gouache (*goo-ash*.) (Opaque watercolor) and black and white oil paint. (Show some of the illustration from *Remington the Years of Critical Acclaim*) He was a prolific writer and specialized in tales of high adventure in the West. His magazine articles were collected into books, and he also published works of fiction.

During the Spanish-American War, Remington worked in Cuba as a reporter sending pictures and information back to the newspapers and magazines in the United States. He sketched and later painted a scene from the war depicting his good friend, Lt. Col. Teddy Roosevelt, leading his troops in a gallant charge up San Juan Hill (Exhibit 1). Roosevelt, who later became the 26th president of the United States, was an avid outdoors man like Remington, and even commissioned him to illustrate a book he wrote on the West.

The breakthrough in his art came when he turned to sculpting, which he excelled at and which earned him the critical respect for his work that he strived for. He is perhaps most famous for his sculpture called "Bronco Buster". More castings have been made of this piece than any other. (Exhibit 2) This was cast in bronze on his 34th birthday. In 1895. (Show some of the sculptures from *Remington the Years of Critical Acclaim*).

Remington's favorite themes were the horse and the struggle, which could be man vs. man, or man vs. Nature, or man vs. animal. Remington wanted to depict action. His focus was firmly on the people and animals of the West, with landscape usually of secondary importance. Let's look at today's painting entitled "Dismounted: The 4th Troopers Moving." What do you see first? (Horses, action, dust, excitement, struggle)

The scene shows selected sharpshooters (on the far left) remaining behind to engage the enemy while the main body of soldiers moves on to a new position, taking the sharpshooters' horses with them for safety. Everything is speed and excitement, determination and energy. Look at the horses. Each horse has its own shape, color and personality. Remington grew up with horses and learned to ride as a young boy. Look at the details in the bridles and saddles. Note the power in the horses' legs. See the tired, unshaven, sunburned faces of soldiers

Now let's think about the four elements of composition. (Show Poster) Which of these elements do you think was most important in Remington's art? Let's talk about line for a moment. (Hold up the "Value of Line in a Drawing" poster.) A vertical line conveys strength; think of a tall tree. A horizontal line communicates rest or repose, such as a lake or prairie. A curved line conveys beauty; imagine the curve of a mountain against the setting sun. A slanting line communicates action. Which one of these do you think is Remington's spatiality? (Slanting line.) His paintings are narratives – that means they tell stories; sometimes full of action, sometimes full of suspense. Look at "A Peril of the Plains" and "The

Lost Warrior” (Exhibit 3). He uses the slanted line almost exclusively. Can’t you just feel the danger and excitement in these pictures?

Remington had two sides of his personality. He lived most of his life in the East in an elegant home and had many famous friends. He enjoyed fine food and fashionable clothes. The other person loved to take trips out West and live in some of the roughest spots in the West.

He liked to sketch and draw when traveling in the West, but waited until he was home in New York to paint and write his stories. He had a large collection of materials – saddles, boots, uniforms – that he brought from his trips and used to help him recreate his time in the West. We can see this in a photograph of Remington painting in his studio (Exhibit 4)

While Remington loved sculpture, he returned to painting by 1900 and began to experiment in Impressionism. (Who can name other Impressionist artist?) His technique changed greatly the last five years of his life. He rejected the crisp linear illustrator style of his early days to concentrate on mood, color and light – sunlight, moonlight and firelight. His later oil paintings were consistent with his conclusion that the West was dead. So he painted impressionistic scenes in which the West, now entirely confined to his memory, was shadowy, subtle and undefined. Look at some of his later pictures and you can see that it has a very different look and feel. (Exhibit 5 and *Remington the Years of Critical Acclaim* “later work”)

Remington died of acute appendicitis the day after Christmas in 1909. He was 48. He wanted his epitaph to read “He Knew the Horse.” Do you think he did? He left behind some 2,800 drawings and paintings, 25 bronze sculptures, illustrations in 41 different magazines and in 142 books, in addition to 13 books that he authored. Today the largest collection of his work can be found in the Frederic Remington Art Museum in Ogdensburg, New York. Frederic’s widow, Eva, and her sister, Emma, lived at the museum from 1915 through 1918, when Eva herself died. Most of the museum’s work came from Eva’s estate.

Frederic Remington was America’s most popular Western artist at the end of the 19th century. Today he comes under some criticism for romanticizing the life of the cowboy but still his work is responsible for the way we view the Old West in movies, television and books. Remington, did what he set out to do, preserve the images of Old West for the future.

Geronimo

The [501st Parachute Infantry Regiment](#)'s [motto and slogan](#) was named after him. In 1940, the night before their first mass jump, U.S. paratroopers at [Fort Benning](#) watched the 1939 film *Geronimo*, in which the actor playing Geronimo yells his name as he leaps from a high cliff into a river, depicting a real-life escape Geronimo successfully attempted in which he jumped off Medicine Bluff at [Fort Sill, Oklahoma](#), into the Medicine Creek with his Cadillac horse. Private Aubrey Eberhardt announced he would shout the name when he jumped from the airplane to prove he was not scared. The trend has since caught on elsewhere, becoming widely associated with any sort of high jump in popular culture. This unit was the first parachute battalion of the [United States Army](#).