



Revised 12/3/2024

## Montana's Charlie Russell PowerPoint Script – Elementary

1. Cover slide [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
2. Charlie Russell lived a long time ago, but he is still one of Montana's best-loved artists. People liked him not only because he was a good artist, but also because he was a good storyteller and a good friend. His paintings show us what life in Montana was like many years ago. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
3. Charlie was born in 1864. *As a class, figure out how many years ago that was.* He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, a big city located many hundreds of miles from Montana, but—like Great Falls and Fort Benton—it is also located on the Missouri River. *Ask: Can you find Great Falls, Montana, on the map? How about St. Louis, Missouri?* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
4. When Charlie was a boy, St. Louis was known as the “gateway to the **frontier**.” This meant that most people traveling west from the eastern part of the country started their trip in St. Louis. Often they traveled by steamboat, like this one, up the Missouri River to get to Montana and other places along the way. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
5. Charlie's family owned many businesses. They lived on what had been a large farm, or **plantation**. Their home was called Oak Hill, and this is a picture that Charlie painted of Oak Hill. He grew up playing with his four brothers, one sister, and many cousins. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#). And, even as a boy, Charlie always loved horses. *This is a picture that Charlie drew after he was grown. Do you think that the cowboy and the horse are good friends?* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
6. Young Charlie also liked to draw and make models. He drew on everything—including the steps of his house—and he even got in trouble for drawing in his books at school. He also made small horses and other animals out of clay and wax. His father entered some of Charlie's models in the local fair, and the models were so good that Charlie won ribbons for them. *Ask: How many of you have entered something in the fair? What was it? Did you win?* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
7. Charlie also loved reading books. He especially liked stories that told about people having adventures in the West. When he was very young, he wanted to be a pirate when he grew up. Then he read books about **mountain men** living in the Rocky Mountains and decided that is what he wanted to be instead. *Ask: Does anyone know what a mountain man was? Answer: Mountain men hunted, trapped, and explored in wild areas, like the mountains of Montana, far away from towns. They hunted and trapped wild animals to make a living. They lived a long time ago (most common ca. 1810–1880).* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
8. What Charlie did not like was school. While he loved reading stories about the West, he never learned to write very well, and he often got in trouble with his teachers. Today we think that Charlie had a learning disability (dysgraphia—a disability that causes difficulty with written expression), but doctors didn't know about such problems back then. Charlie would skip school every chance he got, and often when he “played hooky,” he would go  
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down to the waterfront to listen to the stories told by travelers and boat workers.

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9. At some point, Charlie decided that Montana was where he wanted to live. At that time, Montana was not even a state yet. It became a **territory** in 1864, the same year Charlie was born. Before that, very few non-Indian people lived in, or even visited, Montana, but Native Americans had lived in the area for thousands of years.  
[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
10. When Charlie was fifteen years old, his mom and dad finally agreed to let him travel to Montana. His parents knew that life on the frontier could be very hard, so they hoped that living there would cure him of his dream to be a mountain man. They hoped he would return home to work in the family businesses, but Charlie never did.  
[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
11. Charlie traveled west with a friend of his father's. He didn't get to take a steamboat like he always thought he would. Instead, he came by train and stagecoach. When he got to the Judith Basin in the central part of Montana Territory, he learned that his first job would be tending sheep. He didn't like watching over the sheep and, after he'd been on the job only a little while, he got mad and quit. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
12. Luckily for Charlie, he was taken in by a mountain man named Jake Hoover. Charlie loved staying with Hoover, and the older man taught him many things he needed to know about living on the frontier.  
[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
13. After he'd been in Montana for two years, Charlie got his first job as a cowboy. He worked as a night wrangler; it was the night wrangler's job to watch the horse herd at night while the other cowboys slept. This meant that Charlie had to work all night and sleep during the day. When he wasn't sleeping, he had time to watch the other cowboys and draw pictures of what they were doing. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
14. The Judith Basin, where Russell worked as a cowboy, was home to many Métis people. The Métis were the descendants of French and Scottish fur traders and Indian women, who developed a culture and language of their own. They were known for their multicolored, finger-woven bands. Charlie loved everything relating to the Old West, and he adopted the Métis sash as a personal trademark.  
[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
15. During the time he was working as a cowboy, Charlie drew pictures whenever he could. He always carried a sock that held pencils, watercolors, and paintbrushes. He drew on whatever paper he could find. In addition to drawing, Charlie loved to tell funny stories. And his friends liked his stories even better than they liked his art. They also liked him because they knew he was a good friend—they could count on him to help if they ever got in trouble or needed anything. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
16. Charlie worked as a cowboy for ten years, but he really wasn't very good at it. When Charlie was twenty-nine years old, he decided to quit being a cowboy and work full-time as an artist. While he was already better than average, at this point in his career he was not yet a great artist. It would take him many years of practice and lots of hard work . . . [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
17. . . . before he could paint masterpieces like this. Charlie was self-taught as an artist. This means that he learned on his own by studying the works of other artists that he saw in books and magazines. He paid close attention to the subjects that he wanted to draw (like working cowboys), he read books about history, and he practiced and practiced.  
[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
18. Although he was self-taught, Charlie also got help. Once he started to get famous,

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he became friends with other artists who gave him advice on how to become better. And, most importantly, his wife Nancy helped him by working as his business manager. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)

19. Charlie liked to draw and paint and entertain his friends. But he didn't like to ask people to pay money for his paintings. And he didn't like to make arrangements to hang his paintings in art galleries where they could be sold. Nancy became very good at these jobs. Because she handled all of Charlie's business for him, he became much more famous than he ever would have on his own. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
20. Charlie painted and sculpted Montana scenes for forty-six years. While his art shows many different subjects, mostly he is famous for three things. First, pictures of cowboys. Charlie's paintings tell stories about cowboy life on the open range, before people put up fences. Many of his paintings are full of action and excitement, and they show cowboys hard at work. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
21. Sometimes Charlie's paintings are funny, too, just like the stories that he told. Ask: *What do you think is happening in this picture?* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
22. Even though Charlie painted lots of pictures of cowboys, he made even more paintings of Native Americans. He had great respect for Indians, whom he described as "the only true Americans," because they lived here long before non-Indians started moving here from other parts of the world. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
23. Charlie liked to show all aspects of Indian life, ranging from men hunting and fighting to women moving camp and cooking food. This painting shows a typical camp scene. The man is seated on the ground, smoking a pipe. The woman bending over is cleaning a buffalo hide. Ask: *What do you think the woman wrapped in the red blanket is looking at?* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
24. And, Charlie spent time carefully watching Montana's wildlife and drawing pictures and making models of what he saw. He believed that "Ma Nature" could produce works that were far more beautiful than anything made by humans. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
25. Charlie and Nancy owned a cabin, called Bull Head Lodge, in Glacier National Park. You can see the cabin—with Charlie and Nancy and some friends standing on the porch—in the photograph on the left. One of his favorite things about spending time there was watching wildlife, like these playful bears, in their natural **habitat**. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
26. One reason people loved Charlie's paintings was because they told stories. People loved getting letters from Charlie for the same reason. Writing was a real chore for the Cowboy Artist (remember he probably suffered from a learning disability that made the act of writing difficult). So his letters were short, but they were almost always illustrated. *What do you think this letter is about? Can you guess who is in the picture? (It is Russell himself wearing his trademark sash.)* Here's part of what he wrote: "I have just returned from the glasier ... They say the trail has been improved a lot since you were up. That may be but it will need sum more fixen before the goats are troubled with autoes." [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
27. Charlie often illustrated his letters with self-portraits that poked fun at himself. *What do you see in the illustration that would make you think that Charlie's ride might have been difficult? (Charlie's hair and clothing are messy, his sash has come undone, and the goat has stepped on his hat.)* [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)
28. Charlie always liked Montana better than anyplace else, but what he really loved best was Montana the way it was when he

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

### PowerPoint Script – Elementary (continued)

first moved there as a very young man. As he grew older, he disliked modern changes—like cars, or “skunk wagons,” as he called them—and his paintings became more and more **nostalgic**. That means that he focused most on his happy memories and painted pictures that showed life the way he remembered it.

[ADVANCE SLIDE](#)

29. Charlie lived a long time ago, but because he loved Montana so much, Montanans still love him. We proved our respect for Charlie by putting a statue of him in our national capitol in Washington, D.C., where he stands tall with heroes from all the other states. [ADVANCE SLIDE](#)

30. The End.