

## Tales To Tell

**Artist:** U. Grant Speed (193- ) Lindon, Utah

**Title:** *Ropin' out the Best Ones* 1984

**Media:** bronze cast

**Size:** 19-1/2" x 34-1/4" x 17"

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Grant Speed is one of the nation's top western sculptors. He developed his interest in the west and "cowboyin'" quite naturally. He was born in San Angelo, Texas, in 1930, and spent his summers and post-high school years working as a cowboy.

There was little evidence in Speed's early years to indicate his life would become that of an artist. He spent his summers learning to ride and to rope on his uncle's ranch. Soon, he was working on neighboring ranches and became an accomplished horse breaker. When he grew older, he put his cowboying talents to work as a rodeo rider.

When Speed was 18, he joined the U.S. Air Force for two years. During the next seven years he worked as a cowhand and rodeo rider, completed a three-year mission for his church, and attended college. He married Sue Collins in 1958 (they have three children). Speed received his Bachelor of Science degree in "Animal Science" from Brigham Young University in 1959 and supported his family as an elementary school teacher-living in Provo and working in Salt Lake City. But all the while he was working, Speed says he was thinking about art. "Having come from conservative West Texas, I really wanted to be the world's best cowboy. Yet every time I got a chance to be around any kind of western art, I couldn't stop reading about it, looking at it and studying it."

When he started working at sculpture, he first did a model with some of his daughter's school clay-red and gray and green all mixed together. "Would you believe that when I seriously started working on my art, no one knew about it except my wife. Every time someone came to the door, I would grab my stuff and hide it."

The first serious sculpture Speed did was in an art class at BYU. He had it cast and gave the first of the ten casts to his wife. The other nine sold immediately. This success was a serious incentive for the would-be sculptor. He recalls,

"for about eight years I didn't hardly get any sleep because I taught school all day and worked on art all night . . . I'm not talking about till just 12 o'clock, I'm talking about until two or three in the morning. And then I got up at 6:30 and went to teach school. I probably did twelve to fifteen years of work in the first eight. It took dedication and intensity in knowing that, boy, you've made up your mind to do it now."

After eight years Speed quit his teaching job to devote his life full time to art.

Grant Speed's work and career have grown steadily since those days in the 1960s. In 1965 he joined a group of western artists, "The Cowboy Artists of America "(CAA). He has served several times as president of this group and has won many awards for his work.

His more well-known commissions include a monumental sculpture of Charles Goodnight for the Pan Handle Plains Museum of Canyon, Texas, and one of rock and roll pioneer Buddy Holly for Lubbock, Texas. An edition of Speed's Keepin' an Eye on the Riders was chosen by BYU as a gift to Jimmy Stewart, when he was honored by the university in 1985. Speed created a lifesize horse and rider monument depicting Texas Tech University's Mascot, "The Red Raider," in 1990. In addition to completing commissions, Grant Speed continues to exhibit extensively throughout the West.

Speed characterizes his work as "Loose Realism." His work is full of passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter, born out of his own experience. His sculpture also speaks of a love for the medium and the process, with an aggressive use of texture and delightful exploration of the possibilities of clay and bronze. Dr. Vern Swanson, director of the Springville Museum of Art, terms Speed a Cowboy Western Impressionist and says Ropin' Out the Best Ones is a "pure action piece in technique and subject."

Speed enjoys the results of the sculpture process, saying "It's my feeling that each bronze is an original, because in any edition none of the sculptures are exactly the same." His fellow artists recognize Grant not only as an artist but also as a man of deep character and quiet faith.

Today, Grant Speed and his family live in Lindon, Utah. He comments that it's a good life, though he admits "sometimes I'd really rather be Cowboyin !"

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## **SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)**

When do you think this dramatic scene took place? Why? What clues does Mr. Speed give you? Where does this scene take place? Clues? Could this same scene take place at another time? In another place? How long do you think people have been taking care of cows or herding other animals? (Alta Mira and Lascaux cave paintings c. 15,000 BC)  
What other artists have made art about working cowboys?

Do you think that a sculpture like this is more interesting because you live out here in the West, in cattle country? What different attitudes would you have about cowboys if you had been born and raised in New York City? Do you know any real working ranchers? How do you feel about the cowboys you know? Does it affect how you feel about Grant Speed's sculpture? In what way? Do you think there is a problem with looking at a two-dimensional image of a three-dimensional sculpture?

Of these elements "line, shape, value, and texture" which do you think is the most important? What is there most of? Do you like how the artist used that element? Why? What would you have done to make it better?

## ACTIVITIES

### Art

**Objective:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of basic art criticism and a basic critical model by writing a critique for a supposed audience.

Show students the image of Grant Speed's sculpture and briefly go over a simple, four-step critical model encouraging individual students to answer each question differently.

THE MODEL (first make sure you label the work by artist, title, medium, and date.)

1. What do you see? (visual elements, principles, and subject matter) [description]
2. How was it done? [technical process]
3. What do you think the artist was trying to say? [meaning]
4. How do you feel about this work? [evaluation]

Have students choose another work of western art to critique. Look for Charlie Russell, Fredric Remington, Harry Pollack, or others including artworks from past Educator Evenings packets.

Students should then write a short critique comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the two works, finding similarities and differences. If your class is young, you may want to limit the critique to a class discussion.

## Art

**Objective:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the sculpture process by designing and producing a sculpture with a landscape base and multiple figures engaged in some aggressive activity. (gesture)

Western art is full of the motif of dramatic action plays in sculpture. (Show students works of Grant Speed, Fredric Remington, also Auguste Rodin's *Bergers of Callais*, Frederick Hart's *Viet Nam Memorial*.) Brainstorm ideas of what type of action the humans and/or animals might be doing. As students get ideas and briefly share them, give them paper to draw the idea. When the drawing is finished, with figures and landscape, give students their sculptural material. If you choose ceramic clay as the medium, remind students the clay must be "pinky thick" (about 1/4"), no more and no less. Clay can appear to be thicker by making a shape that is hollow. Start with a "pinky thick" slab of clay the size necessary for this project. This will be the base. First build the landscape. Remember to score and slip each piece of clay to make them stick together. Make sure to leave "breathing holes" in the bottom of each piece.

After pieces are dried and fired they can be glazed or painted (watercolor and acrylic spray) or they can use a wax-based encaustic (shoe polish), which minimizes color and emphasizes texture. Make sure these pieces are exhibited. (Stories describing the action scenario can be written as a form of processing). Don't be afraid to allow young children to create sculpture, their inhibition often allows them to create exciting artworks. If you do not have much practice working with clay, get someone to show you the techniques needed. You may also be able to get a parent, another teacher, or a high school or college student to help you with this activity.

## Art

**Objective:** The students will explore the use of Crayola WET SET or other kinds of malleable materials in portraying EVENTS.

Show the students the slide of *Ropin' Out the Best Ones* and a selection of other artworks that depict events. If possible, include some primitive art.

After discussing some of the ways art can portray events, have the students choose an event to portray using WET SET or some other moldable material. The students should plan their artworks using thumbnail sketches.

Some ideas they may want to consider making are the following:

- a relief or a set of tiles
- a retablo
- an individual sculpture
- small sculptures to be used with other media in a diorama
- petroglyphs
- a set of 3-D symbols

WET SET is a new Crayola clay product that sets up when immersed in water for several hours and does not need firing. The product takes texture and joins easily, and thus, can be used for delicate, complex shapes. The hardened sculptures can be painted. Complete directions are included with each box of clay.

If you choose to use ceramic clay, read the following information:

### **Helpful Hints When Working With Clay**

- Clay should always be wedged before using.
- Clay should always be kept moist. Store it in a sealed plastic bag.
- When attaching two pieces of clay together, always score (scratch) and slip between both clay surfaces.
- Clay projects should always be allowed to dry gradually to prevent cracking.
- Dry clay, not fired, is called greenware.
- After clay has been fired in the kiln, it is called bisqueware.
- Bisqueware is then glazed and fired again in the kiln.
- Or, bisqueware can be painted with acrylic paints and sprayed with a matte, clear sealer.

### **Making clay tiles or relief sculptures:**

Roll clay into slabs using wooden sticks 1/4" to 1/2" thick as guides for an even thickness of slabs.

Cut edges of the clay using a yard stick and a needle tool.

Use a carpenter's framing square to make sure tiles are cut at a 90 degree angle.

Decorative impressions can be made into moist clay with tools. (Small gears, end of thread spool, buttons, scissor handles, impressions of weeds, flowers, leaves, etc.)

Draw in the clay with a not-too-sharp pencil or other tools.

Thin or small shapes can be applied to the tiles by scoring and slipping.

Let the tiles dry slowly before firing.

When firing, spread a thin layer of silica sand on the kiln shelf before loading the tile.

This will help keep the tiles from warping and cracking during firing.

Tiles can be used individually, in small groups, or for murals.

For directions for making a Retablo, see UTAH MULTICULTURAL CRAFTS 1996, Activities for Jeronimo Lozano

The Crayola Model Magic Dimensional Learning Series MATH K-3 (1994) has great ideas for using Model Magic shapes for math activities. These same ideas could be used to spark ideas for uses in art or for the use of WET SET in Math.

## **Art**

**Objective:** The students will demonstrate their understanding of the depiction of events in art by discussing and by making a depiction of a sequential event.

Show the students the slides of *Ropin' Out the Best Ones*, *Lizard Relay*, *Deacon Jones' Experience* from this packet.

Discuss how the artist has depicted an event by choosing one moment to illustrate, rather than the whole sequence of events. Ask the students what they do not know about the events in the artworks such as whether all the lizards got away, or whether the cowboy was able to get the horses he wanted roped and back to the ranch okay.

Ask the students how art could depict a whole event. After the students have suggested some ways, assign them to create an artwork that depicts the sequence of happenings in an event. You may want to limit the students to one way of showing sequence or you may give the students several of the choices they identified.

Have the students choose an event from their own life to illustrate, or tie the activity to another area of your curriculum or to another subject area by using an event from a selection of literature, from Social Studies, or Science, or by depicting a scene from a drama. See the 1997 Crayola DREAM-MAKERS' packet for more ideas on how to depict sequential events.

## **History/Geography/Anthropology**

**Objective:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the "Herdsman" cowboy tradition as expressed by many different cultures throughout the world and spanning the history of the human experience by producing a research paper about a specific culture and its tradition concerning the raising and herding of cattle.

Using works of art depicting the American cowboy, lead the students in a discussion about the cowboy experience in American past, present, and future. Introduce the idea that humans have been having a relationship with bovines at least as long as the age of the cave paintings of Alta Mira and Lascaux. Point out that beef has been an important part of human life for a long time, even to the point of worship (the golden calf, Brahmans of India).

Have students choose a culture and develop a research project (written paper) of that culture. Some areas to direct research to are the Jackaroos of Australia, the Vaqueros of Mexico, the Masai of Kenya in east Africa, Buffalo Soldiers (Black American cowboys), the Buckeroos of the western US, Gauchos of Argentina, Paniolos of Hawaii, Brahmans of India ). Expand the approach to other herding cultures if you need more possibilities, such as Reindeer in Lapland, Sheep of the Basque in the Spanish Pyrenees, Goats of the Arabs, or the animals of the nomadic tribes of the Middle East.

Have the students collect research information and compile it into a concise paper of a length appropriate to the students' age and skill level. A good didactic paper should also include illustrations, either original or photo-copied examples.

Complete the process by having each student present his or her paper and generate open discussion on the particular culture. Encourage a compare and contrast discussion. Let each student assume expert status on his or her own project. Encourage students to demonstrate examples of costume while presenting the paper to make their presentations more interesting.

### **Language Arts-writing**

**Objective:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of the descriptive/narrative style of writing by creating a short story based on careful observation of the image of Grant Speed's sculpture. Or see the Crayola packet for other ways to spark descriptive writing.

Show students *Ropin' out the Best Ones* and lead a discussion of what might be happening in the scene. Stimulate a personal approach to this work by asking questions such as the following: What do you think the cowboy (individually and collectively-others who might be there but aren't shown in the artwork ) are thinking about? What are they doing? Why are they doing what they are doing? Where are they? Where did they come from? Now have each student write an original short story which can be illustrated by Speed's sculpture.

For examples of cowboy literature see Zane Gray, Louis Lamour, and cowboy poets Waddie Mitchell and Baxter Black.

You may be able to get a local cowboy poet to come and perform for your class or for the whole school. Have some of the students read their cowboy writings or give a performance just by your class, using costumes and props to create the appropriate SETTING and CHARACTER. (See other activities in this packet that focus on creating an appropriate setting and that focus on communicating character. You may want to use some of the other activities so the group of activities reinforces and enriches the whole experience.