Young Portrait Explorers: Russell Means

**Learning Objective:** Learn about Russell Means, who was a writer and an activist (a leader who fights for fairness and equality for everyone). Then share something with us about your culture or community!

**Portrait Discussion:**
Spend 30 seconds letting your eyes wander from the top of the painting to the bottom.

Pose: Look at how Russell Means is standing. His body is turned on a diagonal. Can you pose like him? He stands up straight with his shoulders back and his chest out. How do you feel in this pose? Do you feel confident? When you feel confident, how do you stand? Means was confident as an activist, and he stood up for his friends, family, and community when he saw that they were being treated unfairly.

Facial Expression: Look closely at Russell Means’s face. Do you think he is smiling or frowning? Where is he looking? His mouth is closed, and his eyes are looking down at us. What do you think he is trying to tell us?

Clothing: Look closely at what Russell Means is wearing. Is there anything that stands out to you? What shapes and patterns can you find? Can you see the stripes and the stars? What colors are they? Means is wearing red and white stripes that reach from the top of his shoulders to the tips of his toes. Did you also spot the white stars in a blue square? He is actually wearing an upside-down American flag. Can you see it? Usually, we see the American flag hung on a flagpole or in the form of a rectangle with the stars in the top left corner, not the bottom. In the United States, many people wear American flags on their clothing or own an American flag to show their love for their country. Russell Means loved his country, too! But he was often upset that other Americans did not treat his friends and family as equals. Artist Bob Coronato paints Means wearing an upside-down American flag, a naval symbol for alarm, to show us that Native Americans were in distress (or feeling very sad and worried).

**Related Children’s Books:**
*Greet the Dawn: The Lakota Way* by S.D. Nelson
*The Star People: A Lakota Story* by S.D. Nelson

**Historical Context:** Russell Means was Oglala Lakota, a part of the Oceti Sakowin (meaning the Seven Council Fires) and known to some as the Sioux Nation. He was an advocate (or supporter) for Native American rights. As an activist, he demanded the return of traditional Lakota lands that had been taken by the U.S. government in the late 1800s. Some people, though, didn’t agree with Russell Means’s political views or his connection to certain actions of the American Indian Movement (a group that supported Native American rights). In this portrait, Means wanted people to know that “Indians are not to be thought of as ‘in the past’ but a people very much of today, and with a rich history.”

**Activity: Cultural Connections**

**Materials:**
Something to draw with or a camera

**Instructions:**
Russell Means was proud to be a Native American! Draw or take a picture of some part of your culture or community that makes you proud. Here are some examples:

- Do you have a favorite food or meal that you and your family enjoy together?
- Does your family pass down traditions?
- Do you speak a language other than English?
- Do you have a special piece of clothing?
- What music do you listen to with family or friends? Do you dance or sing along?

Find the portrait on our website, here: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2017.81