Writing the West: *Storm*

[Story Map](#) pairing: **Inciting Incident**.

The Inciting Incident is the moment when a character accepts an external call-to-action. When they do, a few things happen at once: they no longer are experiencing Status Quo 2; their life's context changes to Frontstory and Backstory; they choose a Plot Goal, which creates Stakes.

***The Coming of the "Fire Horse" 1910* – Henry Francois Farny (1847-1916)**:
A good starting point to discuss a character's Inciting Incident is their Status Quo 2. Status Quo 2 is when a character feels resigned to life. They might think, "This is it? This is my life?" As a result, they are primed to say, "Yes!" to the Inciting Incident when it arrives. Many stories begin in Status Quo 2. Choose a character in the painting (don't forget about the people on the train). Write their Status Quo 2 situation that leads up to this moment: "the coming of the fire horse."

***Winter Encampment on the Plains 1919* – Henry Joseph Sharp (1859-1953)**:
Again, the Inciting Incident is when an external happening forces a character into action. For example, a snowstorm, seen here in Sharp's painting, causing a character to do what? Find shelter away the camp, build a fire, help a friend lost in the storm? Choose a character and write their Inciting Incident—how the snowstorm made them choose to go down an unexpected path.

***Days of the Forty-Niners 1926* & *Gold Rush 1926* – Dean Cornwell (1892-1960)**: California's Gold Rush created a storm of people. If we establish the painting's Inciting Incident as the Gold Rush, we can now focus on two storytelling elements born from it: Plot Goal and Stakes. The Plot Goal is the character's answer to the Inciting Incident. While the Stakes relate to what happens if a character fails their Plot Goal. For example, if the Plot Goal is: "I want to strike it rich in California," the Stakes might be: "If I fail, my family starves." Choose a character from one of the paintings. What's their Plot Goal? How high are the resulting Stakes?