

**American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection**  
Writing the West: Season 5, October 2023  
*Heroes & Villains*

[Story Map](#) pairing: **Character Arc.**

Character Arc is the internal journey a character makes during a story. Namely, how a character's self-perception shifts in the plot. For example, through the beginning, middle, and end of a story, a Character Arc might look like this: "I'm useless." → "I'm struggling." → "I'm confident." → "I did it!"



***The Cinch Ring*, 1909 by Charles M. Russell (1864-1926):**

A great place to discover an intriguing Character Arc is writing a story's Plot Arc. Plot Arc is the external journey a character experiences. Essentially, external happenings trigger internal thoughts and emotions, leading to personal breakthrough. Using *The Cinch Ring* or another painting on this floor, describe the relationship between Plot and Character. How does an external event force internal change?



***Are You Calling Me a Liar?*, 1935 by William Henry David Koerner (1878-1938):**

In many stories, an author or poet signals to a reader who their main character is by showing a person on a trajectory of change. On the contrary, a conflict character or "bad guy," typically doesn't change. They grow. This is a key difference. A difference between growth and change. Growth is about degrees—a character from beginning, middle, and end, who becomes a larger or smaller version of themselves. Whereas change is about awareness—a character becoming aware of who they are and transforming into who they want to be. In this painting, who's growing into a better version of themselves, thus avoiding change? Who's trying to change into their true self? Pick one or the other and write from that character's point of view.



***After the Hunt*, 1900 by Alexander Pope (1849-1924):**

Imagine a character who's decorated part of their house or cabin in this manner. Where are they in their Character Arc? Are they at the beginning, primed for their internal journey? The middle, where they're not sure if change is possible and failure is near? Or the end, when they can reflect on the person they were and understand how they've changed along the way?