

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection
Writing the West: Season 5, December 2023
Clothing: Material & Function

[Story Map](#) pairing: **Motif/Symbol/Device**.

Motifs, symbols, and devices are part of a story's cultural landscape. Each can be found in the setting, a story's external world. Below, we'll explore how these elements are distinct from one another, as well as how to apply them to your story or poem.



***Trapper's Last Shot* – William Tylee Ranney (1813-1857):**

A motif is a repeating object taken from the setting. By focusing on a specific motif, a story's setting clarifies. In *The Last Shot*, different types of hides (buckskin, buffalo skin, cow leather) is the repeating object. By focusing your writing on this motif, it will allow a reader to gain clarity for character and setting. Choose a painting on this floor that possesses an obvious motif.

Describe it and see how its relationship to setting is formed.



***Always Howling Woman* – Fritz Winold Reiss (1886-1953):**

A symbol is an object taken from the setting that holds a deeper meaning. The bison robe in *Always Howling Woman* isn't being worn just for its warmth. The bison horns present make this clear. What might the horns' meaning be? Depending on the tribe, bison robes meant different things. As outsiders to tribe culture, we can only speculate as to the bison horns deeper meaning. Still, respectful and research-based speculation is fair game. Choose a painting on this floor exhibiting clothing whose function holds a deeper meaning than simple utilitarian use and describe its meaningfulness.



***Chief Rhone* – Grace Carpenter Hudson (1865-1937):**

A device is an object taken from the setting that helps push the plot forward. In *Chief Rhone*, the peace medal is the device. Serving as a catalyst for the plot, the acceptance of the peace medal forces the main character into action. Chief Rhone must go to Washington to receive his medal. Choose a clothing accessory from a painting on this floor and use it as a device in your poem or story.