

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection

Writing the West: Season 7, September 2025

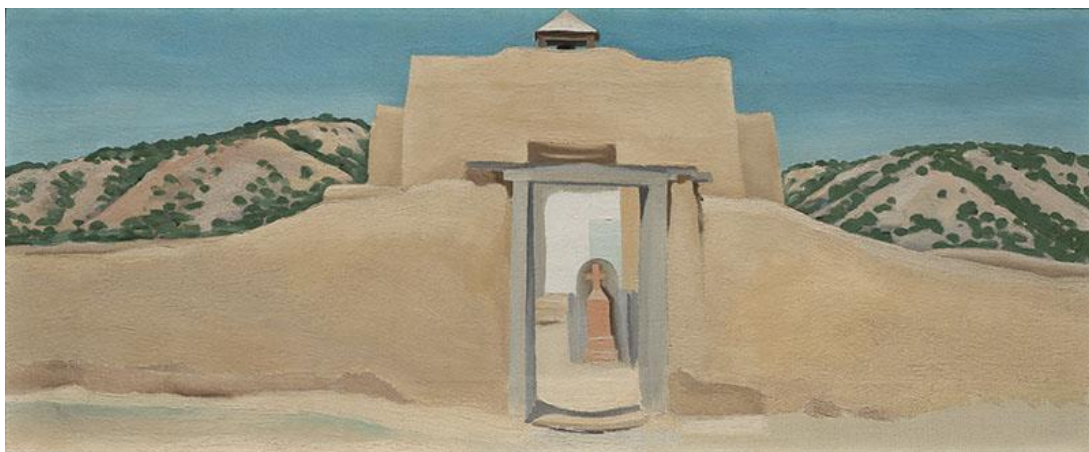
Alternate History

Alternate History is a great genre to ask the question *What if?* Typically, the genre takes a well-known historical event and applies a *What if?* scenario to it. This tactic is called the hinge point, point of divergence, the Jonbar point, or simply 'the hinge'. The hinge alters the known flow of history, exploring new outcomes of an event(s). With the help of a few paintings, we'll practice using *the hinge* in our scenes.



Albertus del Orient Browere, *Gold Prospectors*, 1858

Take 5 minutes to make a list of possible hinge points for the event known as the California gold rush. If it helps, start your list with *What if...* and then go from there. From your list, choose the hinge point that interests you the most. Describe that moment—when history diverges into a different scenario. Feel free to use poetry or prose while writing your scene.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Another Church, Hernandez, NM*, 1931



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Hills, Grey Sky*, 1935

Georgia O'Keeffe has been called the "Mother of American Modernism". One aspect of modernism is embracing subjectivity (emotions, opinions, perceptions) while making art. Make a list guessing what Georgia's mood might have been while creating both paintings. Now, *what if* she painted these red hills using a different mood? *What if* her internal perception of this church shifted? If the hinge point is Georgia's imaginative mood, how might these paintings transform? Describe their change from what we see here to a new reality.