

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection

Writing the West: Season 7, November 2025

Cozy Mystery

The two major benchmarks of the Cozy Mystery subgenre are a small-town setting where crime such as murder is afoot, as well as a town resident who takes on the role of amateur detective. Different than stories featuring gritty reality, the tone of Cozy Mysteries is light, with violence and sex taking place off-stage. Characters are often quirky, and the amateur detective solves crimes through clever deduction.

Use the paintings and prompts below to explore the setting of a fabricated Cozy Mystery based on either Taos Pueblo or Taos Village, as well as create an amateur detective character and the crime they will attempt to solve.



LaVerne Nelson Black, *Buffalo Dance*, ca. 1931



E. Martin Hennings, *Taos Plaza Hitching Post*, 1930s

Prompt 1

Take a moment and decide where you'd like to set your cozy mystery—Taos Pueblo or Taos Village. When you've chosen, describe this setting using ***Buffalo Dance* – LaVerne Nelson Black (before 1931)** for Taos Pueblo and ***Taos Plaza Hitching Post* – E Martin Hennings (1930s)** for Taos Village. While writing about the place, describe the type of work the community does to provide for itself.

Prompt 2

In the 1930's and before, we can easily imagine Taos Pueblo and Taos Village representing close-knit communities—the perfect setting for a cozy mystery. Now that you've picked your story's location, choose an amateur detective. Their job and personality will be well-known by Taos Pueblo or Taos Village residents. Remember, this character's day job has nothing to do with police work. Write a scene where your character is working their day job and then they're interrupted by either discovering a crime themselves or someone else telling them a crime has been committed. Finish the scene with your character taking on or accepting the amateur detective role.