

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection
Writing the West: Season 7, December 2025
Folklore

The Folklore genre evolved from oral storytelling transmitted from one generation to the next. This oral history may encompass traditional beliefs, legends, and customs. Popular subgenres include fairy tales, tall tales, myths, and fables. We'll use the paintings and prompts below to create our own stories and poems celebrating a cast of seemingly simple yet powerful characters.



John Steuart Curry, *Tourist Cabins*, 1934

Imagine you've been commissioned by the Federal Writers' Project to travel through the West collecting folklore stories for publication. You've stopped for the night and are sitting around a fire with your fellow writers and travelers. A debate starts concerning a particular oral history you were told that day. Some people believe it, others do not. What is the story? What local custom or belief does it exemplify?



Ralph Brownell McGrew, *Salah-tso Goes to the Sing*, ca. 1960

Write your own tall tale based on a folk hero you know or have heard about, such as Salah-Tso. End your tall tale with a life lesson or jewel of wisdom you'd like to pass on to the next generation. For example: "Don't break the law or Salah-Tso will find you!"