

American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection

Writing the West: Season 8, September 2026

Cattle Drive

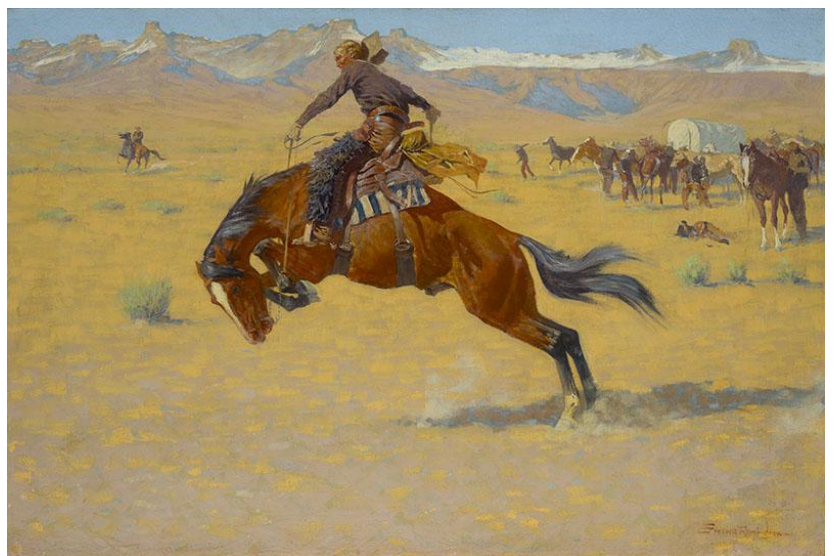
The cattle drive subgenre typically focuses on a young protagonist who makes long strides into personhood during the drive's grueling journey. Set on the open range of the frontier, conflict arrives in the form of natural hazards and human confrontation. For example: discord between drovers and trail boss.



Thomas Eakins, *Cowboys in the Badlands*, 1888

The purpose of the cattle drive was to transport herds of livestock, usually from Texas to railroad shipping hubs up north. The work was difficult. Sometimes the whole endeavor was made more complicated before it began, such as during the Big Die-Up in the winters of 1885-1887. Imagine you're a cowboy who has lived through the Big Die-Up. You've witnessed thousands of cattle prematurely die; animals linked to your livelihood. But now it's time to gear up again for another drive. What are your fears? Your hopes? How difficult or easy is it to get back on the trail?

At long last, the cattle drive has ended. The livestock have been delivered, weighed, and sold. It's time to look toward the trail home. Describe getting back in the saddle and reflect back on the journey. What changed you the most? Who changed you the most? The trail boss, your horse, fellow drovers, the land? Maybe you watched a baby cow born on the trail take its first steps and then later protected it from a stampede. Love, grit, endurance, bravery. Who were you when the cattle drive began and how are you different at its end?



Frederic Remington, *Cold Morning on the Range*, ca 1904