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Dare to Know

Traditional Westerns

A subset that formalized its conventions by the early 1930s, at which time the genre came into its own. Traditional Westerns frequently romanticize the Old West as a place of honor, courage, and adventure, and an age of open options when a man controlled his own destiny. Narratives focus on the virtues of the frontier and the trailblazer's struggle for survival. Stories are characterized by a straightforward style and by iconoclastic people who demonstrate resiliency and vitality, and embody frontier qualities. The stalwart, lonely protagonist might roam the mountain ranges of the West hunting wild game and/or trapping beaver for the Eastern markets. Intrepid characters, both men and women, may play a role in building new communities amid the raw wilderness of the American West, usually facing harsh weather and dangerous circumstances. Others are on a quest for riches, usually in the form of found gold or silver, or engaged in armed conflict with the nomadic Indian bands. Protagonists might be stoic, hardy, capable men who use a gun to right a wrong or make a town safe for law-abiding citizens. Repeatedly in this subset, the lone man must confront and overcome obstacles to achieve justice or redemption. He usually triumphs through sheer force of will, as much as his talents with a six-shooter. Paradoxically, the Western gunfighter cannot co-exist with the civilization he has fought to build and defend. His violent skills and way of life are rejected by the residents of the town made safe for schools and churches, and he must literally or figuratively ride into the sunset.

The Western genre birthed the mythical icon of the American cowboy, a forthright figure who echoed the tenets of the chivalric code. Yet, he remains an everyman who is simply more self-reliant, independent, and free than others. He may embark on a long, often arduous, journey to move a herd of cattle to a railhead. There are often valuable life lessons learned along the way and deep friendships formed, as well as the potential for romance. This idealized version of the actual corporate employee provides a framework for an illustration of shared values of morality and honorable behavior.

Formulated by Owen Wister and others in the early days of the genre, the traditional "code of the West" was a set of principles and practices with no basis in law or government but instead originated in the social and cultural atmosphere of the West. The code simultaneously embodied communal morality and the importance of personal honor. Rather than focusing on material or social success, the Western hero personified the virtues of accepting responsibility, upholding commitments, keeping one's word, avoiding unworthy actions, and pragmatically handling difficult situations with integrity, skill, and discretion. These are considered the true measure of a man.

Oliver Strange's *The Range Robbers* (1930), Conrad Richter's *The Sea of Grass* (1936), Luke Short's *Gunman's Chance* (1941), Max Brand's *Silvertip* (1941), L. L. Foreman's *Jemez Brand* (1942), A. B. Guthrie, Jr.'s *The Big Sky* (1947) and *The Way West* (1949), Jack Schaefer's

Shane (1949) and *Monte Walsh* (1963), Tom Lea's *The Wonderful Country* (1952), Louis L'Amour's *Hondo* (1953) and *The Daybreakers* (1960), Wayne D. Overholser's *The Violent Land* (1954), Alan Le May's *The Searchers* (1954), Frederick Manfred's *Lord Grizzly* (1954), Mari Sandoz's *Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail* (1955), T. V. Olsen's *Haven of the Hunted* (1956), Charles O. Locke's *The Hell Bent Kid* (1957), Elmer Kelton's *Buffalo Wagons* (1957), Frank O'Rourke's *The Bravados* (1958) and *A Mule for the Marquesa* (1964), Will Henry's *From Where the Sun Now Stands* (1960), Max Evans's *The Rounders* (1960), J. T. Edson's *The Ysabel Kid* (1963), Hal G. Evarts's *The Sundown Kid* (1964), Vardis Fisher's *Mountain Man* (1965), and Lewis B. Patten's *The Red Sabbath* (1968) are influential classic examples.

Common Elements

Romanticized view of the West	Opportunity	Character depth
Personal freedom	Heroic endeavors	Surviving harsh elements
Rugged individualism	Democracy	Wild animals
Self-reliance	Equality	Homesteading
Courage	Personal integrity and character	Town building
Work ethic	Characters with grit	Complexities of human conflict
Moral codes	Common sense	

Modern Literary Examples

<i>Aces and Eights</i> (1981) by Loren D. Estleman	<i>The Horse Creek Incident</i> (2007) by Dusty Richards
<i>Appaloosa</i> (2005) by Robert B. Parker	<i>Independence!</i> (1978) by Dana Fuller Ross
<i>Bendigo Shafter</i> (1979) by Louis L'Amour	<i>I Rode With Jesse James</i> (1996) by Charles Hackenberry
<i>The Big Drift</i> (2015) by Patrick Dearen	<i>A Killing in Kiowa</i> (1972) by Lewis B. Patten
<i>Carver's Kingdom</i> (1978) by Frederick Nolan	<i>The Kincaids</i> (1977) by Matt Braun
<i>Cemetery Jones</i> (1985) by William R. Cox	<i>The Last Mountain Man</i> (1984) by William W. Johnstone
<i>Centennial</i> (1974) by James A. Michener	<i>Lawdog</i> (2001) by J. Lee Butts
<i>Comstock Lode</i> (1981) by Louis L'Amour	<i>The Legend of Caleb York</i> (2015) by Mickey Spillane and Max Allan Collins
<i>The Dawn of Fury</i> (1995) by Ralph Compton	<i>Long Road to Abilene</i> (2016) by Robert Vaughan
<i>The Doomsday Marshal</i> (1975) by Ray Hogan	<i>Once a Marshal</i> (1998) by Peter Brandvold
<i>Double the Bounty</i> (2019) by Robert J. Randisi	<i>The Outlawed</i> (1970) by Ray Hogan
<i>The Glory Trail</i> (1978) by Ray Hogan	<i>The Overmountain Men</i> (1991) by Cameron Judd
<i>The Goodnight Trail</i> (1992) by Ralph Compton	
<i>Honor Thy Father</i> (2004) by Robert A Roripaugh	

<i>Riders to Cibola</i> (1977) by Norman Zollinger	<i>To the River's End</i> (2022) by William W. Johnstone and J.A. Johnstone
<i>Sioux Dawn</i> (1990) by Terry C. Johnston	<i>Unwanted: Dead or Alive</i> (1996) by Gene Shelton
<i>Stone Hand</i> (1998) by Charles G. West	<i>The Vengeance of Fortuna West</i> (1983) by Ray Hogan
<i>Sun River</i> (1989) by Richard S. Wheeler	<i>Westward!</i> (1992) by Dana Fuller Ross
<i>A Thousand Texas Longhorns</i> (2020) by Johnny D. Boggs	<i>Widowmaker Jones</i> (2016) by Brett Cogburn
<i>Tomahawk</i> (1983) by Donald Clayton Porter	<i>The Yellowstone</i> (1988) by Winfred Blevins
