

## NARRATOR INTRO

Welcome to the Talking Book Voices, the podcast where we explore the wonders of the Texas Talking Book Program. Join us in making literature accessible to all. This program, a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission provides a free library service to Texans of all ages with a qualifying visual, physical or reading disability. Each episode will uncover its history, share stories, get updates and tips to maximize this invaluable program. So, whether you love reading, seeking accessible materials, or just curious about the program this podcast is for you. Visit [www.texastalkingbooks.org](http://www.texastalkingbooks.org) for more info. So, let's begin the Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State library and Archives Commission.

## LAURA JEAN

Hi podcast listeners my name is Laura Jean and I've been a Readers Advisory Librarian here at the Talking Book Program for nine years now. And before that, I worked as a Library Assistant at various different academic and public libraries for 12 years.

## JOHN

And my name is John and I've been a Readers Advisory Librarian at the Texas Talking Book Program since 2014. I was also a Readers Advisory Librarian at Arizona Talking Book Library from 2007 to 2014. And before that, I was a Youth Services Librarian in Houston, TX, Tempe, AZ, and Glendale, AZ.

## JOHN

Laura Jean, what exactly is readers advisory?

## LAURA JEAN

Well, one of our major responsibilities as Readers Advisory Librarians, is to know about the different types of books that are available to our patrons. And one way to categorize books is by genre.

## JOHN

Oh, what is a genre and what is genre fiction?

## LAURA JEAN

Ok, librarians are the worst at using jargon. So, what exactly is genre fiction? So, Miriam Webster describes genre as a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content. But for our purposes, genre is a group of books that have a similar subject matter, like Westerns or Mysteries and any librarian working in Texas had best know their Westerns.

JOHN

Ah, OK. Well, what are westerns? I mean, they're just historical fiction with Cowboys that are set in the western US, right?

LAURA JEAN

Right, technically that's correct. But honestly, they can be so much more. Here are some of the general qualities of Western fiction. The setting has vividly described landscapes and a sense of timelessness. The main character is generally loner with a simple story arc. The plots can be simple or complex depending on the author. Some can be formulaic, which you know for some patrons as part of the enjoyment factor, and some can be quite intricately plotted. And nostalgic tone for romance of eras past.

The pacing can be action-packed, but sometimes it can be a bit slow due to the lyrical landscape descriptions and the character dialogue is generally sparse but colorful and full of jargon. Often there are poetic descriptions of landscape.

JOHN

Well, I've heard that Westerns are dead. They're uh, old hat, as it were. Is that true?

LAURA JEAN

Just like Mark Twain, the reports of the death of the Western have been greatly exaggerated. They're not dead, they're just evolving.

For example, some of the current trends are more points of view are being looked at. So, you've got African American characters and Asian American and women and LGBTQIA.

You've also got the women have more agency now in the Westerns. You've got women as doctors and outlaws. And not just the saloon girl with the heart of gold.

And another thing is there's been mixing of Westerns with other genres, so you'll have Western romance or contemporary Western mysteries like the Walt Longmire Book series or the Yellowstone TV show.

JOHN

Well, true confession. True, Westerns just aren't my thing. My dad was a Louis Lamour fan. In fact, when he passed away, I inherited my dad's collection of Louis Lamour paperbacks, and I would have much rather inherited \$1,000,000. But my dad was a minister. He didn't have \$1,000,000, he had literally more paperbacks and I've had a grudge against Westerns and specifically Louis Lamour, more ever since.

LAURA JEAN

Well, you're not alone. I used to think that way too, until I realized that some of the things that I like about my favorite genres are also present in Westerns. So, you might find this to be the case also, for example, location genres. So, I like historical fiction and science fiction. Both are all about the environment in which they're set, whether it's their early 17th century Japan and Shogun, or alien planets like in John Scalzi's Old Man's War series.

These genres are referred to as location genres because they all incorporate a strong sense of place.

Westerns, also, feature a vividly described landscape that almost reaches the level of an additional character.

JOHN

Well, I kind of think the lengthy descriptions of the environment and landscapes and stuff like that, that's just kind of slow and pokey, I prefer well more fast-paced books with more action that move along.

LAURA JEAN

Oh, okay. So, you're more into action genres, like thrillers and suspense adventure. Well, Westerns can also be fast-paced, and plot driven and full of action too. You'll just be more interested in Western fiction written by authors like William W Johnstone and Peter Brand Volt or John Sharp.

JOHN

Well, okay fine, I guess I could maybe try some Westerns, maybe. Now, how do I choose one to try?

LAURA JEAN

Well, you know the best way to determine if you like Westerns is to pick something short like a collection of short stories. That way, the time you invest in it is low. So, if you don't wind up liking them, you know two hours of your time isn't that kind of a commitment that an entire book would exact. And you can also try a genre blend anthology.

JOHN

Wait a minute. A genre, a genre whatagy?

LAURA JEAN

There I go with the jargon again. Okay, so a genre blend is when you combined two popular broad genres together. Like if you have a romance, it takes place in the Wild West or if you like the TV show Firefly or the movie Serenity. So that was a blend of western and science fiction.

And if you already like speculative fiction like fantasy or horror, adding a western flavor is a little bit less of a stretch, so you might try something like a Dead Man's Hand, which is an anthology of the weird West edited by John Joseph Adams.

And another way to try out Westerns is to watch Western films or TV shows. Again, you're investing less time than you would in reading a book. Or, if you already love a particular Western movie or show we do have many books in our collection, you might like to try.

Best of the West stories that inspired classic Western film series, and this is a three-book series of western stories that were made into movies like the Cisco Kid and High Noon. The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance and 310 to Yuma, for example. In fact, we have a couple Western genre and genre blend bibliographies full of recommendations for anyone who's interested.

JOHN

Oh well, Laura Jean, you've given us some good ideas for sampling Westerns. Or maybe she had you from the word Western. Perhaps you're already a Western fan. So, here's a question for you. What is it about Westerns you like? Thinking about what specifically you enjoy about a book, or a genre helps us make the best recommendations for you.

And it also helps us think helps if you think outside the box to find the books in in similar genres or similar authors you might enjoy.

Well, that's just about all the time we have. I hope you've taken take the opportunity to ask us for tips on what to read next. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time on TBP Voices.