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Thank you for participating in the Pens to Lens Screenwriting Competition hosted by the Champaign-Urbana Film Society (CUFS). This competition is open to all students in Central Illinois and we encourage you to share this opportunity with teachers, parents, students, and your colleagues.

Pens to Lens is more than just a writing competition. After the submission deadline, your submissions will be reviewed by writing judges, designers, and filmmakers. The writing judges will choose awards, the designers will create movie posters, and the filmmakers will choose screenplays to produce into actual movies. The awards, movie posters, and final produced films will be presented at a screening gala in August 2014.

If you are interested in having your class participate, we are making the following materials available to you for building a curriculum and ensuring eligibility for your students.

1. Submission Guidelines - The guidelines and rules for students participating in the competition.
2. Curriculum Overview - A concise overview to understand and teach screenwriting.
3. A series of worksheets which you may find valuable to students in grades K-5:
   a. Worksheet A - This is a simple guide that will help all students start thinking about how to write a screenplay.
   b. Understand a Screenplay - This first recommended exercise guides students through analyzing a short film. (Note that this is different from the worksheet with the same title for older students.)
   c. Thinking Visually - This second recommended exercise guides students through thinking visually about a film they have seen.
   d. Plan Your Story - This third recommended exercise guides students through planning out their short story idea through drawings.
   e. Storyboard Template - A blank storyboard page that students can use to draw out ideas or storyboards to include in their submissions.
   f. Sample K-5 Submission - This is a modification of a piece of the script for the Disney/Pixar film “Toy Story”. It explains what CUFS looks for in K-5 student scripts. Pens to Lens has simplified the format requirements for K-5 submissions; however, they can follow the same formatting as the older students if they choose.
4. A series of worksheets which you may find valuable to students in grades 6-12:
   a. Worksheet A - This is a simple guide that will help all students start thinking about how to write a screenplay.
   b. Worksheet B - This guide explains the rules of script formatting, and will ensure that your students’ submissions are easy to read and eligible to be chosen by filmmakers.
c. **Understand a Screenplay** - This first recommended exercise guides students through analyzing a short film and how the screenwriter might have intended it.
d. **Format the Script** - This second recommended exercise gives students the opportunity to write an excerpt of properly formatted script.
e. **Write an Adaptation** - This third recommended exercise explains the option available to students of writing an adaptation of previously written work (if it is based upon the student's own original work).
f. **Storyboard Template** - A blank storyboard page that students can use to illustrate or photograph storyboards to plan their films.
g. **Sample Script** - This is an excerpt from the Oscar-winning “Toy Story” film, widely used in teaching screenwriting.
Pens to Lens Submission Guidelines

Entry
Any K-12 student in any Central Illinois school district, private school, or home school is invited to submit one screenplay of his or her own making. Students may also elect to write a single screenplay as a group. After the submission deadline, community artists will choose screenplays to produce. Their finished films and other student awards will be presented at a theatrical event at the Art Theater in Champaign.

Format
The screenplay should be 1-5 numbered pages in standard script-writing format. An in-depth look at the screenwriting process, along with a suggested curriculum guide for teachers and storyboard worksheets, can be found at the Pens to Lens website at www.PensToLens.com. Stories containing inappropriate content will not be considered; adhere to your school’s code of conduct. The Pens to Lens board reserves the right to exclude any stories that do not comply with these requirements.

Screenplay submissions should be entered in the Submissions form on the website homepage at www.PensToLens.com. The Submissions form will go live on the website the day the competition launches, on February 1st, 2014. When uploading your screenplay in the form, please refrain from including a cover page - if a filmmaker sees your name or other identifying information, they will not be able to choose your screenplay out of fairness to other applicants.

Judging Criteria
Entries will be chosen from each of three age categories: grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Entries will be judged based on two sets of criteria:
(1) Community filmmakers and artists will choose screenplays that they would like to bring to life. Movie poster designers will choose screenplays based upon compelling visual descriptions. Screenplays chosen for films will be creative and understand the practical limitations of filmmaking.
(2) Writing awards will be given based on writing ability and originality of the screenplay.

In addition to the creative criteria, evaluations of student submissions will be adjusted based on their grade level. While strict adherence to script format is imperative for high school students, and important for junior high students, K-5 students will be evaluated generously. Consult the materials provided (here for K-5 students, here for grades 6-8, and here for grades 9-12) which are aimed at your students’ age level to understand age-specific expectations. Please email info@PensToLens.com with any questions.

All entries must be original and the sole work of the author(s). Submissions that use copyrighted characters or familiar stories will not be considered. Students are welcome to adapt their own work from other projects into screenplays. However, repeat entries from previous Pens To Lens
competitions will not be considered. Assistance from teachers and parents is expected, but the student is responsible for the ideas in the story and the way those ideas are expressed. We encourage proofreading of the stories prior to submission.

Students give filmmakers and Pens To Lens the right to produce their script. Filmmakers will not own student scripts, nor will they make money from the project. Students, and their parent and teacher sponsors if applicable, agree by submitting that they allow the writer’s name (specified in the “Writer’s Preferred Public Name” field in the submission form) to be used in film credits, and in publicity materials promoting the Pens To Lens Gala and other aspects of the competition. The writer’s name will not be used for profit or outside the context of the Pens To Lens screenwriting competition.

**Deadline**
All stories must be received electronically by 11:59 PM of February 28, 2014. Please submit your screenplay to the form on the homepage of the Pens To Lens website at [www.PensToLens.com](http://www.PensToLens.com). The form will be available February 1st through 28th. If you have concerns with submissions, ask your teacher for help or contact info@PensToLens.com.

You should expect a confirmation that your submission was received. If you do not receive a confirmation by March 1st, 2014, immediately email info@PensToLens.com so your script can be included.

**Recognition**
A community red carpet event will be held at the Art Theater in August 2014. The event will feature the films made from student screenplays, movie posters designed by local artists, and awards for outstanding writers. Watch the Pens to Lens website for details.
Pens To Lens Curriculum Overview

This curriculum guide will help you explain the basics of screenwriting to your students. The following pages contain Learning Objectives, Definitions of a Screenplay, Exercises, Getting Your Film Made in Champaign-Urbana, and Online Resources.

Learning Objectives
- **Common Core:**
  - For K-5 students, the assignments address CCSS.ELA-Literacy Reading Literacy Criteria 1-3 and CCSS.ELA-Literacy Writing Criteria 3-6 (Criteria 4 beginning in Grade 3).
  - For 6-12 students, the assignments address CCSS.ELA-Literacy Reading Literacy 2-3 and CCSS.ELA-Literacy Writing Criteria 3-6.
- **Soft Skills:**
  - Students will understand the difference between writing a screenplay and writing a generic story.
  - Students will understand that film is a visual medium, and write screenplays that “show” rather than “tell”.
  - Students will understand that there is a standard screenwriting format and create a script that follows it as closely as possible.
  - Students will understand the difference between a short film and feature-length film.

Definitions of a Screenplay

*What is a screenplay?*
A screenplay is the written template that describes how to make films or television shows. Screenplays describe only what is seen in a finished movie. This includes primarily what the characters say *(dialogue)*, as well as short descriptions of who the characters are, what the characters are doing *(action)*, and where the characters are *(setting)*.

*How is a screenplay different from a book or short story?*
Books and short stories have narration that tells the reader what is happening, or what a character is thinking, often told through poetic description. In movies, the poetry is in the visuals and dialogue. The viewer is rarely TOLD that a character is taking an action; rather the action is performed on-screen. Similarly, characters do not announce their feelings; rather, an actor interprets the dialogue written by the screenwriter to convey the emotion.

Screenplays focus on the dialogue and matter-of-fact description. As action happens, it
is written in present tense. See *Worksheet B*.

**How is a screenplay different from a play?**
Screenplay structure is comparable to stage play structure and can be taught similarly. The main difference is that films can use real locations and cameras see things differently than a stage play’s audience. Cameras can see expansive landscapes and subtle facial expressions, and screenwriters must constantly aware of where the camera can go to bring the strongest impact to the viewer.

**How is a short film screenplay different from a feature length film screenplay?**
Short films are recognized for their ability to quickly and powerfully convey a single idea. While feature films create complex worlds through the use of sub-plots and large casts of characters, short films focus on a single narrative and only a small cast of characters. Sometimes a short film will only have one character struggling with the world around them.

Because a short film (at around ten minutes) has less material than a feature (at around 2 hours), it’s generally more focused. Short film audiences expect every part of the short film screenplay to serve the point of the film. Dialogue in a short film is extremely refined so that unnecessary words don’t confuse the main point. In fact, frequently there is little to no dialogue at all. Some of the best short films convey all of their story visually and with sound effects.

There is a rhythm to the storytelling in a short film that you can recognize after watching a few. See [online resource 1](#) and [online resource 2](#) to find some examples.

**How do you approach writing a screenplay?**
The first step in writing a screenplay, like writing any story, is to think about what your screenplay will be about. All of the same principles of storywriting apply; plan out protagonists/antagonists, conflict, description, time and location, etc. Think about who your characters are, what the plot might be (what is the conflict and what is causing it), what actions your characters will make, and how your characters speak. There are four major building blocks to a script: Character, Location, Action, and Dialogue. (See *Worksheet A*.)

Many screenwriters like to start with an outline of the story, or use notecards to organize their thoughts on the story. Some even write out “treatments,” which are like prose versions of the story they want to tell. Like any story, it is important to map out the plot and characters ahead of time.

To assemble these story elements into an actual story, screenwriters build a three-act structure. In the first act, the story introduces characters and setting. The second act,
usually the longest, establishes and grows the conflict, and the third act has the climax and the conflict resolution. After arranging all the pieces, screenwriters can flesh out the screenplay in proper form.

Online resource 3 is a useful guide to teaching the approach to writing plays, which is very similar to the approach to writing screenplays.

How do you format a screenplay?
Worksheet B has formatting rules. For Pens To Lens, we have simplified the Hollywood-standard format to include the basics. Notably, we have omitted information on how to write transitions, shot directions, titles, and sound effects. Some of these omissions are described in online resource 4. Disney/Pixar’s “Toy Story” screenplay is a fantastic example of good form, and can be found at online resource 5. A small excerpt from “Toy Story” is also provided in the contest documentation as a Sample Script.

In standard formatting, each page of a screenplay translates to about 1 minute of screen time. This is why the submission length for Pens To Lens is 1-5 pages. Allowing for some embellishment by the filmmakers, student screenplays should translate into films that are less than 10 minutes.

Looking at a sample script is perhaps the easiest way of understanding how scripts are set up. Generally, action, location, and character description statements are on the left, and dialogue is in the middle of the script. Dialogue is always preceded by the speaking character’s name on the line above, in all caps.

Online resource 6 is a piece of software students may use and teachers may choose to use as a teaching aid. Celtx is free, it automatically formats scripts, and it provides free download of sample scripts. Because it formats scripts automatically, the screenwriter is free to focus on creative writing instead of technical details.

Exercises:

The following are recommended exercises your student(s) can complete to prepare for writing a screenplay. Several of these exercises are represented by worksheets in the Pens To Lens curriculum material.

1 - Analyze a film that already exists. Types of analysis include identifying story structures or holding a film criticism discussion. This is represented by Worksheet C - Analyze a Screenplay and Exercise 1 - Understand a Screenplay.

2 - Rewrite a film that already exists. Types of rewriting include taking the dialogue from a film and writing it in the correct script format or drawing a storyboard of the important
parts of the story. This is represented by Worksheet D - Formatting a Script and Exercise 2 - Re-create the Storyboard.

3 - **Write plans for a new film.** Types of planning include writing an Adaptation of an existing work, as described Worksheet E - Adapt a Short Story. Or students can draw a storyboard of a new film, as described at Exercise 3 - Plan Your Story.

4 - **Visualize a story.** Students may take a written story, and attempt to re-create that story using only images. Images can be created by illustration or photography. Younger students may relate this to the task of writing a picture book, while older students can think about it as storyboarding. A blank storyboard template is available at Storyboard Template.

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**Getting Your Film Made in Champaign-Urbana**

**What practical limitations should students consider if they hope to get their screenplay produced by local filmmakers?**

The Champaign Movie Makers (CMM) community is large and features a lot of different talents and tools. CMM members have created, to name a few things, a 9-foot-tall robot puppet, a stop-motion spider, a full-scale unicorn body, a spinning portal in the sky, an 8-car wreck, and a 100-person musical number.

However, in order to create many student screenplays, CMM can't throw all of these resources into every screenplay. Thanks to modern technology, there is very little that we cannot do. The limitations are on how much we can do, and how well. Common limitations include:

- **Crowd scenes.** It is difficult to gather upwards of 12 people at a time, especially if the crowd is supposed to look like specific kinds of people.
- **Animation/computer effects.** CMM has several animators, but animations can take a lot of time to make well, especially for a whole creature or character.
- **Children and animals.** Young kids and animals are hard to keep focused, especially during a potentially long day of filming. There are also sometimes legal concerns with filming children.
- **Exotic locations.** While it is possible to make a film set in the rolling hills of Scotland or on the runway of an airport with green screens and digital backgrounds, this is time-consuming and limiting to what the camera can look at. It is always easier to film in a real location.

Students should always consider what the filmmakers will need to do to make a scene a reality.

Don't consider these limitations to be absolute - part of the fun of filmmaking is problem-solving, making the impossible real. But a screenplay with only a couple of limitations is more likely to get chosen than one with all of them.

**Extra advice in writing screenplays:**

- **Screenplays always have a cover page.** The title belongs there, not on the first page of
the script. (However, for Pens To Lens, we ask that you not include a cover page, and include the script’s title and other descriptive information in the submission form online.)

- Proofread your own script. Making your hand into a “fish” will look very different from a “fist” on screen.
- Get someone else to proofread your script. We all miss our own mistakes.
- Watch films. The more you watch, the more you improve your visual literacy, and understand what parts of a story can be told visually.
- Read other screenplays. Some of these can be found at Online Resource 5.

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**Online Resources:**

Disclaimer: These external sites are not guaranteed to have kid-friendly advertisements. However, we do consider the website content valuable.

   Online collection of short films. Be sure to pre-screen any short film for appropriateness for your students.

2 - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pixar_Short_Films_Collection_Volume_1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pixar_Short_Films_Collection_Volume_1)
   Pixar short films DVD, available at many online retailers.

   A curriculum guide to teaching playwriting, by Center Stage, the State Theater of Maryland.

4 - [http://www.screenwriting.info](http://www.screenwriting.info)
   Instructions on screenwriting format.

   Full-length “Toy Story” screenplay. IMSDB is the Internet Movie Script Database.

6 - [https://www.celtx.com/index.html](https://www.celtx.com/index.html)
   Celtx is a free piece of software that automatically formats scripts, provides free download of sample scripts, provides a community of amateur screenwriters, allows online collaboration on scripts, and their website includes many resources and how-to videos on screenwriting.
MATERIALS FOR
GRADERS K-5
WORKSHEET A:
Building Blocks of a Script

This worksheet will guide you through the steps of starting to think about how stories are told in a visual way. You can see each of the building blocks of a script, followed by the complete script. Each of the steps below are subjects professional screenwriters have to consider in their work.

(1) Start with a story.

Example:
Jim and Sally are talking to each other on the hill. Jim said something Sally didn’t like. Sally ran away.

In film terms, this would be describing the plot. The crisis began when Jim started a conflict with Sally.

(2) Analyze the parts of the story:
All visual stories have Characters, Setting, Dialogue, and Action.

Characters and locations are described at the beginning of the scene. Dialogue and Actions are presented in the order they happen. Reassemble the story using these pieces.

a. Characters
Who will be in the movie? What do they look like? How old are they? Are they happy, sad, mean, or something else? How do they know the other characters?

Example of Characters:
Jim is a 9 year old boy who loves school, he is happy and has dark hair. Sally is a 9 year old girl and Jim’s best friend. She does not like spiders.

b. Setting
Where does the story take place? If it happens in multiple places, make sure to let the reader know about the other places. What time of day is it?

Example of Setting:
Jim and Sally are on a large green hill. It is morning. There are flowers and trees.
c. Dialogue
What do the characters say? Who do they say it to?

Example of Dialogue:
Jim: (to Sally)
I have a present for you.

Sally:
What is your present?

Jim:
It is a big spider.

d. Action
What do the characters do? Are there any props?

Example of Action:
Jim hands Sally a big spider.
Sally screams and runs down the hill.

(3) Assemble your script:

**EXT. HILL - MORNING**

Jim is a 9 year old boy who loves school, he is happy and has dark hair. He is sitting with Sally. Sally is a 9 year old girl and Jim’s best friend. She does not like spiders. Jim and Sally are on a large green hill. It is morning. There are flowers and trees.

JIM (to SALLY)
I have a present for you.

SALLY
What is your present?

JIM
It is a big spider

Jim hands Sally a big spider. Sally screams and runs down the hill.

THE END
WORKSHEET B:
Formatting a Script

There are four important written elements to a screenplay. They are the **slugline**, **action text**, **character name**, and **dialogue**. They help to separate **scenes** (parts of a story that happen in one setting), **shots** (divisions of a scene that are seen from one camera angle), and **lines** (pieces of dialogue spoken by a single character.) You will also learn about **spacing**.

(1) **Slugline**

The **slugline** is also known as the “scene heading” and appears at the beginning of every scene. It describes what the camera is looking at when the scene begins. A slugline indicates a new scene, or a return to a previous scene.

A slugline answers three questions, and is written in **Bold ALL CAPS**:

- Is the scene an interior “INT.” or exterior “EXT.”?
- What location is the scene taking place?
- At what time is the scene taking place?

**Example of a slugline:**

**EXT: BOAT - LATE NIGHT**

(2) **Action Text**

The **action text** concisely describes what is happening at the beginning of each camera shot in the screenplay. It also fits in between blocks of dialogue to indicate something in the shot has changed. It should include any action that the camera sees or hears.

Action text is different from creative writing. It is short and to-the-point. Descriptive words should only be used if they help the film’s director to know what should be seen on screen.

**Example of action text at the beginning of a shot:**

Jeb is an expert fisherman. Kitty is his daughter. Jeb is trying to teach Kitty to fish, but she seems distracted.

**Example of action text to indicate a change in the shot:**

Jeb stands up. The boat rocks and he falls out of it. Fireflies scatter everywhere.
(3) Character Name

The character name tells the film’s director who is talking. It can be the character’s name, or if they don’t have a name, it can be their occupation or just a description. Sometimes it will be generic, and may need to be numbered, like MAN #1 and MAN #2. The character name is always ALL CAPS followed by a colon.

The character name line may also include who the character is talking to if it is unclear in the action text. This “to” element only appears the first time the character speaks in a conversation.

Example of a character name line:

JEB (to KITTY)

If a character is not in the camera shot, they are considered “off screen”, and their character name line should include “O.S.” Likewise, if they are not in the scene, but simply narrating it, that is called a “voice over”, and should be labeled “V.O.”

Example of a character name line for voice over:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(4) Dialogue

Dialogue is a segment of text that the character named on the previous line is speaking. These are the exact words that the character will say in the final film. Unlike creative writing, the dialogue does not have quotation marks around it, because it is separated by character name lines.

Example of dialogue:

What are you lookin’ at?

Sometimes, screenwriters will include a parenthetical description. This is a word or phrase included to help convey the emotion with which the character is speaking. It comes between the the character name line and the dialogue.

Example of parenthetical:

(hypnotically)
There’s a light on the water.
(5) Indentation and Spacing

Perhaps the most unique part of writing a screenplay is the strict set of rules about spacing. These are the rules:

- The left margin of the page should be 1.5 inches. The right margin should be 1 inch.
- The top and bottom margins of the page should both be 1 inch.
- The slugline should be on the left margin.
- The action text should be on the left margin.
- The character name should be indented 2.5 inches from the left margin. Press the “tab” button five times.
- The dialogue should be indented 1.5 inches from the left margin. Press the “tab” button 3 times.

There should also be a blank line between each new script element, except between character names and their dialogue. At the end of every slugline, action text block, and line of dialogue, press “Enter” two times.

With all of these elements, we can create a properly formatted script:

```
EXT. BOAT - LATE NIGHT

Jeb is an expert fisherman. Kitty is his daughter. Jeb is trying to teach Kitty to fish, but she seems distracted.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The day had gone swimmingly. But Jeb knew something fishy would happen that night.

JEB (to KITTY)
What are you lookin’ at?

KITTY
(hypnotically)
There’s a light - on the water.

JEB
Tarnation! Someone’s trying to steal our fishing spot!

Jeb stands up. The boat rocks and he falls out of it. Fireflies scatter everywhere.

THE END
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Consider using Celtx, a free piece of software that automatically formats scripts, to help with the formatting of your screenplay.
UNDERSTAND A SCREENPLAY

Often, short films have some of the best-written screenplays. Pick a short film to see, and as you watch, answer the questions below, keeping in mind Worksheet A: Building Blocks of a Script.

Title of Short Film:

Question 1:
Describe the story or “plot” in one sentence.

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Question 2:
List the main characters. Describe them.

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Question 3:
What is the setting? Where does the film take place, and when?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Question 4:
What was your favorite spoken line from the film? This is called “dialogue”.

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Question 5:
Describe your favorite action in the film. Action has no spoken words.

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Question 6:
What is something that you would do to make this film even better?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________
THINKING VISUALLY

Drawings are a great way to plan out your film. In the boxes below, draw the parts described below for a film you have seen. Be sure to include descriptions on the lines below your drawings.

Title of Film:

Act 1: What is the setting?

Act 1: Who are the characters?

Act 2: What is the crisis?

Act 2: How does it get worse?

Act 3: What is the climax?

Act 3: What is the resolution?
PLAN YOUR STORY

Take a rough story idea you have, maybe written on an index card, and translate it into drawings below. This is similar to storyboarding, where you plan out frames for the film.

Title of Film:

Act 1: What is the setting?

Act 1: Who are the characters?

Act 2: What is the crisis?

Act 2: How does it get worse?

Act 3: What is the climax?

Act 3: What is the resolution?
Excerpt from “Toy Story” by Disney/Pixar.

Below is a sample submission for students in grades K-5. The formatting is simplified from a Hollywood-standard screenplay format, and looks like a stage play script that students may be more familiar with. Pens to Lens will accept all readable submissions from students in grades K-5. When formatting your script, please try to follow these simple rules to ensure that your script is readable.

1. When you change setting, include a line that says what your new setting is. The setting can include place and time.
   a. Example: Setting: Crane Game
2. Write all character names in CAPITAL letters. If your character has no name, call them by their job, or what they look like. If you use the same description twice, give them numbers.
   a. Example: ALIEN #1
3. Put a blank line before and after any character has a line of dialogue.
4. Remember, film is a visual art. Only write enough so that the Director knows what action to show on screen. Your goal is to be as clear and short as possible.

You may find it valuable to compare these written words to the final scene in the “Toy Story” film. You can find the scene in the “Toy Story” DVD or online.

Follow this Sample:

**Setting: Crane Game**

Woody clambers up the side of the deposit slot.

**BUZZ** (off screen): This is an intergalactic emergency! I need to commandeer your vessel to Sector 12!

Woody peeks over the partition to witness Buzz surround by the cute alien toys.

**BUZZ** (continued; to the aliens): Who's in charge here?

All the aliens point upward.

**ALIENS:** The cla-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-w!!

Woody and Buzz look up. The crane dangles directly above the toys.

**ALIEN #1:** The claw is our master.

**ALIEN #2:** The claw chooses who will go and who will stay.
WOODY (to himself): This is ludicrous.

SID (off screen): (laughter)

Woody GASPS at the recognition of Sid's voice. He turns to see Sid heading straight for the crane game.

WOODY: Oh, no! Sid!!!

Woody leaps off the partition and tackles Buzz, pushing the two of them deep into the pile of aliens.

WOODY: Get down!!

Sid approaches the crane game and fishes quarters out of his pants pocket.

BUZZ (loud whisper): What's gotten into you, Sheriff? I was --

WOODY (loud whisper): YOU are the one that decided to climb into this --

ALIEN #4 (loud whisper): Sh-h-h-h-h-h. The claw. It moves.

The claw moves into position and hovers directly above the area where Woody and Buzz are hiding.

The crane drops and grabs hold of the alien toy that is right on top of Buzz.

ALIEN #3 (whispering excitedly): I have been chosen!!

Positioned with his back to Sid, the alien is lifted up by the claw.

ALIEN #3 (continued): Farewell, my friends! I go on to a better place.

THE END.
MATERIALS FOR

GRADERS 6-12
WORKSHEET A:
Building Blocks of a Script

This worksheet will guide you through the steps of starting to think about how stories are told in a visual way. You can see each of the building blocks of a script, followed by the complete script. Each of the steps below are subjects professional screenwriters have to consider in their work.

(1) Start with a story.

Example:
Jim and Sally are talking to each other on the hill. Jim said something Sally didn’t like. Sally ran away.

In film terms, this would be describing the plot. The crisis began when Jim started a conflict with Sally.

(2) Analyze the parts of the story:
All visual stories have Characters, Setting, Dialogue, and Action.

Characters and locations are described at the beginning of the scene. Dialogue and Actions are presented in the order they happen. Reassemble the story using these pieces.

a. Characters
Who will be in the movie? What do they look like? How old are they? Are they happy, sad, mean, or something else? How do they know the other characters?

Example of Characters:
Jim is a 9 year old boy who loves school, he is happy and has dark hair. Sally is a 9 year old girl and Jim’s best friend. She does not like spiders.

b. Setting
Where does the story take place? If it happens in multiple places, make sure to let the reader know about the other places. What time of day is it?

Example of Setting:
Jim and Sally are on a large green hill. It is morning. There are flowers and trees.
c. Dialogue
What do the characters say? Who do they say it to?

Example of Dialogue:
Jim: (to Sally)
I have a present for you.

Sally:
What is your present?

Jim:
It is a big spider.

d. Action
What do the characters do? Are there any props?

Example of Action:
Jim hands Sally a big spider.
Sally screams and runs down the hill.

(3) Assemble your script:

EXT. HILL - MORNING

Jim is a 9 year old boy who loves school, he is happy and has dark hair. He is sitting with Sally. Sally is a 9 year old girl and Jim’s best friend. She does not like spiders. Jim and Sally are on a large green hill. It is morning. There are flowers and trees.

JIM (to SALLY)
I have a present for you.

SALLY
What is your present?

JIM
It is a big spider

Jim hands Sally a big spider. Sally screams and runs down the hill.

THE END
WORKSHEET B: Formatting a Script

There are four important written elements to a screenplay. They are the **slugline**, **action text**, **character name**, and **dialogue**. They help to separate **scenes** (parts of a story that happen in one setting), **shots** (divisions of a scene that are seen from one camera angle), and **lines** (pieces of dialogue spoken by a single character.) You will also learn about **spacing**.

*(1) Slugline*

The **slugline** is also known as the “scene heading” and appears at the beginning of every scene. It describes what the camera is looking at when the scene begins. A slugline indicates a new scene, or a return to a previous scene.

A slugline answers three questions, and is written in **Bold ALL CAPS**:

- Is the scene an interior “INT.” or exterior “EXT.”?
- What location is the scene taking place?
- At what time is the scene taking place?

**Example of a slugline:**

**EXT: BOAT - LATE NIGHT**

*(2) Action Text*

The **action text** concisely describes what is happening at the beginning of each camera shot in the screenplay. It also fits in between blocks of dialogue to indicate something in the shot has changed. It should include any action that the camera sees or hears.

Action text is different from creative writing. It is short and to-the-point. Descriptive words should only be used if they help the film’s director to know what should be seen on screen.

**Example of action text at the beginning of a shot:**

Jeb is an expert fisherman. Kitty is his daughter. Jeb is trying to teach Kitty to fish, but she seems distracted.

**Example of action text to indicate a change in the shot:**

Jeb stands up. The boat rocks and he falls out of it. Fireflies scatter everywhere.
(3) Character Name

The character name tells the film’s director who is talking. It can be the character’s name, or if they don’t have a name, it can be their occupation or just a description. Sometimes it will be generic, and may need to be numbered, like MAN #1 and MAN #2. The character name is always ALL CAPS followed by a colon.

The character name line may also include who the character is talking to if it is unclear in the action text. This “to” element only appears the first time the character speaks in a conversation.

Example of a character name line:

JEB (to KITTY)

If a character is not in the camera shot, they are considered “off screen”, and their character name line should include “O.S.” Likewise, if they are not in the scene, but simply narrating it, that is called a “voice over”, and should be labeled “V.O.”

Example of a character name line for voice over:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(4) Dialogue

Dialogue is a segment of text that the character named on the previous line is speaking. These are the exact words that the character will say in the final film. Unlike creative writing, the dialogue does not have quotation marks around it, because it is separated by character name lines.

Example of dialogue:

What are you lookin’ at?

Sometimes, screenwriters will include a parenthetical description. This is a word or phrase included to help convey the emotion with which the character is speaking. It comes between the the character name line and the dialogue.

Example of parenthetical:

(hypnotically)
There’s a light on the water.
Perhaps the most unique part of writing a screenplay is the strict set of rules about **spacing**. These are the rules:

- The left margin of the page should be 1.5 inches. The right margin should be 1 inch.
- The top and bottom margins of the page should both be 1 inch.
- The slugline should be on the left margin.
- The action text should be on the left margin.
- The character name should be indented 2.5 inches from the left margin. Press the “tab” button five times.
- The dialogue should be indented 1.5 inches from the left margin. Press the “tab” button 3 times.

There should also be a blank line between each new script element, except between character names and their dialogue. At the end of every slugline, action text block, and line of dialogue, press “Enter” two times.

With all of these elements, we can create a properly formatted script:

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**EXT. BOAT - LATE NIGHT**

Jeb is an expert fisherman. Kitty is his daughter. Jeb is trying to teach Kitty to fish, but she seems distracted.

    NARRATOR (V.O.)
    The day had gone swimmingly. But Jeb knew something fishy would happen that night.

    JEB (to KITTY)
    What are you lookin’ at?

    KITTY
    (hypnotically)
    There’s a light - on the water.

    JEB
    Tarnation! Someone’s trying to steal our fishing spot!

    Jeb stands up. The boat rocks and he falls out of it. Fireflies scatter everywhere.

**THE END**

Consider using [Celtx](https://www.celtx.com), a free piece of software that automatically formats scripts, to help with the formatting of your screenplay.
# UNDERSTAND A SCREENPLAY

Every good film starts with a good screenplay. Unlike a novel, where the action unfolds in the words of the narrator, film is a visual medium. The viewer must be able to see the action unfold. The process begins when the writer develops a treatment of the story. A treatment is a brief synopsis that includes the plot, characters, setting, and action in the story. It is an excellent tool to allow the writer to see where story points work, and where they do not. Next, the screenwriter begins to work on the screenplay itself. In doing so, he or she uses a very specific three-act structure: In the opening act the writer sets up the story and establishes the relationships between the characters. Then, there is a second act, when the main character must face a series of crises or overcome obstacles that keep him from achieving his goal. Finally, there is a third act where the crisis is resolved. One page of screenplay is equal to about one minute of time in the film.

Pick a short film that you would like to analyze. As you watch, keep the following questions in mind, and refer to Worksheet A: Building Blocks of a Script. When you finish, share your answers in the blanks provided.

**Title of Film:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: What is the plot? Describe the 3-act structure.</th>
<th>Question 4: Describe your favorite piece of dialogue. Why was it effective?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: Who are the characters? How would you describe them? Who or what is the protagonist and the antagonist?</td>
<td>Question 5: Describe your favorite piece of action. Why was it effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: What is the setting? Where does the film take place, and when?</td>
<td>Question 6: How did the filmmakers show something visually instead of describing it with words?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FORMAT THE SCRIPT

Formatting a script is extremely important. It helps a director to quickly decide whether he wants to take the project when he first sees it, in a pile of dozens of scripts. It helps actors to find their lines when they’re on set. It tells the sound designer when to include sounds, and the cinematographer where to aim the camera.

Included below is a scene from the script for the Disney/Pixar film “Toy Story”. Using the rules of script formatting provided on Worksheet B: Formatting a Script, re-write the text on the left side, with the proper script formatting, on the right side. You can assume blank lines will be added later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unformatted Script:</th>
<th>Formatted Script:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The camera is inside a crane game.</td>
<td>INT. CRANE GAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody clambers up the side of the deposit slot. Buzz says off screen, “This is an intergalactic emergency! I need to commandeer your vessel to Sector 12!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody peeks over the partition to witness Buzz surrounded by the cute alien toys. Buzz says to the aliens “Who’s in charge here?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the aliens point upward. The Aliens say, “The cla-a-a-a-a-a-w!” Woody and Buzz look up. The claw dangles directly above the toys.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first Alien says, “The claw is our master.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The second Alien says, “The claw chooses who will go and who will stay.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRITE AN ADAPTATION

An adaptation is a type of screenplay that is based on a story that has already been written. Adaptations are original works in themselves, but they begin with the previously published material as their source. Screenplays can be adapted from books, or from stage plays, or even from other screenplays.

Adapting a work can be a challenge because the writer must not only create a story that is compelling in its own right, but he or she also must remain true to the original story. Adapting a written story to a screenplay requires the screenwriter to adjust the length of the story, because a book may be too long for a typical movie length. Also, the screenwriter has to consider pacing, because while the reader of a story may take many breaks throughout the story, a film audience has to digest the whole story at once. Finally, when writing an adaptation, a screenwriter must find visual ways to share the information that is described in words in the original story.

To start writing an adaptation, a screenwriter pulls out the most important points of plot, character, setting, dialogue, and action from the source story. The writer also analyzes subplots, which are smaller plots that revolve around added conflicts, and considers whether they should be changed or removed from the film.

In this exercise, choose a short story, either something you wrote or work written by another author, and adapt it to a screenplay for a short film of 1-5 minutes. Type the screenplay using proper script formatting as demonstrated on Worksheet B. Remember, a page of a screenplay is a minute of film, so your screenplay should be 1-5 pages long. It is recommended that you use the front and back of this page to analyze the original work before you begin writing your adaptation.

You are welcome to use a screenwriting program called Celtx to write this exercise. With your parents’ permission, you can access the program at www.celtx.com.

Some text is from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Teacher’s Guide Series website: http://www.oscars.org/education-outreach/teachersguide
You may find it valuable to compare these written words to the final Pizza Planet scene in the well-known Disney Pixar film “Toy Story”. You can find the scene in a copy of the “Toy Story” movie, or you can find the clip online.

INT. CRANE GAME - CONTINUOUS

Woody clambers up the side of the deposit slot.

    BUZZ (O.S.)
    This is an intergalactic emergency!
    I need to commandeer your vessel to Sector 12!

Woody peeks over the partition to witness Buzz surround by the cute alien toys.

    BUZZ
    (continued; to the aliens)
    Who's in charge here?

All the aliens point upward.

    ALIENS
    The cla-a-a-a-a-a-a-w!!

Woody and Buzz look up.

ANGLE: CRANE GAME CLAW

It dangles directly above the toys.

    ALIEN #1
    The claw is our master.

    ALIEN #2
    The claw chooses who will go and who will stay.

    WOODY
    (to himself)
    This is ludicrous.

    SID (O.S.)
    (laughter)

Woody GASPS at the recognition of Sid's voice. He turns to see Sid heading straight for the crane game.
WOODY
Oh, no! Sid!!!

Woody leaps off the partition and tackles Buzz, pushing the two of them deep into the pile of aliens.

WOODY
Get down!!

Sid approaches the crane game and fishes quarters out of his pants pocket.

BUZZ
(loud whisper)
What's gotten into you, Sheriff? I was --

WOODY
(loud whisper)
YOU are the one that decided to climb into this --

ALIEN #4
(loud whisper)
Sh-h-h-h-h-h. The claw. It moves.

ANGLE: CLAW

It moves into position and hovers directly above the area where Woody and Buzz are hiding.

The crane drops and grabs hold of the alien toy that is right on top of Buzz.

ALIEN #3
(whispering excitedly)
I have been chosen!!

Positioned with his back to Sid, the alien is lifted up by the claw.

ALIEN #3
(continued)
Farewell, my friends! I go on to a better place.

END SCENE