

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:

Question 1:

What is the plot? Describe the 3-act structure.

Question 2:

Who are the characters? How would you describe them? Who or what is the protagonist and the antagonist?

Question 3:

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

Question 4:

Describe your favorite piece of dialogue. Why was it effective?

Question 5:

Describe your favorite piece of action. Why was it effective?

Question 6:

How did the filmmakers show something visually instead of describing it with words?