

# DIGITAL STORYTELLING CURRICULUM

## LESSON ONE: THE BIG PICTURE

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to list and define three different roles in the 'script-to-screen' process.
- Students will be able to describe what makes a good writer; using what they have learned they will be able to take a position on the strength of a writer in a given film.

**Description:** This week of class will center on a panel of filmmakers sharing and inspiring students. They will outline the unique roles of writer, director and editor as well as the need for these separate roles and the process of filmmaking. The panel will help the students identify how those roles play out in a specific example.

Because film is a visual art, it is often challenging for students to identify with any roles in the process apart from the highly visible roles. Popular culture rarely focuses on roles outside of the actors, and so it is critical to take the time to get students excited about all the work that comes before the moment when an audience sits in a darkened theatre to engage with a movie. One of the primary focuses of this week is to get students excited about and provide them with a good grasp of the other key players in the game.

**Materials Needed:** Students will need notebooks.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** Before the first day of the course, and before this panel, students will be asked to watch and answer a series of questions on a given film.<sup>1</sup>

- Have you watched this movie before? Do you know the name of the writer? The director? The editor?

**In-class Activities:** During the panel, students will complete the worksheet (HANDOUT: The Roles of Filmmaking)

**Homework:** Students will be asked to do a journal entry processing through the following questions:

- What do you like about the writing of this movie? What makes it strong or weak? What do you dislike?
- What do you like about the editing of this movie? What makes it strong or weak? What do you dislike?
- What do you like about the direction of this movie? What makes it strong or weak? What do you dislike?

**Assessments:** Students will complete an in-class handout that will help assess their understanding of the different roles. This will be further revealed through their journal entry.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*This week you will be facilitating the panel! At the back of this workbook, please find the following attachments to help you:*

1. *HANDOUT: The Roles of Filmmaking.*
2. *TEACHER KEY: The Roles of Filmmaking*

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this course we will use two films from the *Twilight* series, however, teachers are free to select whatever film best fits with their students. If teachers would like to use *Twilight*, students should be divided into two groups: half will watch *Twilight* and the other group will watch *Twilight: New Moon*.

## LESSON TWO: WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to list and explain the key elements of storytelling.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate and defend the strengths of story in a given film.

**Description:** There are two key components of this day's lesson. First, watching and processing the Digital Storytelling DVD. Second, students will debate on the strengths and weaknesses of story in the movie they previously watched.

Most students measure the validity of story based on how entertained they are by the film. However, while every great story will entertain, not every entertaining movie has a great story. Before students can even think about being a part of the filmmaking process they must learn the key elements of story and spend time thinking critically about the movies they encounter. They can learn from every film's strengths and weaknesses. This lesson is designed to help them begin to deconstruct the films they see and form opinions about a movie based on the strength of a story.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** For this class students will need to have done the previous day's assignment of watching one of the movies assigned.<sup>2</sup>

### In-class Activities:

- Students will complete the attached handout during the Digital Storytelling DVD.
- They will participate in an in class debate on the story of their movie.

For the first activity, please find the handout (Handout: Digital Storytelling DVD) in the appendix section of this curriculum. For the latter activity, we recommend giving students the attached guidelines also found in the appendix section labeled: A TWILIGHT DEBATE.

**Journal Entry:** Students should process through the following questions:

- What is your favorite movie and why?
- Does your favorite movie have a good story? Why or why not?

**Assessments:** Both the debate and journal entry will be tools to assess the objectives.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*The Digital Storytelling DVD will cover the following concepts of story: Character, Action, Setting, Plot, Tension, and Dialogue*

*You will find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: DS DVD*
2. *TEACHER KEY: Summary of DVD*
3. *HANDOUT: A Twilight Debate*

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<sup>2</sup> Again, we recommend dividing your students into two groups. One group should watch *Twilight* and the other should watch *Twilight: New Moon*

### LESSON THREE: COMING UP WITH THE IDEA

#### Objectives:

- Students will be able to list and describe some tools for brainstorming.
- Students will be able to employ one or more of those tools to create an idea for their short film.

**Description:** Many students are full of creative ideas that could become wonderful stories. So much of the time students are able to dream far more easily than adults. However, an idea is not a story. After years of working with students, one thing we have discovered is that short-cutting the brainstorming process can result in anemic and underdeveloped story lines.

Brainstorming is a critical and valuable skill. Our temptation may be to just move forward with the first idea we have, but we must become critical thinkers – challenging our own ideas; pushing and prodding them into greater and deeper stories.

The entire lesson this week will be focused around brainstorming and sharing ideas with one another. The teacher will walk through some different inspiration points for ideas. Then students will explore the school grounds and share in their small groups any ideas that stemmed from their pre-class assignment.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** Before this week of class we want students to complete the attached ‘survey’ assignment with their friends or family, (HANDOUT: GETTING INSPIRATION)

#### In-class Activities:

- Students will complete the activity included in the appendix (HANDOUT: Finding Inspiration from your Life)
- Students will explore school grounds to seek inspiration.
- Students will process with small groups any ideas that came from their pre-class assignment

**Journal Entry:** Students should process through their idea:

- What is your story idea?
- How did you create this idea? What brainstorming tools were most helpful to you?

**Assessments:** The ideas themselves should provide insight into their grasp of brainstorming. The journal entry will also help measure their ability to employ the ‘tools’ provided.

#### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will facilitate the activities as well as providing students with more brainstorming ideas.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: Getting Inspiration (pre-assignment)*
2. *HANDOUT: Finding Inspiration from your Life*
3. *TEACHING TOOL: Brainstorming Story Ideas*

## LESSON FOUR: SETTING

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to give examples of strong and weak settings for films, and defend their and defend strong setting and weak settings
- Students will create and defend a setting for their movie.

**Description:** The next four lessons of the curriculum are designed to help students troubleshoot some of the potential pitfalls for first time writers and filmmakers. Each lesson will take an element of story and dig deeper, applying directly to the student's story idea along the way to help develop stories that are robust and transferable to film.

Students often feel limited in the setting of their film through resources. This lesson is critical in helping students see that setting can become a character of its own, shaping and adding to the tone of a film in a unique way.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** Students will complete a journal entry responding to the questions below:

- What is the setting of your favorite movie? How does this setting create a tone for the film or further the story?

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will brainstorm movies they have seen where setting influences story and explain the role of setting in each movie.
- **ACTIVITY TWO:** Students will look at an excerpt describing setting from the novel *Twilight* and the screenplay, working through the attached handout (HANDOUT: SETTING IN TWILIGHT)
- **ACTIVITY THREE:** Students will be divided into small groups. Each group will be given a genre of film (e.g. *Horror, romantic comedy, drama, comedy, thriller...*). The entire class will then be presented with a specific setting. Groups will have some time to brainstorm how that setting would be presented in a screenplay in order to contribute to their genre of film. They will write the opening sequence for a screenplay using setting and establishing the tone of their film. They will then present these to the class.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will briefly emphasize the ways that setting contributes to story.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: Setting in Twilight*
2. *TEACHING TOOL: The Importance of Setting.*

**Journal Entry:** Students will journal through the setting of their idea (created in the previous lesson)

- Where is the setting of your movie going to be? Do you need to tweak your idea based on the locations available to you?
- How do you need to describe or shoot the setting in order to create the right tone for your movie?
- How will the setting be utilized throughout your screenplay to contribute to the story?

**Assessments:** Both the activities and journal entries will contribute to assessment.

## LESSON FIVE: STORY ARC

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to list three distinguishing factors between good plot and bad plot.
- Students will be able to explain three act structure
- Students will create and defend a story arc structure for their screenplay.

**Description:** This lesson of the curriculum is designed to help students practice and strengthen their understanding of story arc.

The plot seems like such a basic component of story that so often it is neglected, but this lesson will help students identify what makes a strong story arc and how to avoid some of the common pitfalls. Students will learn some new concepts (such as the 3-act structure) as well as having opportunities to practice developing tone and character of a story through plot.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** This lesson has no pre-class assignments.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will talk through how *Twilight* fits with the three-act structure. Is it a good example or bad one and why?
- **ACTIVITY TWO:** Students will be divided into small groups. Each group will be given a genre of film (e.g. *Horror, romantic comedy, drama, comedy, thriller...*). The entire class will then be presented with a specific setting and characters. Groups will have some time to brainstorm how those characters and setting could intersect in a three act structure story arc to contribute to their genre of film. They will then present these to the class.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will recap the concept of plot as well as walking through the basic concepts of the three act structure.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *TEACHING TOOL: Three Act Structure Part I & II*

**Journal Entry:** Students will journal through the story arc of their film concept:

- What is the setup of your story?
- What is the inciting incident?
- What is the first plot point?
- What is the confrontation made up of? What is the second plot point?
- What is the climax of the story?

**Assessments:** Both the activities and journal entry will contribute to assessment.

### On Story:

Season 1, Episode 1 – Character Creation, How to Write

Season 2, Episode 12 - Conversations with Shane Black

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## LESSON SIX: TELLING A STORY WITHOUT WORDS

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to list three distinguishing factors between telling a story through film vs. a written narrative.
- Students will be able to implement visual storytelling in their film concept

**Description:** Most students have only encountered two types of stories. They have read stories on the page, and then they have watched stories unfold on the screen. So often the screenwriting part of the process remains a mystery for them.

As a result, when they want to move their story along or provide the audience with insight into a character's motivation they often have to resort to obvious dialogue or voice over. They have never been included in the discussion of how to convey characters and story without 'telling' the audience the answer.

Through this lesson students will begin to see how visual stories differ from written ones and as they examine the different techniques used to further their plot and character development they will become more skilled at the technique of writing for different senses.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** This lesson has no pre-class assignments.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will examine a section from the book of *New Moon* and then a comparable scene in the film. They will complete the questions on the handout included in the appendix, (HANDOUT: New Moon Scene.)
- **ACTIVITY TWO:** Students will be divided into small groups. Each group will be given the same short story and will be asked to create one scene from the story in screenplay form without using dialogue. They will then present these to the class. (HANDOUT: Creating a visual story).

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will help students process through what they learn through in-class activities.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: New Moon Scene.*
2. *HANDOUT: Creating a Visual Story.*

**Journal Entry:** Students will journal through the following questions?

- Are there any plot points or scenes in your film that will not be dialogue heavy? Think through how you can move the plot along without explicit dialogue.

- What are some things you want your audience to know about your characters right off the bat? And how can you communicate those things without simply ‘telling’ the audience what you want them to know?

**Assessments:** Both the activities and journal entry will contribute to assessment.

**On Story:** Season 2, Episode 3 – Writing Action

## LESSON SEVEN: TELLING A STORY WITH WORDS

### Objectives:

- Given a scene from a film, students will be able to critically assess and defend their position on the use of dialogue.
- Students will be able to create dialogue at a higher level for their film concept.

**Description:** This lesson will focus on furthering character development and plot through dialogue in a way that is not contrived or forced.

Too often, when students want to move a plot along or share something about a character they use dialogue as a tool to give us information, rather than exploiting dialogue as an opportunity to teach us how a character thinks, feels and speaks. Through this lesson, students will begin to see how dialogue offers a unique opportunity to engage the audience and convince the watcher to invest in both characters and plot.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** In this lesson, students will complete the handout included in the appendix (HANDOUT: How People Talk)

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will share with one another the different things they noticed about the way people around them communicate on their ‘How People Talk’ handout.
- **ACTIVITY TWO:** Students will examine a scene from the film *Twilight*. They will discuss together any distinguishing markers in dialogue between characters. They will process how the dialogue is used to develop plot and character and if they think it is used effectively.
- **ACTIVITY TWO:** Students will be divided into small groups to complete the activity included in the appendix (HANDOUT: Creating Meaningful Dialogue). Each group will take the same story and the same outline of conversation but will be asked to create characters based on their own family and friends. Using dialogue alone, they will have to convey the character so strongly that the other students in the class have a sense of their personality.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will help students process through what they learn through in-class activities.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: How People Talk.*
2. *HANDOUT: Creating Meaningful Dialogue.*



**Journal Entry:** Students will process in their journal entry the following questions:

- Who are your characters? What are they like? What are their personalities? Interests?
- How does each character talk? What kind of words do they use? Are they verbal communicators, or do they hide behind their words?
- Practice writing dialogue for each of your characters. How would each character communicate if they were in trouble? Write out a few lines of dialogue for each one.

**Assessments:** Both the activities and journal entry will contribute to assessment.

**On Story:** Season 2, Episode 1 – Sydney Pollack on Character

Season 2, Episode 10 - Roderigo Garcia on Character

## LESSON EIGHT: FEEDBACK WEEK

**Objectives:**

- Give students clear and tangible feedback for their film concept.

**Description:** Before students dig deeply into the actual writing of their screenplay we want to take all the pieces they have learned and been fleshing out in their film concept and give them some good feedback.

Not only will this lesson be a great opportunity for students to get 3-4 specific things they can focus on in their screenplays, it will also be an opportunity for them to learn from one another and cultivate an atmosphere where they feel safe to share and receive encouragement and development in their writing.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** Prior to this lesson, each student will prepare a 5 minute presentation on their concepts so far. Please find in the appendix a helpful tool for students in preparing this presentation. (HANDOUT: PRESENTING YOUR CONCEPT).

**In-class Activities:**

- Students will share their presentations and receive feedback! They will get 2-3 encouragements as well as 2-3 things to work on as they begin to develop their concepts! (HANDOUT: Presenting your concept)

**Journal Entry:** Students will process in their journal entry the following questions:

- What feedback did you receive in class?
- What do you think are going to be the easiest parts for you in writing this screenplay? What are going to be the biggest challenges?

### TEACHER SAYS!

*A guest will be joining the class to help provide feedback for the presentations.*

*Please find the following attachments in the appendix to help you facilitate the lesson:*

1. *HANDOUT: Presenting Your Concept*

**Assessments:** Both the activities and journal entry will contribute to assessment.

**On Story:** Season 1, Episode 5 – Feedback and Collaboration

## LESSON NINE: MAKING A SCRIPT

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to format a script according to industry standards.

**Description:** Screenwriting is a literal terms which means that a writer is writing something for the screen. Students should be aware that formatting their script is an important aspect in regards to conveying their story on film.

As students are developing their stories, they will be able to format their original screenplay into a professional format using the appropriate software. This will be a useful tool for students to use in order to clearly define the message of their story and to demonstrate how they envision the story being portrayed through action.

**Materials Needed:** Celtx Software

**Pre-Class Assignments:** This lesson has no pre-class assignments.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will analyze a narrative scene from the book *New Moon* and convert the story into a screenplay format using their notebooks.

**Journal Entry:** Students will need to brainstorm the reasons the four elements of formatting are crucial to a screenplay.

- How do the four elements help the production process of the film?
- Will you have to edit your story in order to convey your message clearly using the four elements of format?

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers may need to remind students of the four elements of formatting a screenplay:*

- **Sluglines/Scene Headings**
- **Action**
- **Character Names**
- **Dialogue**

*Use previous handouts to help equip you with this! Also attached you will find a helpful tool:*

1. *TEACHING TOOL: Screenplay Formatting*
2. *HANDOUT: Formatting Your Script*

**Assessments:** The activity and journal entry will attribute to the assessment.

## LESSONS 10-11: SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to structure their story with more detail and continue to develop their story line.

**Description:** Screenwriting is a meticulous task that requires a thought-provoking process from the storyteller. Screenwriters often question: Are the characters relatable? Is the story cohesive or am I confusing the reader? Is the dialogue leading the story in the direction I want it to go? Is my script written for film instead of from a narrative perspective?

During this lesson, students should develop their script while asking the questions listed above. They should also make sure that their story incorporates the six concepts of storytelling: Character, Action, Setting, Plot, Tension, and Dialogue.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** This lesson has no pre-class assignments.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students should use their brainstorming ideas from Lesson 3 to write a script and develop it.

**Journal Entry:** Students will need to answer the following questions to think about their story's development:

- Who is my lead character? How do they speak? What characteristics make them who they are?
- What obstacles am I going to make the lead character overcome?
- What is the setting of my story?

**Assessments:** The activity and journal entry will attribute to the assessment.

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers may need to remind students of the six concepts of storytelling:*

- **Character**
- **Action**
- **Setting**
- **Plot**
- **Tension**
- **Dialogue**

Attached you will find a helpful tool:

*1. TEACHING TOOL: SIX CONCEPTS OF STORYTELLING*

## LESSONS 12-13: SCRIPT READINGS

### Objectives:

- Students will receive constructive feedback from screenwriters/filmmakers about their script and how it translates to film.

**Description:** Although stories can be told from a narrative perspective, screenwriting is about writing a story with the intention of translating it to film. Writers need to be aware of how they are describing a scene and think about how it would be interpreted on film.

Script readings offer an initial insight as to how the script tells the story. Viewers get to hear the dialogue of the script without seeing props or sound effects that take place in the production and post-production aspect of filmmaking. This allows the writer to examine how audiences react to their script based on the dialogue.

Filmmakers will attend this lesson and listen to a script reading of a student's story. Filmmakers will offer insight and feedback as to what worked for the story and what needs to be revised.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** Students should be provided with the attachment for this lesson to get an understanding of what filmmakers will critique.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will read their script in front of the class and filmmaker(s).

**Journal Entry:** Students should focus on the feedback they received from the filmmaker.

- Was there a scene in my script where I received a different reaction from the audience than what I expected?
- What advice did the filmmaker provide to change a part of the script that I was struggling with?
- Is there something the filmmaker told me to change that I am not going to change? Why or why not?

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Filmmakers will provide feedback to students based on a script reading.*

*A script reading occurs before a script is filmed and offers only a dialogue performance of the script to an audience. It allows the writer to receive feedback before editing the script.*

*Please provide the following handout to the filmmakers:*

1. **HANDOUT: FILMMAKER'S ASSESSMENT**

**Assessments:** The activity and the journal entry will attribute to the assessment.

## LESSONS 14-15: EDITS

### Objectives:

- Students will be able to edit their script based on feedback and personal insight.

**Description:** Editing a script requires feedback from several sources. Often a screenwriter will ask for feedback from a business associate, family member, or filmmaker and make edits to their script accordingly. Editing usually happens several times throughout the screenwriting process.

Although a screenwriter may have invested time into a particular scene, they may have to remove it from the story so that it flows smoothly. The editing process is valuable to a script because it allows the writer to think about writing their script from a different viewpoint than originally anticipated.

**Materials Needed:** No additional materials needed.

**Pre-Class Assignments:** The feedback and journal entry from Lessons 12-13 will serve as the pre-class assignment.

### In-class Activities:

- **ACTIVITY ONE:** Students will form groups or pair up with a partner, depending on class size, and work together to make edits to their scripts. Each student should critique one partner's script with the handout provided.

**Journal Entry:** Students should focus on the feedback they received from their partner/editor.

- List a critique that the editor gave you. Do you think the critique is valid? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is beneficial to have an editor review your script? Why or why not?

### TEACHER SAYS!

*Teachers will want to make sure that students have received feedback from the filmmakers in Lessons 12-13 before beginning the assignment.*

*Student Surveys will also be passed out at the end of the lesson to evaluate the curriculum.*

*Please provide the following handouts to the students:*

1. *HANDOUT: EDITING A SCRIPT*
2. *HANDOUT: STUDENT SURVEY*

**Assessments:** The activity and the journal entry will attribute to the assessment.

# APPENDIX

- Lesson ONE
  - Handout: The Roles of Filmmaking
  - Teacher Key: The Roles of Filmmaking
- Lesson TWO
  - Handout: Digital Storytelling DVD
  - Teacher Key: DS DVD
  - Handout: A Twilight Debate
- Lesson THREE
  - Handout: Getting Inspiration
  - Handout: Finding Inspiration in your Life
  - Teaching Tool: Brainstorming Story Ideas
- Lesson FOUR
  - Handout: Setting in Twilight
  - Teaching Tool: The Importance of Setting
- Lesson FIVE:
  - Teaching Tool: Three-Act Structure Part I
  - Teaching Tool: Three-Act Structure Part II
- Lesson SIX:
  - Handout: New Moon Scene
  - Creating a Visual Scene
- Lesson SEVEN:
  - Handout: How People Talk
  - Handout: Creating Meaningful Dialogue
- Lesson EIGHT:
  - Handout: Presenting Your Concept
- Lesson NINE:
  - Teaching Tool: Screenplay Formatting
  - Handout: Formatting Your Script
- Lessons TEN-ELEVEN:
  - Teaching Tool: Six Concepts of Storytelling
- Lessons TWELVE-THIRTEEN:
  - Handout: Filmmaker's Assessment
- Lessons FOURTEEN-FIFTEEN:
  - Handout: Student Survey

# HANDOUT: THE ROLES OF FILMMAKING

|   | Writer | Editor | Director |
|---|--------|--------|----------|
| What are the key elements of this role?       |        |        |          |
| What makes someone good at this role?         |        |        |          |
| What do you like the sound of with this role? |        |        |          |
| What do you dislike about this role?          |        |        |          |