

## BROOKLYN YOUNG FILMMAKERS

### INTRO TO SCRIPTWRITING LESSON: Creating Characters Who Seem Like Real People

#### RECONCEPTUALIZING “ONE MORE CHANCE”

By Trayce Gardner

*(SPOILER ALERT!: This article should be read after you have read the ONE MORE CHANCE script.)*

#### HONORING THE STUDENT WRITER



*Fayquetta Glenn*

*Brooklyn Young Filmmakers thanks Fayquetta Glenn, the student writer of ONE MORE CHANCE, for granting us permission to use her original script as the basis of our shooting script in the current Make A Film Class. As a teacher and writer, I am grateful to Fayquetta for allowing me to lead the class in a re-envisioning of the characters in ONE MORE CHANCE. Then I did a rewrite that has resulted in our shooting script BABY BLUES. In keeping with the Pre-Production phase the class is in, Fayquetta has shifted from being a writer to being a Co-Producer, helping with paperwork and planning.*

#### TURNING “ONE MORE CHANCE” INTO A TEACHING STORY

The students had fun reading ONE MORE CHANCE aloud in class because it has passionate dialogue and sensational acts. Writers, like actors, love to play with/explore subject matter that they themselves would never be involved with in real life. I was interested in the story because it has human subject matter we have never dealt with in a BYFC film – cheating in a couple relationship; unsafe sex and transmittal of AIDS; attitudes towards sex; and interpersonal violence. As it is, ONE MORE CHANCE is a far out yet (unfortunately) mostly believable story about revenge. It titillates you, and then leaves you caring about no one. For Brooklyn Young Filmmakers to produce a script, it has to illustrate human concerns – *what drives a character to do wrong or harmful acts?* Towards this end, I led the class in a re-conceptualizing of the characters in ONE MORE CHANCE.

#### INITIAL FEEDBACK ON SCRIPT

In our Intro to Scriptwriting Class, students bring copies of their scripts and distribute them to the class. Fellow students stand up and read the script aloud. This is followed by the students giving the writer their feedback. Then I follow with my feedback. Here is some of the feedback I gave to Fayquetta after the class reading of ONE MORE CHANCE (2nd draft):

## REVERSAL

I think you can draw the audience in more by doing a complete *reversal*. Don't show them any hint of Lisa's aggression in the beginning. Then, when she turns aggressive, *both* Clint and the audience will be surprised.

This was also my feedback for Fayquetta's first draft. In that original script version, Lisa was yo-yo-ing back and forth in the very beginning, from angry behavior and language to over the top sexiness. You *knew* from the first that Lisa was planning to do something to get back at Clint. In her second draft, Fayquetta has cut most of that early show of aggression out. But there are still hints – "Lisa, an aggravated looking woman....clutching a letter..."

## THE TRAP

When you use an answer and response between characters to set up important details of a suspenseful situation, don't split the information – putting part of it on one page and the rest of it two pages later – *unless you have a creative reason for doing so*. On page 1 of ONE MORE CHANCE:

CLINT: ....It's so peaceful the kids must be asleep!

Then on page 2, *after many other things are talked about*:

LISA: ....Dropped the kids at mommy's house. It's just me and you...

After Clint asked about the kids, Lisa should have immediately responded with the information that they were alone.

## METAPHOR, SIMILE, OR FORESHADOWING

On page 1, Clint tells Lisa in detail the story of his catching the shoplifters. Yes, from Clint's story we learn what he does and it's funny. The more experienced writer could also turn this minor anecdote into a *metaphor* or *simile* – a symbol, likeness, or comparison to something that happens in the main story.

Or the experienced writer could use this sidetracking story to *foreshadow* something that is going to happen in the main story. The sidetracking story can also be the subtle payoff moment that leads the audience to understand something that has been said or done earlier. If you have a character tell a sidetracking story about something that is not in the immediate situation, you want to make sure it indirectly helps to illuminate (or drive) the main story.

## MOTIVATION

On page 5:

LISA: ....I stood by you, carried four of your children!....And in the end I won't be around for my children! You take my life, I take your life!!!

Then she stabs Clint to death. She takes Clint's life to avenge her (possible) death from AIDS. But what happens to her kids? Lisa's headed for prison and has hastened her own end as a present mother. How would you judge Lisa as a mother? She doesn't really seem to be fighting for her kids' well-being. Revenge is her ultimate motive. Does the writer want us to regard Lisa to be as bad a person as the cheating husband who has given her AIDS?

I asked Fayquetta how Lisa's children played into her motivation for her deadly act. Fayquetta hadn't clearly thought that out. A character, just like a person, can be of two-minds, but we need to believe it is the character's head we are in – and not the writer's.

## THEME

Yes, it's about revenge. But I ended up thinking Clint and Lisa are both wrong. What was the point of the story? Which character undergoes a real change (for good or bad)? I asked Fayquetta what her message is to the audience, and she didn't know yet. ONE MORE CHANCE clearly shows us "what" happens, but not "why".

## MAKING STORY SENSE

ONE MORE CHANCE ends with:

LISA: Oh GOD, forgive me!

Then fade out. This is after pages of Lisa acting out with relish her bloody fantasy of revenge. It's as though the writer, after having unrestrained fun playing with violence, had a last minute conscience attack and wants the audience to know that Lisa immediately feels guilty for her deadly act. If you really want us to believe Lisa undergoes a sudden change at the end, you have to make us *feel* Lisa's sorrow. It doesn't have to be done with a lot of words, but they need to be words that give us new insight into Lisa. Or it could be done with a strong image or telling act by Lisa.

## DEVELOPING CHARACTER PROFILES

I told the class to begin re-imagining who the characters are and why they do what they do, we first need to create a more extensive back story for them. I asked them to begin by answering these basic questions:

- When did Clint and Lisa meet? How old were they?
- What was Lisa's family background? Clint's?
- What were their goals as young adults, before they became parents?
- Was their first child planned? Can what kind of parent is Lisa? Clint?
- Is Clint happy in his job as a security guard?
- Does Lisa work outside the home? Does she have a network of friends?
- What is Lisa and Clint's sex life like? How often has he been unfaithful?

Come up with your own back story for the characters and write it down. In the next scriptwriting lesson I will share the extensive back story we came up with. You can then compare what you came up with what we came up with. Any story and any character could be developed many different ways. You can learn a lot though by studying choices other writers make.

## GIVING MEANING TO THE STORY

We need to make the audience care about our characters, even when they do despicable things. We can do this by making a character more complex, giving him not only his conscious goal but also his unconscious need that is eating away inside him. Let the audience see something about the character that the character himself does not yet see. When we are successful in getting the audience to identify, even briefly, with our character, we have made our story meaningful. In the next lesson I will share how we gave more meaning to our story.

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