

Write-by-the-Lake Writer's Workshop & Retreat, June 15-19, 2009

Section #12— W.R.A.P.* your screenplay

*(Write, Revise, Adapt, and Pitch)

Led by Laurie Scheer.

Held at the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Contact: coordinator, Christine DeSmet, (608) 262-3447, cdesmet@dcs.wisc.edu

Syllabus

Monday

Write.

Introductions are in order. We're about to spend a business week together. Let's get to know each other.

Why this industry? A basic overall discussion of the current trends, marketplace, and changes in technology that are affecting films and how they are consumed.

The writer's life. Every writer has pet projects and favors certain projects over others. As we compare and contrast established writers' works, and discuss their successes and failures, we'll analyze their careers (i.e. Steven Zallian – from *Searching for Bobby Fischer* to *American Gangster* and David Koepp from *Death Becomes Her* to *Zathura* to name just a couple examples) to begin to understand the life of working screenwriters in this sometimes-tumultuous industry.

Next, we'll determine and discuss the specifics of your projects. Everyone will have these answers; otherwise it will be difficult to move your work out into the world. One must also know the ending of your script before you begin writing your script – along with the following elements;

- Why did you choose your subject matter? What is your theme?
- As a writer, why do you think your project will make a difference in the world?
- If you've chosen a period piece, describe why you feel the topic will resonate to a 21st Century audience?
- Who will enjoy your material the most?
- What does the audience get from your work that they are unable to experience anywhere else?

By the end of the day you'll have a mission statement for your script.

Participants will be asked to view a recent film (film to be announced closer to seminar time). Please view this film this Monday evening if you haven't already.

Tuesday Revise.

Revising often involves researching. We'll do some investigation regarding original 37 plots and their variations. Topics will be examined and attention paid to the spin that is placed upon those topics through history, ethnic diversity, generational changes, and economic considerations.

With this new perspective, you'll be asked to take another look at your material - a careful look. Has your idea appeared/been done before? Why is your version better?

How do you assure the topic is appealing, reader-friendly, and commercial? What can you do to assure your material is the material that will be chosen, that will sell, that the audience will embrace?

As you explore the above answers, you'll begin to see your script from a different perspective – a perspective that will help you see how your work will be evaluated and understand the development process so you'll be able to succeed in front of every producer and/or production company or studio.

And finally, you'll choose the moments that will be used as scenes in the trailer or promotion for your material – if you are unable to do this, you'll need to continue to revise and do that research.

By the end of the day, you'll have an outline of a mock trailer that will sell your script.

Wednesday Adapt.

From fiction to the visual medium, from the screenplay to manuscript (and yes, some agents are suggesting that writing your screenplay as a novel could help to sell it) - here's how to adapt your material to the winning form.

We'll look at successful novelists that have bridged the world of film, such as John Irving, Amy Tan, John Grisham, Anne Rice, and even renegades like Joss Whedon who boldly took his BUFFY THE VAMPIRE KILLER from film to TV effortlessly.

Why is it difficult for long-form fiction writers to adapt their screenplays? A discussion about the “economic use of words” will take place.

Why is it difficult for visual media writers who normally write for the screen to write long form fiction? A discussion about the reverse of the “economic use of

words” will take place.

Writing exercises utilizing scenes with and without dialogue will help all of us to understand the ease and/or difficulties of adapting material for another medium.

Should you make the move to adapt? An up-to-date discussion regarding the successes and failures of recent switchover projects.

By the end of the day, you’ll have made your decision – to adapt or not to adapt, that will be the question.

Thursday Pitch.

Everything you've always wanted to know about how to research, prepare, rehearse, and captivate the attention of those you'll be pitching your idea to will be explored.

Examples of successful loglines, selling synopses, and treatments will be displayed and discussed.

Phone pitches, in-person meeting pitches; elevator and cocktail party pitches will be viewed.

Mock pitches will be performed.

Pitches are welcome. You pitch, you receive feedback.

By the end of the day, you’ll know where and how to pitch like a pro.

Friday It’s a W.R.A.P.

A blending in harmony of the work we'll do all week wherein we achieve a brand for each writer.

As we review the work you’ve completed – your mission statement, mock trailer, decided adaptation, and pitch material, your overall unique energy will emerge and that unique energy is your brand.

A discussion of branding from Rachel Ray to Stephen King to Joan Didion to Jon Stewart and everyone in-between will take place so you can easily arrive at your very own brand.

Exercises to find and hone your brand, inclusive of the material you’ve prepared, will take place.

The brand will be used to effectively present the writer and his/her work to the world. You will embrace all the confidence you need to become a (more effective) player in the industry.

By the end of the day (and on this day, the week), you will have no fear of success and be armed and ready to go out into the world to unwrap and present your screenplay.

Credit Option: Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others' work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.