

## StoryLab 10-02-09:

Welcome! StoryLab is simple: **Watch and evaluate** scenes from 168 Film Project films, **then compare to similar scenes from major motion pictures**. Writers and Directors, learn fundamentals and fine points and then we **hear from the Filmmakers**. Your host is Indie Filmmaker **Derrick Warfel**, a graduate of USC Film School, Princeton University and Dallas Theological Seminary. We will attempt to post each StoryLab meeting.

**WRITERS LEARN:** 1. Common story mistakes in Speed Filmmaking 2. Choosing the most powerful story 3. Creating compelling, believable characters 4. Writing realistic, powerful dialogue 5. Communicating: leaving the cheese in the dairy aisle 6. Riveting dramatic structure - the scene. **DIRECTORS LEARN:** 1. Tips on directing actors in engaging performances 2. Thinking visually

**HOST YOUR OWN StoryLab** wherever you are. Here's what you need. The video is online, but for an expanded discussion of the entire short film, you should get the 168 DVD with "The Last Laugh" on it (2009). [http://store.168project.com/merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store\\_Code=1HPAF&Category\\_Code=DVD](http://store.168project.com/merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=1HPAF&Category_Code=DVD)

**StoryLab Focus:** "The Last Laugh" starring Victoria Jackson is based on Genesis 22:2 (verse is below in #4). Producers: McCall Jones, Amber Deegan, Susan Shearer, and Director Eric Tozzi. StoryLab Host; Derrick Warfel, Indie Producer, Princeton, USC Film School and Dallas Theological Graduate.

Here is the **StoryLab procedure** for your group, wherever you are.

1. Watch "**The Last Laugh**," paying special attention to the "Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene," which is online at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWv\\_Dfi5W8Q&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWv_Dfi5W8Q&feature=youtube_gdata)
2. Watch similar scenes in "**Toy Story**" (See minutes 3-8), "**Romancing the Stone**" (See 15:30 min.), "**Bruce Almighty**" (See min. 27-33).
3. Watch StoryLab discussions and have your own discussion.
4. Homework: **Rewrite the scene** from "The Last Laugh" using new-found skills.
5. EXTRA CREDIT: WATCH "**Night at the Museum**" and watch for the line by Dick Van Dyke, "Oh, yeah he's the one." (See min. 12 – 20). Discuss the "Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene."

**Below are:** 1. LINKS and written Descriptions of the video clips, 2. an Evaluation of Writing and Directing and 3. a Scene Rating Guide.

**DISCUSSION TOPIC:** "Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene": This is the scene where the primary story conflict is established. Before this there are scenes that reveal the ordinary world of the hero, his desires, his weaknesses, his daily conflicts, and his disappointments. A game changer. Things will never be the same. Other names for this scene: Inciting Incident – Robert McKee, Plot point one – Syd Fields

**SPECIFICS:** "The Last Laugh's" Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene is when the owner of the comedy club (Victoria Jackson) has to tell everyone that the club is closing its doors.

**THE PROBLEM WITH THE CALL TO ACTION/OBLIGATORY SCENE:**

Since **a lot of information** has to be gotten out in this scene (new world, new conflict, new characters) for the audience to understand the story, EITHER it's dry, boring and you lose your audience, as when the writer spells out all the information. Or the story becomes confusing when the writer fails to clearly communicate the information.

Exposition is often the writer's enemy. The trick of the call to action/obligatory scene is to get ALL the necessary information out to set up the primary story conflict without boring the audience.

Writers **inform while entertaining** and make the audience REALLY CARE for the hero and his goals.

## VIDEO CLIPS:

### 1.0: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.0 "The Last Laugh" ("Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene")

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWv\\_Dfi5W8Q&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWv_Dfi5W8Q&feature=youtube_gdata)

### 1.1 (THERE IS NO 1.1)

### 1.2: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.2 "The Last Laugh"

What was good? Emotion, Acting, Fit the verse, Conflict, camera, sound design, writing, dialogue, and character?

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpdL3TZ0EPM&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpdL3TZ0EPM&feature=youtube_gdata)

### 1.3: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.3 "The Last Laugh"

Dialogue is character specific. If you can switch dialogue between characters, you have a real problem. Montage is nice. "I am sad" = lazy writing. Give them something to do. Lighting & creating a world. How do you get sense of the world you want to create? Research. Setup vs. Payoff and time to emotionally process. Reaction scene. Editing.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSaR7QqU9VI&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSaR7QqU9VI&feature=youtube_gdata)

### 1.4: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.4 "The Last Laugh"

Conflict, Conflict, Conflict. Dealing with conflict is a major problem with short films (and many churches).

Conflict must be well-defined, high stakes and reasonable. Setup vs. Payoff. Clarify relationships in interesting ways. <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/18040309>

### 1.5: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.5 "The Last Laugh"

Verse: Genesis 22:2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Who is antagonist? Does he change his mind? Strongest antagonist is the one that never changes, they are only defeated. Logic of the movie. Audience buy-in. Hitting the problem.

<http://www.dailymotion.com/video/18040377>

### 1.6: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.6 "The Last Laugh"

Logic problems take the audience out of the picture. Wide lenses vs. close-up.

<http://www.dailymotion.com/video/18040364>

### 1.7: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.7 "The Last Laugh" - Journey

Hero's journey. Different types of heroes, superhero vs. everyman hero. Hero must be tempted to stray from virtue. Story of Christ's temptation.

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&videoid=63959171>

### 1.8: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.8 "The Last Laugh" - Theme-Push or Pull

Does the story allow the theme to come out naturally? Execution of this is crucial. Creative license. How will the 168 Films be judged on scriptural integration? <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/18040348>

### 1.9: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.9 "The Last Laugh" - Meet the Filmmakers

Meet the filmmakers: L-R Producers: McCall Jones, Amber Deegan, Susan Shearer, and Director Eric Tozzi.

Getting the verse they were dreading. Involving the entire team in making their 168 film. Eric agreed with and appreciates all the criticism. "Fantastic." Problems with the location and timing of difficult scenes. Actor ramp-up time to emotional scenes. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooq3YtYRPjE&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooq3YtYRPjE&feature=youtube_gdata)

### 1.10: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.10 "The Last Laugh" - Challenges

Relationship depiction in a short. Subtlety. Challenges of making a short. McCall Jones, "The option to give up is not there. Does it take begging, pleading or another phone call..." Questions to the group.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nc0Snca8GQ&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nc0Snca8GQ&feature=youtube_gdata)

1.11: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.11 "The Last Laugh" – Call2Adventure

Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene defined: it sets up the primary problem/opportunity of the story. Introduces a new factor in the hero's life. This scene can become very boring. See the character's inner motivation.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B25BWuGMDPY&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B25BWuGMDPY&feature=youtube_gdata)

1.12: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.12 "The Last Laugh"- Tired at 5AM

Director's perspective: Emotional honesty in fictitious circumstances. Actors are really tired at 5am. Sometimes it helps the scene. Flashbacks. Volunteering information when no one asked. "I can see you see how sad I am."  
Logic is good. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh1u5ANdqe&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh1u5ANdqe&feature=youtube_gdata)

**WATCH** Call to Adventure/Obligatory Scene in "Toy Story." (See minutes 3-8). Dialogue: Mr. Potato Head says "Look, I'm Picasso." Toy Story. Watch the ordinary world of the toys when Woody has a meeting to discuss the move and Andy's birthday party.

1.13: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.13 "The Last Laugh" – Discuss Toy Story

Discuss "Toy Story." See what the writers do to make the scene have continual conflict and fun. Toys discuss "getting replaced." Andy comes in with a mysterious new package. Conflict and disagreement. Everyone disagrees with Woody. Moving. You need a moving buddy. Threat: A new toy. All characters introduced by what they DO, not what they say. Rapid-fire jokes.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS\\_SoabUavs&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS_SoabUavs&feature=youtube_gdata)

**WATCH** Call to Adventure/Obligatory scene: in "Romancing the Stone." (See 15:30). The boring life of an adventure/romance writer is spiced up when her sister is kidnapped and she has to go rescue her. Watch the scene where she and her publisher talk over drinks and the following (the obligatory) scene where the kidnapped sister cries out for rescue.

1.14: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.14 "Romancing the Stone"

Setup "Romancing the Stone" Call to Adventure/Obligatory Scene.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWPwOe9P3Uo&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWPwOe9P3Uo&feature=youtube_gdata)

1.15: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.15 Discuss "Romancing the Stone "

"Romancing the Stone" discussion. What holds you in this very talky scene? Music. Phone call. Stakes. Reluctant, ill equipped hero. Hero's decision and gatekeepers. Call to adventure.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-pFNztO-sU&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-pFNztO-sU&feature=youtube_gdata)

1.16: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.16 call to adventure When?

When should the call to adventure come?  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrrHB\\_zVzmM&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrrHB_zVzmM&feature=youtube_gdata)

**WATCH** "Bruce Almighty" for a "split Call to Adventure/Obligatory Scene," where Bruce (Jim Carey) meets God (Morgan Freeman). Bruce Almighty (See min. 27-33).

1.17: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.17 "Bruce Almighty"

Derrick explains plot of "Bruce Almighty"  
<http://www.dailymotion.com/video/18040334>

1.18: 168 StoryLab Clip 1.18 "Bruce Almighty" 2

What gimmicks did they use? Reveals. You must get it out thru conflict.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN-0aRobA9w&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN-0aRobA9w&feature=youtube_gdata)

---

A Motion Picture (and storytelling in general) is NOT real life, it is a **dramatized, streamlined, climaxing** series of realistic feeling situations used to communicate a thematic purpose.

**Need to choose the RIGHT STORY to COMMUNICATE your theme.** Does the theme feels "tacked on" to the story, cheesy, preachy, rather than growing out of the story? Either change the story to have the theme come out of it organically, or look at the theme that is emerging naturally from the story.

The theme is what you believe in about how a person should act in a situation. And, you can see that every story is a kind of argument. It's a moral argument. The hero must fight for something. He's has values that he believes in strongly enough to fight for. He is opposed by somebody who has different values. And, that's really what we are interested in: the battle of values between them. Each side makes their argument. They argue by what they do and how they justify what they do. The theme is what you the writer believe in, the destination the hero will eventually get to. You are not making your argument by laying ideas on top of your character. What you are doing is far more difficult. You are making your argument through your characters and through what they do. It is one of the most difficult things I can think of. *John Truby Tapes (1985)*

**Common Mistakes:** 1 not knowing who your main character is (too many heroes, or a not well defined hero). 2. not caring about the hero's struggles, wants, goals, needs cause there is not significant jeopardy and things at stake. 3. not having a strong, unrelenting antagonist with a clear, driving goal. 4. not using strong conflict in each and every scene to move the story forward.

**Creating compelling, believable characters.** Don't start with a straw man, start with yourself, start a real person or persons you know. Look at a picture of the character and try to draw out details of his life by being inspired by it. Your character should NOT be average in the everyman sense. They need to have rough edges. They need to be great sinners or great saints. People with strong desires, strong pain, deep suffering.

**Writing Realistic Dialogue** (not real life dialogue). Real life dialogue is realistic but boring and way too wordy to fit in a short or even feature film. Film dialogue sounds real, but it is not. It is short., terse, indirect. Really the only way to get a feel for screen dialogue is to repeat it out loud as you are watching a film. Writers try to get necessary exposition out through the dialogue and the dialogue sounds contrived, forced, on-the-nose. Exposition is the enemy of the writer. He has to get it out to tell the story – but if he has characters just say it, it kills the story. Use the conflict in the scene to reveal the exposition in a natural way. Don't have character volunteer information.

**Riveting Dramatic Structure** Dramatic Structure is composed of four elements:

**SET-UP** the conflict and get us to anticipate what might happen. (Beginning)

**BUILD** the conflict, dramatize it, make it more important, increase the stakes. (Middle)

**PAY-OFF** the conflict (End)

**REACT TO** the Pay-off: This is where the emotions of a scene are processed (Anticlimax)

These four elements are structure of the whole screenplay and the structure of EACH SCENE.

The most common mistake is paying-off a conflict without setting it up and building it, and reacting to it.

It's like telling the punch line of a joke without setting up the joke, without pointing back to it afterwards.

**DIRECTING** Actors must understand what their INTENTION in a scene is to play it successfully. Intention is not just what the character wants (his goal and his motivation for that goal), but specifically what he WANTS FROM THE OTHER ACTOR RIGHT NOW. This should be described in measurable terms by the director to the actor (e.g. get that person to leave the room immediately).

Motion Picture directing is about PICTURES in MOTION. Telling a story through actions and visuals. This forces the audience to think rather than having the story spoon fed to them by the dialogue. Visuals and particularly characters behavior is far more powerful and visceral than words. Tell the story through picture, visuals, actions. Dialogue is used to best effect to create the subtext or color the background of a scene rather than the foreground.

**RATE SCENE #1** (name of scene) \_\_\_\_\_ ©2009 Derrick Warfel

- Y N 1. This story BEST communicates the theme. Is there a better story (conflict, argument) to reveal the theme?
- Y N 2. Is it clear Who the main character is (Believable, interesting, sympathetic? Why or why not?
- Y N 3. Does hero desperately want/need a stated goal that he will pay a heavy price for if he doesn't get it?
- Y N 4. Is it clear who the antagonist is? Is he/she strong, with clear goals, relentless, well suited to this story
- Y N 5. Is there a strong conflict in this and every scene scene (not just an irritation or an inconvenience)
- Y N 6. Does the main character seem believable, sympathetic, compelling, interesting, or do unbelievable things ,
- Y N 7. Does the dialogue seem forced with people volunteering information they would not in real life. Is it fun?
- Y N 8. Does the scene have an adequate: set-up, build, pay-off, react-to
- Y N 9. Do the actors have clear intentions (specifically what they want from the other actor)
- Y N 10. Is the main story conflict told through actions and visually rather than through dialogue.

**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RATE SCENE #2** (name of scene) \_\_\_\_\_

- Y N 1. Does story BEST communicate this theme. Is there a better story (conflict, argument) to reveal this theme?
- Y N 2. Is it clear Who the main character is? Believable, interesting, sympathetic? Why or why not?
- Y N 3. Does the hero desperately want/need a specific stated goal? Heavy price paid if he doesn't get it?
- Y N 4. Clearly defined, strong antagonist? Clear goals, relentless, well suited to the story?
- Y N 5. Is there a strong conflict in this and every scene scene (not just an irritation or an inconvenience)
- Y N 6. Does the main character seem believable, sympathetic, compelling, interesting, or do unbelievable things?
- Y N 7. Is the dialogue forced, with people volunteering info they would not in real life? Is it fun?
- Y N 8. Does the scene have an adequate: set-up, build, pay-off, react-to?
- Y N 9. Do the actors have clear intentions (specifically what they want from the other actor)?
- Y N 10. Is the main story conflict told through actions and visually rather than through dialogue?

**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**RATE SCENE #3** (name of scene) \_\_\_\_\_

- Y N 1. Does this story BEST communicate the theme. Any better way to reveal conflict/argument/theme?
- Y N 2. Is it clear Who the main character is (is he/she: believable, interesting, sympathetic? Why?
- Y N 3. Does the hero desperately want/need the stated goal that he will pay a heavy price for if he doesn't get it?
- Y N 4. Is it clear who the antagonist is? Are they strong, clear goals, relentless, well suited to this story?
- Y N 5. Is there a strong conflict in this and every scene (not just an irritation or an inconvenience)
- Y N 6. Does the main character seem believable, sympathetic, compelling, interesting, or do unbelievable things?
- Y N 7. Is the dialogue forced with people volunteering information they would not in real life. Is it fun?
- Y N 8. Does the scene have an adequate: set-up, build, pay-off, react-to?
- Y N 9. Do the actors have clear intentions (specifically what they want from the other actor)?
- Y N 10. Is the main story conflict told through actions and visually rather than through dialogue?

**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_