



## Lesson Plan

# Scripting a Crime Drama

### Overview

"Scripting a Crime Drama" is intended to follow lesson two of the Crime Drama unit: "Viewing a Crime Drama." In this lesson, students will tackle the scripting of a television crime drama by looking at the plot formulas and structures that underpin this genre. Students begin by studying a script from an actual television series and then they script and produce their own crime dramas.

**Level:** Grades 9-11

### About the Author

Adapted, with permission, from a unit developed by Mark Zamparo, an Ottawa-based media educator

### Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- understand how crime shows construct reality
- appreciate the differences between the constructed reality of crime dramas, and crime in real life
- understand how filmmaking techniques contribute to a drama's overall effect
- be aware of plot formulas that underpin crime drama
- become acquainted with the script-writing process

### Preparation and Materials

Photocopy:

- *Twin Peaks Script* (five or six copies)
- *Script Checklist*
- *Evaluating a Television Production*
- Arrange for video equipment, where possible.

*Note: Scripts for other crime shows can be used. To find the script to another crime drama try Drew's Script-O-Rama, [www.script-o-rama.com/tv/tvscript.shtml](http://www.script-o-rama.com/tv/tvscript.shtml) or check the library or drama department of your school.*

### Procedure

#### Guided Discussion

A story idea is not enough to sell a television show. In order to sell a story, writers must be able to communicate their ideas to producers through scripts.

Television writers have to think in terms of video and audio, and both must be indicated on the script. Writers often include other information with their scripts. For example, they may write detailed character sketches, or suggest specific actors to play certain roles, to help the producer understand the character that the writer has in mind.

In 1989, a pair of innovative writers, David Lynch and Mark Frost, submitted a draft for a new mystery/crime drama to producers at ABC. *Twin Peaks* would become a hit in the early 1990s and has maintained a cult following to this day.

Divide the class into five or six groups and distribute the *Twin Peaks* Scripts. Explain that this script is just a small scene from the series' first episode. Give students ten minutes to read the scripts in their groups, and ask them to note any script-writing

conventions as they read along.

Once students have finished reading the script, discuss any conventions they noticed. Compare the students' observations to the conventions in the *Script Checklist*.

### **Activity**

#### **Group Assignment**

- Ask students to return to the groups they formed for Lesson Two, "Viewing a Crime Drama."
- Distribute *Script Checklist*, and *Evaluating a Television Production*
- Discuss the parameters of this assignment. Explain that the evaluation sheet will be used for peer evaluation of the final products, and that students should be familiar with the terms and guidelines used.
- Each group is to write a script for a scene from the crime drama that they analyzed in Lesson Two. Before writing their scripts, groups must submit a plot outline for approval. The script should be approximately ten minutes in length and should imitate the style of the original program. It should include setting, scene changes, stage directions, etc. Script options might include:
  - writing the beginning to a new episode
  - writing a different ending to an old episode
  - bringing in a new minor character
  - bringing back a favourite minor character
  - taking the techniques observed in Lesson Two and scripting an original Canadian program, one that people will watch!

Once the students are satisfied with their scripts, the groups will read/perform them for the rest of the class, perhaps with a few props, background music or sound effects. If video cameras are available, scripts can be performed and taped. (To "edit" their final product, students can copy from one VCR to another.) If video equipment is not available, students can shoot slides of the drama, tape their scripts on audio tape and present their performance in a slide/tape format.

### **Evaluation**

Final grades for this lesson are obtained through combined peer and teacher evaluations. For each performance:

- Select four students to act as peer evaluators.
- Using the *Evaluating a Television Production sheet*, students tally the group's scores according to the guidelines provided.
- The teacher reviews each completed sheet and averages the four evaluations, for an overall presentation grade.
- The teacher's evaluation of submitted scripts is combined with presentation marks for the final grade for this assignment.

### **Related Resources on the Media Awareness Network Web site:**

- Crime Drama Teaching Unit:
  - *Overview*
  - *Crime Perceptions Quiz* – Lesson
  - *Viewing a Crime Drama* – Lesson
  - *Comparing Crime Dramas* – Lesson

### **Recommended Reading, Viewing, Surfing**

- *Drew's Script-O-Rama*  
[www.script-o-rama.com/tv/tvscript.shtml](http://www.script-o-rama.com/tv/tvscript.shtml)

Student Handout #1

## **TWIN PEAKS Episode #1 by Mark Frost and David Lynch**

"TRACES TO NOWHERE"

**FIRST DRAFT: July 2, 1989**

*(The following is an excerpt from the first act of this episode. The numbers represent scene changes.)*

### **13. EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION ENTRANCE - MORNING**

Re-establish.

CUT TO:

### **14. INT. SHERIFF'S STATION RECEPTION AREA - MORNING**

(Deputy Andy takes a big bite of his plum frappe turnover, just as Dale Cooper breezes through the front door and waves brightly as he passes.)

COOPER

Morning, deputy.

ANDY

(his mouth completely full) Good morning, Agent Cooper.

(Lucy, at the coffee station holding a pot and a cup, turns to face Cooper, with a doughnut stuck in her mouth.)

COOPER

Hey there, Lucy.

LUCY

(barely intelligible) Agent Cooper, I got jelly for you special, the Sheriff's down the hall in Interrogation.

COOPER

I'll just look for him down in Interrogation.

(He moves down the hall.)

CUT TO:

### **15. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM A - MORNING**

(Cooper whisks in just as Truman, coffee mug in hand, takes an enormous bite of a humongous bearclaw.)

COOPER

Hey, Sheriff: three for three.

(Truman tries to chew, but holds up his hand to be patient. Cooper sits.)

COOPER

Number one, James Hurley: as soon as his lawyer gets here, we bring him up from Cell Four and talk to him straight. He was in love with Laura Palmer, my bet is she told him whatever dirt she knew about Bobby and Mike and who knows what else ... if James plays ball, we send him off with our blessings and a firm reminder to watch his back when Mike and Bobby hit the streets... (Truman nods, trying to chew fast.) Then we'll have a chat with those two perpetrators, let's run a top to bottom on Bobby's vehicle and in the meantime, let's find out what the autopsy report on Laura Palmer gives us. (he rises) I've got the rest of the day mapped out. I'll meet you back here in Interrogation ... I really have to urinate. By the way, the coffee at the Great Northern? Incredible.

(He exits, just as Truman finally swallows his mouthful of bearclaw.)

CUT TO:

### **16. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM A - DAY**

(JAMES HURLEY is seated, next to his LAWYER, across from Truman, as Cooper enters and sits down beside the Sheriff.)

TRUMAN

James has been advised of his rights.

COOPER

James, you were placed under arrest for suspicion of murder, the murder of Laura Palmer. You have no previous criminal record, is that correct?

JAMES

None. No, sir.

(Cooper turns on the VCR and we see the same videotape of Laura and Donna at the picnic that we saw earlier. James watches the video.)

COOPER

James, did you shoot this videotape?

(Cooper fast forwards to the freeze frame of the motorcycle reflected in Laura's eye.)

COOPER

Isn't that your cycle, James?

JAMES

Yes, sir, it is. The three of us went up there three Sundays ago.

COOPER

(gently) James, you were in love with Laura. (James is silent) The two of you were seeing each other secretly. No one else at the school, or any of her friends knew about it; she was the homecoming queen, her boyfriend was the captain of the football team. How much longer did you think you could keep this relationship secret?

JAMES

It was secret because that's the way she wanted it.

COOPER

Why do you suppose that was, James? Do think it had something to do with Bobby?

JAMES  
It had everything to do with Bobby.

COOPER  
Why? Was she afraid of Bobby?

JAMES  
I think so.

COOPER  
Did you know that Laura was using cocaine?

JAMES  
(pause) Yes.

COOPER  
Did you ever take cocaine with her?

JAMES  
No, I tried to get her to stop.

COOPER  
When was the last time you saw her?

JAMES  
Two nights ago. The night she died. For about three hours. She snuck out of the house about 9:30. About 12:30 I stopped the bike at the light at Sparkwood and 21. She jumped off and ran away. I didn't see her again.

COOPER  
You're sure it was 12:30?

JAMES  
Yes, sir, Steve's Liquor Locker was closing up as we drove by and he closes right at 12:30.

COOPER  
You and Laura have a fight?

JAMES  
Not exactly. But she said she couldn't see me anymore.

COOPER  
Why?

JAMES  
She didn't say.

COOPER  
Was she high that night?

JAMES  
Yes.

COOPER

Where did she get her drugs?

JAMES

I don't know. Most of the time we were together she was clean.

COOPER

Did she get her drugs from Bobby?

JAMES

I really don't know where she got 'em, she never talked about it. She didn't like that part of herself.

COOPER

Why did she start using again?

JAMES

(getting emotional) I don't know. Something happened, a couple of days ago --

COOPER

What happened?

JAMES

I don't know exactly. I think something scared her. She wouldn't talk to me, she wouldn't see me for a couple days --

COOPER

Until the last night.

JAMES

Yes.

COOPER

Did she call you that night?

JAMES

Yes.

(Cooper looks at Laura's diary, opened in front of him, at the page for February 5th; the page marked "DAY ONE." He takes the half-hearted necklace from his pocket.)

COOPER

Did you recognize this necklace, James?

JAMES

Yes, sir.

COOPER

James, what happened on February 5th?  
(Tears form in his eyes. He fights them back.)

WHITE OUT TO:

**17. EXT. PARK - DAY**

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## **Script Checklist**

1. **Does each scene start with a description of the setting?**
2. **Are the setting locations and times in capitals?**
3. **Are scene changes clearly indicated?**
4. **Are stage directions in brackets?**
5. **Are scene changes numbered?**
6. **Are the names of characters in capitals (unless they are used in the dialogue)?**
7. **Are the names of the characters in the centre of the page and on separate lines?**
8. **Are stage and setting directions in the present tense?**
9. **Is there a line between each character's speech?**
10. **Do the scenes change when the settings change?**

