CTAN 436 – WRITING FOR ANIMATION

(2 units)

USC School of Cinematic Arts

Section 17862R

Fall 2020

**Instructor:** Elizabeth Gill Brauer

**Class Day:** Thursday, 1 – 3:50 p.m.

**Location:** ZOOM (SCB304)

**Office Hours:** Before or after class, or by appointment. Students are encouraged to arrange individual meetings to discuss their work.

**E-Mail address:** brauer@usc.edu

**SA**:

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a workshop writing course designed to stir the creative juices by presenting animation students with tools for developing narrative. As such, special attention will be given to character, dramatic structure, and theme/premise and how to integrate these with the visual art of animation.

Class meetings will be held in workshop format: work will be written, presented, analyzed, and discussed. The focus of discussion will be on what is communicated in the writing as presented. Feedback will be of a constructive nature, addressing how the writer may enhance the communication of his/her intention.

**COURSE GOALS:**

--Acquire a personal, professional writing style in screenplay format

--Write from a visual and aural perspective.

--Understand character, the basis of compelling drama

--Develop a fundamental understanding of the dramatic scene

--Understand the economy of effective narrative screenwriting

--Develop an understanding of story – the elements, the human need for story.

--Explore your own stories, via memory and observation

--Develop a responsiveness to the world you live in and find stories therein.

--Understand how theme is expressed through characters and story.

--Understand aspects of the human condition in order to achieve universality in your stories.

--Use details to make stories come to life; the value of specifics.

--Understand how to make an emotional connection with the audience; why do we care?

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

*The Tools of Screenwriting,* Howard & Mabley

*The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters,* Vogler

FINAL DRAFT – screenwriting software or use cltx.com

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

**\*\*\*SUBJECT TO CHANGE!**

**Class 1. Aug. 20 –** Introductions. Overview of class. What is narrative? What is its use in animation and how does animation affect story? Why do we tell stories? The Human Condition. Class exercise: Write about object from third person and then in the first person.

Assignment: Pose a specific question and answer it in a short story (1 page, 3 paragraphs, single-spaced, can be either past or present tense).

Watch and outline sequences: DUMBO

**Class 2.Aug. 27–** Share Q&A stories. Go over screenplay format.

In class: Create horror atmosphere in scene without using characters or dialog; repeat using same setting but romance.

Assignment: Write a love story between two familiar objects in an everyday setting. No dialogue. If you want, add a human character somewhere in the middle or end of the story.

Watch and outline sequences: LADY AND THE TRAMP. Also check out “Johnny Fedora and Alice Bluebonnet” on YouTube.

**Class 3. Sept. 3 –** Share object love story scenes. Keep going over screenplay format. Discuss fables and fairy tales; discuss choices such as parody, tone, genre in relation to familiar tales.

In class: Rewrite “Little Red Riding Hood.”

Assignment: Retell a fairy tale (or nursery rhyme or classical myth) in a new way or begin with a fairy tale character, and using the freedoms of animation, put a new spin on it. Use different genres. (3-5 pgs., **screenplay form**) May include dialogue. Try to tell it in at least 3 scenes.

Watch: Optional - SHREK. Check out “Fractured Fairy Tales” on YouTube.

**Class 4. Sept. 10 –** Share fairy tales. Discuss CHARACTER – history, development, arc. What does the character want (goal)? What or who is in his/her way? What obstacles does s/he encounter?

In class: The “rewind” exercise with oneself. With a fictional character. Big past event, big decision exercises.

Assignment: Eavesdrop on conversations around you and write down TEN lines of dialogue. Choose the one with the most story potential and include it in a short script (3-5 pgs. max.).

Watch and outline sequences: FINDING NEMO

**Class 5. Sept. 17 –** Share eavesdropping stories. “Make it personal. Write what you know.”

Assignment: Childhood Home exercise: draw a blueprint of house you grew up in and put a memory in each room. Choose a memory and turn it into a story told through animation, or combined live-action and animation.

In class: Self-discovery through the 4 elements.

Begin reading: TOY STORY 3.

**Class 6. Sept. 24–** Share childhood stories. Ripped from the Headlines, or Ads!

In class: Break into groups, create stories from magazine photos.

Assignment: Find a story in a newspaper, online, or maybe even be inspired by a magazine ad or TV commercial. Create character and story out of this. It can be a personal issue or a larger political or social issue. Just make sure you make it specific, not general. Feel free to satirize.

In class: Group exercise with magazine photos.

Keep reading TOY STORY 3.

**Class 7. Oct. 1 –** Share “media” stories. Discuss premise and theme. (Review Human Condition.) What do you have to say? What subjects interest you? Why? Universal themes? How to find the universal in the everyday?

Assignment: Developing your Final Class Project. Identify a dramatic premise and, based on all the techniques we’ve discussed, tell this story for an animated short in a single paragraph, and include a one-sentence logline. (Script length 8 pages)

Watch and outline sequences: TOY STORY 3. **Take-home MIDTERM.**

Read: Writers Journey (the Archetypes and the 12 stages)

**Class 8. Oct. 8 –** Pitch your final project story. General discussion of “The Writers Journey” approach to narrative (referring to TOY STORY 3). Ordinary and Special worlds. Subplots. Difference between ‘Crisis’ and ‘Climax.’

Assignment: Fill out character sketches for your main character. Keep reading Writers’ Journey.

**Class 9. Oct. 15 –** Character “interviews.” Further discussion of 12 stages of Writers Journey.

Assignment: Using the WJ’s 12 Stages, make a step outline of your final project. Consider your story’s time frame. Include both an internal and external obstacle.

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**Class 10. Oct. 22** – Share step outlines. Feedback.

In class: Make “sunburst” charts for characters/theme.

\*Extra Credit: Write a 3-5 page short Halloween script.

**Class 11.Oct. 29 –** Share 1st acts.

In class: “As God as my witness” declaration. Central Dramatic Question – either/or – and its relationship to the stakes of your story and the climax/resolution.

**Class 12. Nov. 5 –** Share 2nd acts.

**Class 13. Nov. 12 –**  **Review and Guest Speaker!** (Mandatory attendance)

**Nov. 14 – 16 - STUDY DAYS**

**Nov. 25** - **FINAL Project** due.

**CLASS RULES:**

This is a workshop. We will all respect each other’s creative process, offer useful feedback and constructive criticism (in the true spirit of collaboration), and together provide an atmosphere of trust and inspiration. Self-proclaimed geniuses will not be tolerated.

Watch for spelling and grammatical errors!

All work MUST have your name and date on it. The date is very important. Final work (the short scripts) must have a TITLE, even if it’s just a “working title.” I prefer that you title exercises too. Just for practice.

LAPTOPS: Please bring your laptops to class, but only for accessing class work. We will be reading your emailed work in class.

EMAIL ME: If you have any questions or if, for any reason, you can’t attend class.

**GRADING:**

Grades will be based on attendance, class participation, timely completion of assignments, quality of the writing, use of the imagination, level of commitment, and the degree of improvement in the writing over the course of the class, ie., your growth as a writer. In that regard and as reflected in your final grade, I will not be comparing you with anyone else but you. Your progress is a reflection of your commitment to the class.

Participation means offering feedback on our classmates’ work and contributing to classroom discussions. It also includes attendance. Attendance is mandatory. TWO UNEXCUSED ABSENCES constitutes a drop in your grade. THREE and you will fail. And please BE ON TIME. Class starts on the hour. Anyone later than five minutes will be marked TARDY, and three TARDIES will constitute an ABSENCE.

30 per cent – class participation

70 per cent – quality of weekly assignments/exercises

**Academic Conduct** Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences.  Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards*<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>.  Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.  You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>.  This is important for the safety whole USC community.  Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.  *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

**Support Systems** A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing.  Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more.  Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.  *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html>provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.  If an officially  declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/>will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

**Disruptive Student Behavior**: Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

**DISABILITIES STATEMENT:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disabiiity is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obrtained from DSP. Please be sure this letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. , Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0076.