BACKROOMS (2026)

Screenwriter's Breakdown for Students & Educators

Recursion, Trauma, Responsibility, and the Horror of Walking the Same Path Forever

Nick Runyeard
8FLiX Institute for Screenwriters (8FLiX), Toronto
Nick[!@]8flix.com

Source Material

SCREENPLAY: Backrooms (2026)

WRITTEN BY: Will Soodik (based on the series by Kane Parsons)

VERSION: 1st Draft
1 December 2024
100 pages
https://8flix.com/scripts/film/backrooms-2026-screenplay/

GENRES: Liminal horror, Psychological horror, Science-fiction mystery, Survival horror

Pseudo Syllabus

MENTOR: Nick Runyeard

PROFICIENCY: NOVICE | ADVANCED BEGINNER | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | EXPERT

REQUIRED READING: Backrooms (2026) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING:

DUE DATES: What you can, when you can.

Overview

Logline

When Clark, a struggling furniture-store owner with a collapsing marriage and a talent for self-destruction, discovers an impossible recursive space hidden behind the walls of his business, his obsession with exploring it unleashes horrors that eventually draw his therapist, Mary, into the maze. To escape, Mary must confront not only what the Backrooms have become, but the traumatic pattern that has governed her own life for fifteen years.

Primary Teaching Focus

Turning theme into physical space

The great craft trick in *Backrooms* is not simply that its characters become trapped inside impossible architecture.

They are already trapped before they enter it.

Clark believes he is inherently destructive. He hurts people, feels guilty, withdraws from them, becomes lonely, and then uses that loneliness as evidence that he was right to isolate himself in the first place.

Mary believes she failed to save her sister. That guilt shapes a life spent trying to help other people escape their own destructive patterns.

The Backrooms take those invisible loops and make them architectural.

Hallways return to themselves. Doors lead somewhere impossible. Rooms imitate other rooms. Voices repeat old words. Human beings are reproduced incorrectly. Escape routes deliver characters back to where they began.

The screenplay therefore asks a deceptively simple question:

> *If you keep walking the same emotional path, does it matter how large the maze becomes?*

Mary articulates the metaphor early in Clark's therapy: repeated behaviours form pathways until eventually "*the path itself dictates where you walk.*"

By the climax, Clark has inverted that lesson. He believes no new path is possible because "the forest" always decides where a person goes.

The horror story is therefore also an argument between <u>determinism and responsibility</u>.

Why This Screenplay Matters

It Makes the Setting Mean Something

The Backrooms are not treated merely as a collection of creepy rooms.

Their fundamental properties mirror the screenplay's characters:

- They repeat.
- They imitate.
- They misremember.
- They trap people inside patterns.
- They create approximations rather than originals.
- They make forward movement difficult to distinguish from repetition.

That is thematic design.

The environment does not merely challenge the protagonist. It expresses the protagonist.

It Performs a Genuine Protagonist Handoff

The screenplay is formally divided into three chapters:

I. CAP'N CLARK
II. MARY
III. BREAKTHROUGH

The transition is unusually bold because Clark dominates roughly the first half of the story before Mary assumes narrative control.

This lets the story perform a baton pass without feeling like two unrelated movies.

Clark teaches us how the Backrooms work.

Mary teaches us what they mean.

It Uses Repetition as Storytelling

"How can you be sure?" begins as Mary's therapeutic challenge to Clark, returns through her childhood memory, and finally comes from James after Mary believes she has escaped.

"Help me" moves from Clark's resentment, to Julie's dying plea, to Mary's desperation for rescue.

The broken glass begins as a symbol inside Clark's failed marriage and returns during the final therapeutic confrontation.

Three birds. Seven seconds. first appears as an unexplained warning inside the Backrooms. Later, Mary discovers the same pattern operating in a landscape she believes is reality.

Repetition does not merely create callbacks.

It becomes evidence that reality itself may be recursive.

Story Structure

Prologue: James Kittredge

A frightened man in a hazmat suit leaves M&Ms behind as breadcrumbs while counting his steps through a shrinking hallway. The corridor eventually forces him through a tiny door, only for him to fall through a ceiling and discover the same M&M trail he created earlier.

He has travelled.

He has also gone nowhere.

That paradox establishes the governing rule of the screenplay before we meet its protagonist.

James then receives a distorted countdown over his radio as darkness advances through the corridor. Something using a human voice hunts him.

The opening therefore establishes several elements that will recur throughout the screenplay:

- Counting
- Repeated spaces
- Mimicked voices
- Failed navigation
- Surveillance
- The illusion of progress
- Human attempts to impose systems upon the irrational

James eventually disappears from surveillance footage inside a crude imitation of a frontier bank. Only afterward do we learn his name and connection to *Async*.

Chapter I: Cap'n Clark

The False Kingdom

Clark owns *Cap'n Clark's Ottoman Empire*, an enormous, failing Northern California furniture store whose branding combines pirates, sultans, neon signage and financial desperation.

The joke is useful.

Clark sells artificial rooms.

Bedrooms nobody sleeps in. Kitchens nobody cooks in. Living rooms nobody lives in.

He is surrounded by simulations of domestic life while his actual domestic life has collapsed.

Even worse, Clark is secretly living inside one of the store's model bedrooms.

The Backrooms will later reproduce the same concept on an infinite scale.

Clark's Central Wound

Clark has been thrown out by his wife, Barbara.

He drinks heavily, resents the collapse of his architectural ambitions and believes he is fundamentally dangerous to the people around him.

During therapy with Mary, he explains his worldview simply:

> *"I hurt people."*

Mary identifies the loop beneath that belief.

Clark assumes he deserves to be alone, pushes people away to protect them, hurts them by doing so, then treats their departure as evidence that isolation was correct.

His belief creates behaviour. The behaviour creates evidence. The evidence strengthens the belief.

The first Backroom Clark enters therefore already exists *inside him*.

The Path Metaphor

Mary compares the brain to a forest.

A new behaviour is difficult because the route is overgrown. Walk it repeatedly and the obstacles disappear. Eventually the path becomes so familiar that a person follows it without thinking.

The screenplay intercuts this therapeutic idea with literal roads, paths and Clark returning to watch Barbara from outside the home where he once lived.

Psychological repetition becomes geography.

This is the screenplay quietly teaching us how to read everything that follows.

The Impossible Furniture

Clark first encounters the Backrooms indirectly.

A customer brings him a piece of furniture supposedly found downstairs: a real birch stool with five legs.

Clark does what Clark always does.

Instead of admitting he does not understand the problem, he improvises a sales pitch and pretends the defect is intentional.

That behaviour becomes important.

Clark repeatedly protects himself from uncertainty by creating explanations.

The Backrooms are about to present him with something explanation cannot contain.

The Breaker

Clark discovers an unmarked electrical breaker that appears new, is installed differently from the others and seems connected to nothing.

Later, television footage inexplicably shows James inside the Backrooms.

Then Clark notices a thin shaft of light coming through a solid wall.

From one exact position, a gap exists.

Move slightly and it disappears.

Through the opening he can see yellow wallpaper, beige carpet and fluorescent lights: a continuation of his own store.

The discovery is visually simple and conceptually excellent.

There is no giant portal

Reality simply stops behaving correctly when viewed from the right angle.

First Exploration

Clark enters.

The first environment resembles his furniture store, except the contents have been piled into an enormous pyramid.

Beyond it he finds:

- An office bullpen
- Endless corridors
- A frontier bank
- A 1950s candy store
- Strange signage
- Objects that imitate reality without understanding it

The imitation resembles what Clark describes to Mary later: imagine asking someone who has never seen a dog to draw one from a verbal description.

From far away, the result might look correct.

Up close, the mistakes become obvious.

This becomes one of the screenplay's most important horror principles:

> The Backrooms know what human spaces look like, but not necessarily why they look that way.

James's Trail

Clark finds James's M&M breadcrumbs and eventually his *Async* identification.

Inside the candy store he also finds a message:

3 BIRDS

7 SECONDS

At this point the warning has no meaning.

That uncertainty is useful. The script plants information before giving either character or audience the framework needed to understand it.

The First Imitation

Clark hears a young girl asking whether anyone has seen her father.

He later hears a distorted copy of his own voice.

The Backrooms are not merely empty.

Something is listening.

Something is learning.

Clark escapes and returns to the furniture store terrified.

Then he smiles.

That smile is the real turning point.

The place frightens him.

It also gives him something his ordinary life no longer does: wonder.

Clark and Mary: The Failure of Belief

Clark tells Mary what he discovered.

He even draws a map filled with impossible corridors, looping passages and rooms that should not exist.

Mary responds like a therapist confronted by a patient who may be experiencing withdrawal, psychosis or another crisis.

She asks whether Clark can be certain what he experienced was real.

That response is professionally understandable.

Dramatically, it devastates him.

Clark came to the person whose job is to help him distinguish harmful beliefs from reality.

For once, the impossible thing he believes is actually true.

Mary does not believe him.

The irony is brutal.

Clark decides to obtain proof.

The Found-Footage Expedition

Clark recruits his young employees, Bobby and Kat, and asks Bobby to bring his borrowed video camera.

The shift to camcorder footage changes the grammar of the screenplay.

Suddenly:

- Framing becomes imperfect.
- Information exists outside the image.
- Battery life becomes a narrative resource.
- The audience becomes dependent upon whoever is holding the camera.
- What is not recorded becomes as important as what is.

Clark brings rope because he believes physical connection can defeat spatial uncertainty.

The Backrooms immediately demonstrate otherwise.

Bobby's Death

Bobby walks down an apparently endless corridor while tied to Clark and Kat.

He turns around.

Clark and Kat are gone.

Then their positions reverse impossibly, placing Bobby on the other side of them.

Something unseen grabs the rope.

The characters enter a tug-of-war against an opponent that appears not to exert tension on Clark's end of the line.

Bobby is slammed repeatedly against floor and ceiling until his screams become gurgles, then his body is pulled away.

The sequence is effective because the characters attempt a rational solution.

They use rope because rope should establish physical continuity.

The horror comes from learning that even basic physical relationships such as here, there, near, far, and connected cannot be trusted.

The Still Lifes

Separated from Kat, Clark encounters distorted approximations of human beings.

A little girl in a raincoat.

A redheaded woman.

Their features appear unfinished, as though a human face has been assembled from incomplete reference material.

The script names them *Still Lifes.*

The name matters.

A still life represents objects arranged to resemble living experience while remaining fundamentally static.

That is exactly what the Backrooms are doing.

They produce environments.

They produce people.

They reproduce appearance without necessarily reproducing consciousness.

The Broken Camera

Clark eventually communicates with Kat through what appears to him to be a solid wall.

She can see him.

He cannot see her.

Then someone silently picks up Bobby's camera behind Clark.

Before we learn who or what is filming him, the battery dies.

Chapter I ends.

That is an elegant use of an established limitation.

The dead camera does not merely withhold information from the characters.

It turns the audience's own point of view off.

Chapter II: Mary

The Narrative Reset

The second chapter begins in 1975 with fifteen-year-old Mary and her older sister, Julie.

The girls break into an elderly man's Victorian house.

They *expect* petty theft.

Instead, the owner catches them.

As the architecture behaves strangely and Mary struggles to reach Julie, the old man drags Julie from beneath a bed and places a shotgun against her head.

Julie looks at Mary and whispers:

> *"Help me."*

Mary retreats into the darkness.

Julie is killed.

The scene later reveals itself as a recurring traumatic memory or nightmare that Mary has carried into adulthood.

Her therapy career now acquires another dimension.

Clark wants Mary to save him because that is her job.

Mary needs to save people because once, when someone begged her to, she could not.

Mary and Nancy

Mary is close to Nancy, James Kittredge's wife.

Nancy believes James is dead.

She describes his absence as a blank space where her husband used to be.

Mary initially responds with therapeutic language about grief.

Nancy asks her to stop being a therapist and tell the truth.

Mary answers:

The grief does not go away.

The exchange destabilizes Mary because it confronts her with the possibility that some wounds *cannot* be repaired.

That idea will eventually become central to her breakthrough.

Clark Disappears

Clark misses therapy.

Then he misses another appointment.

Two months pass.

Mary goes to the abandoned furniture store looking for him.

She discovers:

- Clark's unpaid bills
- His improvised bedroom
- His unfinished Backrooms map
- James Kittredge's Async identification card
- The chalk marks indicating the portal

For the first time, the evidence becomes impossible to explain away.

Mary reaches toward the wall.

She almost enters.

Then fear wins.

She retreats.

This is crucial character writing.

Mary is not suddenly converted into an adventure hero because the plot requires it.

She sees the impossible and *initially* chooses not to cross the threshold.

Async

Mary goes to *Async*, where her husband Phil works.

She sneaks into his office and finds plans for a classified project called KV31.

The plans contain the same impossible geometry Clark drew on his map:

- Rooms without doors
- Corridors that circle back
- Spatial relationships that should not exist

When Mary places Clark's map over the KV31 design, they match.

The supernatural maze is suddenly linked to an organized scientific project.

Phil later describes KV31 as research into recursive space, speculating about uses including storage, waste disposal and overpopulation.

But his explanation is deliberately incomplete.

Mary overhears Phil and other researchers discussing what she knows and what may need to happen if she discovers too much.

The domestic relationship that once made Mary feel safe becomes another uncertain room.

She runs.

Chapter II Turning Point: Mary Enters

Mary drives to *Cap'n Clark's*.

She uses the breathing exercise Phil taught her:

- Right now, nothing bad is happening.
- Right now, she is safe.

Then she puts her hand through the wall.

Mary chooses the unknown.

That is the act Clark never manages emotionally.

Clark constantly insists he wants change, but when confronted with responsibility he returns to the same explanation.

Mary is terrified and crosses anyway.

Mary's Backrooms

Mary retraces familiar locations:

- The shrinking hallway
- The frontier bank
- The candy store

But the spaces have changed.

Inside the candy store, the words 3 BIRDS / 7 SECONDS now cover the walls repeatedly.

When Clark first saw the warning, the paint appeared fresh.

When Mary finds it, the paint is old.

Time inside the Backrooms clearly does not correspond neatly to time outside.

Then she finds Clark.

Only two months have passed in Mary's experience.

Clark appears to have aged decades. His hair is largely white and his face gaunt.

He tells Mary they are at "*the source*."

Then he attacks her.

Chapter III: Breakthrough

The False Suburb

Mary regains consciousness while Clark drags her through an artificial suburban neighbourhood.

Yellow houses sit beneath a painted blue ceiling.

A cartoon sun smiles overhead.

The environment is a childlike representation of the suburban dream rather than the real thing.

This is the Backrooms doing what they have always done:

Reconstructing human life from incomplete instructions.

But now Clark is doing exactly the same thing.

Clark Builds a Home

Clark has created a domestic tableau.

Mary sits bound at a kitchen table.

Still Lifes occupy positions around the room like family members or furniture.

Clark has named them according to superficial characteristics rather than identities.

They are bodies without demands.

People without contradiction.

Relationships without rejection.

Clark describes them as an improvement because they possess no thoughts, pain or ego.

The statement reveals how far his original wound has curdled.

Clark believed he hurt people.

Instead of learning how to stop hurting people, he has created a world in which the people around him cannot be hurt.

That is not growth.

It is the elimination of other minds.

The Backrooms as Emotional Wish Fulfilment

The *Still Lifes* become Clark's perfect companions because they cannot disagree with him.

They cannot leave him.

They cannot accuse him.

They cannot require change.

Some become food.

Kat's partially eaten body sits in his refrigerator.

Clark has crossed the line separating a man who fears becoming monstrous from a man who has built a philosophy explaining why his monstrous behaviour does not matter.

Mary Becomes Barbara

Clark forces Mary to reenact the therapeutic roleplay in which she once pretended to be his wife, Barbara.

He even scalps the redheaded *Still Life* and places its hair over Mary's head because Mary does not look enough like Barbara.

This is simultaneously grotesque horror and thematic culmination.

Clark is reconstructing a failed relationship using:

- A fake house
- A fake wife
- Fake people
- Repeated dialogue
- A repeated argument

He has finally created a world in which nothing new has to happen.

The loop is complete.

The Breakthrough

Mary initially follows the script because she is trying to survive.

Then she stops.

Clark repeats the argument with Barbara.

Mary answers differently.

She tells him that his misery is not some external thing that keeps happening to him.

He blames Barbara for his career.

His career for his drinking.

His drinking for his marriage.

His brain for all of it.

Mary finally tells him that responsibility cannot be separated from identity.

Then she reaches her own realization:

> *"I can't save anyone."*

The line sounds cruel without context.

Within Mary's arc, it is liberation.

She could not save Julie.

She could not save James.

She cannot force Clark to change.

Therapy can help someone walk another path.

It cannot walk for them.

The Breakthrough (CONT'D)

Clark asks the question he should have asked from the beginning:

How does he stop?

Mary answers:

She does not know.

That is arguably the most honest therapeutic moment in the screenplay.

No metaphor.

No clever exercise.

No magical breakthrough.

Only responsibility and uncertainty.

Clark accepts it.

He frees Mary.

For perhaps the first time in the story, both characters stop performing the roles they assigned themselves.

The Glass

Clark apologizes to Mary.

She asks:

For what?

He begins to answer:

The glass.

The same broken glass that anchored the roleplay of his failed marriage.

For once, the apology is not part of the exercise.

It might actually be real.

And then the ceiling explodes.

That timing is vicious.

The screenplay allows Clark a genuine moment of change and immediately refuses to guarantee that change will save him.

Personal growth is not an immunity spell.

The Entity

The Entity finally emerges in full.

It is a mass of black tendrils with a shifting, almost liquid face, rainbow colours shimmering across its surface.

It has been responsible for the mimicked voices.

Its behaviour has repeatedly suggested that it learns from the human beings inside the Backrooms.

The Entity kills Clark brutally.

His spine breaks.

He lies helpless on the floor.

He looks at Mary and whispers:

> *"Help me."*

It is Julie's plea again.

Mary retreats.

The screenplay recreates the most traumatic moment of her life.

But the *meaning* has changed.

Fifteen-year-old Mary hid because she was terrified and powerless.

Adult Mary runs because staying would kill her too.

The action is visually identical. The *psychology* is different.

That distinction is central to the screenplay's treatment of repetition.

Changing does not necessarily mean encountering a new situation. Sometimes it means making a different meaning out of the same one.

The False Escape

Mary runs.

She enters an airplane hidden inside the Backrooms.

The Entity follows.

The plane tilts impossibly upward while Mary battles toward the cockpit.

She finally forces a door open...

And tumbles into daylight.

Trees.

Blue sky.

Fresh air.

The Backrooms appear to be gone.

Mary laughs and cries.

She follows a path through the woods and emerges into the rolling hills surrounding *Async*.

For a few moments, the screenplay gives her and the audience permission to *believe* the nightmare is over.

Then three birds leave a tree.

Seven seconds later:

Three birds leave the same tree.

Again.

And again.

The cryptic message finally resolves.

The False Escape (CONT'D)

3 BIRDS.

7 SECONDS.

Mary has not escaped.

Or, at minimum, the reality she has entered is still repeating.

The Backrooms have learned to make skies.

Async

The landscape begins breaking apart.

Square pieces of meadow flip over, revealing gypsum ceiling tiles beneath the grass.

Below them lies the familiar yellow maze.

Mary races into an imitation of *Async* while the Entity moves beneath the artificial landscape.

She eventually finds a threshold chamber where three people in hazmat suits stand on what appears to be the other side of the Backrooms.

Mary crosses.

A metal door closes behind her.

For the first time, she appears to have reached a genuinely human facility.

Phil removes his helmet.

Mary collapses into his arms.

Then he tells her:

> *"I was waiting for you."*

He repeats their private phrase:

Love you to the moon.

Then he injects her with a sedative. The phrase had appeared earlier in their domestic life and now returns during betrayal.

The person associated with safety has become the person taking away her freedom.

The Ending

Mary awakens inside an Async holding cell.

Across the corridor sits James Kittredge.

Alive.

Emaciated.

Vacant.

Mary insists they escaped.

James finally responds with the question that has followed Mary through the entire story:

> *"How can you be sure?"*

Mary looks through the window.

The hills are outside. The trees are there.

Then three birds fly from one.

She begins counting.

Seven.

Six.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

The Ending (CONT'D)

A door opens somewhere down the hall.

SMASH TO BLACK.

The screenplay does not conclusively explain whether:

- Async itself is compromised,
- the supposedly real world is another Backrooms layer,
- the Backrooms have reproduced Async,
- Mary and James have crossed between different recursive realities,
- or Async understands far more about the phenomenon than it has admitted.

The ambiguity works because the screenplay has spent nearly one hundred pages teaching us its final rule:

The appearance of an exit is not proof of escape.

Character Study

Clark

External Want

Initially, Clark wants to repair his life and reconnect with Barbara.

Later, he wants to understand and master the Backrooms.

Internal Need

Accept responsibility for his own behaviour without using guilt as another excuse to remain unchanged.

Defining Contradiction

Clark desperately wants connection while constructing beliefs and behaviours that guarantee isolation.

Strength as Flaw

Clark is imaginative.

He wanted to be an architect.

He sketches plans in the furniture store.

He recognizes strange spatial relationships quickly and becomes fascinated by the impossible architecture around him.

That curiosity makes him the ideal explorer.

It also makes the Backrooms *irresistible*.

The failed architect finally discovers an infinite building.

He loses himself inside it.

Clark Character Study (CONT'D)

Arc

Clark begins with:

> *"It's the way I'm wired."*

That belief allows him to imagine his harmful behaviour as architecture he merely occupies.

By the climax, he has transformed the metaphor into nihilism.

Nobody changes.

The forest decides.

The path controls the walker.

Mary finally destroys that defence by insisting that Clark is not separate from his choices.

Clark momentarily accepts responsibility.

The tragedy is that recognition arrives after Bobby, Kat and others have already paid for his refusal to do so earlier.

Mary

External Want

Help Clark, understand what happened to James and eventually escape the Backrooms

Internal Need

Accept that helping people is not the same as being responsible for saving them.

Defining Contradiction

Mary teaches others to question destructive patterns while living inside one of her own.

The Rescue Loop

Julie asked Mary for help.

Mary could not save her.

The guilt appears to have become foundational.

Mary becomes a therapist.

She helps Clark.

She comforts Nancy.

She searches for the missing James.

She investigates Clark's disappearance.

She repeatedly moves toward damaged people.

What looks entirely altruistic may also be repetition.

Mary is still beneath that bed, trying to answer Julie differently.

Mary Character Study (CONT'D)

Arc

Mary's breakthrough is not becoming fearless.

She remains terrified.

Her breakthrough is accepting limits.

"*I can't save anyone*" does not mean people cannot be helped.

It means another person's survival, recovery or transformation cannot become proof of Mary's worth.

Phil

Phil begins as Mary's safest relationship.

He knows how to calm her after nightmares.

He places a hand on her sternum and guides her back into the present.

He appears patient, affectionate and protective.

That makes his connection to Async more effective.

Phil does not suddenly become a theatrical villain.

He withholds.

Minimizes.

Redirects.

Explains just enough of KV31 to satisfy Mary while concealing the larger truth.

His final betrayal transforms the language of intimacy into institutional containment.

The phrase "*Love you to the moon*" survives.

Trust does not.

James Kittredge

James functions as the screenplay's bookend.

At the beginning, he is the person who knows the Backrooms better than the audience.

At the end, he is the person who knows more than Mary.

His opening strategy is measurement:

- Count steps.
- Leave M&Ms.
- Maintain radio contact.
- Search for the threshold.

The Backrooms defeat every system.

By the final scene, James has abandoned the frantic desire to prove where he is.

His only contribution is a question:

How can you be sure?

The scientist has become the screenplay's philosopher.

Bobby and Kat

Bobby and Kat give the first half of the screenplay youthful energy and humour.

Their presence is also structurally important because they transform Clark's private claim into witnessed reality.

Once Bobby's hand passes through the wall, Clark no longer needs the audience to wonder whether he hallucinated the Backrooms.

The mystery changes.

The question is no longer:

Are they real?

It becomes:

What are they?

Their fate also demonstrates Clark's first catastrophic failure of responsibility inside the space.

He brings them there.

Bobby dies.

Kat eventually ends up dead inside Clark's constructed home.

Clark's fascination has consequences outside himself.

The Still Lifes

The Still Lifes are among the screenplay's strongest conceptual inventions.

They are not traditional monsters.

They are approximations.

Their horror comes from insufficiency.

Their faces contain the right categories of features but the relationships *between* those features are wrong.

- They imitate speech without understanding meaning.
- They resemble people without demonstrating clear interior lives.

Clark eventually treats them exactly as furniture.

That comparison connects the monsters directly to his store.

- *Cap'n Clark's* sells objects arranged to simulate a home.
- The Backrooms manufacture objects arranged to simulate people.

Clark ultimately prefers the simulation because simulations cannot reject him.

The Entity

The Entity represents the Backrooms at their least human-readable.

The *Still Lifes* imitate people.

The Entity imitates their voices.

It hunts.

Observes.

Repeats.

Learns.

Yet the screenplay resists explaining exactly what it is.

That is the correct choice for this draft.

A complete biological or technological explanation would reduce the terror.

Its most important characteristic is not anatomy.

It is adaptation.

The more humanity enters the Backrooms, the better the Backrooms become at reproducing humanity.

Major Themes

1. Repetition Is Not the Same as Fate

Characters repeatedly encounter old situations.

The screenplay asks whether repetition proves inevitability.

Clark says yes.

Mary eventually says no.

A pattern explains behaviour.

It does not absolve it.

2. Responsibility Versus Blame

Clark experiences responsibility as condemnation.

If something is his fault, he believes he must therefore be irredeemable.

Mary's breakthrough offers a more difficult possibility:

A person can be responsible for harm without being sentenced to repeat it forever.

3. The Horror of Exact Fulfilment

Mary's profession allows her to help people.

Her trauma makes her believe she should be able to save them.

The screenplay slowly separates those concepts.

Help can be offered.

Change cannot be imposed.

4. Simulation Without Understanding

The Backrooms reproduce:

- Banks
- Furniture stores
- Candy stores
- Pools
- Department stores
- Suburbs
- Airplanes
- Human beings

But something is always wrong.

The script repeatedly distinguishes recognizing a form from understanding its purpose.

This also applies to Clark.

He can recreate the appearance of a marriage.

He cannot recreate the mutual humanity that made the marriage meaningful.

5. Architecture as Psychology

Clark wanted to become an architect.

His life is dominated by buildings:

- The furniture store
- The home he lost
- Mary's therapy room
- The Backrooms
- The artificial suburb
- Async

Spaces constantly express psychological states.

Clark eventually attempts to build a home inside the Backrooms because he cannot repair the relationships that make a home possible.

6. Trauma Repeats Until Meaning Changes

Mary cannot alter what happened to Julie.

The screenplay instead gives her a horrifyingly similar moment involving Clark.

He asks for help.

She retreats.

The action repeats.

Mary's understanding does not.

That is the screenplay's most sophisticated treatment of healing.

The past cannot always be rewritten.

The relationship to the past can.

7. Certainty Is Dangerous

"*How can you be sure?*" appears repeatedly.

Sometimes doubt is healthy.

Sometimes doubt becomes denial.

Mary's skepticism initially prevents her from believing Clark.

Clark's certainty later prevents him from accepting responsibility.

The screenplay never argues for unquestioning belief.

It argues for humility.

Recurring Motifs

Paths

Forest paths, roads, hallways, staircases and corridors continually turn psychological movement into physical movement.

Circles and Loops

James follows his own M&Ms.

Hallways return to previous locations.

Mary relives Julie's death.

Clark recreates arguments with Barbara.

Three birds repeat every seven seconds.

The screenplay repeatedly asks whether movement has actually produced change.

Broken Glass

The broken glass belongs to Clark's marital memory.

It becomes part of his therapeutic reenactment.

It returns during the final confrontation.

Clark's unfinished apology to "*the glass*" is therefore really an apology for everything surrounding it.

Three Birds / Seven Seconds

Initially meaningless graffiti.

Eventually navigational evidence.

Finally existential proof that Mary's apparent reality is still repeating.

“How Can You Be Sure?”

Therapeutic question.

Childhood phrase.

Challenge to Clark.

Final warning from James.

The line becomes progressively less reassuring as the screenplay removes every reliable standard of reality.

Voices

The Entity repeats human speech.

Therapy repeats old arguments.

Mary hears Julie.

Clark hears himself.

Characters continually confront words removed from their original context.

Cameras

The screenplay uses surveillance cameras and Bobby’s camcorder to create the illusion of objective evidence.

But cameras fail too.

They pan away.

They lose subjects.

They run out of battery.

They record impossible things without explaining them.

Furniture

Furniture is everywhere.

Clark sells it.

The Backrooms rearrange it.

Still Lifes are positioned like it.

Clark describes beings without thoughts or pain as ideal companions precisely because they function like furniture.

The motif quietly connects commerce, domesticity and dehumanization.

Screenwriting Craft Lessons

Lesson 1: Make the Monster Obey the Theme

The Backrooms are scary because they are infinite.

They are meaningful because they are recursive.

The screenplay builds its character conflict around exactly the same concept.

That gives the horror thematic cohesion.

Lesson 2: Teach the Audience How to Read the Story Early

Mary's forest-path metaphor appears long before the final act.

At first it sounds like ordinary therapy dialogue.

Later it becomes the interpretive key to the entire screenplay.

Good thematic planting often works this way.

The audience understands the line before realizing how important it is.

Lesson 3: Change Protagonists With a Shared Question

Clark and Mary are not separate protagonists stitched together.

Both confront the same question:

Can people escape the paths that shaped them?

That shared dramatic argument makes the handoff work.

Lesson 4: Let Setting Carry Exposition

The screenplay rarely needs someone to explain that the Backrooms imitate human spaces imperfectly.

The objects explain it…

- Five-legged furniture.
- Unreadable checks.
- Wallpaper pools.
- False suburbs.
- Malformed people.

The environment teaches the rules.

Lesson 5: Use Limitations to Create Suspense

The camcorder has limited battery power.

That mundane fact becomes terrifying because the audience knows the camera is temporarily functioning as objective evidence.

When the battery dies, certainty dies with it.

Lesson 6: Escalate the Accuracy of the Imitation

The Backrooms begin with crude environments.

Eventually they can produce:

- People
- Homes
- Landscapes
- Sky
- Async itself

The threat grows not simply because the monster becomes stronger.

It becomes better at passing.

Lesson 7: Repeat Dialogue With Different Meaning

A repeated line should not merely *remind* the audience of an earlier scene.

Its meaning should change.

"*How can you be sure?*" demonstrates this beautifully.

The first version encourages flexibility.

The final version destroys certainty.

Lesson 8: Let the Character Build the Climax

Clark does not arrive at a random final chamber.

He constructs a domestic reality from his own unresolved conflict.

The climax therefore feels psychologically inevitable even while the location is surreal.

Lesson 9: Give the Monster an Incomplete Explanation

KV31 provides enough science to establish that *Async* has been experimenting with recursive space.

It does not explain everything.

That balance allows the screenplay to expand its mythology without shrinking the unknown.

Lesson 10: Make the Escape Part of the Horror

Mary escaping the Entity would be a conventional climax.

Mary discovering that the escape itself is another constructed space produces a stronger final movement because it attacks the audience's expectation of narrative safety.

Key Scenes to Study

1. James and the M&M Trail

Study: Establishing rules through action, spatial impossibility and immediate visual storytelling.

2. Mary's Forest-Path Explanation

Study: Planting the thematic thesis inside character dialogue.

3. The Five-Legged Stool

Study: Introducing supernatural contamination through comedy before overt horror begins.

4. Clark Discovers the Wall

Study: Making a portal frightening through restraint rather than spectacle.

5. Clark's First Exploration

Study: Environmental exposition and uncanny production design.

6. Clark Tells Mary the Truth

Study: Dramatic irony and the collision between reasonable skepticism and impossible reality.

7. Bobby's Rope Experiment

Study: Creating horror by breaking an apparently reliable physical rule.

8. The Camcorder Battery Dies

Study: Turning a planted practical limitation into a POV cliffhanger.

9. Mary's Childhood Memory

Study: Revealing character backstory only when it becomes structurally necessary.

10. Clark's Map Matches KV31

Study: Converting a psychological mystery into a conspiracy without discarding the supernatural.

11. Mary Crosses the Wall

Study: Character-driven threshold crossing.

12. Mary Finds the Aged Clark

Study: Revealing time distortion through character appearance rather than exposition.

13. Clark's Fake Family

Study: Making the villain's environment a physical expression of his psychological state.

14. "I Can't Save Anyone"

Study: Character breakthrough through a change in belief rather than acquisition of information.

15. Clark's Death / Julie Echo

Study: Repeating an earlier traumatic situation while changing its meaning.

16. Three Birds, Seven Seconds

Study: Delayed payoff and the false-escape reversal.

17. Phil at the Threshold

Study: Betrayal through repeated language and inverted intimacy.

18. James's Final Question

Study: Closing a screenplay by transforming an early thematic phrase into existential dread.

Critical Lens (Opine)

What the Screenplay Gets Right

The Horror Has a Thesis

This is not simply a collection of liminal spaces.

The script consistently connects recursive space with recursive behaviour.

Clark Is More Than a Monster

The screenplay lets us understand him before it asks us to fear him.

His insecurity, resentment, abandoned ambitions and alcoholism do not excuse what he becomes, but they establish a believable emotional path toward it.

Mary Has Her Own Story

She is not merely "*the therapist who investigates.*"

Her trauma changes how every decision she makes should be interpreted.

By the climax, the screenplay belongs to her.

The Backrooms Escalate Conceptually

The phenomenon appears increasingly capable of reproducing human reality.

That gives the story somewhere to go beyond additional yellow corridors.

The Ending Protects the Mystery

The final pages provide answers about *Async* without providing certainty about reality itself.

That is a useful distinction.

Where It May Fall Short

The Mental-Health Metaphor Requires Care

Clark's therapy, drinking, rage and eventual violence are tightly intertwined with the supernatural horror.

That creates strong drama, but educators should avoid flattening the material into an implication that psychological illness produces monstrosity.

The screenplay itself places substantial emphasis on choice and responsibility, which provides a better framework for discussion.

Bobby and Kat Are Primarily Functional

They are funny and likable enough for Bobby's death to hurt, but much of their narrative purpose is to verify Clark's discovery and demonstrate the danger of the Backrooms.

Additional character depth could make their loss land even harder.

Async Arrives Relatively Late

The KV31 explanation expands the mythology and gives Mary a strong investigative path.

It also shifts the story from intimate psychological horror toward institutional science-fiction conspiracy.

Some readers may prefer the earlier ambiguity.

Others may appreciate the widening scope.

That tension makes an excellent adaptation discussion.

Clark's Final Transformation Is Extreme

Clark moves from damaged, defensive alcoholic to murderer and cannibalistic captor.

The Backrooms' time distortion implies that far more subjective time has passed for him than for Mary, but much of that transformation necessarily occurs offscreen.

The audience must bridge a substantial psychological gap.

The Final Escapes Stack Several Reversals

Mary escapes the false suburb.

Then the plane.

Then the woods.

Then the fake *Async*.

Then apparently the Backrooms.

Then she is betrayed by Phil.

Then James questions whether escape happened at all.

The accumulation is exhilarating, but students can debate the point at which repeated false exits strengthen dread versus begin reducing confidence in any apparent resolution.

Classroom Discussion Questions

1. What does the Backrooms environment represent for Clark before it becomes a literal threat?

2. Why does the screenplay introduce Mary's forest-path metaphor before Clark discovers the Backrooms?

3. Is Mary wrong not to believe Clark during therapy?

4. At what point does Clark become morally responsible for Bobby and Kat's fate?

5. Why is Clark happier with the *Still Lifes* than with actual human beings?

6. What does Clark mean when he argues that people are born onto paths they cannot escape?

7. Does Mary's statement "*I can't save anyone*" contradict her profession as a therapist?

8. Why does Clark's request for help echo Julie's?

9. Is Mary abandoning Clark in the climax, or finally recognizing the limits of her responsibility?

10. What does the five-legged stool teach us about how the Backrooms understand reality?

11. Why does the screenplay repeatedly associate cameras with unreliable evidence?

12. What does *Async* know about the Backrooms that Phil refuses to tell Mary?

13. Is Phil protecting Mary, protecting *Async*, or protecting something else?

14. Why are the *Still Lifes* more disturbing because they are passive rather than aggressive?

15. What does "3 Birds / 7 Seconds" mean structurally as well as literally?

16. Has Mary escaped at the end?

17. What evidence supports the idea that she has?

18. What evidence suggests she has not?

19. Why is "*How can you be sure?*" an effective final thematic line?

20. If the Backrooms learn from the humans who enter them, what might they become next?

Writing Exercises

Exercise 1: Build the Character Before the Maze

Create a protagonist caught in a repeating behavioural pattern.

Write one page describing the pattern without any supernatural elements.

Then design a horror environment whose physical rules reproduce that pattern.

Goal

Make setting grow from character rather than decoration.

Exercise 2: The Imperfect Copy

Choose an ordinary human environment:

- Grocery store
- Classroom
- Airport
- Hospital
- Apartment

Change only the context surrounding the actions so the scene becomes frightening.

Include five mistakes.

Goal

Create uncanny horror without relying on gore or monsters.

Exercise 3: Repeat the Line

Write one sentence that appears three times:

1. As reassurance
2. As accusation
3. As threat

Goal

Explore how context changes meaning without changing words.

Exercise 4: Protagonist Handoff

Write ten pages featuring one protagonist.

At the midpoint, shift the story to a second character.

The new protagonist must inherit:

- One unresolved plot problem
- One thematic question
- One object or image from the first protagonist

Goal

Maintain narrative continuity during a POV transfer.

Exercise 5: The Reliable Tool Fails

Give characters a simple method of staying safe:

A rope, compass, map, camera, radio or clock.

Then break one assumption underlying that tool without destroying the tool itself.

Goal

Generate fear by attacking logic rather than equipment.

Exercise 6: The False Exit

Write an escape sequence.

Let the protagonist reach safety.

Give the audience three pages to relax.

Then plant one tiny repeated detail proving the escape was false.

Goal

Make the reversal emerge from previously established information.

Exercise 7: The Same Choice, Different Meaning

Write two scenes years apart.

In both scenes, your protagonist performs the exact same physical action.

In the first scene, the action represents fear.

In the second, it represents growth.

Goal

Show character development without changing behaviour.

Exercise 8: Architecture as Argument

Design three rooms representing three competing beliefs held by your protagonist.

The character must move through them in an order that mirrors their psychological arc.

Goal

Treat production design as storytelling.

Screenwriting Vocabulary

Liminal space:

A transitional or in-between environment that feels disconnected from a clear destination or purpose.

Recursive space:

An environment whose structure repeats or refers back to itself.

Protagonist handoff:

A structural technique in which narrative control passes from one principal character to another.

Environmental storytelling:

Communicating plot, history or theme through locations and objects rather than direct exposition.

Uncanny:

Something familiar enough to recognize but altered enough to feel disturbing.

Found footage:

Story material presented as recordings created by characters within the fictional world.

Subjective time:

Time experienced differently by a character from how it passes elsewhere in the story world.

Motif:

A recurring image, phrase, sound, object or situation that develops meaning through repetition.

False escape:

A narrative reversal in which apparent safety is revealed to be another stage of the threat.

Plant and payoff:

Introducing information early so that it can return later with increased significance.

Dramatic irony:

A condition in which the audience knows something a character does not.

Spatial metaphor:

A physical environment used to represent an abstract psychological or thematic idea.

Callback:

The deliberate return of an earlier piece of dialogue, imagery or action.

Thematic recursion:

Repeating an idea or dramatic situation while changing its context or meaning.

Educator Sensitivity Note

Backrooms contains graphic violence, firearm violence, the murder of a teenager, strangulation, dismemberment, decapitation, body horror, cannibalistic imagery, psychological coercion, alcohol misuse, panic attacks, traumatic flashbacks, captivity, grief and disturbing imagery involving humanlike bodies.

Clark's psychological distress, addiction and therapy should not be treated as explanations for violence in real-world mental illness. The screenplay's more productive classroom framework is its repeated distinction between patterns that influence behaviour and responsibility for choices made within those patterns.

The material is best suited to mature senior-secondary or postsecondary study.

Final Takeaway

Backrooms understands something essential about good horror:

A frightening place becomes much more frightening when it already existed inside the character.

Clark spends his life walking circles.

He hates himself, drives people away, feels abandoned, then points to the abandonment as proof that he was right to hate himself.

Mary spends fifteen years walking another circle.

Someone asks for help.

She cannot save them.

She carries the guilt forward and builds a life around trying to answer differently next time.

The Backrooms make both patterns literal.

Infinite corridors are not frightening simply because they have no exit.

They are frightening because every new hallway carries the possibility that you have been here before and failed to notice.

Clark eventually decides that this proves change is impossible.

Mary reaches the opposite conclusion.

She cannot rewrite what happened to Julie.

She cannot force Clark to become someone else.

She cannot guarantee that the next doorway leads to safety.

She can only decide what she does when the pattern appears again.

And even after making that breakthrough, the screenplay leaves one final fluorescent bulb buzzing over the whole idea:

Final Takeaway (CONT'D)

Three birds.

Seven seconds.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Maybe the real question was never whether Mary escaped the Backrooms.

Maybe it was whether she stopped walking the same path.

That is where this draft has teeth. The maze is scary. The possibility that we help build our own is worse.

Nick Runyeard
© 2026
8FLiX Institute
545 King St., West
Toronto, ON., Canada M5V 1M1
+1 (647) 317-9057

This lesson plan is free to republish (citation required -- see metadata for details).
DO NOT ALTER