

# The Chronology of Water (2025) – Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators

Screenplay By: Kristen Stewart

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY based on the memoir by Lidia Yuknavitch

Final Draft: June 5, 2024; 110 pages.

Biography / Drama / Romance / Based on True Events

## **LESSON PLAN**

MENTOR: Nick Runyard | 8FLiX Institute (for Emerging Screenwriters)

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

REQUIRED READING: The Chronology of Water (2025) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING: The Souvenir (2019 - Joanna Hogg), Persona (1966 - Ingmar Bergman), Titane (2021 - Julia Ducournau).

## **Logline**

A woman, after an abusive childhood, escapes into competitive swimming, sexual experimentation, toxic relationships, and addiction before finding her voice through writing.

## **What This Screenplay Teaches**

**The Chronology of Water** rejects the idea that life unfolds in neat sequences. Instead, it organizes experience the way memory actually works: through sensation, emotional echo, and associative leaps. Trauma is not something the protagonist “overcomes.” It is something she carries, swims through, and reshapes into language.

This is a screenplay about embodiment. The body remembers before the mind does. Pain, desire, shame, and intimacy are not subtext here -- they are the text.

For screenwriters, this script offers a rare lesson: story doesn’t have to move forward to move deeper.

## **Discussion Topics**

- Writing trauma without spectacle
- Fragmented narrative as ethical choice
- The relationship between memory and structure
- Writing the body vs writing events
- Voice as architecture
- Gendered expectations of coherence
- When discomfort is productive
- What makes something “unadaptable” (and why that matters)

## **Tone Breakdown**

### **Primary Tone: Lyrical Brutality**

The writing is poetic, but never soft. Beauty and pain coexist without apology.

### **Secondary Tone: Fragmented Intimacy**

Scenes feel like memories surfacing rather than events unfolding.

### **Tertiary Tone: Feminine Defiance**

The script refuses sanitization, sentimentality, or simplification.

### **Undercurrent: Survival as Art**

Creation becomes the only stable identity.

### **In short:**

Raw, poetic, destabilizing -- a film that feels rather than explains.

## **Screenwriting Takeaways**

- **Voice can replace structure**

The script uses language, sensation, and emotional logic to guide the audience.

- **Fragmentation is not confusion**

Disruption becomes meaning, not obstacle.

- **Trauma can shape form**

The story is built the way trauma is experienced: cyclic, intrusive, nonlinear.

- **The body is narrative**

Physical sensation drives emotional truth.

- **Repetition creates resonance**

Moments recur with new emotional weight rather than new information.

- **Refusal of closure is a choice**

Not every story needs catharsis to be complete.

## **Legacy & Context**

This screenplay belongs to a lineage of formally radical, autobiographical cinema: *Jeanne Dielman*, *The Souvenir*, *Persona*, *Blue Valentine*, *Titane*. These films reject conventional plotting in favor of experiential storytelling.

Kristen Stewart's adaptation treats Yuknavitch's memoir not as material to tame, but as a shape to honor. Rather than forcing the book into a three-act mold, the film lets voice dictate form.

For writers, this is a reminder: structure is not universal -- it is expressive.

## Critical Lens: What Works vs Where It Challenges Students

### What Works

#### Form mirrors subject

- The fragmentation reflects lived experience.

#### Embodied perspective

- Sensation leads emotion.

#### Refusal of simplification

- Trauma is not aestheticized.

#### Voice-driven storytelling

- Language becomes navigation.

#### Radical sincerity

- The film never winks at its own pain.

### Where it Challenges Students

#### Form may alienate some viewers

- The lack of narrative anchors can feel destabilizing.

#### Emotionally demanding

- There is little relief or distance.

#### Minimal external stakes

- Everything is interior.

#### Difficult to summarize

- This is a felt story, not a told one.

## **Why This Screenplay Matters in Film Studies**

Most screenwriting education prioritizes coherence, clarity, and causality. **The Chronology of Water** asks a harder question:

*What if coherence isn't the truth?*

This screenplay teaches that storytelling can be experiential, ethical, and embodied... without becoming indulgent. It expands what “narrative” can be.

## **Writing Exercise**

Write a two-page scene that follows emotional logic rather than *chronological logic*.

Rules:

- No timestamps
- No explicit exposition
- Sensation must drive action

Then discuss what changed.

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