

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 Runyeard | 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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8FLiX Institute

545 King St., West
Toronto, ON., Canada M5V 1M1
+1 (647) 317-9057



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