

# It Was Just an Accident (2025) – Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators

Screenplay By: Jafar Panahi

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Crime / Drama / Mystery / Dark-Dry Comedy

## LESSON PLAN

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

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

REQUIRED READING: It Was Just an Accident (2025) Screenplay (8FLIX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING: A Separation (2011 - Asghar Farhadi), Parasite (2019 - Bong Joon Ho & Han Jin-won), Dogville (2003 - Lars von Trier).

## Logline

An unassuming mechanic is reminded of his time in an Iranian prison when he encounters a man he suspects to be his sadistic jailhouse captor. Panicked, he rounds up a few of his fellow ex-prisoners to confirm the man's identity.

## What This Screenplay Teaches

**It Was Just an Accident** is a study in moral corrosion. It examines how trauma warps judgment, how group dynamics accelerate cruelty, and how the desire for justice mutates into performance.

Rather than presenting revenge as catharsis, the screenplay treats it as contamination. Each character enters the story with a reason. No one leaves with innocence.

This is a script that understands something rare:

the scariest villains are people who believe they’re right.

For screenwriters, it demonstrates how to create tension without spectacle, how to turn conversation into combat, and how comedy can be used as a moral solvent.

## **Discussion Topics**

- When does justice become cruelty?
- Is revenge ever ethical?
- How humor changes moral perception
- Groupthink as narrative engine
- Trauma and moral certainty
- Writing tension without violence
- The psychology of “deservedness”
- Who gets to define accountability?

## **Tone Breakdown**

**Primary Tone:** Deadpan Moral Dread

Everything is said plainly. That’s what makes it horrifying.

**Secondary Tone:** Absurdist Social Comedy

Situations spiral not because of chaos, but because of logic.

**Tertiary Tone:** Psychological Entrapment

Every choice narrows the exit.

**Undercurrent:** Trauma as Contagion

Pain spreads. Certainty accelerates it.

**In short:**

Funny, disturbing, and quietly suffocating.

## **Screenwriting Takeaways**

- **Tension doesn't require action**

Dialogue, hesitation, and social pressure do the work.

- **Ensembles can function as a single psyche**

Group dynamics replace individual arcs.

- **Comedy can sharpen stakes**

Laughter becomes a trap, not relief.

- **Moral logic is more dangerous than chaos**

The characters don't spiral; they reason.

- **Escalation should feel inevitable**

Each step is small. Each step is justified.

- **Complicity can be engineered**

The audience is never allowed moral distance.

## **Legacy & Context**

This screenplay belongs to a tradition of morally destabilizing dark comedies like *A Separation*, *Dogville*, *Parasite*, and *Festen* -- stories where ethical clarity collapses under proximity.

Iranian cinema has long excelled at exposing power through quiet confrontation rather than spectacle. *It Was Just an Accident* continues that lineage, replacing melodrama with slow-burning psychological pressure.

For students, this is a rare example of political storytelling that never lectures -- it implicates.

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

### What Works

#### Moral complexity without confusion

- The story never tells you what to think -- it forces you to feel it.

#### Deadpan tonal control

- The humor never breaks the tension.

#### Group psychology as narrative force

- Collective behavior becomes character.

#### Escalation through logic

- Each choice is defensible until it isn't.

#### Audience entrapment

- You laugh. Then you realize you shouldn't have.

### Where it Challenges Students

#### Relentlessly uncomfortable

- Some viewers will disengage.

#### Limited emotional release

- The script offers no catharsis.

#### Deliberate pacing

- The slow coil may test patience.

#### Moral ambiguity can feel punishing

- No one is let off the hook -- including the audience.

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

This screenplay shows that ethical storytelling is a craft, not a theme. It teaches how tone, structure, and pacing shape moral perception.

It asks a crucial question:

*If everyone is justified, is anyone innocent?*

## **Writing Exercise**

Write a scene where:

- No one raises their voice
- No one threatens anyone
- No violence occurs

Yet the scene must feel terrifying.

Then analyze how tension was created.

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