

Vice (2018) - A Screenwriter's Breakdown for Educators

Written and directed by Adam McKay, *Vice* (2018) is a dark political satire chronicling the rise of Dick Cheney from a quiet Washington insider to one of the most powerful and controversial Vice Presidents in American history. The film uses an unconventional narrative structure, meta-humor, and fourth-wall-breaking moments to explore the consequences of power, ambition, and manipulation.

With Christian Bale's transformative performance at its center, *Vice* is both a biographical drama and a biting commentary on American politics.

Key Themes for Screenwriters and Educators:

1. Power & Accountability

Cheney's rise is depicted not as a dramatic climb, but as a calculated series of quiet power grabs. The film forces viewers to examine how power is exercised behind closed doors.

Screenwriting Takeaway:

- Sometimes the most dangerous characters are the quietest ones.
- Show influence through action and consequence, not just speeches.

2. Narrative Experimentation

Vice plays with traditional storytelling through nonlinear timelines, a fake ending, direct address, and documentary-style cutaways.

Screenwriting Takeaway:

- Don't be afraid to break the rules if it serves your story.
- Meta-narration can add depth, irony, or clarity when used with purpose.

3. Satire as Commentary

The film balances real-world political history with exaggerated humor and absurdity, creating a biting critique of unchecked authority.

Screenwriting Takeaway:

- Satire is powerful when it exposes truth through exaggeration.
- Keep tone consistent to avoid confusion between drama and parody.

4. Character Complexity

Cheney is portrayed with empathy, cruelty, ambition, and restraint. He's neither hero nor outright villain-just disturbingly human.

Screenwriting Takeaway:

- Layered characters make the audience uncomfortable in the best way.
- Avoid one-dimensional portrayals of real people.

5. The Role of Family

Lynne Cheney and the daughters play essential emotional and political roles, showing how personal relationships inform public actions.

Screenwriting Takeaway:

- Private moments can illuminate public personas.
- Use family dynamics to humanize or complicate protagonists.

Legacy:

Vice is an ambitious, polarizing film that challenges both political and cinematic conventions. For screenwriters, it's a masterclass in style, risk-taking, and shaping real-world events into compelling character-driven drama. A must-study for anyone tackling biopics, satire, or political narratives.



8FLiX

Screenplays
Teleplays
Transcripts

© 2025
8FLiX Institute
545 King St., West
Toronto, ON., Canada M5V 1M1
+1 (647) 317-9057
8flix.com