

THE STORY GRID GUILD
Writing Sprint for the week of May 4, 2020

Scene Assignment Type: A “Speech in Praise of the Villain” scene with third person omniscient narration.

The Example is from *The War Room* by Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker. A documentary about the 1992 Bill Clinton Presidential campaign, it features the genius of James Carville. Carville masterminded the strategy that would outflank messaging about sexual misconduct associated with a political candidate. He turned the focus from “character-issues” to “who will relieve my money problems?”

Character Number One: Your protagonist is putting forward their “Code 1.0” behavioral system to an indispensable group of people they are unsure of. Think of this person as Mark Antony just after Caesar’s murder. Carville is Antony... He must rally a group of New Hampshire volunteers to stay out in the cold banging on doors so that his candidate will perform at a level that will keep the campaign contributions coming in. If he fails, he will be out of a job. [Keep in mind that Carville’s love interest Mary Matalan is his rival campaign manager for George Bush]

Character Number Two: This is the crowd character number one is speaking to. They must be convinced to do something. In this case “stay the course” with renewed vigor. These people are not inclined to give Clinton the benefit of the doubt. It’s clear he’s lying about his relationship with Jennifer Flowers. They are all probably considering moving on from Clinton and joining his closest rival’s campaign, Paul Tsongas.

Analyzing the Scene:

You may find the prompt is enough to get you writing without having to sweat the story grid structural details.

But you may find it easier to flow into the writing process by outlining the scene before you start scribbling.

Whatever the case, follow this simple process.

If you are energized by the prompt...just start writing and follow whatever pops into your mind without any hesitation or second guessing.

If you are befuddled and need to think through an outline, head on down to the “analyzing the scene” and “five commandments” prompts below.

Answering these questions should start poking ideas out of you. Once you get excited about a particular idea...start writing. You don't have to answer all of the questions before you begin. Just use as many as you need to generate some sentences.

You may get stuck before you complete a first draft of the scene. If that's the case, go back to the questions below and work through them as long as it takes to get you writing again. Don't revise the previous material until you've put together a first draft. So, if you decide to change the inciting incident in order to solve the crisis, change it later after you've created the rest of the scene.

The key element here is to only outline and edit when you find yourself stuck. And when you're writing, don't break to outline or edit until you absolutely have to.

Here are our SG scene tools.

A STORY EVENT is an active change of life value for one or more characters as a result of conflict (one character's desires clash with another's).

A WORKING SCENE contains at least one Story Event. To determine a Scene's Story Event, answer the following four questions:

- 1. What are the characters doing?** A single figure is 'making a speech,' speaking to a group of crowd of people.
- 2. What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in this scene?** The speaker is making an argument, laying it on the line, manipulating the group to do their grunt work.
- 3. What life value has changed for one or more of the characters in the scene?** Someone is going to "win" the scene. And one of the other people will lose the scene. That means that someone will get what they set out to achieve. The other will fail to get what they want. Does the speaker win? Or does the group see through their arguments?
- 4. Which life value should I highlight on my Story Grid Spreadsheet?** Clearly considering the win/lose dynamics in a scene will home in on conflict. What's amazing about THE WAR ROOM is that the "speech in praise of the villain" is directed at Roger Ailes (who will go on to found Fox News in 1996) ...but Carville's motivations...what he truly thinks about Clinton's prevarications is hidden.

HOW THE SCENE ABIDES BY THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

Inciting Incident:

Choose an unexpected event to drop into the scene that will require the protagonist to actively process. In this case, James Carville has to contend with the Jennifer Flowers revelation. At the

time, allegations of sexual misconduct (including a consensual affair outside of marriage) were poisonous to a Presidential candidate. This was the drop-in unexpected phere event that used to mean “game over” before Carville.

Progressive Complication: After the unexpected event drops in, have at least two complications that threaten or encourages the goals of the protagonist. Carville has only six more days before the New Hampshire primary. He has a candidate who refuses to directly address the revelation. And he has a weary group of volunteers who are not “hip” just about ready to abandon ship.

Turning Point Progressive Complication:

Carville brings up Ed Muskie... Roger Ailes was behind the wide dissemination of the revelation that Ed Muskie “cried.” Ailes was the king of Nixon’s dirty-trickier dept.

Crisis: Does Carville attack Bush et al? Or does he attack Flowers?

Climax: Carville hits the money hard.

Resolution: The group is reinvigorated and on a mission.