

SCREENPLAY GURUS

SCRIPT NOTES

TITLE: X
LOCALE: Portland, Oregon
WRITER(S): X
PERIOD: Present
FORM: Feature Screenplay
GENRE: Family Drama, Comedy
BUDGET: Low
PAGES: 113
DRAFT DATE: 05/22/22
COVERAGE DATE: 6/6/22
PREPARED BY: AJ

COMMENTS

OVERALL

X tracks a single mom who learns just before her mother's death that she birthed then gave up a son. The son is a famous, well-respected journalist and activist. The information turns her life on its head. There are complications like playing matchmaker and outing the gay son.

The writer has voice. The script is professionally written. Formatting is spot on. There is good character work and dialogue.

However, the overlength, autobiographical story is a tad episodic. There are a few too many unnecessary scenes and subplots that hijack momentum, dilute the story, and miss opportunities for greater depth of emotion. The tone wavers a tad too much.

Let's take a look at ways to improve the draft.

STORY

Clever work, writer. This is a heartfelt story due to biographical elements. The writer most likely worked a trendy sushi restaurant. Details are too specific. The writer might also have a child. Hiro lifts off the page. Mother/son interactions feel very real. There is a likelihood the writer is Japanese/American.

These inclusive times are ripe for stories with strong ethnic flavor, including Asians. MINARI, THE FAREWELL and even CRAZY WHITE ASIANS enjoyed box office and critical success. However, these stories provided a deeper glimpse into the Asian heart that is a bit lacking in this script.

Violence against Asians peaked in the aftermath of Covid; the "Kung Flu." A suggestion to add a touch of social commentary in overt or covert race hatred.

Jen's contentious relationship with Fumiko is universal between moms and their daughters. Jen sorting out feelings about her life with Fumiko is not as well formed and clear as it could be:

I'm a failure because my mother was a failure. And that's not even her fault. She did the best she could with what she had. And that means that I don't have any control over my own life. That's why I always have to turn it over. Which means nothing I do is actually my fault so I don't have to feel shitty about myself anymore.

These emotions and sentiments are a bit basic. Jen forgives herself and mom but does not pass through enough fire to get there. It's a bit easy. Fumiko is a familiar harpy: The critical mom. However, she was not a good parent. A mom who cares about their offspring would not OD to force a child to rush to their side. This is beyond the stated codependency. It is emotional blackmail. Her daughter became addicted to drugs or alcohol. While Fumiko cannot be blamed for this, she was contributory in the household environment. Jen can't wait to run away.

For Jen to profoundly move past this, and Fumiko's lifelong deception about Masaru, she must experience feelings best laid out by Kubler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. The link leads to a detailed breakdown of the model and aspects of behavior.

<https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>.

The writer does include aspects of the Kubler-Ross model – Jen’s depression, for example. The script need not be a primer on the psychology of managing the death of a parent with a secret. The idea is to broaden the scope of the story through Jen’s actions/reactions.

Hiro does not overtly mourn Fumiko. Not a tear or word to or from Jen. It is a gap. The signs of something amiss are the nighttime “accident” on page 18, fighting later and hiding in the storage closet. The latter of these is due to bullying.

Though it is age-appropriate to withhold a response to a death, it would carry more weight story-wise to include a heart-to-heart talk between Jen and Hiro following Fumiko’s passing. This can stand in for scenes where they rush about a grocery store, or we look over her shoulder at the restaurant. It does work to show Jen working three jobs plus caring for Fumiko and Hiro.

On these work scenes, there are a few too many. The suggestion is to cut or trim. Further, some of these scenes exist to land a joke or bit like the price of a fancy loaf of bread. Funny, but how does this sharp observation advance the core story?

Jen is a Twelve Stepper. Beside inappropriately crashing a rehab group therapy session, and the beautifully written, realistic byplay between Shawna and Jen about recovery, the suggestion is to add a scene at a meeting.

There is a trend in films to excise male figures from the story. This script carries on the trend. Neither Jen nor Fumiko have partners. Further, not a single word is said about past relationships or Masaru, Jen or Hiro’s fathers. This is a fairytale trope to create pathos for characters but leaves a story hole. Was Fumiko married to Jen’s father? How about Jen to Hiro’s father. Jen nearly aborted Hiro.

On this, there are two schools of Fumiko not explaining why she abandoned Masaru. The letter is a central plot element that teases throughout the script. The ambiguous end works but it subverts expectation. The audience must form their own opinion. Conversely, an explanation within the letter fulfills expectation. It is the difference between cheating audience out of experience, or catharsis through added texture to Fumiko’s character.

There is no suggestion to change the end. But what if Fumiko’s reason startles? A subtle whiff exists that George colonized Fumiko and is Masaru’s biological father.

This could be a climactic reveal when it is learned Edith gave the pictures of Masaru. He and Jen correctly deduce and state it. This is devastating for Masaru.

What if in one line of dialogue Jen explains she is a widower to add sympathy for her and Hiro? Or another reason the writer concocts to explain why his dad is MIA.

The work of Jen learning she has a half-brother is well done. Changes to Jen's relationship with Fumiko will shade the proceedings with him.

Jen receives a bill for \$32K. This is forgotten in the backwash of the story. It could be expanded for added pressure on her. Where does she get this money? What effect will non-payment have on her life? Bankruptcy? Seizure of assets? "A gun introduced in the first act must be used by the third," said Chekhov.

This goes to the episodic nature of the story. This happens then this happens then this happens. There should be more cause and effect. Greater rising action. This happens, *and therefore* this happens. *But* this happens, *therefore* this happens. It's the 'but' 'because', 'therefore' that adds causation between beats. That's a story.

The tertiary scenes cooked up to deliver a specific line or gag worsen the episodic nature. Clarity and directness in storytelling should trump clever.

The story has an extraordinarily strong core premise. Splendid work. Going forward, the writer's challenge is to add greater stakes, more complications, and obstacles. Unnecessary scenes should be cut to insert more emotional content surrounding the death of Fumiko, Jen and Hiro's struggles and how Masaru complicates it all.

STRUCTURE

Story notes changes to structure. As written, the script is about 10 to 15 pages too heavy. Markup suggests gross trims and cuts that add up to around four pages. A good target for this type of story is 100 to 105 pages.

The recommendation is to cut most of the short interstitial scenes that are not critical. These unnecessary scenes slow the pace. The following action is assumed.

EXT. PRIDE RESIDENTIAL - DAY

Jen's car pulls into the parking lot.

As noted, the grocery shopping and issues surrounding work, including the rewriting, should either be cut or at least trimmed. Less is more here. On the rewrites, this is a well-executed plot element to check in on Jen's emotional state. Clever work. However, English does not land well. Neither does Uh... it's like... rice for white people. What message is Jen sending Hiro. Rice is rice for everyone. A suggestion to rethink during these very tricky, correct times.

There are piled complications like the press junket juxtaposed with Hiro at school, and the story gathers a full head of steam from about midpoint to the end.

The story starts a little soft. The recommendation is to cut or severely trim fixing breakfast, intro Hiro, cut the rewriting work. A case is made to drop Marisol. She is not vital to the story and only appears in the open. Pick up with Hiro and end:

HIRO
You mean, die?

Then pages 13 to 16 where Fumiko reveals her abandoned son. The funeral should hit closer to page 11 or 12. The Inciting Incident is the reveal about Masaru on the current page 15. This restructure cuts five pages in the first 15.

A case can be made to start at the funeral and flashback. Another alternative is to start with a Framing Device of Jen at the ocean with Masaru then circle back to it at the end. The open Frame could run just up to announcing the identity of his father. Or cleverer the imaginative writer discovers.

The recommendation is a pass at the structure to trim fat and get the story off the blocks faster to run through an emotionally charged landscape to a messy yet satisfying conclusion.

PLOT LOGIC

I couldn't get the funeral arrangements made until after the weekend This could be Jen's lie, but funeral homes are available for arrangements seven days a week.

There aren't any Ubers available This could be the case, but it seems Uber runs 24/7. Not an earthshattering issue but it stuck out as a convenience.

CHARACTERS

The character work is generally good. The people have dimension and flaws.

JEN

She is complicated. A liar. Intrusive and obsessed (anal retentive). A good mom. Hardworking though she'll spit in food upon request. Though her action comes from a decent place, she outs Masaru. This causes dire ramifications for him though he does find acceptance with her.

She is a tad immature re: the fart ringtone. The following is character informing:

JEN

Actually, it's hilarious.

HIRO

What are you? Twelve?

HIRO

He is a standout. The D&D dress up and commitment to the game tracks real. One issue with Hiro is a bit too much wisdom for a six-year-old. 6 going on 16 does not explain it. The following thoughts and words are too advanced:

HIRO

I'm writing an adventure where the players are the monsters. Usually in D&D, the monsters are pretty one dimensional. They aren't really able to think or feel. So in my world, they're more human. Like the Doppelganger shapeshifts because it wants to fit in and it thinks pretending to be someone else is the only way to join a party.

It's a defense mechanism to make them feel better about themselves...

Sometimes, characters inform the writer. Masaru and Jen don't buy in. Hiro and the ringtone, too. Rightfully so. This means an audience won't buy in.

Masaru looks to Jen, eyes wide. Who is this kid?

Jen shrugs like, I don't fucking know.

Hiro can be smart but not to this degree. The suggestion is to make him a tad more age appropriate. Otherwise, he becomes the John Hughes Too Wise Kid trope.

The rest of the characters work. Shawna correctly hauls Jen's butt. It feels right for a 12 Step sponsor. Masaru is spot on: Dignified, smart and also flawed.

Good work.

DIALOGUE

Generally good although lengthier blocks could use trimming. Markup flags suggested trims and cuts.

Some lines come across as conversation that do not always move the story. 'Oh', 'Wow', 'Ugh' and 'you know' are filler and used a tad too much. Dialogue is written with actors in mind. The script could be projected as starring vehicle for the writer.

CRAFT

The script is beautifully written. As noted, the writer has confidence and Voice. These are most difficult attributes to master. Splendid work.

Markup flags the few typos and other issues. Markup suggests cuts and trims.

On Voice, some Actions are too direct and do not land. Rethink.

Yes, it's that romantic comedy trope that never gets old.

The following descriptors, and others, are a touch passé and unnecessary. They land on the side of 'Tell' in "Show, don't tell." We can learn about Jen, Marisol, and others by what they say and do.

...somehow exudes anal retentive and hot mess at the same time...
...Mexican-American, hospice care nurse with a great sense of humor who genuinely loves her job...

Finally -

Double Em dashes are preferred in scripts.

Finally --

Some parentheticals are a touch long. Use sparingly. Keep them short. Anything over two words of simple feeling (sad) or direction (to Hiro) becomes an Action.

JEN
(pretending to get it)
Mmm.

She pretends to get it.

JEN

Mmm.

Here, the parenthetical is unneeded. She answers a phone in the Action.

she answers.

JEN

(into phone)

The writer uses references that are not universally known. These tend to distance the audience from the story. Simplify and make accessible to the widest audience.

clashes with Marie Kondo inspired minimalism

clashes with minimalism (restraint, simplicity, sparse)

EDM (???)

SEO

Internet-optimized text

He's like Daniel Dae Kim

What does this mean in context? Which Kim roles or personal qualities fit here?

Avoid specifics like *The Neverending Story*. There are several issues. Will the rights holder allow it? The cost for licensing the clip. It's also a tad lazy to plug in other media to tell the story. Substitute "a fantasy film" or similar; End credits roll. Jen snoozes. Let the director and producer figure it out.

Some text skews to Passive Voice. Use Active Voice.

Hiro is fuming. He won't make eye contact.

Hiro fumes. He avoids eye contact.

The writer adds mini-slugs as a Scene Heading. These should be inserted as an Action. A Scene Heading field adds a line return. The read is cleaner without it. If a script report is run (in Final Draft) HOURS LATER is listed as a Scene.

She scrolls.

HOURS LATER

The recommendation is a pass to clean up typos and other issues, assure the text is understandable to a wide audience.

TONE

The tone changes. The story begins like a comedy but turns dramatic due to the serious subject matter. It is seen as a drama with comedic touches. The writer should assure they are more in balance. This will occur by reworking the first 10.

TITLE

The title is indicated "working." It's successful, evocative. A suggestion to keep it.

MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

As previously noted, this is the time for inclusive material. That's a plus along with a low budget script. A film of this story is in the under \$5M range. With a sharp pencil, a strong tailwind, and concessions, it could be \$1M to \$1.5M.

There is much to like in the script. It has heart, intriguing characters, skillful writing. However, it is not quite ready for the marketplace. No more than a draft or two should do it. The writer's concentration should be streamlining the story and expanding the emotional content. The pieces of the puzzle are extant.

The mother/daughter relationship is a universal tale. Add a surprise like an unknown half-brother who falls from the sky. There is more juice to be squeezed from these elements. The writer's challenge is to find a bit more originality in the relationships and mesh them together with a bit more finesse and nuance.

The writer is talented and passionate. Those traits are evident on the page. X could be an Indie darling that will draw an audience into its orbit. The writer is strongly encouraged to continue development.

Thank you for the opportunity to read the script.
Andrew

SCREENPLAY GURUS' 11 POINT SCORING MATRIX

Scores: 0 – 10 points for each element, 110 total possible points

Pass: 0 – 75
 Weak Consider: ¹ 76 – 80
 Consider: 81 – 90
 Strong Consider: 91 – 100
 Recommend: 101 – 110

Statistical Scores of submitted screenplays

Pass: 80%
 Weak Consider: ¹ 10%
 Consider: 5%
 Strong Consider: 3%
 Recommend: 2%

PRESENTATION	9
THEME	7
STORYTELLING	9
ORIGINALITY	6
STRUCTURE	5
PLOT	6
CHARACTERIZATION	7
DIALOGUE	7
STYLE	8
CONCEPT	7
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	6
TOTAL POINTS	77

SCRIPT: WEAK CONSIDER
WRITER: CONSIDER

Presentation:

Is the script properly formatted, free of typos and misspellings? Does the writing use standard English conventions? Is the cover page attached with the author's name and contact information only? Is there white space? Are there lengthy blocks of dialogue and action?

Theme:

Is the theme stated and does the screenplay reinforce it throughout? Is the theme relevant or unique?

Storytelling:

How effectively has the author crafted the timeline of events? Is the story interesting or compelling? Is it relevant? Does the script serve the genre in which it's written? Does the story have a through line and respect it without unnecessary departures?

Originality:

Does the story twist well-worn conventions, or create a new one, without straining credibility? Where does the story fit into the four degrees: Totally Familiar; Familiar, Yet Different; Different, Yet Familiar; Totally Different (Familiar, Yet Different and Different, Yet Familiar are preferred).

Structure:

Does the script have and an Inciting Incident, proper Act Breaks, Rising Action, Complications and Obstacles, a well- identified Protagonist and Antagonist?

Plot:

How well has the author informed the audience why the story's events belong in the script, and what the story is meant to communicate?

Characterization:

Do the characters have dimension beyond cliché and trope? Are they real or relatable? Do they have flaws? Do the characters elicit empathy or sympathy?

Style:

Is the writing clear, economical, free of bloat and unnecessary description? Does the writer "Show, don't tell?" Are the descriptions visual and intriguing? Does the writer use Active Voice and Present Tense?

Concept:

Is it sound, interesting or compelling? Do Plot, Storytelling and Structure reinforce the concept?

Marketability/Commercial Appeal:

Where does the script fit in the marketplace? How likely is it to be made? How does it compare to similar films? How will audiences react?

1. AKA Consider With Revisions.

Thanks for submitting your screenplay to Screenplay Gurus! We hope the analysis gives you the info you need to make the script as good as it can be.

www.screenplaygurus.com

guru@screenplaygurus.com