

TV Drama Script Writing Workshop

Sandscribe Communications and St. John's University

Guest instructor from the United States: Dr. Steven Thomas, St. John's University

E-mail: swthomas@csbsju.edu

Website: <http://www.employees.csbsju.edu/swthomas/>

Format of Class

December 28—January 13 daily class format:

5:00 pm—5:50 pm*: watch episode of TV show in classroom in Addis Ababa

5:50 pm—6:00 pm: break

6:00 pm—6:30 pm: discussion with facilitators in classroom in Addis Ababa

6:30 pm—6:40 pm: break

6:40 pm—7:30 pm: Skype lecture and discussion with St. John's University

***Note: 5:00 pm in Ethiopia is 8:00 am in Minnesota**

January 16—25 daily class format

St. John's University's spring semester classes begin on January 16th, so the classroom becomes unavailable then. Therefore, the last day of the Skype classes will be on January 13th. After January 13th, our students will focus entirely on finishing their own scripts, but they will continue to watch and discuss the show. Therefore, the class format will change to this:

6:00 pm—6:50 pm: watch episode

6:50 pm—7:00 pm: break

7:00 pm—7:45 pm: small-group workshop in classroom in Addis Ababa

Watching: The class will focus on one show throughout the semester, *NYPD Blue*. We will focus on one show so that we can learn both short plot arcs for individual episodes and long plot arcs for entire seasons.

Reading: students should read the material before coming to class. The reading material comes from these sources:

(1) Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*

(2) Pamela Douglas, *Writing the TV Drama Series: How to Succeed as a Professional*

Writing in TV

(3) Margaret Mehring, *The Screenplay: A Blend of Film Form and Content*

(4) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of the Single Story*

Writing: written homework should be done before class and can be done in any language (Amharic, Afan Oromo, or English), depending on the individual. Individuals can e-mail their

homework to the appropriate instructor. I will read all the homework done in English. The on-site instructor and facilitators can read all the homework done in Amharic or Oromo.

Discussion Questions: Each day we will have discussion questions about the watching, reading, and writing.

Small group workshops after January 13: students will get in groups of four, and share their work with each other.

Schedule of Classes and Content

December 28:

Subject: characters, setting, genre, and meaning

Watch: season one, episode 1 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Story*, pp. 31-42 and pp. 67-131

Writing the TV Drama Series, pp. 7-30

Writing: write an analysis of characters, setting, structure, and meaning of *NYPD Blue*

Discussion Questions: What makes a good story? How can you learn to write? Is TV writing different from other kinds of writing (e.g., movies, plays, novels, and short stories)? How did *NYPD Blue* establish characters, setting, and genre in the first two episodes? What is the meaning of *NYPD Blue*?

December 30

Subject: conflict, loss, lack, event, symbol

Watch: season one, episode 2 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Story*, pp. 136-154 and 177-180

Writing: (1) rewrite the analysis of *NYPD Blue* that you wrote for last class in terms of conflict, loss, lack, event, and symbol

(2) write new idea for your own show in terms of setting, character, genre, conflict, loss, lack, event, symbol, and meaning

Discussion Questions: What gives an event meaning? What makes a story move forward? Why do we desire what we don't need? What makes a character complex? What is the difference between what the character desires and what the audience desires?

January 2

Subject: major and minor characters, fact and fiction, research, symbol

Watch: season one, episode 3

Reading: *Story*, pp. 181-207, and

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"

Writing: (1) character map of *NYPD Blue* in terms of relationships and events;
(2) do some research for your own show and make character map

Discussion Questions: Why do major characters need minor characters? How is a person real and how is a person a symbol? How can you research your story?

January 4

Subject: point of view, frame, sound-image

Watch: season one, episode 21 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Screenplay*, pp. 15-40 and 169-185.

Also, look up summary of episodes for whole first season on IMDb.com

Writing: (1) describe some scenes of *NYPD Blue* in terms of different characters' point of view, sound-image, and symbol (2) do some research for your own show (interviews, books, etc.)

Discussion Questions: What is the form of TV and how is it different from other writing? How does point of view, frame, and sound all make meaning? How can you change point of view in a scene?

January 6—8 Christmas Holiday

January 9

Subject: season plot and episode plot

Watch: season two, episode 1 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Story* pp. 43-61 and pp. 217-232

Writing: (1) outline the long plot arcs and the short plot arcs in *NYPD Blue*
(2) outline the long plot arcs and an short plot arcs of your show

Discussion Questions: How do small plot arcs help long plot arcs? How do long plot arcs help short plot arcs?

January 11

Subject: three-act structure, four-act structure, and the business of television

Watch: season two, episodes 4 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Writing the TV Drama Series*, pp. 67-73
and *Story* pp. 257-59 and pp. 334-345

Writing: (1) analyze the four act structure of episode four of *NYPD Blue*
(2) write an outline of your first episode following four act structure

Discussion Questions: What is the difference between three act and four act structure? How are Ethiopian and American television different? When you watch *NYPD Blue*, can you identify where the commercial breaks are between each “act”? If American television has a four act structure, what should Ethiopian television have?

January 13

Subject: beat, scene, sequence, frame

Watch: season two, episode 5 of *NYPD Blue*

Reading: *Story* pp. 388-419, and *Screenplay* pp. 231-42,
and *Writing the TV Drama Series*, pp. 73-94

Writing: (1) analyze the beats, scenes and frames in an episode of *NYPD Blue*

(2) begin sequencing your scenes and explain movement from one scene to another

Discussion Questions: Students decide on the questions.

January 16-24

Begin writing first episode of own show

Continue meeting to discuss each other's writing and to discuss *NYPD Blue*