Story Time Episode 5: Creating Your One-Sentence Stories

PILAR: Hey, welcome back. Last time, we learned how to brainstorm story elements using a "Divide a story." If you didn't get a chance to do that or if you want a refresher on any storytelling elements, you can check out some of our other videos or you could even do it after the video. So today, we are going to plug those ideas into one sentence stories called a "Logline."

Loglines help you come up with the core idea for your story that you're going to expand on later when you're writing your script. There's a simple way to express your idea clearly and give other people a sense of what your story is about. Let's hear from our friend, Chris Mack. You know, he mentors writers just like you at Netflix.

CHRIS: Hi, young storytellers. I'm Chris Mack and I work for Netflix in Amsterdam. So today, I want to talk about loglines and how important it is to tell your story or any story for that matter in two to three sentences.

Did you know you can come up with the logline by asking yourself six simple questions? I like to call these questions the "story questions." Who is the hero, what do they want, why do they want it, how do they go about getting it, what stops them and what happens if they don't get it?

So let's use my life in law school as an example. I just finished my first year and I realized I wanted to break into Hollywood because I wanted to tell stories. So who is the hero? Well it's me, of course. What did I want -- to get into Hollywood more than anything else. So I networked, met some really cool people and told them my story. And because they liked my story, they helped me any way they could.

The only thing that could have stopped me from doing it would have been my father because he really wanted a lawyer in the family. So you know what I did? I kept it a secret. And if I wasn't successful then I guess I just would have ended up being a lawyer which isn't so bad, right?

So the logline goes something like this -- "Chris Mack, a story about a law student who wants to tell his stories and gets into Hollywood by networking and keeping it a secret from his father." Why is this important to tell your story? Well the easier it is to tell your story, the easier it is to meet new people, to make new friends and who knows, maybe find yourself working for Netflix in an exotic country. Well that's it. And as we say in Amsterdam, "Farewell."

PILAR: If you've found the sheets from our website helpful, please, use the Logline worksheet or you know, you could use a blank piece of paper or even speak your ideas out loud. Hey, let's join Vira and Curtis in the Imaginarium to create your loglines.

VIRA: Hey, everyone. Welcome back. I'm Vira.

TAMARA: I'm Tamara.

CURTIS: And I'm Curtis.

VIRA: Coming to you from the Imaginarium which can be anywhere or anything we need to bring our stories to life.

CURTIS: Today, we'll take the elements that make up a story and plug them into a logline.

TAMARA: A logline? Huh? Do you mean like this?

VIRA: Smart guess. But the loglines that Curtis is talking about don't leave splinters. A logline is a simple way of squeezing a big idea into one simple sentence. Writers use it to get other people interested in their ideas.

TAMARA: So it's kind of like a quick preview.

CURTIS: Exactly.

TAMARA: Super cool. But how do you write one?

VIRA: I am so glad you asked. There are a ton of ways to write loglines but a simple way goes like this -- "In a SETTING, CHARACTER wants GOAL but OBSTACLE stands in their way until CLIMAX which helps them learn LESSON."

TAMARA: Then all I have to do is plug in my story elements?

CURTIS: You got it. We'll be coming up with all different genres of loglines.

TAMARA: Hold on. Genres?

CURTIS: Genre is a specific type of story. It's a way to think about how you want the audience to react or feel about the story you create.

TAMARA: Can you give us an example?

CURTIS: Of course. Questions are always good when a topic's a little
            fuzzy. So let's say you want the audience to laugh then comedy
            might be a good bet. And if you want the audience to cry,
            maybe a drama.

TAMARA: Or maybe you want the audience to laugh and cry. That's called
            a "Dramedy."

CURTIS: Nice connection, Tamara. If those are the emotions you want
            the audience to feel, you should go for it. There's also fantasy or
            sci-fi if you want the audience to be transported to a totally
            different place. Then there's action or mystery that might make
            an audience constantly try to guess what's going to happen next
            or you can totally mix genres to tell the story you want to tell.

TAMARA: I think a sci-fi comedy would be totally up my alley.

CURTIS: That works, too. If you want, you can take a moment to list
            some of your favorite movie genres and select the top three.
            Think about why those are your favorite. If you like, you can
            write them down on your Logline worksheet.

TAMARA: Only three? But they're all so good.

CURTIS: If it's challenging choosing only three, think about your favorite
            movies. Are there any that are similar? What do they have in
            common? Maybe they're funny, so you like comedies, or maybe
            they have people doing cool things, so action is more your style.

VIRA: You can get some really cool ideas when thinking about your
            favorite genres.

CURTIS: If you still have the "Divide a story" from last video, you can use
            your story elements from that to make a logline, otherwise, feel
            free to make one up right now.

[Pause]

VIRA: Tamara, what'd you come up with?

TAMARA: In a rocket ship, Inyo wants to go to Earth but a meteor stands in their way, until they wake Tamara up, which helped them realize humans really are dog's best friend.

CURTIS: Hmm, you have a one-sentence logline for your story.

VIRA: Now that you have created a few loglines, select the one you'd like to expand into a five-page screenplay. We know you might have a bunch of different ideas so take as much time as you need to pick one. And remember, it's just for now. So once you're done with your first story, you can write as many more as you'd like.

TAMARA: Congratulations. Give yourself a pat on the back because now, you have a logline for your screenplay. I'm pretty proud of myself for creating one, too.

VIRA: Well that's it for us today. Sending it back to Pilar to wrap things up. Until next time.

PILAR: To wrap it up, today, you learned what a logline is. You brainstormed your favorite movie genres and you also wrote a few loglines and you came up with the logline that you're going to be expanding into a five-page screenplay.

If you want your loglines brought to life by our actors or designers, ask an adult to email us or have them post it on social media but remind them to tag us.

Hey, next time, we're going to be planning out our entire screenplay using an outline. See you next time. Bye.

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