Story Time Episode 7: Formatting Your Story

PILAR: Hey, it's me, Pilar again. Welcome back to Story Time. Last time, you planned out your entire story by creating an outline and you came up with your character's motivation. Today, you'll learn all about how a script is formatted. Here is one of our friends. He's going to share why screenplay format is so important.

HARRY SHUM JR: Hey, young storytellers. I'm Harry. I'm an actor, sometimes singer and a dancer.

So as a performer, the script is my guide. Now it gives me enough information to understand my part and what the writer was imagining when they created my character. Now "dialogue," that lets me know what my character says and how they speak and interact with other people. And the "action," now that lets me know what my character does and how they move. So that key information helps me stay true to the vision and creative ideas of the writer when I perform my role.

And a script, now that's formatted in a way that helps me easily find out that information so I have space to have a lot of fun and be creative in my performance. So just like you, I love making creative choices and being able to add my own personal touches. But honestly, I can't do that without a script and writers like you.

So have fun today and please, please share your creative ideas with actors like me. I'm waiting for it.

PILAR: So today, you could use a computer or even a pencil and paper to write out your first scene and you can use the outline you wrote last time as a guide. Now let's go to Vira, Curtis and Tamara in the Imaginarium.

VIRA: Today, we're going to learn how to write a screenplay -- the script for a movie. And that script is written in a really specific way called "Screenplay format."

TAMARA: What makes a screenplay different from a book?

CURTIS: Great question. A screenplay is different than a book because you read a book and get to imagine everything that goes on in it but a movie is meant to be performed by actors and watched by an audience.

TAMARA: So you write a screenplay to be watched by people?

CURTIS: Exactly. The screenplay shows the actors how to act out the story and list details about what the audience is seeing so the movie makers know exactly how to make the movie once it's fully written.

TAMARA: Oh, how does it do that?

VIRA: A screenplay is made of four basic screenplay elements which each contain important information for making a movie. The first is a slugline.

TAMARA: Ew. I've seen those. They're gross.

VIRA: Well, this is a different kind of slugline and it looks like this -- [EXT. IMAGINARIUM DAY]. The slugline tells us the setting of the scene or where the scene takes place. It's made up of three

parts -- interior or exterior, so we know whether the scene is inside or outside, the name of the location and whether it's during the day or the night. The slugline is in all capital letters so it gets our attention whenever a new scene starts.

CURTIS: The next element is action.

TAMARA: Oh, I know this one. That's everything the characters are doing, right?

CURTIS: That's right. On top of everything the characters are doing, action lines also describe what the audience is seeing, any sound effects and any characters that are introduced for the first time.

VIRA: The next element is dialogue. Those are the words the character is saying. The character's name is on top and what they say is underneath. Dialogue is in the middle of the page so it's easy for the actors to find and read their lines. -- Okay, that's enough.

TAMARA: What's that in the parentheses?

CURTIS: The last element is a parenthetical. It shows an actor how to perform a specific line. It can be an emotion, a type of voice or even an action done while saying the line. Watch.

VIRA: (Agitated) Okay. That's enough. (Impatient) Okay. That's enough. (Bothered) Okay. That's enough.

TAMARA: Great. Now we know all the elements. Can we practice a little?

CURTIS: Of course. Practice makes perfect. Do you think you're ready to start turning your story idea into a screenplay, Tamara?

TAMARA: Can we go somewhere a little quieter to write? -- Perfect. I'm ready.

VIRA: Why don't we start with the first scene? First things first, we need--

TAMARA: A slugline.

VIRA: I can tell you paid attention earlier.

TAMARA: [Widely smiles]

VIRA: Where does this scene take place?

TAMARA: I want my story to start on the planet Mars.

VIRA: Is that inside or outside? And what time of day is it?

TAMARA: Hmm, I'm thinking outside and during the day. So it should look like -- [EXT. MARS - DAY]

CURTIS: There's your slugline. Now let's describe your settings so we know where the beginning of the story takes place.

TAMARA: It's hot, dusty and red. The sky is bright orange.

VIRA: Where are we on Mars?

TAMARA: Inyo's, my protagonist, backyard. There's a small fence around the yard and Inyo's there, too.

VIRA: Tamara, you're a natural. Tell us a little bit more about Inyo.

TAMARA: Inyo is a little white dog. She's a fluffy friendly dog who's eating lunch from her dog bowl.

CURTIS: Is there any dialogue we can add to show what Inyo might be like?

TAMARA: To show that Inyo is friendly and nice, maybe she can be greeting everyone that walks by her yard.

INYO: "Hi. How's it going? Good morning."

CURTIS: Your screenplay is off to a solid start.

TAMARA: Can I add a parenthetical to that line to show some emotion?

CURTIS: Yeah, of course. Parentheticals help certain lines stand out, so you probably don't want to use them too much. But you should definitely use them online that needs some clarification.

TAMARA: Cool. I want Inyo to say that like she's really nervous like this --
            (Nervous) "Hey, how's it going? Morning, everyone."

VIRA: Look at that. You started writing your screenplay with all the
            elements we learned today. Pause this video and write out the
            first part of your script. In this first part, describe your setting
            and protagonist. Describe what they look like and show what
            your character is like.

            [Pause]

CURTIS: Awesome job starting your screenplays, everyone. We learned
            and did so much today. Pilar, would you mind summarizing it all
            for us?

PILAR: To wrap it up, today, you learned how a script is formatted and
            you learned what action, dialog and a slugline are. You also
            started writing out your script.

            Well, that's about it for today. Next time, you'll continue writing
            out your script. See you then.

English Transcription provided by: Translation Services.