

APPENDIX: A FRAMEWORK FOR SCRIPTING ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

The following list of questions is derived, distilled, synthesized and supplemented from the foregoing chapters. It is intended as an initial guide rather than an immutable prescription for environmental scholars, practitioners and teachers seeking to engage broader publics through developing scripts for stage and the screen—although aspects might be applied to additional storytelling media. The questions involve factors relating to the craft of scriptwriting and its evaluation as arts-based research.

DEFINING THE IDEA

1. What are my goals for this project?
2. Where could my idea come from (e.g. experience, curiosity, inspiration)?
3. With which environmental issue(s) does it engage?
4. Will it address the environmental issue(s) directly, inferentially or analogously?
5. Does my idea lend itself to a clearly defined research question in environmental studies? What is that question?
6. What is the premise or hook of my story around that question?
7. Why does this story matter?
8. To whom should it matter?
9. Is it an appealing, fresh twist on a familiar tale or genre?
10. What is the genre of my story?

11. What emotions stand to be engaged by this story? Are these consistent with my desired genre?
12. Can my story be summarized in a one- or two-sentence pitch? (See below.)

GATHERING STORIES (DATA)

1. What background information is needed to determine and explore elements of my environmental issue(s)?
2. Where can that issue-related information be found?
3. How can that issue-related information be obtained? At what cost(s)? Over what timelines?
4. What background information is needed to tell my story?
5. Where and from whom can that story-related information be found?
6. How can that story-related information be obtained? At what cost(s)? Over what timelines?
7. Does my research reflect a genuine exploration of scientific, technical, political or other complicated aspects of my environmental issue(s)? Does it omit or gloss over difficult but essential concepts?
8. How can my story incorporate and communicate scientific or technical aspects of my environmental issue(s) as to engage an audience?
9. What flows or issues of power can I perceive in my story?
10. How might I address any issues of marginalization, oppression or other injustice to the Earth and/or any form of life arising in or around my story?
11. Does my story risk overwhelming the audience in any way? If so, how can I reduce that potential?
12. What, if any, research method(s) will be used in aid of my arts-based research? (*Note: Arts-based research is a form of inquiry in its own right, but can serve as a methodological supplement or be supplemented by other research methods.*)

CHOOSING THE FORMAT

1. To what extent is my story grounded in actuality?
2. If my script is to be a documentary, does it (Rabiger 2015):
 - (a) depict real people in an existing world?
 - (b) stem from the beliefs of those it depicts?

- (c) aim to raise awareness?
 - (d) display an array of human values as people grapple with human quandaries?
 - (e) involve conflict as people struggle to achieve what they value?
 - (f) stimulate viewers to engage in social criticism?
3. Considering the extent of fictionalization and/or dramatization required to tell my story:
 - (a) Does my story require dramatic enhancements to enable or aid its telling (docudrama)?
 - (b) Would my story be told best by recreating it significantly or crafting it with a protagonist, a quest, obstacles and other elements of my own design (fictional(ized) drama)?
 4. Will my inquiry follow a propaganda, binary or dialogic model?
 5. Is my story best told on a screen, on a stage or in some other format or medium?
 - (a) Would I prefer to control the audience's visual point of view (screen)?
 - (b) Is my story tethered to time and place, making quick transitions among them difficult (screen)?
 - (c) Does my story revolve primarily around dialogue rather than images (stage)?
 - (d) Would the audience benefit most from the co-presence of my characters as the story unfolds (stage)?
 6. How can my script best use my chosen media:
 - (a) to communicate scientific, technical, political or other complicated aspects of my environmental issue(s) to engage an audience?
 - (b) to share my story with an audience in the most engaging way possible?

CHOOSING VOICES (PARTICIPANTS/CHARACTERS)

1. Whose story is it? For whom should the audience be rooting?
2. Which characters are necessary to advance the story?

3. Are my characters actual people, composites and/or purposive creations?
4. Are they multidimensional rather than reductionist binaries or puppets of my plot or environmental issue(s)?
5. Are their voices distinct in and of themselves, and among each other?
6. Are their goals and motivations well defined and clearly shown in my script? How do my characters relate to my environmental issue(s)?
7. What key points in my characters' backstories colour their participation in the story (especially in a drama):
 - (a) dominant trait(s)?
 - (b) potentially fatal flaw?
 - (c) greatest joy and/or fear?
 - (d) primary paradox?
8. How do my main characters change over the course of the story? What lesson(s) do they learn?
9. How much would audiences relate to and care about what happens to my characters, and why (not)?

DETERMINING THE WORLD OF THE STORY

1. What are the elements of my story's world:
 - (a) physical setting?
 - (b) geographic location?
 - (c) time (era, year, season, time(s) of day)?
 - (d) cultural, social, economic and other conditions?
 - (e) physical objects?
2. How is my world organic to my story and characters? How does it:
 - (a) shape the characters' choices?
 - (b) prescribe rules of behaviour?
 - (c) reveal aspects of my characters?
 - (d) add visual or other weight to my story?
3. Can I use contrasting worlds to advance my story?

CRAFTING THE STRUCTURE

1. What is my primary research question? Are there secondary research questions?
2. In what genre will my story be situated (e.g. historical, mystery, satirical)?
3. Will my story be driven primarily by plot or character?
4. Does my story contain sufficient conflict to engage audiences and sufficient connection to satisfy them?
5. How does at least my protagonist change? Is there a journey of transformation and of increasing emotional significance and narrative consequence?
6. To what extent does my story use tools of organization and audience engagement from dramatic three-act structure, i.e.:
 - (a) a setup (opening balance)?
 - (b) a disruption of that balance (inciting incident)?
 - (c) a major turning point introducing the major dramatic question and ending Act I (call to adventure)?
 - (d) rising obstacles, action and stakes, born of complications and reversals?
 - (e) a mid-story 'pinch' (point of no return or trap)?
 - (f) rising action, leading to an ordeal ending Act II (dark moment)?
 - (g) a rededication to the protagonist's goal (enlightenment)?
 - (h) further rising action leading to a crisis and then a dramatic climax?
 - (i) a resolution of the major dramatic question (catharsis or denouement)?

SHAPING THE VISUAL STYLE

1. What elements of my story will make it visually engaging to audiences?
2. How does the visual style expressed in my script reflect and advance the genre and tone of my story?
3. How does the visual style tap into people's greater bandwidth of comprehension of visual information (especially regarding scientific and technical information)?

SEEDING THE THEME

1. What coherent and cohesive perspective, moral or prescription for living does my story suggest to me that might lead to a greater understanding or appreciation of life and the world?

2. How does my story embody that? How is that theme manifested in my protagonist's journey and transformation in the story?
3. What coherent and cohesive perspectives, morals or prescriptions for living might my story suggest to audience members?
4. Does my story communicate potential themes in a didactic or heavy-handed way as to disengage an audience?
5. How is my theme likely to engage audiences emotionally?
6. How is my theme likely to engage audiences intellectually?
7. Are audience members likely to be motivated to consider and take any kind of physical action on my environmental issue(s)? If so, what could they do and how could they do it?
8. How can I craft my script as to maximize the potential to engage and motivate audiences to take any such action?

PITCHING MY SCRIPT

1. Does my story have an engaging, catchy and memorable title?
2. Are the story's genre and format discernible to potential audiences?
3. Is there a clearly motivated protagonist?
4. Is my protagonist actively engaged in a discernibly motivated, clearly expressed and challenging quest, with serious consequences (stakes) to her/himself and others?
5. Is there a formidable antagonist (e.g. the protagonist him/herself, another individual, society, nature and/or the supernatural) and an unwillingness to, or impossibility of, compromise?
6. Is there an unusual or not typically accessible setting, with strong sensory appeal (e.g. visual appeal in screenplays)?
7. Does the story involve rising action, conflict and stakes?
8. Does it have an emotionally powerful climax and a satisfying catharsis?
9. Is it likely to precipitate a memorable sense of meaning among audiences, leading to a greater understanding or appreciation of life and the world?
10. How is my story more than just another tale of environmental doom and gloom? Why should audiences care?

EVALUATING MY SCRIPT

1. Is my script *scholarly*, namely:
 - (a) rooted in a clearly focused research question?

- (b) in keeping with ethical research practices?
 - (c) clear in explaining and justifying my choices of theory and research methods, including arts-based research?
 - (d) congruent with my research question, theory and research methods?
 - (e) holistic in its processes of inquiry, interpretation and expression?
 - (f) robustly researched in terms of collecting and analyzing stories (data)?
 - (g) robustly researched in terms of gaining comprehension of difficult scientific, technical, political and other complicated aspects of my environmental issue(s), as to ground an ability to communicate them in my story?
 - (h) true to the content and spirit of my participants' contributions?
 - (i) appropriately critical, reflexive and transparent?
 - (j) contributory in advancing human knowledge, understanding and appreciation?
2. Is my script *authentic*, namely:
- (a) credibly situated in lived experience?
 - (b) allied to a recognizable focal point of engagement by the audience?
 - (c) accessible, socially significant and useful to communities which it seeks to engage, especially beyond the Academy?
 - (d) open to scholarly, aesthetic and political criticism?
 - (e) pluralistic in terms of its voices and knowledgably open to indigenous, multicultural and other non-hegemonic ways of thinking and living?
 - (f) sincere, non-intimidating and open-ended as to invite multiple interpretations and responses?
3. Is my script *artistic*, namely:
- (a) intentional, creative and original in its conception and expression?
 - (b) coherent and thematically unified?
 - (c) succinct and incisive in focusing on the core of my environmental issue(s)?
 - (d) passionate, principled and powerful in its conviction and execution?
 - (e) aligned with my research question and overall goal?
 - (f) aligned with substantive and formal aspects of the craft of screenwriting, playwriting or otherwise (see the foregoing questions on aspects of storytelling)—but not to the point of reproducing oppressive or unjust practices or effects?

- (g) likely to engage audiences emotionally and intellectually, with positive transformative potential?
4. Is my script *green*, namely:
- (a) aligned with a sustainable rather than overly anthropocentric ethos and practices?
 - (b) critical of hegemony and injustice relating to environmental concerns, while providing and inspiring potential alternative courses of action?
 - (c) likely to engage audience members in my environmental issue(s) and invite related reflection, understanding and motivation to respond actively and positively in changing behaviours (theirs or those of others)?
 - (d) written and planned to be produced and disseminated as ecologically soundly as possible?

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. How will I best use my chosen media to share my story?
2. What is my budget to get my script produced to share with an audience?
3. How will production of my script be funded?
4. Whose professional, technical, logistical and/or other help do I need to produce and disseminate this story?
5. How will its dissemination be promoted? How will that be arranged and financed?
6. How will I engage audiences in continuing the conversation that my story aims to start?
7. What means of expression can I give people to provide comments and/or take action in response to my story? How will that be arranged and financed?
8. Considering my goals for this project, when (if ever) will I consider it to be completed?

REFERENCE

- Rabiger, Michael. 2015. *Directing the documentary*. 6th edn. Burlington: Focal Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Geo Takach is a veteran writer, speaker and instructor, and a documentary filmmaker. His efforts as a professional communicator, artist or both span hundreds of publications in speeches, print, theatre, film, radio, television and Boolean ether. He has taught diverse aspects of communications at four universities and in workshops for the public, private and volunteer sectors in Alberta, Canada. After some decades in 'Wild Rose Country', he recently decamped to join the faculty of the School of Communication and Culture at Royal Roads University in 'Super, Natural' British Columbia. He has numerous, supportive family members, friends and colleagues, old and new, of whom he has grown rather fond.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

Patents

Law-de-da! Lampooning the Laws in Our Lives

Will the Real Alberta Please Stand Up?

Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta's Image

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