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The 5 Elements of Screenwriting: Structure Within Film

Within screenwriting, the 5 notable elements would include the three act structure, plot points, sequencing, scene descriptions, and throughlines. Three-act structures are storytelling models that divide themselves into three parts of a script - Act I, Act II, & Act III. Act I usually includes the exposition and the set up of the story. Act II consists of the midpoint, and confrontation of the film - which includes the conflicts that clash with certain characters' goals, and how they overcome it. Act III is the resolution and falling action that establishes the resolving of said issue. Although the three-act structure assists with outlining a story, plot points further propel the story forward and act as a catalyst for a character's development. In total, there are five notable plot points: inciting incident, the lock in, first culmination, main culmination, and a twist. It truly depends on how many points a writer wants incorporated within their screenplay, as it can vary from 5-8.

In addition to plot points, sequencing is another form of structuring used to thoroughly develop a story. Eight sequences are included within this process: inciting incident, predicament, first obstacle, midpoint, rising action, main culmination, twist, and resolution. After this is completed, scene descriptions should be added. They describe the look, feel, and action of what's occurring in certain screens, and should be no longer than one to four sentences. Masterfully-constructed stories always include throughlines, themes that run through the plot of a film, in order to create the momentum that personifies the main protagonist's conscious desires and actions.

Within Little, we can see these structural devices used in various scenes. For instance, Jordan Sanders being bullied in middle school and growing up to become a worse bully to her employees highlights the throughline of Jordan's trauma, and her desire to never be picked on again. Jordan's multifaceted narcissism and confidence is one of the primary throughlines within the movie - and how it affects those around her. Though resolved by Act III, this main throughline was manifested in Sanders' unhealed trauma, and its festering caused her to become something that she once tormented by.

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