



SAMPLE LESSON FIVE

Closed Circle Mystery

Jed Mercurio

WRITING DRAMA FOR TELEVISION

BBC
MAESTRO

Contents of the full course

1.	Writers Are Made, Not Born.....	🔒
2.	Inspiration.....	🔒
3.	Developing Ideas.....	🔒
4.	What Kind Of Show Are You Making?.....	🔒
5.	The Setting.....	🔒
6.	Relationship Between Character & Setting.....	🔒
7.	Starting The Pilot.....	🔒
8.	The Content Of The Pilot.....	🔒
9.	Story Architecture.....	🔒
10.	Inciting Incidents.....	🔒
11.	The Science Of The Story: Critical Mass & Chain Reaction.....	🔒
12.	Set-ups & Natural Story.....	🔒
13.	Story Events.....	🔒
14.	Plots & Subplots.....	🔒
15.	Episodes.....	🔒
Projecting Forward:		
16.	The Series Bible – Part One.....	🔒
17.	The Series Bible – Part Two.....	🔒
Coefficients Of Narrative Power:		
18.	(i) Mystery	🔒
19.	(ii) Jeopardy.....	🔒
20.	(iii) Forward Momentum.....	🔒
21.	Dialogue.....	🔒
Attenuators Of Narrative Power:		
22.	(i) Confusion.....	🔒
23.	(ii) Implausibility.....	🔒
24.	(iii) Boredom.....	🔒
25.	Mastering Your Craft.....	🔒
26.	Fallacies.....	🔒
27.	Rewriting & Collaboration.....	🔒
28.	Career Development.....	🔒

“

**Mystery is one
of the most
important
tools you can
use as a writer.**

OPEN AND CLOSED MYSTERY

An Open Mystery

Here the audience is shown the crime, the perpetrator and everything they do to avoid being caught. The episode revolves around whether the person solving the crime can bring the perpetrator to justice. A classic example would be Columbo or Cracker.

A Closed Mystery

The identity of the perpetrator is withheld. The secret is closed to the audience, only to be revealed later. It teases the audience, presents a suspect, then takes them away and presents another one. Think of Inspector Morse.

A Lone Suspect Closed Mystery

You want the audience and investigators to be concerned about only one person. It works around the idea that the audience is hugely invested in that one character and will want to know whether they are guilty or innocent. Plenty of famous films use this – Basic Instinct for example. In TV, Prime Suspect did it very well and, of course, we’ve used in some seasons of **Line of Duty** too.

When writing a lone suspect closed mystery, think of your storytelling as a pendulum, swinging from guilty to innocent. That is the game you play, episode after episode. You’re using mystery to enhance the complications in the middle of your series.

“

The audience care about knowing the answer. If you tantalise them and hold it back, you’ll have more narrative power.

BREAKING THE RULES

Some stories are complicated. They need to be complicated. Confusion arises when you don’t know the story. When...

- **You leave things hanging, and don’t follow them through**
- **You don’t quite get a point across**
- **Dialogue is misleading for no good reason**
- **Characters act one way, and then in a completely different way a few scenes later**

These create a feeling that the story is breaking basic narrative rules. You’ve set up an environment in which there is no causality and where anything can happen.

And if events don’t have any kind of logic, the audience will cease to care.

EXERCISES

1. Look at a scene you've written – or one from someone else's script. What information could you withhold to make the scene more interesting?
2. As you work through your script, try to remove as much key information as you can to create intrigue.
3. What kind of show are you writing? Is it a closed or open mystery? Does it have a lone suspect? If neither, can you use mystery in any way to increase the narrative drive of the show?



THIS IS A TINY PART OF JED'S 115-PAGE COURSE NOTES

Unlock the full course or get a free lesson

EXPLORE JED'S COURSE