

The **April 2025 Sundance Collab Script Club** showcases the award-winning screenplay for the fantasy-drama coming-of-age film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* written by Behn Zeitlin and Lucy Alibar and directed by Zeitlin.

*Beasts of the Southern Wild* premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival where it won the Grand Jury Dramatic Prize. It went on to win the Camera D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Adapted Screenplay. The script won the 2012 Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

An allegory for Hurricane Katrina, this magical-realist fable follows precocious 6-year-old Hushpuppy (Oscar-nominated Quvenzhané Wallis), who lives with her sickly father Wink (Dwight Henry) in an isolated Louisiana bayou named “the Bathtub.” When their homes flood after a terrible storm, Hushpuppy and Wink gather the survivors of their community, all accustomed to living on the fringe of society, to rebuild over the waters.

Read the [screenplay](#), watch the [film](#), and [see the trailer](#).

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## Screenplay and Film Discussion:

### I. Act One: Character Introductions, Catalyst, World, Theme Stated

- How would you describe the world of this film, how does the environment and community of the Bathtub function as both a physical location and a metaphorical space?
- What makes Hushpuppy an effective protagonist? How does her young age affect our experience of her story?
- Discuss Hushpuppy's relationships with her parents. How is Wink and Hushpuppy's complex father-daughter relationship established in the first act? What do we learn about Hushpuppy's mother, and how do you think her absence shapes Hushpuppy's worldview?
- Hushpuppy sees the world through a lens that shifts between fantasy and reality. How does this magical realism, including the aurochs, serve the story?
- How do the screenwriters successfully introduce the conflict, relationships, and tone of this film? What scenes do you appreciate from Act One?

- What role does Hushpuppy's teacher play in establishing the film's thematic concerns about nature and extinction?
- The film depicts extremes of autonomy and isolation with family and community. Discuss the scenes that showcase; how does this theme drive the story forward?
- What makes *Beasts of the Southern Wild* distinctly American, yet universal in its themes?
- What does *Beasts of the Southern Wild* teach us about how setting can become a character in climate storytelling?

## II. **Act Two: Conflict, B-Story Relationships, Midpoint, Raising Stakes**

- In the film, many events are determined by atmospheric and natural elements such as storms, ice and fire. What does this communicate about Hushpuppy's internal and external experiences?
- Several residents of the Bathtub decide to weather the storm and stay in their homes during the hurricane. What does this tell you about their community and how does it reflect the theme?
- How would you define the character Wink? What are his relationships like? What role does he serve for the community? How does he drive the story forward? Is his arc symbolic in any way?
- How does the film portray the tension between the Bathtub residents' desire for independence and their physical vulnerability?
- What do you think is essential for creating momentum within a screenplay? How do the screenwriters succeed in moving the story forward by raising the stakes?
- How does the storm sequence function as both a literal and metaphorical turning point in the narrative?
- How does the film handle the contrast between the world outside the Bathtub and the community's way of life? What does the film suggest about government institutions and their relationship with marginalized communities?
- The script and film utilizes a lot of narrative voiceover. How does this give insight into Hushpuppy's world?
- In your own writing, where might climate or ecological pressure be a background force affecting character decisions, even if it's not the central plot?

- What does Hushpuppy's experience in the medical facility reveal about her character development?
- What are your thoughts about the secondary characters? What did you learn about them through their dialogue and actions?

### III. **Act Three: Climax, Descending Action, Finale**

- What is the significance of the floating brothel/restaurant sequence in Hushpuppy's journey?
- What do you think makes a climate story feel grounded and emotionally honest rather than "preachy"?
- How do you interpret the scene where Hushpuppy finally confronts the aurochs?
- The film balances hope and tragedy in its conclusion. How does *Beasts'* ending avoid sentimentality while still providing emotional resolution? How is this reflected in the characters and community?
- How might the film be different if told from an adult perspective rather than through a child's eyes? If you were to add your own screenwriting touches to the finale, what would you include?
- Heartbeats are a recurring theme for Hushpuppy. What do you think heartbeats mean to her, and how do they impact the story?
- What motivates the characters' decision to return to the damaged Bathtub, and what does this tell us about their values?
- How does the film balance depicting the harsh realities of poverty with celebrating the community's resilience?
- What specific choices in the screenplay most effectively develop Hushpuppy's character arc?
- What do you like or dislike about the ending? If you were to add your own screenwriting touches to the finale, what would you include?

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**Please see the #scriptclub channel on the [Sundance Collab Discord for continued discussion](#).** This community forum is a great place to connect with fellow filmmakers.

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## Screenwriting Insights for *Beasts of the Southern Wild*:

- No Film School: [Benh Zeitlin and Lucy Alibar Describe the Script's Evolution for \*Beasts of the Southern Wild\*](#)
- Vulture: [The Toughest Scene I Wrote: Screenwriter Lucy Alibar on \*Beasts of the Southern Wild\*](#)
- Academy Conversations: [Beasts of the Southern Wild](#)
- No Film School: [How Benh Zeitlin Made an 'Impossible' Film \(and Why the Industry Is 'Disturbing'\)](#)
- American Film Institute: [Beasts of the Southern Wild](#)
- The Historic New Orleans Collection: [Interview with Benh Zeitlin of \*Beasts of the Southern Wild\*](#)
- The Los Angeles Times: [The Contenders: 'Southern Wild' Screenwriter's Heart Went Against the Beat](#)
- BFI: [Rebel Charm: Benh Zeitlin on \*Beasts of the Southern Wild\*](#)
- The Script Lab: [Interview: Lucy Alibar](#)

## Recommended Resources for Climate Storytelling:

- Sundance Collab: [Advisor Studio: Climate Storytelling: How to Promote Sustainability from Script to Screen](#)
  - Sundance Collab: [Advisor Studio: A Guide to Sustainable Movie Production with Kent Hayward.](#)
  - Sundance Collab: [Master Class: Changing the Narrative - Climate Representation in Film & TV](#)
  - Sundance Collab: [Green Filmmaker Toolkit](#)
  - Sustainable Entertainment Alliance: [Climate Storytelling Guide](#)
  - Good Energy: [Playbook for Screenwriting in the Age of Climate Change](#)
  - [Green Film School Alliance](#)
  - [Green Production Guide](#)
  - WD Scripts: [The Climate Screenwriter](#)
  - Yale Climate Change Program: [The Power of Narrative: How Storytelling Can Amplify Climate Solutions](#)
  - [Climate Storytelling and Sustainability Opportunities](#)
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## Related Sundance Collab Resources and Courses:

- [Screenwriting Course: Core Elements](#)
- [Screenwriting Course: From Outline to First Draft of Your Screenplay](#)
- [Rewriting Your Screenplay and Crafting Your Pitch](#)
- [Crafting Your Short Screenplay](#)

- [Directing: Core Elements](#)
  - [Master Class: Finding Your Screenplay's Story with David Schwab, Mira Nair, Tamara Jenkins and Destin Daniel Cretton](#)
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## **Sundance Collab Community Challenge: Climate Story Pitch:**

**Write an original elevator pitch for a story that reflects the climate emergency through its setting, plot, or both.** The story should clearly showcase how this impacts the world and/or character(s) of the narrative. It can be for a feature film, short film, or television show.

**The elevator pitch can be submitted as a voice recording of 60 seconds or less, or as a written pitch of 250 words or less** (entries that exceed these limits will not be considered).

Post the pitch to the #challenges channel on our [Sundance Collab Community Discord](#). Limit three (3) entries per person. Community feedback and improvement are encouraged; entries can be edited before the May 30, 2025 deadline. All entries must comply with our Community Guidelines.

Two prizes will be given: (1) Best climate story pitch as selected by Sundance Collab community leaders and staff, and (2) best feedback given to the person who meaningfully contributes to the improvement of others' work through constructive comments on Discord.

See these resources about how to write your climate story pitch:

- Script: [How to Build a Climate Screenplay](#)
- ScreenCraft: [How Writers Can Master the Elevator Pitch](#)
- No Film School: [How to Write An Elevator Pitch \[FREE Pitch Template\]](#)
- Industrial Scripts: [Write an AWESOME Movie Pitch or TV Pitch in 10 KEY Steps](#)