



Learning from the Masters

**AN INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITER ROBIN SWICORD**

**QUIZ & SUGGESTED EXERCISES**

*(RECOMMENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS)*

*“Part of the craft of screenwriting is to write in such a pithy way, it’s almost a combination between a poet and a journalist. You’re trying to get the important information out there, but you’re trying to do it with enough concision and accuracy that you’re almost like a poet, describing in as few words as possible, but as vivid as possible.”*

*Robin Swicord*

## EXCERPTS FROM ROBIN SWICORD'S INTERVIEW:

**JAY FERNANDEZ:** *Much of what you've had produced has been in adaptation. What do you like in adaptations, versus doing specs?*

**ROBIN SWICORD:** I like the conversation with the other writer. There's an exploration you're doing of [that writer's] mind and their story and their characters. I come to it a bit more as an actor comes to a role.

**FERNANDEZ:** *How so?*

**SWICORD:** In that I'm trying to analyze the text, and to find what's hidden there. I'm taking on characters that don't come from inside me, they come from inside another writer. I'm trying to bring myself to that, almost at an interpretive level.

**FERNANDEZ:** *So you start from the interpretive, rather than breaking it down by scene?*

**SWICORD:** Eventually you have to do that, but the first part...is trying to have a deeper understanding of the novel than you might just have on a first read. To understand what the book is about thematically, to understand who the protagonist might be. Since narrative writing is not dramatic writing, there's a certain transition that has to happen in terms of how the person who's the central character in a book becomes the central character in a drama. So some of it is analysis, and some of it is just feeling your way toward the book and toward the material...

**FERNANDEZ:** *How faithful do you feel you have to be to the book?*

**SWICORD:** That's one of the great questions about adaptation. Sometimes books are not a really natural fit dramatically, and more invention is required. I try to stay faithful to the underlying material, to the intention of the author as much as I can.

## QUIZ:

As you watch the interview, see if you can answer the following questions.

1. Where is Robin Swicord from?
2. When did she start writing screenplays?
3. What institutional change does she say she would like to make in Hollywood's process of developing screenplays?
4. Swicord says an aspiring screenwriter should carry a camera. Why?
5. What does she like about doing adaptations?
6. What kind of research did she do in adapting "Little Women?"
7. Why does Swicord say she was doing adaptations of books even as a child?
8. In what way does she consider her work on "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" to have been a creative leap forward?
9. What does it mean to "write forwards and look backwards?"
10. How does Swicord use an outline when writing?
11. When does she use notecards?
12. What made writing "Memoirs of a Geisha" different from her other work experiences?
13. Whom does Swicord like to take on as a creative partner during the writing process?
14. What screenwriters does she most admire?
15. How does she know when a script or scene is done?

### Bonus question:

16. What is "Stock Cars for Christ?"

## SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

1. Robin Swicord describes the research she does to get a sense of how characters might think, speak and behave. Think of a book you have enjoyed that is set in world you don't know well. What kind of research might you do before attempting an adaptation of this book?
2. Swicord suggests it's a mistake to leave screenwriters out of the rehearsal process. To see if she's right, try writing a 3-5 minute scene between two characters. Ask two friends to do a "table read" of your scene, playing the parts. What was it like hearing the scene read aloud? Did you learn anything about your script?
3. Swicord says she became aware that movies are actually written when first noticed onscreen writing credits. Later, she lists some screenwriters she particularly admires. What about you? Can you think of any screenwriters whose work is distinctive, or stands out in more than one film? What about it captures your attention? What do you like about it?
4. Swicord looks at a framed photo of a soldier in uniform and thinks of a similar picture that appears in a project she is working on. Using the same object, can you generate your own story? Try to be aware of where your own ideas come from, and how one idea leads to the next.

TO PURCHASE THIS AND ANY OF THE OTHER 26  
DVDS IN THE DIALOGUE SERIES PLEASE VISIT

[WWW.THEDIALOGUESERIES.COM](http://WWW.THEDIALOGUESERIES.COM)

And enter code **STU2008** to **SAVE 15%**