

SAVE THE CAT! GOES TO THE MOVIES

The Screenwriter's Guide To Every Story Ever Told



SAMPLE BEAT SHEET
DO THE RIGHT THING

BLAKE SNYDER

DO THE RIGHT THING (1989)

Torn between wanting to belong and the need to “do the right thing,” what is a more apt description of any dilemma of the “I” type than that found at the heart of writer/director Spike Lee’s critic’s fave. Featuring an all-star cast including such “unknowns” (at the time) as Martin Lawrence and Rosie Perez, and standout performances from veteran actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, the film’s about the pull of the group versus listening to the “little voice” inside us all.

At the center of the debate is Mookie (Spike Lee), poised between boyhood and manhood, old family and new family, peace (symbolized by Martin Luther King) and war (as represented by Malcolm X). He has loyalty to his proud boss and mentor Sal (Danny Aiello), but fears Sal’s sons and an uncertain future.

On the hottest day of the year, a Bed-Stuy block will erupt in racial hatred. Despite the calming voices of Da Mayor (Davis) and Mother Sister (Dee), the friction creates sparks and finally fire. Setting it into motion are radical views represented by Buggin’ Out and Radio Raheem. Told to “do the right thing,” it will be loyalty to himself that changes Mookie’s life.

I Type: Family Institution

I Cousins: *The Godfather*, *Boyz N the Hood*, *Goodfellas*, *Terms of Endearment*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *Liberty Heights*, *Avalon*, *American Beauty*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Spanglish*

DO THE RIGHT THING

Written by Spike Lee

Opening Image: To Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," Rosie Perez dances. Beautiful and strong (Ernest R. Dickerson is the film's cinematographer and MVP), she soon wears boxing gloves. We're not just dancing; we're warming up for battle.

Set-Up: The forecast for New York's Bedford-Stuyvesant is HOT this summer morning, according to neighborhood DJ Mister Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson). We meet Mookie (Spike Lee), counting money. Spike is alone at the start, but by the movie's finish (next morning), he is with Tina (Perez) and son Hector. Something will occur in the course of this day to make that transformation possible. We also see Sal (Danny Aiello) and sons, stalwart owners of Sal's Famous Pizzeria, a Bed-Stuy landmark — and soon to be ground zero for racial antipathy. We also meet the stuttering Smiley (Roger Guenveur Smith), selling a photo of Martin Luther King with Malcolm X. These two leaders' opposing views are the crux of Spike's dilemma — and his community's.

Catalyst: At Minute 11, Spike walks into work and is told, "You're late again" by "Company Man" Pino (John Turturro), Danny's bigoted son. Stress between Danny and John sets the tone for the day. We also meet the boom box-carrying Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), a strong, silent man proclaiming "Fight The Power." He will spark the fire.

Debate: Where do Spike's loyalties lie? Spike's is a timeless "I" problem: being a Naif trapped in the system.

Break into Two: At Minute 19, after getting static from Danny about his pizza, a Brando figure, Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito), looks up on the wall of Sal's Famous and sees nothing but Italian-Americans. "Why ain't you got no brothers up on the wall?" he protests. And since it's primarily an African-American community, Buggin'

Out wants answers. Instead, Danny kicks him out, with Spike assisting. For now, Spike is trying to keep his boss happy.

Theme Stated: At Minute 23, while on a delivery, Spike is told by Da Mayor (Ossie Davis) to “always do the right thing.” As we’ll see, this is Spike’s choice: to listen to his inner voice or not.

B Story: Ossie is the spokesman for the neighborhood, its roving lifeguard and timeworn hero. His romance with Mother Sister (Ruby Dee), who hates him at first, is where we’ll discuss the older values of this community and the film’s theme. Like Spike, today will be a turning point for Ossie; he’ll not be alone tomorrow.

Fun and Games: The city on a hot day is seen in “Fun and Games.” When kids open up the fire hydrants and play in the water, the cops come by to shut it down, but for the moment, they are well-meaning defenders of the status quo. A bicyclist (John Savage) with a “Bird” jersey (for basketball star Larry Bird) gets grief from the kids for being a Yuppie renovator of a brownstone. We see more friction when Korean owners of a market get hassled by “Sweet Dick Willie” (Robin Harris). And at Minute 48, we get a close-up of hate as several citizens complain to the camera.

Midpoint: At 1 Hour 15 Minutes, the lines are drawn and the conflict looms: Danny tells John he’s not moving, and Buggin’ Out decides to organize a boycott of Sal’s Famous. “Stakes are raised” more when Spike’s sister visits and Danny flirts with her as John and Spike watch. There is a B Story “false victory” as Ossie buys flowers for Ruby. At 1 Hour and 19 Minutes, the sun is going down and Spike tells his sister: “I’ll be making a move.”

Bad Guys Close In: Tension increases between Danny and Spike over Danny’s attention to Spike’s sister. Later, Spike has a loving moment with Rosie but it seems to be the calm before the storm as the cops come by Sal’s, acting a little more aggressively. John and his younger brother have a fight in the storeroom with John saying Spike is not

to be trusted. Maybe John is jealous of Danny's relationship with Spike?

All Is Lost: About to close for the night, and pleased to have gotten through another day, Danny is confronted by Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out. With Radio Raheem's boom box cranked up loudly, Buggin' Out demands satisfaction, and the showdown boils over into violence. Danny grabs his bat and destroys the boom box. Raheem attacks Danny and the fight spills out into the street until the cops come. Arresting Buggin' Out, the cops grab Radio Raheem and violently put him in a choke hold. He dies while everyone watches. At 1 Hour 35 Minutes, all are in shock.

Dark Night of the Soul: Smiley wails while the cops take away the body. Danny pleads he had nothing to do with it. While Ossie tries to calm everyone, the neighborhood is about to tip. And the one who commits the "sacrifice" comes as a shock.

Break into Three: Naif turns Brando: Spike grabs a trashcan, throws it through the window of Sal's — and a riot starts.

Finale: The neighborhood kids burn Sal's Pizzeria down while A and B stories cross as Ossie whisks Danny to safety and comforts Ruby. The Korean market is next, but the owner manages to talk down the rioters by saying "Me black." The comment defuses the violence and the neighborhood watches as firemen come to put out the blaze. In a note of Synthesis, Smiley puts his photo of King and Malcolm X on the wall of Danny's burned-out restaurant.

Final Image: Spike wakes the next day with Rosie and their son, but leaves to get his back pay from Danny. Danny's business is destroyed, Radio Raheem is dead, and another day is starting — but has anything changed? Over credits we see quotes from both King and Malcolm X. Like the twin rings Radio Raheem wore — one saying LOVE, the other HATE — the conflict goes on.