

LSF Screenplay Contest Evaluation

Submission Identification

Title: *Small Town Rainbow*

Writer(s): Not listed in the submitted screenplay

Apparent Contest Category: Short Screenplay / Genre Drama

Genre: LGBTQ+ coming-of-age drama / social-issue drama

Approximate Page Count: 21 pages

Estimated Runtime: 17–20 minutes, as stated in the script.

Format: Short Film

Primary Setting: Bracken Falls, a fictional small Texas town

Texas Connection: Strong and materially relevant

Book-to-Screen Adaptation: No. The screenplay states that it is inspired by the Neon Quill song “Small Town Rainbow.”

Eligibility and Technical Screen

No obvious disqualifying compliance concerns identified from the material reviewed.

The screenplay is recognizably formatted as a short-film script with scene headings, action, dialogue, character introductions, visual beats, and a defined ending.

There are, however, two craft considerations.

First, the screenplay contains numerous **DIRECTION NOTE** passages telling the director or performers how scenes should emotionally land. Examples include instructions that Eli and Mara's silence is “not romantic,” that the pastor should not be played as cartoonishly hateful, and that the school-board climax should not receive additional speeches.

Those notes are useful production thinking, but a competition screenplay would generally be stronger if more of that intent were embedded directly in action and behavior rather than explained to the reader.

Second, the writer's name does not appear in the script. That is actually appropriate for blind judging, although the contest submission metadata should of course identify the writer separately.

Official Scoring Rubric

Category	Score
Story & Structure	17 / 20
Character	13 / 15
Dialogue	8 / 10
Originality	8 / 10
Pacing	9 / 10
Visual Storytelling	9 / 10
Theme & Emotional Impact	9 / 10
Craft & Formatting	4 / 5
Market / Production Clarity	9 / 10
TOTAL	86 / 100

TOTAL SCORE: 86 / 100

Under the prompt's scoring standard, this falls in the **very strong** range: professional-level qualities with comparatively limited weaknesses.

1. Story & Structure — 17/20

This is a very well-shaped short.

The story begins with an image of concealment: Eli stands literally behind the bleachers while a rainbow-thread bracelet is hidden under his sleeve.

The ending reverses that image.

Another younger student stands behind those same bleachers, but now the town contains visible signs of safety:

- Mara nearby,
- Mrs. Calder at the school,
- Anita's diner,
- Floyd's barbershop,
- a rainbow heart in the window.

The younger student remains nervous, but now has enough evidence of belonging to stay.

That is an effective structural bookend.

The screenplay also progresses cleanly through a series of increasingly public spaces:

Behind the bleachers — hidden identity

Church — private spiritual fear

Classroom — recognition through books

Diner — first small community

Courthouse square — tentative family reconciliation

Creek — chosen community forms

School board — private fear becomes public testimony

Porch/home — safety becomes organized

County line — Eli can leave without believing he has been defeated

Bleachers again — the cycle continues, but the environment has changed

That is thoughtful dramatic architecture for a short.

The main structural limitation is that **quite a lot happens in 17–20 minutes**.

The script contains:

- Eli's closeted fear,
- Mara's experience,
- Noah's identity struggle,
- church conflict,
- school-book controversy,
- Noah's father,
- Anita learning to support Mara,
- Floyd's mentorship,
- safe-space formation,
- a school-board confrontation,
- Eli leaving town,
- a generational epilogue.

It mostly works because the scenes are economical, but the screenplay occasionally approaches the edge of feeling like a compressed feature rather than a short.

2. Character — 13/15

Eli Parker

Eli is clearly the emotional point-of-view character.

He begins:

- closeted,
- watchful,
- eager to escape,
- convinced that freedom exists somewhere else.

His early line about wanting to move somewhere people don't know his truck before they know his name efficiently establishes both small-town intimacy and his discomfort with it.

His arc is not that he decides to stay.

That would be too easy.

Instead, he learns that **leaving and running are not necessarily the same thing**.

Mara gives him that distinction near the end:

“You’re not running... You’re going.”

That is the proper conclusion to his arc.

He can leave without rejecting the people who helped him survive.

That's strong.

Noah Bell

Noah has the most overtly emotional arc.

The introduction is excellent: Noah sits in church repeatedly locating every possible exit.

That single physical behavior tells us a great deal.

The question—

“Do you think God knows... my real name. Even if I don't.”

—is one of the script's strongest emotional moments.

Later, at the school-board meeting, Noah converts private fear into public speech.

The development is clear and earned.

Mara Solis

Mara may be the screenplay's most naturally charismatic character.

She is confident without being invulnerable.

The screenplay makes an important choice by explicitly rejecting a romance between Mara and Eli. Their relationship is recognition and solidarity, not a conventional love subplot.

Her dry humor also keeps the screenplay from becoming relentlessly solemn.

Her mechanic identity gives her physical specificity:

- work shirt,
- boots,
- grease,
- wrench,
- tow truck.

She feels like someone who inhabits this particular world.

Mrs. Calder

Mrs. Calder is strong because she acts rather than merely makes speeches.

She:

- refuses to remove books,
- discreetly puts a book in Eli's hands,
- maintains the rainbow-heart sticker,
- joins the creek gathering,
- speaks at the school board.

Her line—

“The kind who are already here?”

—is especially effective because it exposes the flaw in the principal's language without requiring a large speech.

Anita Solis

Anita receives a surprisingly complete arc for a supporting character.

She initially loves Mara imperfectly.

At the school-board meeting, she accepts responsibility rather than defending herself:

“That is my shame, not hers.”

That makes her movement toward support emotionally meaningful.

Mr. Bell

His arc is wisely restrained.

He does not transform into a perfectly articulate affirming father.

He:

- struggles,
- listens to Floyd,
- offers Noah his hand,
- later offers a ride,
- finally stands beside Noah publicly.

That gradual progression feels considerably more believable than a sudden conversion speech.

Floyd Washington

Floyd is economical and effective.

His role is essentially elder/community conscience.

His strongest line may be the simplest:

“Love them. You only get one.”

The scene gains power because much of the conversation is observed through glass rather than fully heard.

3. Dialogue — 8/10

Dialogue is generally one of the screenplay's strengths.

Characters have distinct rhythms.

Mara is dry and practical.

Noah is vulnerable and searching.

Eli is guarded.

Anita uses humor to create safety.

Floyd speaks sparingly.

Mrs. Calder is sharper and more confrontational.

The screenplay also understands the value of callbacks.

Early:

“Okay-ish.”

Later:

“Okay-ish.”

And Eli responds:

“That's better than yeah.”

That repetition gives the ending emotional memory.

The humor is particularly useful.

Examples include:

- "free pie to emotionally damaged youth,"
- "dangerous literature,"
- Mara's mechanic insults,
- Anita “workshopping” supportive language.

Those lines keep the film from becoming a collection of earnest speeches.

Where dialogue weakens

The school-board sequence becomes somewhat more declarative.

Mrs. Calder, Anita, and Noah each articulate the film's themes quite directly.

The speeches are individually effective, but three consecutive thematic statements risk making the climax feel authored rather than spontaneous.

Noah's speech is the most important.

If anything is reduced there, it should be material around Noah rather than Noah's central moment.

4. Originality — 8/10

The basic premise—queer youth finding support in a conservative small town—is not unprecedented.

The execution is more distinctive.

Several choices elevate it:

- the rainbow thread rather than a large Pride symbol,
- the safe classroom communicated through book covers,
- the diner booth,
- mechanic Mara,
- Floyd's barber shop,
- rainbow fabric by the creek,
- the rainbow heart sticker,
- the repeated language of breathing,
- the final rainbow appearing in an oily roadside puddle.

The screenplay consistently makes its theme **small** rather than spectacular.

That is appropriate to the title.

This isn't about a town suddenly becoming perfect.

It is about tiny signals accumulating until a person understands:

There are places here where I might survive.

That perspective gives the work its own identity.

5. Pacing — 9/10

The pacing is impressively controlled for a 21-page script.

Scenes are generally short.

Most enter late and leave early.

There is very little unnecessary setup.

The progression from:

football → church → school → garage → diner → square → bedroom → school → market → creek → school board

keeps the visual environment changing while the emotional thread remains coherent.

The screenplay also does not overstay the school-board climax.

The direction note explicitly recognizes that Mr. Bell's hand on Noah's shoulder is the turning point and that no further speeches should follow.

That's good dramatic instinct.

Slight concern

The final portion contains several endings:

1. school-board resolution,
2. porch/safe-space scene,
3. Eli leaving town,
4. younger kid behind bleachers,
5. final road/rainbow voiceover.

Each works individually.

Collectively, the screenplay risks **ending several times**.

The county-line scene is emotionally strong enough to function as a conclusion.

The bleachers epilogue adds thematic generational payoff.

The final road/voiceover then adds one more ending.

I would examine whether all three are necessary.

6. Visual Storytelling — 9/10

This is one of the screenplay's strongest categories.

The visual language is unusually coherent.

Rainbow thread bracelet

The bracelet appears first hidden.

Later Noah recognizes it.

Eventually Noah wears a similar bracelet.

That is strong visual progression.

Stained glass

Noah's faith struggle is juxtaposed with colored light.

Books

Eli receives a book discreetly.

He later reads it secretly under a blanket with a phone flashlight.

No lengthy explanation is required for what the book means.

His whispered word—

“Proof.”

—is enough.

Rainbow heart

The sticker is tiny, contested, but remains.

That is an effective symbol because it matches the scale of the story.

Creek

The rainbow fabric is not associated with a formal event or organization.

Nobody knows who placed it.

That mystery makes it communal rather than proprietary.

School-board hand

Mr. Bell does not give a speech.

He touches Noah's shoulder.

Again, behavior does the work.

Final puddle

Oil, rainwater, dust, and sunlight form a rainbow sheen.

The screenplay explicitly says:

“Not magic. Just light finding what was already there.”

That image summarizes the entire film.

The main reason this is not a 10 is that the numerous direction notes occasionally explain the symbolism that the images already communicate successfully.

The script should trust its own images.

7. Theme & Emotional Impact — 9/10

This is probably the screenplay's strongest element alongside visual storytelling.

The central theme is not merely LGBTQ acceptance.

It is **visibility as survival**.

The film repeatedly connects hiding with physical and emotional suffocation:

- Eli hides behind bleachers.
- Noah counts exits.
- Books are threatened.
- Eli reads under blankets.
- a sticker marks a room where students can “breathe.”
- the creek creates a small informal refuge.
- Noah finally speaks publicly.

Mrs. Calder summarizes the central danger:

“Silence is dangerous because it teaches them they should disappear.”

The ending then broadens the idea beyond the principal characters.

Eli has left.

But another younger child is standing behind the bleachers.

The town has not been transformed.

There are simply now enough visible signals that the child may stay another minute.

That is emotionally effective because the film avoids claiming total victory.

The final voiceover—

“Someone sees your color and survives another night.”

—states the theme directly.

I think the line works, although the screenplay is already visually communicating that message so effectively that the writer could legitimately test whether the voiceover is needed.

This is a genuine screenplay and is highly readable.

It uses:

- scene headings,
- action,
- dialogue,
- character introductions,
- visual transitions,
- voiceover,
- clear locations,
- controlled scene length.

There is very little dense prose.

The primary issue is the frequency of **DIRECTION NOTE** instructions.

Examples include:

- telling us a relationship is not romantic,
- telling us how to play the pastor,
- stating which image should be a major symbol,
- directing music usage,
- instructing actors/directors not to overplay a moment,
- describing a scene as the emotional climax.

These notes reveal strong filmmaking instincts, but many are unnecessary on the contest page.

For example, if the scene successfully demonstrates that Eli and Mara share recognition rather than romance—and it does—then the screenplay does not need to tell the director that explicitly.

A polished submission could remove or substantially reduce these notes and allow the writing itself to carry the intention.

9. Market / Production Clarity — 9/10

The film communicates exactly what it is.

This is an approximately 17–20 minute socially conscious coming-of-age short centered on queer youth in a small Texas town.

The audience is clear.

The tone is clear.

The production scale is realistic:

- football stadium,
- church,
- school,
- classroom,
- mechanic garage,
- diner,
- courthouse square,
- creek,
- meeting room,
- house,
- county road.

The locations are numerous, but none requires unusually large-scale production.

The film also has clear festival programming potential because it combines:

- youth,
- LGBTQ themes,

- faith,
- family,
- education,
- small-town culture,
- Texas identity,
- intergenerational community.

That is not a prediction that the film would win or sell; it is an assessment that the project communicates its screen identity and intended audience clearly, which is what this rubric category asks for.

What Works Particularly Well

1. The opening and closing mirror each other

Eli begins alone behind the bleachers.

Another young person ends there—but now sees signs of safety.

That is excellent structural payoff.

2. The rainbow symbolism is mostly restrained

Bracelet.

Stained glass.

Heart sticker.

Fabric.

Oil sheen.

These repeat without becoming one giant literal Pride image.

3. Noah's church material is nuanced

The pastor is not written as a screaming villain.

The script specifically seeks harm arising from familiar language rather than caricature.

That is a more mature choice.

4. Mr. Bell's development is believable

He does not transform instantly.

Hand offered at market → ride offered → public shoulder touch.

The progression matters.

5. Mara is memorable

She supplies humor and grounded confidence without being turned into a flawless guide character.

6. Adults have different forms of support

Mrs. Calder acts institutionally.

Anita learns.

Floyd advises.

Mr. Bell struggles.

They aren't all versions of the same ally.

7. The school-board climax is earned

Noah's public speech grows directly from their earlier private fear.

Their line about counting exits in church returns the audience to the opening spiritual conflict.

8. The film refuses a perfect victory

Some people leave the meeting angry.

The town isn't magically fixed.

That's important.

What Needs the Most Attention

1. Reduce the direction notes

Issue: The script repeatedly explains how the audience or director should interpret scenes.

Why It Matters: Strong screenwriting already creates those interpretations through action, framing, and dialogue.

Where: Throughout, especially pages approximately 3, 5, 7, 10, 12–16, 18.

Possible Direction: Remove notes where the scene already communicates the intention successfully.

2. Examine the number of endings

Issue: School board, porch gathering, county line, bleacher epilogue, and final road image all function partly as conclusions.

Why It Matters: Multiple emotional endings can dilute the strongest one.

Possible Direction: Decide which is the primary emotional ending and which material truly functions as epilogue.

3. Protect Noah's climax from thematic overstatement

Issue: Several characters speak thematically before Noah.

Why It Matters: Noah's speech should feel like the culmination, not the third version of the same argument.

Direction: Examine whether Mrs. Calder's and Anita's speeches can remain strong while leaving Noah the most emotionally consequential language.

4. Give Eli one slightly more active choice

Eli's emotional journey works, but much of the town's support happens around him.

Mrs. Calder gives him the book.

Mara supports him.

The creek community appears.

Noah speaks.

A slightly stronger moment in which **Eli actively risks being seen** could deepen his protagonist agency.

It does not have to involve a public coming-out scene.

Something smaller would fit this film better.

5. Clarify exactly what changes at the school-board level

The screenplay deliberately avoids a perfect victory, which is good.

But the practical outcome of the meeting is somewhat unclear.

Did the books remain?

Was a proposed restriction rejected?

Was the meeting simply public comment?

A small piece of clarity could make the external story feel more complete without changing the emotional ambiguity.

Character Analysis

Eli Parker

Wants: Freedom, safety, and ultimately a life in which he doesn't have to hide.

Obstacle: Fear of exposure, small-town familiarity, family/community expectations, internalized belief that safety exists only elsewhere.

Motivation: Survival and the desire to breathe freely.

Agency: Moderate. Increasing as the story develops.

Voice: Quiet, understated, thoughtful.

Relationships: Mara provides recognition; Noah reflects similar fear; Mrs. Calder provides access to language; community adults demonstrate imperfect forms of support.

Change: He moves from seeing escape as his only salvation to understanding that leaving can be growth rather than flight.

The change is earned.

Mara Solis

Wants: To live openly enough to remain herself without pretending small-town life is painless.

Obstacle: Social judgment and imperfect family understanding.

Agency: Strong.

Voice: Dry, practical, funny.

Change: Her largest movement is relational rather than internal: she begins seeing her mother's support becoming more deliberate and public.

Noah Bell

Wants: Safety, language for identity, and assurance that identity does not separate them from faith or family.

Obstacle: religious anxiety, family uncertainty, fear of exposure.

Agency: Starts low and grows dramatically.

Voice: Vulnerable, intelligent, spare.

Change: Counting exits → public microphone.

That is a very strong visual and emotional arc.

Mrs. Calder

Wants: To keep students from being erased.

Obstacle: institutional pressure and Principal Evers.

Agency: Very strong.

She acts consistently with her values.

Anita Solis

Wants: To love her daughter but initially fears making things worse.

Obstacle: her own fear and imperfect understanding.

Change: She moves from private love to public accountability.

That is effective because she admits failure rather than announcing herself as an ideal parent.

Mr. Bell

Wants: To preserve his relationship with Noah while wrestling with beliefs and fear.

Obstacle: his own discomfort.

Change: Slow, physical, credible.

The hand on Noah's shoulder succeeds because the script avoids giving him a dramatic conversion speech.

Floyd Washington

Floyd functions almost as the town's conscience.

He has little screen time but significant influence.

His restraint works.

Structural Analysis

For a short film, the dramatic movement is approximately:

Opening

Eli hides behind the football bleachers. Mara recognizes him without forcing disclosure.

Establishment

Church introduces Noah and the conflict between identity, faith, and fear.

First movement toward connection

Mrs. Calder's book creates a bridge between Eli's private identity and a larger world.

Community formation

Eli, Mara, and Noah gather at the diner.

Adult allies begin appearing around them.

Midpoint / symbolic shift

Eli reads the book and whispers:

“Proof.”

He now knows his experience exists beyond himself.

Rising action

The rainbow heart becomes publicly contested.

Mr. Bell begins moving toward Noah.

The creek gathering becomes an informal community.

Climax

At the school-board meeting, Noah speaks openly.

Mr. Bell publicly stands beside them.

Resolution

The community continues imperfectly.

Epilogue

Eli leaves town but does not reject it.

Another younger child discovers that signs of safety remain behind.

This is a coherent short-film structure.

Pacing and Page-by-Page Concerns

Pages 2–4: Excellent opening. Efficient characterization and visual hook.

Pages 4–6: Strong church material. Emotional conflict becomes clear quickly.

Pages 6–8: School/book sequence continues momentum without repeating the church scene.

Pages 8–10: Diner provides necessary warmth and humor.

Pages 10–12: Floyd/Mr. Bell and Eli reading are particularly strong.

Pages 12–14: Market and creek scenes broaden community. Slight danger of becoming episodic, but character continuity holds them together.

Pages 15–16: School-board climax is powerful.

Pages 17–21: Emotionally satisfying, but somewhat extended because the script supplies several successive closing sequences.

Overall, the screenplay is very economical.

Dialogue and Exposition

The strongest dialogue is brief and character-specific:

Mara's practical humor.

Noah's questions.

Floyd's quiet wisdom.

Anita's slightly awkward warmth.

Mrs. Calder's sharp responses.

The screenplay generally avoids “as you know” exposition.

Its main dialogue risk is **aphoristic density**.

There are many highly quotable lines:

- “The kind who are already here?”
- “Some kids look like they're carrying weather.”
- “Love them. You only get one.”
- “Division was already here.”
- “Silence is dangerous...”
- “Pride can sound like listening.”
- “Change doesn't usually announce itself.”
- “Hearts can come in as they are.”
- “You're not running. You're going.”

Individually, these are strong.

Collectively, there are enough that the dialogue occasionally feels more polished than spontaneous.

The writer should protect the best ones by allowing ordinary speech around them.

Visual / Cinematic Potential

This screenplay understands images.

Particularly strong moments include:

- rainbow thread disappearing beneath a sleeve,
- football lights exposing Eli for a second,
- stained glass falling across Noah,
- book slipped under a hall pass,
- grease-covered Mara carefully wiping her hands before taking the book,
- Noah and Mr. Bell observed through diner glass,
- Eli reading beneath a blanket,
- tiny rainbow heart in the classroom window,
- Mr. Bell's half-extended hand,
- unidentified rainbow fabric by the creek,
- school-board hand on Noah's shoulder,
- warm porch light,
- matching bracelet on Noah,
- rainbow sheen in roadside oil,
- younger child hidden behind the same bleachers.

These are exactly the kinds of motifs that allow a short film to say more than its running time would otherwise permit.

Texas Storytelling / Heritage

Texas is materially relevant.

Eli explicitly imagines Austin or Dallas as places where he might breathe more freely.

The screenplay also uses a recognizably Texas/small-town environment:

- Friday night football,

- church life,
- courthouse square,
- mechanic shop beside a feed store,
- diner,
- cedar and limestone creek,
- old trucks,
- county roads,
- open land.

Eli's bedroom includes a folded Texas map, and his eventual departure takes place at the county line rather than an airport or generic city boundary.

Importantly, the screenplay avoids presenting Texas solely as hostile.

The same town that produces fear also contains:

- Mara,
- Mrs. Calder,
- Floyd,
- Anita,
- evolving Mr. Bell,
- Booth Three,
- creek gatherings,
- porch lights.

That complexity is one of the film's strongest Texas elements.

Texas is not simply the villain.

It is the contested home.

Five Most Important Revision Priorities

1. Reduce or remove most direction notes

Trust the screenplay's images and performances. They are already doing the work.

2. Consolidate the ending

Determine the strongest final emotional progression and avoid weakening it through too many separate conclusions.

3. Protect Noah's school-board moment

Make sure earlier speeches do not diminish the climax by saying too much of what Noah ultimately needs to say.

4. Give Eli one stronger active choice

Let the protagonist risk visibility in some concrete way before he leaves.

5. Add a small amount of practical school-board resolution

Preserve the imperfect outcome but clarify what the meeting actually changes—or fails to change.

Final Assessment

Small Town Rainbow is a very strong short screenplay built around a modest but emotionally potent idea: people do not always survive because an entire community changes; sometimes they survive because **one person, one classroom, one diner booth, one porch light, or one small symbol tells them they are not alone.**

Its greatest strength is the combination of **visual metaphor and restraint**. The rainbow motif appears repeatedly without requiring a spectacular Pride event or simplistic transformation of the town. The bracelet, stained glass, book, sticker, creek fabric, and roadside oil sheen build a consistent cinematic language.

The characters are also unusually well differentiated for a roughly 20-minute film. Mara, Noah, Anita, Mrs. Calder, Mr. Bell, and Floyd each represent a different

relationship to fear, identity, support, and change. Most importantly, they do not merely exist to deliver the same message.

The screenplay's greatest challenge is that it occasionally explains its own strengths. Direction notes tell the reader how important certain images are, and several highly polished thematic lines occur close together. The film would become stronger by trusting the audience slightly more.

The writer should protect **the opening behind the bleachers, Noah counting exits, Mrs. Calder's book, Booth Three, Floyd's quiet intervention, the creek gathering, Noah's school-board speech, Mr. Bell's hand on Noah's shoulder, Mara's "You're going" line, and the final visual recurrence of another child behind the bleachers.**

The central dramatic intention comes through clearly: **visibility does not solve everything, but small acts of recognition can create enough room for someone to breathe—and sometimes enough room to survive.**

LSF SCORE: 86 / 100