

# Save the last dance essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

This essay will focus on the opening sequence of ' Save the Last Dance', the dramatic teen romance movie starring Julia Stiles as the main character, Sarah, and her estranged father played by Terry Kinney. It will look particularly at the flashback sequence at the opening of the film, predominantly concentrating on the effect that the flashbacks have on us, the audience. At the start of the film, the barriers are coming down at the road crossing of a railway track as a train comes down the tracks towards the camera, and then past.

The camera then cuts to Sarah sitting alone on the train staring out of the window mournfully. A black woman enters the scene, glancing at the book on the seat, the first prop. ' I love ballet', she exclaims, ' You dance? ' she asks Sarah happily, she replies meaningfully, ' I used to'. This leads into the first flashback. The camera cuts from the train to Sarah dancing wearing a pink shirt, a metaphor for happiness, happy music is playing, as her mother enters the scene. Sarah's mother speaks in a comforting voice, and gives her the necklace. In this first flashback, Sarah, is looking back on happy times with her mother.

The camera flashes forward to Sarah sitting on the train, touching her necklace lovingly in memory of her mother. Then quickly cuts to flashback two. In flashback two, Sarah is dressed all in black with pink dancing shoes on (bright happy colour, contrasts the black and other dark colours within the scene), dancing up on her tip toes in front of a dark screen, perhaps in a theatre or on a stage. Her facial expression shows that she is deep in concentration, although she seems to have a contented look on her face as if she is proud of her self, and pleased with the standard of her dancing.

Flashback three cuts to a sweeping shot of a school bus parked outside Sarah's school then goes inside, we see Sarah talking to her friend, Lindsey worriedly, her friend reassures her, telling her that it will all be ok, meaning that she will pass the forthcoming dance auditions. Lindsey asks Sarah to pray with her, in the corridor at school, Sarah looks around, embarrassed by her friend. Lindsey's voice is still heard as the shot cuts forward to Sarah with tears in her eyes on the train, Lindsey's voice is then replaced by Sarah's mothers, as the sound first, and then the picture progress into flashback four.

We hear Sarah's mother's worried, stressed voice on the train in Sarah's mind. The scene then cuts to the street outside the florist where Sarah's mother works, and quickly cuts inside. Sarah's mother tells Sarah that she may not be able to make it to the audition to watch her daughter dance because she has too much work to do, and can't find the time to be there. Sarah pleads with her to be there because ' this is the hardest, most important day' of Sarah's life and she needs her mother to be there as they look sadly into each others eyes.

We then see Sarah again on the train, in a quick flash forward to real time, before going back into Sarah's memory in flashback five. We see a shot of a sign saying, Julliard Dancing School Auditions, as the camera pans around the changing room where Sarah is stretching and warming up ready to dance, looking worried and lonely, she makes no attempt to communicate with any of the other girls in the room with her. Glancing at the doorway, Sarah anxiously awaits the arrival of her mother when a stewardess from the

school approaches her and asks her to come with her for the audition. Sarah looks nervously at the panel of judges.

They are all dressed in black, and look very 'judgemental' making it hard for her to identify with them. In the next flashback, Sarah remembers her mother promise to be there, the camera then cuts quickly back to Sarah dancing in the audition, then we see Sarah's mother in the car, glancing at her watch, hurriedly driving her florists van down the motorway, then the screech of breaks, as a car in front skids to a halt just short of a truck, crashes sideways blocking the whole motorway for traffic but Sarah's mother doesn't see the truck until it is too late and fatally crashes into it.

At the same time as Sarah's mother skids and crashes Sarah falls on stage, the quick editing of the flashbacks give the sequence a very tense worrying feeling. The final flashback shows a Policeman giving Sarah the bad news, in this scene, we can see the characters, but we are made to feel excluded from part of the scene by a transparent screen, stopping the sound, so all that we see are the actions, although we can clearly see what the nature of the news is by Sarah's body language.

Sarah faints at the news of her mothers death, and falls helplessly into the arms of the Policeman. The next thing we see of Sarah is on the train, again with a tear in her eyes. From studying all of these flashbacks, one can learn a great deal about Sarah's life. At the beginning of the opening sequence, Sarah's life was happy and simple. Everybody was happy. She and her mother got on very well and Sarah 'danced like an angel', she had a good

lifestyle, lived in a rich neighbourhood in a big house and everything was going swimmingly.

But towards the end of flashback three, one can detect a hint that things are beginning to go wrong. Sarah begins to doubt herself when talking to her friend, Lindsey, then in flashback four, her mother tells her that she may not be able to make it to the auditions. This is just the beginning of the bad luck for Sarah and her mother. If the flashbacks were shown as they happened (not as flashbacks) they would have been quite different, because when they were written, the writer already knew what had happened, so all of the events have a negative prospect to them.

**Read next:**

How does The Royle family challenge the conventions in a sitcom