

THE SECRET LANGUAGE — Draft 2 Production Notes

Runtime estimate, location breakdown, scene-by-scene timing, and two imagined reviews. All numbers derived from the draft-2 pages (~96 formatted screenplay pages at standard ~1 min/page).

1. Estimated Running Time

Script length	≈ 96 formatted pages / ≈ 110 min of scripted material
Act One	≈ 40 min (runs long on the page; see note)
Act 2A	≈ 28 min
Act 2B	≈ 23 min
Act Three	≈ 18 min
End credits w/ real footage	≈ 4–6 min

Projected theatrical cut ≈ 105–115 min (target ~1h50m)

Two opposing forces roughly cancel: the held wordless scenes (the stopped-girl scene, the promise, the morning after) play *longer* than their page count, while the montage-adjacent sequences cut *faster*. Note that Act One is currently the heaviest act (~40 min of material for a 28-min slot) — normal for a draft 2, and it means the Act One revision pass (already planned for the montage note) doubles as a trim pass. A disciplined edit gets the film to 108–112 with credits, which is exactly the genre sweet spot (CODA 111 min, Marley & Me 115 min).

2. Locations

The family home, Bellingham (~45% of the film — the anchor set).

Kitchen/dining, living room (piano), Mary's bedroom, Izzy's bedroom, the upstairs hallway (load-bearing — three of the film's biggest scenes live in it), Ted's office, bathroom, backyard (weave poles), driveway.

Bellingham exteriors & town. Whatcom Creek + trail (opening, closing), waterfront trail (dream, magic hour), middle school (hallway, cafeteria), dance studio, soccer field, diner, neighborhood street (night walks), park, Dr. Sullivan's clinic, Whatcom Community College (parking lot, lecture hall, classroom).

Seattle / UW. Red Square, Rainier Vista path, two Japanese classrooms, UW lecture hall (night), Mary's U-District apartment, UW Medicine office, Seattle vet clinic, Husky Stadium (graduation — the biggest production day: crowd + likely VFX tiling).

Road & away. I-5 minivan interiors (rain south / dusk north), family car; breeder's property in fir-country Oregon; breeder's ranch in red-rock Utah (the one deliberately alien palette in the film).

Production observations. ~34 unique locations but heavily consolidated — one house carries half the movie, and everything except Utah and the UW cluster shoots within one region. Period runs 2010–2024 with a light touch (phone models, one masked Covid scene). The real casting problem is canine: Secret needs puppy + adult black-tri performers (plus "sick" makeup for the adult), Promise needs blue-merle puppy + adult — four to six trained Aussies, and the flower-painting and dance behaviors are real, documented, trainable behaviors. The obvious consultant for the animal unit is Mary herself, which is also a marketing story.

3. Scene-by-Scene Timing

Estimates from page-length per scene, rounded to half-minutes; timecodes are cumulative. Treat as relative weight, not gospel.

ACT ONE — "The Wrong Planet" (≈40 min on the page; trim target ~30)

Min	At	Scene
1.5	0:01	EXT. WHATCOM CREEK — the crayfish; "Look at it."
0.5	0:02	EXT. BACKYARD PARTY — Ted watching from the top of the bank
1.5	0:03	EXT. BACKYARD — the kids follow her down; the two girls who don't
1.0	0:04	INT. KITCHEN/DINING — home is LOUD (baseline dinner)
1.0	0:05	INT. KITCHEN — the heron painting
1.0	0:06	INT. LIVING ROOM — the piano chord

Min	At	Scene
1.0	0:07	EXT. BACKYARD — the cartwheel Izzy can't learn
0.5	0:08	EXT. SOCCER FIELD — perception at speed
0.5	0:08	INT. DANCE STUDIO — the room that works
1.5	0:10	INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL HALLWAY — the rules have changed
1.0	0:11	INT. CAFETERIA — "Jake or Ethan?" / "For what?"
1.0	0:12	INT. CAFETERIA — the heron-nest invitation fails
1.5	0:13	INT. CAFETERIA — the newt; the phones come out
0.5	0:14	INT. MARY'S BEDROOM — the video of herself; the mirror
1.5	0:15	INT. DINING ROOM — the register curdles; the plate
0.5	0:16	INT. IZZY'S BEDROOM — rage through the wall
2.0	0:18	INT. MARY'S BEDROOM — Ted's loving talk; the burn taught
0.5	0:18	INT. HALLWAY — Ted with the toolbox at the fire
0.5	0:19	INT. KITCHEN — "I don't know what I said." / "I know."
1.5	0:20	THE NARROWING — scale, plates, sleeves, bathroom cleared
0.5	0:21	EXT. DRIVEWAY — Spencer leaves
2.0	0:23	INT. HOME — Izzy's 12th birthday; the detonation
2.5	0:25	INT. HALLWAY — the two sentences that can't meet
0.5	0:26	THE SILENCE — the house goes quiet
0.5	0:26	INT. MARY'S BEDROOM — the stopped girl (hold)
2.0	0:28	INT. KITCHEN 2 A.M. — "We're at the end here."
1.0	0:29	INT. MARY'S BEDROOM — the training videos, all night
1.5	0:31	INT. KITCHEN — "Look at this." (to Lisa)
1.5	0:32	INT. KITCHEN — "I need a dog."
2.0	0:34	THE CAMPAIGN — Izzy sits; the weave poles in the rain
1.5	0:36	INT. DINING ROOM — "We called her Tuesday."
1.0	0:37	EXT. I-5 SOUTH — the Hail Mary drive
2.0	0:39	EXT. OREGON — "Huh. She doesn't do that."
1.0	0:40	INT. MINIVAN NORTH — "Secret." / "Why?" / (no answer)
0.5	0:40	EXT. HOME, BLUE HOUR — breath

ACT 2A — "The Reprieve" (≈28 min)

Min	At	Scene
0.5	0:41	INT. BEDROOM — arm through the crate door
0.5	0:41	EXT. BACKYARD — sit vs. leaf
1.5	0:43	INT. LIVING ROOM — the scream, the flinch, the floor (THE REPRIEVE)
1.0	0:44	EXT. BACKYARD SPRING — click/treat; parents at the window
1.5	0:45	EXT. BACKYARD — Ted's stapled science vs. "She was ready."
0.5	0:46	EXT. STREET NIGHT — the ritual; "Don't."
1.0	0:47	INT. DINING — the good loud; the emptying plate
1.5	0:48	INT. DINER — "perfect everywhere"; the floor fry
0.5	0:49	INT. BEDROOM — my_aussie_gal created
1.0	0:50	INT. BEDROOM — eleven likes; drawing again
1.0	0:51	INT. LIVING ROOM — the Irish dance video
1.0	0:52	INT. KITCHEN — viral; Ruby's text; "Look at it." (to Secret)
1.5	0:53	EXT. PARK — "bad dog"; first talisman
1.0	0:54	INT. BEDROOM — the follower's comment; a-u-t-i-s-m
1.5	0:56	INT. KITCHEN — "Look at this." (the article)
1.5	0:57	INT. UW MEDICINE — the diagnosis as relief
1.0	0:58	INT. CAR — "I'm not just bad at being a person."
0.5	0:59	INT. TED'S OFFICE 2 A.M. — the grammar book lands on him
0.5	0:59	INT. HALLWAY — the heron, again
0.5	1:00	INT. BEDROOM DOORWAY — the first unsaid sentence
1.0	1:01	INT. WCC EMPTY HALL — rehearsing a world
1.0	1:02	INT. WCC CLASSROOM — "Here."
1.5	1:03	EXT. BACKYARD SUMMER — THE FLOWER
1.5	1:05	INT. DINING — "I can't imagine what it'll be like..."
1.5	1:06	INT. LIVING ROOM — Lil Wayne; a hundred million
1.5	1:08	INT. KITCHEN — the offers refused
1.0	1:09	INT. BEDROOM — the phone glowing; the wave out at sea

ACT 2B — "The Fight" (≈23 min)

Min	At	Scene
1.0	1:10	EXT. WCC PARKING LOT — Covid graduation; Secret in the cap
1.0	1:11	INT. KITCHEN — waitlist
1.0	1:12	INT. TED'S OFFICE — "You wrote 'we.'"
0.5	1:12	INT. KITCHEN — the yes; the crooked phone video
0.5	1:13	EXT. RED SQUARE — "that's the PAINTING dog"
1.0	1:14	INT. APARTMENT — Lisa, twenty-minute person
1.0	1:15	INT. JAPANESE 101 — the echo with her voice inside it
1.0	1:16	EXT. RAINIER VISTA — the limp (a sixteenth-note late)
1.5	1:17	INT. APARTMENT — "It's not her leg."
1.0	1:18	INT. SEATTLE VET — "Say it plainly."
1.0	1:19	INT. FAMILY KITCHEN — the delivery; "Everything."
1.5	1:21	INT. SULLIVAN'S CLINIC — "She's not somebody's dog."
2.5	1:23	INT. DINING — Dan's story; the GoFundMe pings; the false hope assembles
1.5	1:25	INT. LIVING ROOM — the messages; Spencer's call
1.5	1:26	INT. DINING — trend lines vs. "She's drinking wrong."; "I believe you."
1.0	1:27	THE FIGHT, COMPRESSED — clinic / stairs / the pill skyline
1.5	1:29	INT. KITCHEN NIGHT — the offered paw; the rope
1.0	1:30	INT. BEDROOM — "I will be okay."
0.5	1:30	INT. BEDROOM MORNING — the ribs
1.0	1:31	INT. HALLWAY — the family; the silence they've heard before

ACT THREE — "The Water Is the Same" (≈18 min)

Min	At	Scene
0.5	1:32	INT. KITCHEN — the bowl with no job
1.0	1:33	INT. DINING — the foundation; "You're treasurer."
1.5	1:34	INT. SULLIVAN'S CLINIC — the beagle; third talisman; "somewhere to be"
0.5	1:35	EXT. BACKYARD DUSK — walk time, with no walk
1.5	1:36	INT. HALLWAY/BEDROOM — the night he doesn't ask

Min	At	Scene
1.0	1:37	DREAM — not away; ahead
0.5	1:38	INT. BEDROOM MORNING — a direction in the getting up
1.0	1:39	INT. KITCHEN — "I'm going to Utah." / "Okay."
2.0	1:41	EXT. UTAH — Promise; the wave, changing shape
1.0	1:42	EXT. RED SQUARE — pigeon chaos; "No. This is Promise."
1.0	1:43	INT. UW HALL NIGHT — the empty rooms, again
0.5	1:43	INT. SEMINAR ROOM — the tuck, achieved
2.5	1:46	EXT. HUSKY STADIUM — WE DID IT, SECRET; "Who's Secret?"
3.5	1:49	EXT. WHATCOM CREEK — "Come look."; "How's she doing?"; For Secret.

4. What the Critics Might Say (imagined, at draft-2 level)

The mainstream review — four stars

"Bring the whole family. Bring two packs of tissues. THE SECRET LANGUAGE is the best kind of true story — the kind you'd never buy if it weren't."

Every few years a movie comes along that the industry has no idea how to categorize and audiences have no trouble categorizing at all: you laugh, you sob, you call your mother from the parking lot. The Secret Language is that movie. On paper it's "girl meets dog." In the theater it's something much rarer — a film about a family trying to reach a daughter they love and cannot read, and about the Australian Shepherd who walks in and does it without a single word.

The dog stuff is spectacular — a real dog doing real things (stay for the credits, which show the actual footage and will finish off anyone the movie missed). The Irish dance will make you cheer. The painting scene — a dog, a brush, a flower arriving petal by petal — belongs on the short list of great animal moments in movies. But the film's secret weapon is the father. While the internet falls in love with the girl and her dog, he's the one at the kitchen window, holding his printed-out research, learning the hardest lesson a smart man ever learns: that some people can't be reasoned with — only loved correctly.

And then there's the scene. You'll know it when it arrives, late at night, four words long, and if you can hear it over the sound of the entire theater breaking, you'll realize the movie has quietly taught you exactly what those four words cost. That's not manipulation. That's craftsmanship.

Quibbles: the first act goes to darker places than the poster will admit, and parents of younger kids should know this is a movie about a teenager in real trouble before it's a movie about a dog. It also takes its time — this is a film that would rather hold a shot three seconds too long than one second too short. Hold anyway. It knows what it's doing.

*The Secret Language does the thing we stopped believing crowd-pleasers could do:
it earns every tear it takes. We did it, Secret, indeed.*

The higher-brow review — a critic's pick, with reservations

"A weepie with a formal spine — and a quietly radical wager about what we can know of another mind."

*The most interesting thing about *The Secret Language* — a film that will be marketed, accurately, as the-dog-movie-that-makes-you-cry — is a rule it never announces and never breaks: the camera refuses to go inside its protagonist. We are never told what Mary wants, plans, or realizes. No inspiration close-ups, no explanatory voiceover, no scene where she articulates herself to a therapist for our benefit. The action lines of her life are all what and no why — and slowly you understand that this refusal isn't withholding. It's the film's entire argument. Everyone in Mary's life reads her from the outside; now, so do we. The audience's surrogate isn't the luminous girl. It's her father — a systematic, decent, catastrophically verbal man whose every loving question lands on his daughter like a hand on a hot stove, and whose education (learn to stop asking; learn to arrange the world instead) is the film's true arc. The movie's whole thesis fits in the distance between the two questions he asks her, years apart: "I just want you to understand what you did" and, at a creek, at the end, "How's she doing?" The second one is the first one, healed.*

This structure produces the film's finest effects. The climactic four words arrive completely unexplained — the film has spent ninety minutes teaching you the grammar and then trusts you to read the sentence, a courtesy Hollywood almost never extends. A dog's flinch rhymes with a girl's flinch across an hour of screen time and lands like a thunderclap. And the film's theology — nobody chooses, nobody's to blame, mercy means building conditions where the vulnerable can succeed — is smuggled in so gently, through dog training of all things, that you don't notice you've absorbed a genuinely deterministic ethics until you're arguing about it in the car.

Reservations, and they're real. The film's account of autism is, finally, one family's account — a father's loving, brilliant, decades-in-the-making model of a daughter the film itself admits he cannot fully reach. Its "what without why" framework is poetically potent and clinically contestable, and some autistic viewers will bristle at a portrait built partly on what its subject is said to lack. To its credit, the film

seems aware of this — it presents its readings as readings, and its most honest moment may be that the camera never claims to have solved her either. Elsewhere: the viral-fame middle section, though smartly played as character beats, is the one stretch where the film relaxes into convention; the dog is permitted no flaws whatsoever, which is either sentimentality or, arguably, the point; and the girl's aphorisms — those little assembled stones of philosophy she sets down to end conversations — flirt with schematism right up until a late scene reveals why she speaks that way, at which point the device retroactively justifies itself.

*Comparisons will reach for the recent run of cross-species grief pictures, but the film's real cousin is *Aftersun*: a parent and child at zero distance and unbridgeable distance simultaneously, a film assembled from the outside of a person, grief as the price of the watching. That *The Secret Language* smuggles this into a four-quadrant tearjerker with a viral dog in it is either a compromise or a coup. I lean coup. Bring tissues; keep your wits.*

Both reviews are predictions, not verdicts — written against draft 2 to show where praise and fire will likely concentrate. The representation critique in the second review is the one to prepare for seriously (press, casting, consultants, and Mary's own voice in the campaign are the answers to it).