



The Danish Poet

Study Guide

For general viewers

1. Discuss the subtle techniques used in the film. Which elements had an emotional impact? (The delicate music and the lilting accent of the narrator, for example, give the film a kind of sweetness and sense of pending romance.)

How did the filmmaker, Torill Kove, prevent the story from being too sweet? (She adds regular dashes of wickedly funny detail, e.g., the perilously sliding bovine, the madly growing hair, the dog that gets kicked regularly, the eventual love affair between that dog and the neighbor dog, etc.)

2. Talk about the elements of truth in the film: summers in Norway are notoriously rainy; many Danes, Swedes and Norwegians are somewhat confused about their national beginnings; Sigrid Undset was a writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Do the viewers believe that Undset was really a distant relative of the filmmaker? Or is this a device to tell a wonderful story? Does it matter? This should lead to a discussion about poetic license and fact vs. fiction, when writers and filmmakers create an entertaining story based on real events and people. (If you have a map, ask a volunteer to point to Denmark, Norway and Sweden.)

3. Elicit a few anecdotes about parents and grandparents and how they met. Now ask viewers to “imagine” a family history, either inspired by actual events or made up of fictional people and how they met. The stories must begin with an ending such as the one in *The Danish Poet*: “If it hadn’t been for a Danish poet and Sigrid Undset and a rainy summer in Norway and a slippery barn plank and a careless mailman and a hungry goat and broken thumb and a crowded train, my parents might never have met.” Give viewers time to write their stories and then share them.



There are many ways to trace one's ancestors, either by researching genealogy or through DNA tracing, but if we want to know the human stories, we have to ask family members and hope for the best.

For younger viewers

1. Ask the children if they know how their parents met. What about their grandparents? Make a list of all the ways and places mentioned. Then, using the list, work with the children to make a fanciful and happy story of love and adventure, with travel to foreign lands.

2. Discuss some of the details of *The Danish Poet*: talk about the music, the narrator, the visual details, the style of the drawings. Would they have done anything differently? How would they have told this same story in their own personal way?

3. Refer to the story the children concocted using the life stories of everyone's parents and grandparents. How would they film this story? What details would they concentrate on? What kind of music would they use? Together, construct a simple script with directions and effects for making an animated short. This project could end here at the idea stage or be developed further with a rough storyboard and script.

For another animated story by Torill Kove, see the NFB film *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*. It too is a mixture of fact and fiction about the filmmaker's family.

