

Film and Video Reviews

An Adventure of Both Form and Content

The Reluctant Deckhand. Package in three parts. Novel by Jan Padgett. Illus. Amanda Forbis. Pacific Educational Press, 1995. 128 pp. ISBN 1-895766-01-X. Film directed by Jan Padgett, animated by Amanda Forbis. National Film Board of Canada, 1995. 33 mins. VHS. Includes documentary on the making of the film. 13 mins. NFB order no: 9195 141. Teacher's Guide for the Novel and Film. Cheryl Macdonald and Janet Pivnick. The National Film Board, 1995. 36 pp. ISBN 1-895766-15-X. Package cost \$29.95 (from Pacific Educational Press). ISBN 1-895766-11-7.

In an interview in the documentary section of the above package, we learn that writer/director Jan Padgett built her own home. Like their creator, the women and girls in *The Reluctant Deckhand* are independent, strong and physically active, and both the novel and the film (the latter came first) will inspire a taste for the outdoors. The map at the front of the novel, and the many fishing charts and maps glimpsed in the film, lend a sense of reality to the West Coast adventure of ten-year-old Tess, who has to accompany her mother, Sue, on a northern fishing trip. While the novel is somewhat pedestrian in its language ("...Tess looked into the most piercing blue eyes she had ever seen"), the emotions and relationships are authentic. The film is more stylish, with cut-out animation that manages both realism and whimsy.

There are surprisingly interesting hard facts about a number of situations in addition to fishing, including what lighthouse keeper Anne explains about her life, and what Tess learns when she goes out in a kayak with Paul from the Orcalab. The sequence where Auntie Betty describes the many uses First Nations people have for tree bark, with its comprehensive list of present and past uses, nudges toward becoming a social studies lesson, but Tess's interest in basket weaving helps justify it.

The suggestions in the Teacher's Guide to discuss things as varied as tides and currents and family relationships are fully supported in the broader strokes of the animated film and in the more detailed pages of the novel. Both versions follow the same story, and although available separately, together they provide an excellent opportunity for the recommended age group of eight- to twelve-year-olds to explore the differences between the two mediums.

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