



## **Misa Mi Teacher Resource**

This teacher resource has been adapted from the *Misa Mi* study guide written by Susan Starkman, available through the John VanDuzer Children's Film Collection.

**TITLE:** Misa Mi

**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** Sweden

**RELEASE YEAR:** 2003

**ORIGINAL LANGUAGE:** Swedish

**DIRECTOR:** Linus Torell

**RUNTIME:** 80 Minutes

### **DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:**

1. *The Planet* (2006)
2. *Vinnarskallar* (2006) TV series
3. *Misa Mi* (2003)
4. *Allra mest tecknat* (2002) TV series

### **CURRICULUM LINKS:**

#### **English:**

*Misa Mi* can be used as part of the media-literacy component of the Language curriculum from Grades 4 through 8. Connections to the Reading strand of the Language curriculum can also be made by comparing the film *Misa Mi* to written versions of Little Red Riding Hood and other fairy tales and literary texts involving wolves.

#### **Social Studies (Heritage and Citizenship):**

*Misa Mi* can be applied to the Heritage and Citizenship strand of the Social Studies curriculum in Grades 5 and 6. The units involving early civilizations and First Nation people can be linked to the depiction of the Sami people in the film. Students could research the history, customs and



traditions of the Sami and draw connections between them and the First Nation people of North America, particularly in terms of issues relating to deforestation and other environmental challenges facing both groups. In the Canada's Links to the World strand of Grade 6 Social Studies, students can identify and describe Canada's economic, political and cultural links with Sweden.

**Science and Technology:**

Wolves play a central role in the film, and science teachers could use *Misa Mi* as a springboard to the Habitats and Communities strand of the Grade 4 Science curriculum. Students could research wolves and their habitats and separate the facts about wolves from the fictional ways in which they are depicted in cinema and literature.

**Geography:**

The remote Lapland area where most of *Misa Mi* is set can be incorporated into the Grade 7 and 8 Geography curriculum, specifically as it relates to the Natural Resources and the Patterns of Human Geography strands of the subject. Students can research the natural resources of this region and explore the positive and negative ways in which human activity affects resource sustainability and the health of this particular environment. In Grade 8 Geography, students can explore the patterns and trends in Sweden's population distribution, identifying the factors that influence population distribution and land use.

**FOCUSING QUESTION:**

What are the environmental issues facing both the Sami and the wolves?

**SYNOPSIS:**

Ten-year-old Misa is spending the summer with her grandmother in northern Sweden, the place where her own mother, who recently passed away, grew up. Used to life in the city, Misa feels there's nothing to do in the country – after all, her grandmother doesn't even own a television. Soon, however, Misa begins adjusting to her surroundings, learning her way around the nearby woods and tentatively striking up a friendship with Gustav, who is Sami (the Indigenous people of Scandinavia), and whose family practises traditional reindeer herding.



Spending time with Gustav's family, she learns that some reindeer have gone missing and that a wolf is the suspect. While wolves are protected animals, poachers are on the hunt for the predator under the auspices of trying to protect livestock. When Misa discovers two wolf cubs whose mother was captured by poachers, she decides it is up to her, in a race against time, to transport the young animals to safety.

Highlighting the natural beauty of the northern landscape and featuring strong performances from the young cast, *Misa Mi* is a sensitive and heartwarming story about overcoming loss, appreciating other cultures and ways of life, and the importance of protecting endangered wildlife. *Misa Mi* is part of the John VanDuzer Children's Film Collection. For more information on renting films from the collection to screen in the classroom, please visit [reellearning.ca](http://reellearning.ca).

**Recommended for Grades:** Grade 4 through 8

### **AN EDUCATOR'S COMMENTS AFTER SCREENING THE FILM:**

"This film provides a great discussion opportunity to talk about animal conservation and the environment from perhaps a new and different perspective than what is being presented in classrooms."

### **PRE-SCREENING PREPARATION:**

Wolves: Fact and Fiction

Literature (and more recently, film) has not been kind to wolves. The Big Bad Wolf is a feature of many fairy tales, and more often than not, the species is used to represent behaviour that is cunning, predatory and murderous. Indeed, many common expressions evoke the image of the wolf as a dangerous beast (e.g., "wolf in sheep's clothing," throwing someone "to the wolves," "wolfing down food" and "wolf at the door," to name a few). Students should consider why this animal in particular has captured the popular imagination as a symbol of calculated, cold-blooded behaviour. Teachers could begin a lesson by asking students what they know about wolves and writing their answers on the board or on a large sheet of paper.



Once this is done, teachers could direct their students to various resources relating to wolves and ask them to answer the following questions:

1. What are the habitat requirements of a wolf pack?
2. What do wolves eat?
3. How do wolves help to ensure the survival of the species on which they prey?
4. Do wolves attack humans?
5. Are wolves smarter than most animals (including humans)?
6. Do wolves have a good memory?
7. Are wolves always hungry?
8. Can a wild wolf be tamed?
9. Can a wolf bond with a human?

Once the students have answered these questions, compare their findings to what they initially thought they knew about wolves. How accurate was their information before they did any research?

#### **POST-SCREENING ACTIVITY:**

##### **Humans vs. Animals**

Central to the film is the conflict between the townspeople and the wolves. The Sami who inhabit the area depend on the reindeer for their livelihood. When a wolf kills three reindeer calves, they are understandably worried that others will also fall prey to the wolves. As the camera focuses on the carcass of a reindeer being hauled away, the viewer is shown in no uncertain terms the threat that the wolves pose to the Sami's main source of income. On the other hand, the film also depicts the wolves as vulnerable, particularly the wolf cubs who will not be able to survive if a poacher kills their mother. This conflict is best summed up in the following conversation between Misa and her grandmother (Mormor):

Misa: "A wolf just does its job, what it's made to do."

Mormor: "Maybe the people are just doing their job: trying to survive. It would be better if wolves didn't live around reindeer."

Misa: "How can they know that?"

Mormor: "That's just it."



Neither the Sami nor the wolves are villains; they are both doing what is necessary to survive. Unfortunately, their needs are at odds with each other, and for one to live, the other must perish.

1. With whom do you think the filmmaker wants the viewer to sympathize – the wolves or the Sami reindeer herders? Provide evidence from the film to support your opinion.
2. At one point, Gustav tells Misa that the wolves “won’t be cute when they’re grown.” How much of the audience’s sympathy toward the wolves is based on how cute they are? Do you think the viewer would be as sympathetic to an animal like a rat?

### **CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP:**

Write a letter to your local Member of Parliament (MP) outlining the issue your class chooses to address surrounding the environment and animal preservation. Include three ways in which you would like your local MP to take action, and any potential solutions to the problem.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

#### **Websites:**

1. International Wolf Centre <http://www.wolf.org>
2. A Wolf Adventure <http://www.wolfechovalley.com>
3. BC Wildlife Park Kamloops <http://www.bczoo.org>
4. Wolves Ontario <http://www.wolvesontario.org>
5. Wolf Education and Research Centre <http://www.wolfcenter.org>
6. For an excellent lesson on the Big Bad Wolf stereotype in film and literature, teachers can refer to this website:  
<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

#### **Books:**

1. Lawrence, R.D. *Wolves*. (Toronto: Key Porter Books), 1990.
2. Shedd, Warner. *The Kids’ Wildlife Book*. (Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens), 1997.
3. Wolpert, Tom. *Wolves for Kids*. (Minocqua: NorthWord Press, 1990).