

VILLAGE OF IDIOTS

2nd Prize – Short Film Category and winner of the International Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI) “for expressing the eternal and meta-physical questions of the human condition in a subtle, humorous and concise way.” Montreal World Film Festival, 1999.

A hilarious story about a lovable fool who leaves his village on a circuitous quest for knowledge, only to find it in a very surprising place.




With a dash of humour and a pinch of old-world philosophical insight, this new animated film by Oscar®-winning Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove gives a new slant to the adage “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” **Village of Idiots** is based on a Jewish folk tale.

Children will be delighted by Shmendrik’s escapades, while adults will be amused by his practical and simple approach to a complex, existential problem.

Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Directed and animated by Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove
Produced by Michael Scott and David Verrall

12 minutes, 41 seconds
Order number C9199 025

 Closed captioned.
A decoder is required.

TO ORDER NFB VIDEOS, CALL TODAY!

1-800-267-7710 (Canada)

1-800-542-2164 (USA)

www.nfb.ca

© 1999 A licence is required for any reproduction, television broadcast, sale, rental or public screening. Only educational institutions or non-profit organizations who have obtained this video directly from the NFB have the right to show this video free of charge to the public.

National Film Board of Canada
P.O. Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5



Printed in Canada



VILLAGE OF IDIOTS



VHS

C9199 025



A National Film Board of Canada Production

VILLAGE OF IDIOTS

Another hole in the roof to fix, another day in Chelm—the second Chelm that is. An old shoe sole sets Shmendrik, a lovable schlemiel, on a hilarious quest for knowledge that makes him leave his village of Chelm, only to end up in another village that looks a great deal like the first.

A practical man, Shmendrik decides to stay in the second Chelm rather than return to the first: “Why should I walk my feet off to get where practically I already am?” he asks. Why indeed! With a leaky roof just like his, a wife and bratty children just like his, and another Shmendrik who conveniently left the second Chelm exactly as he had left the first, Shmendrik figured the hand of God must be at work. So what else could he do? He moved in.

Based on a Jewish folk tale adapted by John Lazarus, **Village of Idiots** is the story of Shmendrik’s new life and its uncanny closeness to his old life, offering an extremely funny take on our tendency to romanticize what we don’t have.

Technique

Co-directors Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove filmed paper cut-outs on layers of glass to achieve the rich, textured visuals that convey **Village of Idiots’** irresistible humour and charm.

About the filmmakers

Co-directors Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove have been busy animating, directing and teaching together for the last twenty-five years. In addition to their most recent film, **Village of Idiots** (1999), their partnership has resulted in several pieces, most notably **Every Child** (1979), which won the Academy Award™ for Best Animated Short Film in 1980. From 1974 to 1984 they taught animated filmmaking to children in Toronto.



Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove

Directed and animated by
Eugene Fedorenko,
Rose Newlove

Written by
John Lazarus

Based on a Jewish folk tale told by
Nicholas Rice

Yiddish Dialogue
Jack Newman

Original Music and Arrangements
Normand Roger

Sound Editing
Jean-Baptiste Roger

Foley
Andy Malcom

Foley Recording
Tony van den Akker

Re-recording
Serge Boivin,
Geoffrey Mitchell

Producers
Michael Scott,
David Verrall

Executive Producers
John Spotton,
John Taylor,
Dennis Murphy,
Gerry Flahive,
Barrie Angus McLean,
David Verrall

Order number:
C9199 025

12 min 41 sec



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For general viewers

1. Point out that the main character’s name, Shmendrik, is a Yiddish word that means, among other things, someone who holds unrealistic hope, a person who cannot succeed yet believes he can and persists in acting as if he can. Discuss how this name is perfectly suited to the hero of the film. (Recommend another story with an anti-hero named Shmendrik: Peter Beagle’s *The Last Unicorn*, in which a hapless wizard tries his clumsy best to help the title creature.)
2. Stories of this kind exist in virtually every society in the world. Discuss the need within cultural groups to tell stories about clueless and haplessly uninformed people. Why is this so? Is it simply the human instinct to find a way to feel superior? Is this necessarily a bad thing?
3. Recommend independent library research to find a sampling of a) the many collected stories about the citizens of Chelm, b) tales from Puerto Rico concerning the Bobo, c) Greek stories about a character named Small Sarkis, d) Turkish tales of the wise idiot known as the Hodja, e) stories from India that feature the hapless weaver, and any other stories that feature some foolish fellow who beats the odds or saves the day—inadvertently through his foolishness—and becomes a hero.

For younger viewers

1. Ask the children if they believe that there are two villages named Chelm, as Shmendrik says in the film. Have someone explain what really happened on Shmendrik’s trip to Warsaw.
2. Select one fairy tale that involves the youngest and most unmindful son, who makes his way sweetly and without malice or cunning, in an adventure that ends with his winning the princess or finding gold. Some examples are Hans Christian Andersen’s “Hans Clodhopper,” or from the Brothers Grimm, “The Golden Bird,” “The Queen Bee,” “The Golden Goose” and “The Water of Life.” Compare one of these tales with the story of Shmendrik. Was Shmendrik a winner at the end? Was he happy and content?
3. Shmendrik fears that one day the other Shmendrik will show up in the second Chelm. Ask the children to make up a story in which that very thing happens. Have them tell what Shmendrik One and Shmendrik Two do and say to each other.

Recommended readings

- *Yiddish Folktales* by Beatrice S. Weinreich. Published in 1997 by Schocken Books, Inc. New York, N.Y.
- *Noodle, Nitwit, Numskull* by Meguido Zola, illustrated by Jillian Hulme Gilliland. Published in 1990 by Quarry Press. Kingston, Ontario.
- *The Angel’s Mistake: Stories of Chelm* by Francine Prose, illustrated by Mark Podwal. Published in 1997 by William Morrow & Company, Inc. New York, N.Y.
- *Wisdom Tales from Around the World* by Heather Forest. Published in 1996 by August House Publishers, Inc. Little Rock, Arkansas.