

Sien Van Sellingen – The Hairdressing

Sien Van Sellingen (KRO, Netherlands) is a live-action mini series about a little girl, Sien, who lives on a farm with her family. In the episode *The Hairdressing*, Sien's parents take off for the day to attend a wedding (cf. screenshot 1), leaving the grandmother to watch the three children. Sien notices that her grandmother is sad (cf. screenshot 2) – it is the anniversary of her husband's death – and decides to cut the grandmother's hair to cheer her up, waiting until she is asleep to do so (cf. screenshot 3). When the grandmother awakes and sees her hair, she is upset (cf. screenshot 4), and Sien runs to hide in the barn. The grandmother writes Sien a series of letters (cf. screenshot 5), using the brother as a mailman (cf. screenshot 6), to tell Sien that although she is angry, she still loves her. Sien comes out to face her grandmother and explain her actions (cf. screenshot 7), then offers to wash her grandmother's hair to make up for her deeds – turning the hose on her, to the grandmother's great surprise (cf. screenshot 8).

Sien Van Sellingen – The Hairdressing was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 finalists in the Up to 6 Fiction category.

International experts' opinions

International experts shared their opinions about *Sien Van Sellingen – The Hairdressing* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. Many enjoyed the program, stating that it showed the girls as adventurous and imaginative, but also agreed that some aspects of the film could be controversial and not quite age-appropriate. Many of the experts agreed that, although they liked the use of live action, the child actors seemed too old to represent the target age group.

“The emotions that the children were experiencing felt a bit too old.” (female expert, UK)

Noting the grandparents who appeared in many of the programs for this age group, many experts were glad to see them portrayed so positively. They also enjoyed the sense of fun in the film.

“The grandmother was good, I thought. I'm always happy when we have good grandparents because, historically, older people have been portrayed as just crabby and inaccessible at times.” (female expert, USA)

“I thought the story was quite fun, in a cheeky sort of way.” (male expert, UK)

While acknowledging that the girl was not malicious in her actions, many experts were concerned about what seemed to be a lack of consequences for the girl's actions in cutting her grandmother's hair. Most experts were concerned about the lesson taught to children through the apparent lack of consequences. Calling the cutting of someone's hair an “attractive nuisance”, most experts discussed the need to be sure that consequences were clearly understood.



Ill. 1: Mom and Dad go to a wedding, leaving Grandmother in charge



Ill. 2: Sien notices her grandmother looks sad



Ill. 3: Sien cuts her grandmother's hair while she sleeps



Ill. 4: Grandmother is very upset by the haircut

“Everyone goes silent watching that and just saying, ‘She’s actually doing it.’ That’s what makes the scene so strong.” (male expert, Norway)

“I guess that is the consequence then, is that she understands that she’s upset her grandmother.” (female expert, USA)

“We actually had a chance to see that she didn’t mean it in a bad way. She really thought she was doing something nice for the grandmother.” (female expert, USA)



Ill. 5: Grandmother writes Sien a letter

Many of the experts were also concerned about the idea presented in the film that sleep is not a protected place. They felt that sleep should be shown as a safe state, free from concern about what someone might do to you, and that this film could frighten children.

“I was wondering whether this was something that you would really want children this age to watch on their own.” (female expert, UK)

“That’s why the grandmother is angry with her. It’s about [what] you should not do.” (male expert, Netherlands)



Ill. 6: Simon delivers the letter to Sien

“If it’s targeting kids under five or six, the whole idea that you can disturb sleep wouldn’t be tolerated.” (male expert, UK)

Most experts were charmed by the method that the grandmother used to reach out to her granddaughter, to re-establish communication with her by use of letters delivered by a “mailman”.

“The grandmother was great; she was so inventive with the mailman idea. I’m definitely going to use that!” (female expert, Germany)



Ill. 7: Sien apologizes to her grandmother

Discussing the water fight at the end of the program, it seemed to some as a punishment of the grandmother, rather than just a playful act.

“The message sent out to kids worried me, because she’d gotten away with it. Then she doubled it by soaking her grandmother in cold water. I think if the grandmother was laughing and giggling when she was being soaked, it would have completely changed my feelings about the whole film.” (male expert, UK)

Overall, the experts agreed that the story was told very well, and was very enjoyable. In spite of the lack of consequences for the haircut, the lesson offered was that you could be forgiven for mistakes.

“The other thing you get out of it is that even if you’ve made a horrible mistake you can be forgiven somehow. You shouldn’t run away because [the situation] is redeemable.” (female expert, USA)



Ill. 8: Sien “washes” her grandmother’s hair with a hose

Margaret Lundberg (University of Washington Tacoma, USA)

Screenshots from *Sien Van Sellingen* © KRO, Netherlands

Target Audience 6.43	Idea 6.80	Script 6.73	Realization 6.88
Average Score per Category by experts’ voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2012			