

INFLUENCE | FILM CLUB

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Maidentrip Discussion Guide

Director: Jillian Schlesinger

Year: 2013

Time: 82 min

You might know this director from:

This is the first full-length feature from this director.

FILM SUMMARY

“To thine own self be true,” says Polonius to his son Laertes, as Laertes hurries to board a boat to Paris. Uncannily, Shakespeare could very well have been directing these words to Laura Dekker, the Dutch teenager depicted in MAIDENTRIP, who sailed solo atop the high seas in response to that inner call, that dream of self.

Although Laura may have missed Shakespeare at school while off sailing, she certainly followed the advice of the literary master by mastering the high seas on her own, overcoming challenges not even the most seasoned of sailors dare, covering 27,000 nautical miles over 519 days. From Gibraltar to the Canaries, through the infamous Panama Canal and on to the breathtaking Pacific Islands, passing her New Zealand birthplace and rounding the perilous Cape of Good Hope, Laura makes the treacherous journey both across the globe and across adolescence, with the ocean and her trusted boat Guppy intimately witnessing her coming of age.

The challenges facing Laura were many. Not only were high winds, no winds, epic storms, broken sails, and faulty equipment just some of the knots this teenage girl had to unwind, but also a lengthy court case brought against her by her native Dutch government and an ocean of disbelievers threatened her solo quest.

Circumnavigation is no ordinary endeavor, however, and Laura is no ordinary girl. The story told by Dekker and director Jillian Schlesinger – who managed to overcome Laura’s abhorrence of the media and grant her a platform from which to express her story – is more than just one of perseverance atop the high seas, instead extending far deep beneath the surface. MAIDENTRIP is a story of dreams and the satisfaction allocated to those who honor that inner voice, a modern echo of Shakespeare’s age-old words, an testimony of ocean clear self-realization.

FILM THEMES

Nothing – not the Dutch government, a lack of funds, an education, nor the fiercest of weather conditions – could stop teenager Laura Dekker from rounding the world alone on her personal passage to womanhood.

BRAVERY OF A DREAM

Laura was born with saltwater blood, the essence of sailing coursing through her veins. In a swift 16 years, she gained the sagacity of an old seaman, chartering passages that have downed many a sailor. Where others allow societal norms and conventions to carve out their path, Laura remained yoked to her vision of becoming the youngest sailor to circumnavigate the globe alone. The world did its best to stop her: the Dutch government waged a heavy legal battle against her. She persisted and conquered. The ocean challenged her, winds disappeared, and intense loneliness set in, but her dream always meant more than all that, and her undying devotion and bravery made its fulfillment so very sweet.

COMING OF AGE

Adolescence is an awkward time. Faced with a war of hormones wreaking havoc on emotions, the personal transformation of puberty is a chaotic time for the best of us. As Laura crosses oceans, docking on foreign shores, she simultaneously charts over the rocky waters of young adulthood. Rather than hiding in the comfort of her family home, she declares, “Home to me is Guppy,” embracing the boat and the open ocean as the only place for her to make sense of the nonsense she faces within herself. Like any teenager she rides a rollercoaster of emotions, contradicts herself with butterfly speed and outwardly embraces a world where anything and everything is possible.

SOLITUDE VS. COMPANIONSHIP

Live with anything long enough, and it becomes normal. Surviving on a diet of spaghetti and solitude, Laura established a pattern of life for herself atop the wide ocean. “I love being alone,” she bravely stated to the camera, and cultivated her character over the endless hours of thinking time her loneliness provided. And yet she craved companionship in time, thanking the dolphins for accompanying her one day, eagerly embracing the love and warmth offered by newfound friends Mike and Deana. No human is an island, and by the time the film closed she had taken on a crew of one, admitting, “Some moments are way more beautiful if you share them with someone.” Laura found the right balance of solitude and companionship to suit her best.

PERSONAL VS. PUBLIC GOALS

Fame was not high on Laura’s list of motivating factors. Turning down sponsors, interviews, and media attention she proved herself to be a grounded individual wise beyond her years. But then why race to be the youngest sailor to circumnavigate the world? Why compete at all? Laura set out not to prove her ability to the world but to prove it to herself, to answer the questions she had been living with. By selecting self over celebrity Laura set no limits, allowing her possible reservoir of accomplishments to reach as deep as the sea.

“Freedom is when you’re not attached to anything.”

Laura Dekker

“The hardest thing about building bonds like this is when you have to leave people you love.”

Mike Ruel

“I wanted the storms. I wanted the calms. I wanted to feel loneliness. Now I know all these things. It’s the end of the dream I had as a kid and the beginning of my life as a sailor.”

Laura Dekker

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Have you ever been sailing? Discuss any experience you have atop the open seas. Do you consider yourself to be more of a sea-worthy or seasick individual?
2. Discuss your own experience of puberty. Was there anything in Laura’s personal journey through puberty that reminded you of your own?
3. Do you believe the Dutch government was wise to initiate proceedings against Laura and her father’s efforts for her to circumnavigate the globe alone at the age of 14? Or was it none of their business?
4. If Laura had been your daughter, would you have allowed her to embark on such a mission? Do you believe she was too young for such an adventure?
5. Have you ever pursued something in spite of being discouraged by the majority? Or have you ever chosen to not follow your heart’s desire because you were discouraged?
6. Discuss Laura’s education. Do you think she has gaps in her learning from the time she missed at high school? What valuable lessons did she learn through her travels?
7. What is your dream? What one thing do you harbor within? What five simple steps could you take to bring this dream closer to the light of day?
8. Do you feel that director Jillian Schlesinger respected Laura Dekker’s side of the story in her telling of MAIDENTRIP? Were there any ways in which you feel Dekker was misrepresented?
9. Why does the media get so whipped into a frenzy over stories such as those of Laura Dekker? What public need is the media responding to in these circumstances?
10. If Laura Dekker had not been born atop a sailboat during her parent’s around-the-world trip, would she have still longed to pursue this adventure? Are some people born with the spirit of adventure, or is it something to which they are introduced?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- MAIDENTRIP, the debut feature film from director Jillian Schlesinger – who has worked as a writer, producer, and editor of TV promos since 2009 – was met with critical acclaim, winning a number of awards, including Audience Awards at both the Camden International Film Festival and the SXSW Film Festival.
- A few months before Laura set out on her trip, the Guinness Book of World Records decided to do away with their category for the youngest sailors to complete a sailing task, as they did not wish to endorse the danger involved. Thus, Laura never made it into the record books.
- Director Jillian Schlesinger first read about Laura Dekker and her battle with the Dutch government to sail solo around the world in “The New York Times” in 2009. Schlesinger worked on MAIDENTRIP over a period of three years, giving Dekker the necessary equipment to film her journey and also meeting the young sailor en-route nine times over the course of her travels. The director is no stranger to sailing, as she had grown up hearing her father’s tales of his sailing trip around Central America in his early 20s.
- Guppy is a 38 ft. (11.5m) two-masted Jeanneau Gin Fizz ketch. A ketch is a type of sailing craft with two masts, the forward mast (mainmast) being larger than the after mast (mizzen).
- In early 2015, Laura participated in Dutch TV show Expedition Polar Circle in the Arctic Circle.
- Laura’s father – Dick Dekker – is Dutch, while her mother – Babs Müller – is German, granting her German, Dutch, and New Zealand citizenship.
- The history of sailing extends far back in time, as the act of sailing enabled ancient civilizations to move about much easier than on land and especially helped with fishing. The earliest representation of a sailboat was found on a painted disc in Kuwait from the 5th century BC.
- Laura cites Bernard Moitessier, a French sailor, and Tania Aebi, an American sailor and first American woman and youngest person at the time to circumnavigate the globe, as her idols. Aebi wrote a book entitled “Maiden Voyage.”
- The term “circumnavigation” is used to describe a journey around an island, continent, or the entire globe. The Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation of 1519 was the first global sailing trip ever completed. Five ships set off on the journey westward from Spain, in search of a path from the Americas to East Asia across the Pacific. After three years atop the open seas, only one ship –the Victoria – captained by Juan Sebastián Elcano and manned by a crew of 18, arrived back in Spain.
- The 48 mile (77km) Panama Canal connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The French began construction on the canal in 1881, and the Americans took over in 1904, officially opening it in 1914. It takes 8 to 10 hours to pass through it.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to be inspired by its story.
2. **Read** “One Girl One Dream”, written by Laura Dekker after completing her global journey.
3. **Get** involved with [Dare to Dream](#), a non-profit devoted to empowering girls to finding, believing in, and following their dreams by presenting them with inspiring female role models.
4. **Find** the courage to invest in a dream by starting small. Focus 10 minutes a day on learning about making that dream a reality, and find how those simple minutes soon equal hours of information and motivation.
5. **Play** your part in protecting our oceans by supporting organizations like [Sea Shepherd](#) that works to protect marine wildlife and the ocean’s ecosystem, or [Ocean Conservancy](#) that’s fighting to keep pollution from filling the oceans.

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.