

Weaving a Danish Christmas

A Hans Christian Andersen Story Program

By Carol L. MacKay, LMS in Bawlf, Alberta

Glædelig Jul! (“Merry Christmas” in Danish)

The enduring stories of Hans Christian Andersen have long been staples of library story programs. His tales are widely read and enjoyed, with new picture book versions being published on a regular basis. What isn't as well-known is Andersen's contribution to the way Denmark celebrates Christmas, a contribution that goes beyond the written word.

In the early 1800s, Danish Christmas trees were largely decorated with items that could be eaten after they had been admired: kringle cookies, marzipan figures, and gingerbread men. Paper ornaments began to be used around the 1820s. Then, in the mid-1860s, Andersen, who had by this time was well-established as a prolific and successful author of fairy tales, created a paper heart basket for his friend, Mathilde Ørsted by weaving two pieces of folded paper together. This first heart did not include a handle, a feature which would be added later to make it possible to hang the woven heart on the Christmas tree. Some of the author's paper hearts have survived and the oldest known version, a green and gold heart without handle, can be found in The Hans Christian Andersen House Museum in Odense, Denmark. In the 1870s, the heart basket Christmas ornament was fast becoming a new Christmas tradition.

Today, the Danish woven heart is a much-loved Christmas tree tradition that is enjoyed throughout Scandinavia. The craft has evolved from the simple classic red and white version into a variety of multi-colored designs and motifs and has become a respected art form.

Books to Share: Andersen Tales

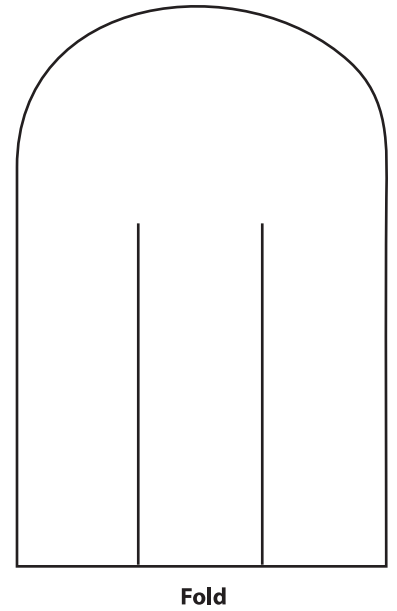
- Read *The Fir Tree* by Hans Christian Andersen. Nancy Ekholm Burkert or B. Watts versions are recommended.
- A second Andersen tale may be read, depending on time available. A good choice would be Jerry Pinkney's version of *The Little Match Girl*.

Craft: Christmas Hearts (Julehjerter)

For beginners, I've included the basic two-color, three-strip version. Older children may want to tackle the more difficult four- or five-strip styles, or even some of the more complicated patterns such as Christmas trees, snowmen, or doves. While it is difficult to find English-language Christmas hearts pattern books, instructions for more complicated woven hearts can found online.

Craft Instructions

1. Cut out the pattern to the right and then trace onto a folded sheet of glossy red paper. Trace a second time onto a sheet of glossy white folded paper. Construction paper may also be used, but lightweight paper like gift wrap or origami paper would be easier to work with. "Glanspapid" is paper specially designed for woven Christmas hearts and can be found in Scandinavian shops or through mail-order. Be sure to place the bottom edge of the pattern along the fold.
 2. First row: Hold the two heart pieces as indicated. [picture #1] Weave the first white strip into the first red strip. Next, put the middle strip through the white strip. End the first row of weaving by putting the white strip into the last red strip.
 3. Second Row: Begin by putting the white strip on the outside of the red strip. Then put the white into the second red strip and end the row with the white outside of the red strip.
 4. Third Row: Same as the first row. You may have to gently ease the paper into place to make it fit.
 5. Finish off the heart by adding a paper handle, made of a long, thin strip in either red or white. Fold strip in half, and glue ends of handle to the inside of the basket.
- As a special treat, you may fill the hearts with a candy or two, but be careful not to weigh the heart down too much or the handle will break.



Snack: Danish Christmas Cookies

Serve kringle cookies, peppernuts, or heart-shaped sugar cookies.

