

## Teesdale Hill Farming

The history of hill-farming in Teesdale since photography began, by Cotherstone School, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham

### Aim

For children to experience film-making whilst investigating their local heritage in the farming community.

### Action

We researched extensively into local hill-farming practices through visits, talks and archives, compiling our findings into a documentary style film with animation, photographs, role-play and talking heads.

### Outcome

A 30-minute film featuring all the children in Years 5 and 6 presenting their own work in poems, sketches and animations, interspersed with interviews with the local farming community and experts on set and on location in the dale.



### Details

Cotherstone School is situated in the village, which has a strong farming heritage, and the surrounding area is home to a number of farming families. However, for those children without direct links to the industry their knowledge of hill-farming is often quite limited. From the experience of making this film, the children gained, as well as technical expertise, a broad knowledge and a deep sense of understanding of the place they live in and the people they share it with.

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The children came to recognise the themes that run through the history of this area and way of life – the rhythm of the seasons, the jobs to be done whatever the weather, the loneliness and the camaraderie and the utter dependence on nature and hard work. The stories and life stories they heard gave them insight into how progress, government initiatives and individual life-choices intermingled to create the hill-farming world that surrounds them now.

The project was initiated by Sam Forsyth, Director of Teeny Tiny Films and a governor and parent at the school, who approached us with the suggestion of making the film and obtained funding from Northern Film and Media and Durham County Council. We incorporated the making of the film into our topic 'Food and Farming'.

The children in Years 5 and 6 spent five weeks on the project. During this time we visited farms and spoke to local farming families related to children in the school. We found information from books, the internet and photos and interviewed experts such as local historians and vets. We focused on the ways that some circumstances and practices have changed whilst others have stayed the same over the last 150 years. The children wrote poems about the key events and developments such as the impact of the war and the invention of the tractor and also about personal anecdotes told to us by those we interviewed. The children also animated their own drawings, models and photographs and used stop-frame animation to create scenes illustrating changes and stories.

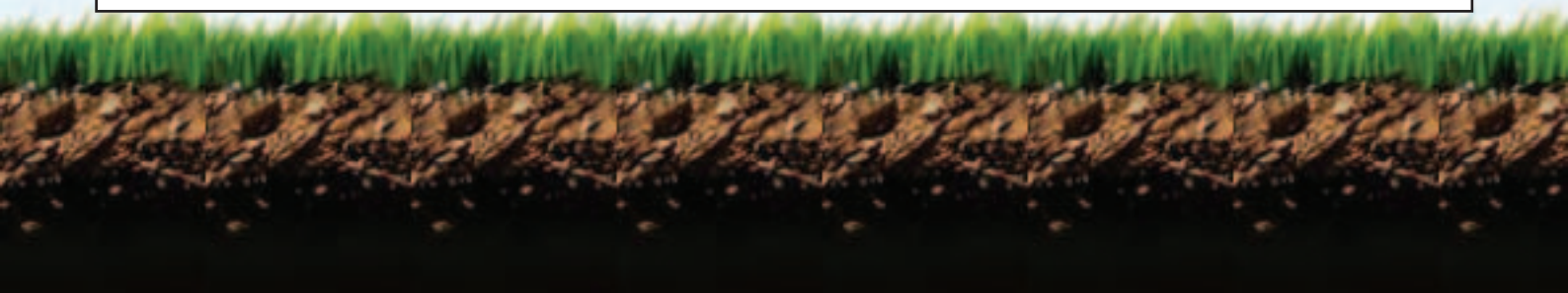
All the interviewing, sound recording and filming was done by the children in collaboration with the film company, Teeny Tiny Films. The children devised their own music and chanted their own rhymes to accompany the film, based on sounds they'd recorded and local dialect. The film was scripted through a process of ordering and selecting information the children had gathered, with each child telling a different section of the story many in their own words accompanied by their original poems. Their poems and animations reflect their understanding and interpretation of what they discovered told from their own unique viewpoint and with a great sense of humour.

Quotes from participants:

Sam Forsyth: 'The creativity and energy that the children put into this project has been wonderful. We also had great deal of support from the wider farming community.'

Alec, Year 6 pupil: 'It was really good fun making the film. We learned facts about what has been going on all around us throughout our lives, how much thought goes into farming and all the jobs involved.'

Shona, Year 6: 'We see farmers working around us but until now I didn't know that much detail about what they do.'



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Alistair, Year 6: 'You can see the changes that have taken place, such as from using horses to using tractors. I think people will keep hill-farming in the future because I don't think the farmers will give up that easily. I'd like to be a hill-farmer one day – I have relations doing the job and I like the idea of being in the fresh air and around animals for my job.'

Dr Jellis (Headteacher): 'The project was a truly wonderful experience for the children on so many levels. I am genuinely impressed with the skill and professionalism of all those involved.'

The film was premiered at a local village hall with 170 people attending and received a fantastic response.

