

The High Master and Little Billy Clough

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Pre-reading

Task 1. Are there any social markers of high or privileged classes in your society, such as a type of clothes or makes of cars? If so, what are they?

Task 2. Do you know of any important social markers in British society?

Task 3. Watch an extract from a TV documentary with Stephen Fry. What is it about?

Task 4. Match the words and expressions **in bold** in the sentences (1-8) with their meanings (a-h)

1. Clifford had a sound education there and learned the basics of his engineering trade.	a. To unfairly consider a person, activity etc as belonging to a particular type or group (label).
2. You are pigeonholed in upper-crustian society by the way you speak, where you've been to school and which college at Oxbridge you attended.	b. The person from whom one is descended (an ancestor)
3. All upper-crustians spoke well, from the royal family down. it was their Shiboleth .	c. A business magnate, a businessman of great wealth and power.
4. It irks me to see money being wasted.	d. To complain or criticize continuously.
5. There was no trace of Yorkshire accent in her speech, she spoke posh .	e. In an upper class way.
6. Stop nagging . I'll do it as soon as I can.	f. A motto, a slogan. A custom that distinguishes a particular class/group of people.
7. Rupert Murdoch is a media tycoon .	g. Complete and thorough.
8. The forebears of present-day Yorkshiremen may have come from anywhere in the world.	h. To irritate, to annoy

Task 5. What sounds do we notice when we say that someone has an accent?

While Reading

Task 1. Read the first part of the story and mark on the map where different influences on the English language came from and when it happened.

There's no doubt about it. It's his flat, short vowels and clean-cut consonants which mark out a Yorkshireman from his fellow Brits. The forebears of present-day Yorkshiremen may have come from anywhere in the world: Africa, Asia or Europe, and he may have skin of any colour, but he'll still speak with the pronounced accent of the Anglo-Norse settlers who laid down West Yorkshire's dialects centuries ago.

Of course, they didn't all speak the same dialect throughout Yorkshire. The dialects of the farmlands in the North and East of the county are derived from the Angle and Danish-Viking settlers, who came direct from North Germany and Denmark from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. But the dialects of the industrial West are derived from the Angle and Norse-Viking traders, who came from North Germany and Norway via Ireland, also from the sixth to the eleventh centuries; and that same instinct for trade is there still. There's a potential tycoon in every Yorkshireman.

Task 2. Read the second part of the story and fill in the chart about Clifford Clough and Edna Clough (née Shackleton)

Keighworth produced several tycoons in the explosion of industry in the town in the 19th century. It was still producing them in the 20th when Clifford Clough made his millions in the wool trade. Clifford was a short, stocky man, bluff and very sure of himself, yet canny. No one pulled the wool over Clifford's eyes – not even his fellow wool merchants. He was down-to-earth and as hard-headed as they come. There was no lah-di-dah about Clifford Clough, no edge, no finesse. He was a West Yorkshire man of trade through and through.

He'd had the usual education at a Council School; starting and going right through the same school to the senior department before he left at 14. He had a sound education there and learned the basics of his engineering trade before he left. But he knew little about the arts, literature and all that, though he enjoyed brass band music and always went to the annual performance of "Messiah" in Keighworth.

When he left school he went straight into the mill as an apprentice mechanic and learned what made the textile trade tick on the factory floor. It wasn't long before he was made manager and as manager grasped the essentials of finance and banking. By the time he was thirty he had his own small mill. At forty he had four mills and was a millionaire and a good catch in marriage. He married another mill tycoon's daughter, Edna Shackleton, who produced their only child, Billy.

Now Edna had been brought up very differently from Clifford. Her parents may have come up through the ranks like Clifford Clough, but she'd been packed off to prep school at an early

age and then to a finishing school in Switzerland. As a result, she became upper-crustian¹ and there was no trace of a Yorkshire accent in her speech. In brief, she spoke posh.

	Clifford Clough	Edna Clough (née Shackelton)
Appearance / Speech		
Character		
Origin		
Education		
Occupation		
Interests		

Task 3. Read the third part of the story and fill the blank spaces with the sentences from the table.

- a. Already several of her friends at coffee mornings had commented in their sly way how her son spoke.
- b. because the lads who went to Northern public schools still spoke with a modified Yorkshire accent;
- c. It didn't bother Clifford one jot; in fact, he was rather proud that his son was growing up speaking broad Yorkshire.
- d. It was the first time away from home and Billy was very apprehensive; but he'd enough of his dad in him to carry it off and he settled in nicely.
- e. Those like Edna who'd been away to school didn't have to try and spoke proper from the word go.

However, as little Billy grew up he modelled himself on his dad and spoke 'broad'. (1) _____ Yet his mother knew, in the wise way of all mothers, that if Billy was to get on in life he would have to speak well. All upper-crustians spoke well, from the royal family down. It was their Shibboleth. You were pigeonholed in upper-crustian society by the way you spoke, where

¹ Upper-crustian – an adjective coined by the author, derived from 'upper crust' = the upper class

you'd been to school, which Lodge you belonged to and which college at Oxbridge² you attended.

The South of England was very different from the North and once you left the North and went down South you were caught up in the Old Boy net³ After numerous take-overs when the old family businesses disappeared, the Old Boy net crept North which was being filled by multi-national managers who spoke posh and came from abroad or down South.

The crunch came one lunch-time when young Billy arrived home from school and asked his mother: "What we bahn to hev for dinner, mam?" She realised then that something had to be done. (2) _____ They'd passed it off as a joke but there was no escaping their sinister undertones. Edna had laughed it off, but she was irked. Upper and middle-crustian ladies in Yorkshire tried hard to iron out their Yorkshire accents from an early age, till their speech became a sort of mangled Yorkshire (for they could never get rid of the flat vowels) which came down the nose. (3) _____

She nagged and nagged at Clifford till he gave in and they selected a top-drawer, public school down South. It had to be down South, (4) _____ not quite dialect but still markedly Northern. No, it had to be a school down South where they all spoke proper so that Billy would follow suit.

Now Edna had been at school in Switzerland with the wife of the High Master of a very select school in Berkshire, so she was able to pull strings and get Billy signed in there. Came Billy's twelfth birthday and Clifford took him down to meet the High Master. (5) _____

Task 4. Read the following part of the story and guess the ending.

Clifford stressed to the High Master that he was sending his son to have his accent ironed out and taught to speak proper. The High Master, a tall, polished man with a cut-glass voice, who could well have been an ambassador, gave a thin smile and said: "Actually, we pride ourselves here on how our boys speak. We're very strong on drama and the boys practise public-speaking and debating all the way up the school. After all," he added with a smug smile, "many of them go into the City when they leave, and Parliament. Indeed, there are several in the Cabinet at present." And he went on to name them.

At the end of term Clifford went to pick up his son for the holidays. He was met again by the High Master who was asked how Billy was faring with his speech.

² Oxford and/or Cambridge

³ Old Boy Net – network of friends who attended the same school [usually a public – i.e. private] – school, or the same university [usually Oxford or Cambridge]

Task 5.

Listen to the end of the story and check your predictions.

Glossary

as something as they come

as much of a particular characteristic as is possible

Eric is as competitive as they come and always trying to win.

bluff

direct or too honest, often in a way that people find rude

Despite her bluff manner, she's actually a very kind woman

canny

thinking quickly and cleverly, especially in business or financial matters

These salesmen are a canny lot.

edge

a small but noticeable amount of anger in someone's voice

There's a definite edge in her voice when she talks to her husband.

finesse

great skill or style

It was a disappointing performance which lacked finesse.

hard-headed

not influenced by emotions

a hard-headed approach to problems

lah-di-dah

a woman who is lah-di-dah thinks she is better than other people and tries to speak as if she is from a high social class

No one really liked her in the village. They all thought she was a bit lah-di-dah.

mill

a factory where a particular substance is produced

a cotton/paper/steel mill

Old Boy Net

a network of friends who attended the same school [usually a public – i.e. private] – school, or the same university [usually Oxford or Cambridge]

Oxbridge

Oxford and/or Cambridge

pull the wool over someone's eyes

to deceive someone

Don't try to pull the wool over her eyes. She's too smart.

stocky

describes a person, especially a man, whose body is wide across the shoulders and chest and who is short

The man was described as short and stocky and very strong

upper-crustian

upper class (an adjective coined by the author, derived from 'upper crust' [= the upper class])

After reading

Task 1. Choose the right summary of the story.

1. A boy called Billy Clough was born into a family of a bread trader Clifford Clough and his wife Edna. They lived in Yorkshire. Clifford started working at the age of 14 as an apprentice mechanic and by the age of 30 he became a millionaire and married another tycoon's daughter. Edna got a poor education and spoke posh English. She didn't like her friends laughing at her husband's accent. People were pigeonholed in society by the way they dressed. There was no lah-di-dah about Clifford and he was happy with his son's flat consonants. Edna nagged and nagged, and, eventually, they sent Billy to a proper upper-crust school. The High Master promised in a cut-glass voice to teach Billy to get rid of his accent. However, when Clifford came to pick up his son for the holidays, he was surprised to hear the High Master speak with a Yorkshire accent.

2. A boy called Billy Clough was born into a family of a wool trader Clifford Clough and his wife Edna. They lived in Yorkshire. Clifford started working at the age of 14 as an apprentice mechanic and by the age of 40 he became a millionaire and married another tycoon's daughter. Edna got a good education and spoke posh English. She didn't like her friends laughing at Billy's accent. People were pigeonholed in society by the way they spoke. There was no lah-di-dah about Clifford and he was happy with his son's flat vowels. Edna nagged and nagged, and, eventually, they sent Billy to a proper upper-crust school. The High Master promised in a cut-glass voice to teach Billy to get rid of his accent. However, when Clifford came to pick up his son for the holidays, he was surprised to hear the High Master speak with a Yorkshire accent.

3. A boy called Billy Clough was born into a family of a wool trader Clifford Clough and his wife Edna. They lived in Yorkshire. Clifford started working at the age of 14 as an apprentice mechanic and by the age of 30 he became a millionaire and married another tycoon's daughter. Edna didn't get a good education and spoke posh English. She didn't like her friends laughing at Billy's father. People were pigeonholed in society by the way they dressed. There was no lah-di-dah about Clifford and he was happy with his son's flat vowels. Edna nagged and nagged, and, eventually, they sent Billy to a proper upper-crust school. The High Master promised in a cut-glass voice to teach Billy to get rid of his accent. However, when Clifford came to pick up his son for the holidays, he was surprised to hear Billy speak with a Yorkshire accent.

Task 2. What do you think the father's reaction will be? Why?

Task 3. Work in pairs. Act out a dialogue between Billy Clough's parents talking about the language their son speaks, his further education and career opportunities. Read the role card carefully and ask about any words you don't know. Use phrases and expressions from the story to take part in a conversation with your partner.

Task 4. Why do you think the story is called "The High Master and Little Billy Clough"?

Task 5. Work with another student and discuss the question:

Why does the Headmaster speak in a broad Yorkshire accent at the end of the story?

Task 6. Watch the video and say what the problem was.

Task 7. You are going to see a short amateur video “English accents and dialects of the British Isles”. Count how many accents you can hear.

Task 8. If you changed the setting of the story to your country, what changes would you need to make?

Task 9. “We’re very strong on drama and the boys practise public-speaking and debating all the way up the school.” (the High Master). You are going to take part in a debate 'Global versus Local'. To help you, read the *Information for Students* sheet.

Information for Students - Debate: Global vs Local

1 Choose four rules for the debate which everyone agrees with.

1. Find good arguments
2. Be very emotional
3. Give reasons not emotions
4. Be polite
5. Don't interrupt a speaker
6. Yell when you don't agree
7. Respect other people's opinions
8. Clap when you agree
9. Raise your hand when you want to speak
10. Listen to other people
11. Express your opinion and give reasons
12. Keep to the time limit
13. Ask the permission of the Chairperson when you want to speak
14. Take turns to take the floor

2 Choose a chairperson.

3 **Discuss the issue** *What is better for your country: to go for globalization or keep to local traditions, language and culture?*

Group A : You support the idea of globalization. Make a list of arguments for thinking and acting locally that group B might have. Put your counter-argument against each of them.

Group B: You are against globalization. Make a list of arguments for thinking and acting globally that group A might have. Put your counter-argument against each of them.

4 Vote.

Useful language

To agree:	I agree (that...) / Certainly. That's right.
To disagree:	Yes, but...I'm afraid, I don't agree that.... I don't think so.
To add an argument:	And... What's more... Also...

Tips:

- *Think of examples of global influence in your environment (language, adverts, notices, food, clothes, lifestyle etc). Analyse these examples. Are they beneficial or not?*
- *Think of ways of preserving your identity, culture, language etc*

- *Think of the any compromise that could make the situation better.*