

The High Master and Little Billy Clough

John Waddington-Feather

Teachers Notes

Level: Intermediate

Age: 14+

The High Master and Little Billy Clough is a humorous short story written by John Waddington-Feather (born 1933), a British author who belongs to the West Yorkshire 'school' of writers.

Set in North Yorkshire, the story not only tells about a twelve-year old boy placed in a 'select' school to iron out his accent, but also provides a great opportunity to explore the role of accents in British society.

Pre-reading activities are aimed at activating language necessary for understanding the story as well as raising cultural awareness.

While-reading activities are focused on developing reading for detail.

After-reading activities develop speaking skills with the use of vocabulary from the text.

The extra activity suggests organizing a debate: 'Global versus local'.

This 'kit' was designed by Russian teachers and methodologists under the guidance of Alan Pulverness, Assistant Academic Director, Norwich Institute for Language Education, UK.

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Pre-reading Teacher's Notes

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?

The aim of this activity is to activate students' general knowledge and to prepare them to talk about the role of accents in British society.

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

The aim of the activity is to arouse cultural awareness through informing students about the significant role of the language one speaks in the UK. It is an important indicator of social position. Standard English, also called BBC English or the Queen's English, which is characterized by the use of grammatically correct structures, along with 'proper' pronunciation (Received Pronunciation or RP), is thought to be spoken by upper-middle and upper classes and is often referred to as posh, whereas some other accents are mainly associated with working classes.

This information is essential for understanding the story.

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

The video extract with Stephen Fry can be shown on YouTube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFvMsmw0a2U>

In this extract Stephen Fry talks to the Yorkshire poet Ian McMillan about the many varieties of Yorkshire accent.

Ian McMillan (born 21 January 1956 in [Darfield, South Yorkshire](#)) is a British poet, journalist, playwright and broadcaster, generally best known for his strong and distinctive Barnsley-area accent and his characteristic manner of speech. He continues to live in [Darfield](#), the place of his birth.

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

Students work individually, reading the sentences with words in bold and matching the highlighted words with the definitions.

Give the students 2-3 minutes and then get them to check the answers in pairs.

1. Clifford had a **sound education** there and learned the basics of his engineering trade.
2. You were **pigeonholed** in upper-crustian society by the way you spoke, where you've been to school and which college at Oxbridge you attended.
3. All upper-crustians speak well, from the royal family down. It is their **Shiboleth**.
4. It **irks** me to see money being wasted.
5. There was no trace of Yorkshire accent in her speech, she spoke **posh**.
6. Stop **nagging**. I'll do it as soon as I can.
7. Rupert Murdoch is a media **tycoon**.
8. The **forebears** of present-day Yorkshiremen may have come from anywhere in the world.

- a. To unfairly consider a person, activity etc as belonging to a particular type or group (label).
- b. The person from whom one is descended (an ancestor)
- c. A business magnate, a businessman of great wealth and power.
- d. To complain or criticize continuously.
- e. In an upper class way.
- f. A motto, a slogan. A custom that distinguishes a particular class/group of people.
- g. To irritate, to annoy.
- h. Complete and thorough.

Answers: 1 h 2 a 3 f 4 g 5 e 6 d 7 c 8 b

Option

Ask students to make up their own sentences with the words and then read them aloud to the class. Give them more collocations with these words. Possible examples:

Nagging wife

Property/press/business/yacht-sailing tycoon

Sound understanding (of money and banking system), sound knowledge (of English).

A posh restaurant/hotel/car – here 'posh' is an adjective, not an adverb

To pigeonhole sb/sth as sth

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

When we say that someone has an accent, we usually notice vowels and consonants which are pronounced in a distinctive way.

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 they happened.

The first part of the story sounds a bit like an article from an encyclopedia, as it gives a brief historical survey of the English language in Yorkshire. We suggest using visualization of the text so that students could see where Yorkshire is situated, as well as which countries influenced its accents.

Individual/pair work.

You can use a map of Yorkshire using the following link:

<http://www.picturesofengland.com/mapofengland/yorkshire-map.html>

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 (born Shackleton)

The aim of this activity is to develop reading for detail. Individual work.

Suggested answers:

	Clifford Clough	Edna Clough (née Shackleton)
appearance / speech	short, stocky ¹ ; speaks "broad" / with Yorkshire accent	speaks "posh" / proper English / no trace of Yorkshire accent
character	bluff ² , very sure of himself, canny ³ , no one pulls the wool over his eyes ⁴ ; down-to-earth; as hard-headed as they come ⁵ ; no lah-di-dah ⁶ , no edge ⁷ , no finesse ⁸ ; a Yorkshire man of trade through and through	an "upper-crustian" lady, wise (as a mother), nagging (if necessary)
origin	West Yorkshire, <i>probably</i> not rich family	West Yorkshire, daughter of a "mill tycoon", who "has come up the ranks"
education	usual, sound education at Council School in Yorkshire; basics of engineering trade; learns textile trade while working at the factory as an apprentice; learns essentials of finance and banking working as a manager	prep (boarding) school ⁹ , school in Switzerland
occupation	businessman in wool trade / mill tycoon	
interests	enjoys brass band music, annual performance of "Messiah" ¹⁰	Billy (her son) , <i>probably</i> arts and literature

¹ **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.

² **bluff** direct or too honest, often in a way that people find rude
*Despite her bluff **manner**, she's actually a very kind woman.*

³ **canny** thinking quickly and cleverly, especially in business or financial matters
These salesmen are a canny lot.

⁴ **pull the wool over someone's eyes** to deceive someone
Don't try to pull the wool over her eyes. She's too smart.

⁵ **hard-headed** not influenced by emotions
a hard-headed approach to problems
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.

⁶ **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.

⁷ **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.

⁸ **finesse** great skill or style
It was a disappointing performance which lacked finesse.

⁹ **prep school** in Britain, a private school (= a school paid for by parents not the government) for children, especially boys, between the ages of 7 and 13, who will then usually go to public school

¹⁰ **Messiah** is an English-language oratorio composed in 1741 by George Frederic Handel. Performances are particularly popular during the Christmas season.

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

The aim of the activity is to develop reading for detail as well as to raise students' awareness of text structure. Individual work.

Get students to check their answers in pairs. Then ask them to read out their answers (numbers of the gaps and letters of the sentences in turns, explaining their choices). Correct them if necessary and find out what strategies they have used to fill in the blanks.

- a. Already several of her friends at coffee mornings had commented in their sly way how her son spoke. **(2)**
- b. because the lads who went to Northern public schools still spoke with a modified Yorkshire accent; **(4)**
- c. It didn't bother Clifford one jot; in fact, he was rather proud that his son was growing up speaking broad Yorkshire. **(1)**
- 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. **(5)**
- e. Those like Edna who'd been away to school didn't have to try and spoke proper from the word go. **(3)**

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

Students work individually and then share their predictions in pairs or in the class.

Task 5. Listen to the end of the story and check your predictions.

The final part of the story should be read out by teacher or played as it's important to outline the difference in the accents of the High Master before and after meeting Little Billy Clough.

After reading

Task 1. Choose the right summary of the story. The summaries include some of pre-introduced vocabulary. The wrong words are shown **in bold**. Invite the students to explain their choice if necessary.

Answer: 2

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?

This activity is aimed at developing speaking for fluency as well as giving students a good opportunity to 'interfere' with the text. Class discussion.

Task 3. 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.

The aim of this activity is to practise fluent speaking using vocabulary from the story.

Divide students into pairs and decide who will act as the mother and who as the father. Distribute the cards. Allow 2-3 minutes for students to look through the phrases and expressions. Make sure all the students understand the meaning of all the words. Then, allow 5-10 minutes for acting out the dialogue. Monitor the process, giving support if necessary.

Role cards

The mother

The mother is nagging, trying to persuade her husband to send Billy to a select school in the south of England where he is to learn the 'proper' accent, RP. She is rather tactful and does not ridicule her husband's speech; she only expresses her concern for Billy's success in his future career.

- Is proud of her education, fine manners and fine speech; there is no trace of a Yorkshire accent in her speech
- Feels she is really upper-crustian and speaks English no worse than the royal family
- Feels ill at ease when her son speaks broad Yorkshire in the presence of her refined friends because they make unpleasant comments on his accent
- Believes her son will always be pigeon-holed by the way he speaks; if he is to get on in life, he will have to speak well; believes her son should go to one of the best schools and then to Oxbridge; wants her son to benefit from the Old Boy net upon graduation; his speech will be more important when their son has to deal with multi-national managers. She is not in business herself, but she is well aware that business is becoming increasingly international, so the essentials of finance and banking won't be enough for real success
- Does not hurt her husband's feelings on this subject but secretly regrets the fact that he speaks the way he does
- Insists their son should go to a top public school down south; if he goes to a Northern school, his speech will be markedly Northern
- As Edna had been at school in Switzerland with the wife of the High Master of a very select school in Berkshire, she might pull strings and get Billy enrolled there. Billy's accent will be ironed out there, for sure

Useful expressions:

"Don't you see...?" "I'd like you to see the point..."

"If Billy graduates from Oxbridge, he'll be respected in the Old Boy net". "If Billy speaks with this local accent, he won't be respected by multi-national managers." "But can't you see that the Old Boy net is creeping up North and businesses are going multi-national?"

The father

The father first tries to resist but finally gives up.

- Is proud of his forbears (the Angles and North-Vikings) and of his dialect
- Is proud of his position of a wool tycoon; has made millions in the wool trade
- Does not care much for posh, finesse, for good manners, for 'proper' speech as he is respected by his fellow merchants
- Thinks he has got enough education and can even enjoy the annual performance of "Messiah" (admits, though, he fell asleep in the church last time.) Does not care for the arts and literature; believes the essentials of finance and banking will be good enough for his son
- Is proud that his son has modelled himself on his father and speaks broad Yorkshire
- Suggests their son might go to one of good Northern schools and modify his accent a little there
- Reluctantly agrees to take Billy to the school in Berkshire on the boy's twelfth birthday and talk to the High Master

Useful expressions:

First he is rather rude and may say: "I don't care a fig for posh as long as the boy has mastered the essentials of finance and banking". "Can't you see that I have made my money myself with my accent and am proud of it?" Or: "I don't care for your lady friends". "Any Northern school will be good enough for the boy". But he starts to understand her arguments and gets gradually convinced. He may say: "All right, all right, as you wish". "Have your way". "All right, if it does him any good..." "All right, if it makes you any happier, I'll take him to that stupid/posh school in Berkshire..." "But I'm not sure it will make him very happy to be so far away from home."

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

Task 5. Why did the Headmaster speak in a broad Yorkshire accent at the end of the story?

The aim of the task is to encourage students to work collaboratively and develop their ability to form their own opinion. Ask the students why they think the Head Master speaks “broad” at the end of the story. Ask students to work in groups or pairs to discuss the question. Go through the answers with the class, giving your own opinion at the very end, if necessary.

Option: You might find it interesting to present the results as a bar chart.

Possible answers: The High Master has been influenced by the boy. He is from Yorkshire and happy to reveal his background. He is trying to be polite to the father. He is a bit ironical, showing that it’s a difficult job to teach Billy – that learning Broad Yorkshire is easier for him.

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

The aim of this activity is to outline, in a humorous way, the practicality of speaking standard English. You may also ask your students whether they have ever been in such situations.

The video is on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FFRoYhTJQQ>

Suggested answer: the elevator didn’t react to a Scottish accent.

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.

This video is on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu9g_vedO7w&feature=related

Suggested answers: 1 Scottish (Glasgow) 2 Scottish (Edinburgh) 3 Newcastle 4 North Yorkshire 5 West Yorkshire 6 South Yorkshire 7 Manchester 8 Lancashire 9 Liverpool 10 Midlands(Derby) 11 Birmingham 12 Home counties (‘proper’ English/BBC English/Queen’s English/Received Pronunciation) 13 youth culture (Asian and Black influence, rap and hip-hop English) 14 Cockney 15 Devon 16 Cornwall 17 Bristol 18 Wales 19 Irish

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

The aim of this activity is to get students talk about their own cultures and the significance of language, as well as to convey an idea that sensitivity to language is not a peculiarly British phenomenon.

Additional Activity

Task 9. Debate: Global v Local

Objectives

SS will

- develop debating skills
- speculate on pros and cons of globalization
- practise working as a team

Skills development

Ss will

- practise presenting arguments and counterarguments
- practise exchanging opinions

Introduction

- If this is the first time a debate is being held in your class, ask students to think of what they know about debates and various possible situations where a debate might take place.

You might want to ask the following questions:

- 1 What is a debate?
- 2 Have you ever taken part in a debate? What was it about?
- 3 Who takes part in debates?
- 4 Why do people hold debates?
- 5 What happens in a debate?

- Mini-group/ class. Explain that during a debate participants observe certain rules. Ask students to look through the rules on their worksheets (Activity 1) and choose those which they are going to follow in the debate. When the class agree on the rules, write them on the board. (Three or four of them will do.)
- Explain the procedure. Tell students that you will not take part in the debate and let them choose a chairperson. Explain that they are going to debate the question of what is more appropriate for their country, **the tendency towards globalization or keeping to local traditions, language and culture**. Students should know that at the end of the debate they will be asked to vote.
- Split the class into two groups. Group A agrees that globalization brings positive changes and is already a reality. They are supposed to think of examples from their environment.
- Group B is against global influences and supports the idea of going local. They are supposed to think of examples from their environment to support their arguments.

Tell the groups that they should write a list of arguments they think the other group will give. Against each argument they should write their own opposite view. Allocate ten or fifteen minutes for the work.

- Ask the chairperson to read his/her card (*see at the end of these notes*) to prepare himself/herself to organize and lead the debate. Provide language help if necessary.

Activity

- a) Put an empty box between the groups. Give each student a token (a button, a stone etc). When a student speaks, he/she puts his/her token into the box. Every student must get rid of their token. This ensures active participation from all of them.
- b) Ask the chairperson to begin the debate. At the end of the debate the chairperson organizes the vote.
- c) At the end of the debate ask students to get their usual seats so that they can vote out of their groups and roles, expressing their real opinions.
- d) The teacher does not intervene during the debate but takes notes so as to be able to give feedback after the debate.
- e) To begin the debate, you can suggest that students fill in the gaps in the slogan:

Think _____, act _____. (Key *Think globally, act locally.*)



The Chairperson's responsibilities

1 Welcome and announce the procedure

- Welcome the audience and announce the beginning of the debate.
- Ask the audience to agree on three or four rules for the debate from the list in Activity 1.
- Announce the issue of the debate.
- Tell that team A supports the idea of globalization and team B is against it.
- Remind the audience about the need to observe the rules. Read the rules.
- Let the audience know that at the end they will have a vote.

Control the order of speakers and manage the time.

Useful language: Your time is up.

Order, please!

Next speaker, please.

2 Lead the vote

- Let students take their usual seats and ask them to vote according to what they really think.

Useful language: Please, vote now.

If you are for globalization, raise your hands.

If you are against globalization, please, raise your hand.

If you are in the middle of the road, please, raise your hand.

- Count the votes and announce the result.

Useful language: ... people out of ... agree that globalization is a positive phenomenon.

... people out of ... think that globalization is destructive.

... people out of ... are sure that we shouldn't go to extremes.

So the class thinks that *globalization should/ shouldn't be stopped // going locally is more/ less beneficial for the country// global and local should go together.*

- Thank everyone for their participation and announce the end of the debate.