



THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



University of
Reading



Ploughing at Fair Mile, Oxfordshire in the 1930s

What is the future of our countryside? An opportunity to debate as a class

Students are given the opportunity to represent different members of the rural community and to understand how and why the countryside might change in the future. They are encouraged to collect information from the Museum of English Rural Life to support what they feel is the future for their character and the effect it might have on them, other people and the wider countryside.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this set of activities students will:

- be better informed about the factors that will influence how the countryside changes in the future and how this will affect people's lives
- work effectively as a team and be more confident to deliver a verbal argument to an audience based on evidence and researched information
- be more aware of how the countryside could change in the future and what this might mean for them
- have worked as a team to summarise information and compare evidence.

Before your visit

Split the class into six groups and assign each group to one of the characters below:

- farmer
- home owner
- conservationist
- school teacher
- fertiliser/pesticide manufacturer
- village shop owner

Give each group copies of their character's profile and enquiry questions. These can be found at the end of this document. Explore these questions either before visiting the museum or at the start of your visit so children keep them in mind when taking notes and preparing for the debate back at school.

THEMES AND TOPICS

- Environmental change
- Interactions and interdependencies
- Ecosystems
- Evolution, inheritance and variation
- Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to present day
- Types of settlement and land use
- Economic activity
- Population and urbanisation
- Use of natural resources
- Human and physical processes interact to influence, and change to landscapes, environments and the climate.

LINKS WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES

This activity could also be used in conjunction with the *Where have all our songbirds gone?* and *What was farming like before modern technology?* resources.



Before your visit: Films for the conservationist character

These accompany the character profile on page 8.



We have made two short films about the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Coombe Bissett Down, near Salisbury in Wiltshire. They are available on the webpage for this resource and will be useful for the conservationist character.

One film shows reserve officer Ashley White (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust) and her colleague Dave Blake explaining how they are reviving rare chalk grassland habitat back to what it was like before it was ploughed.

The other film shows Louise Hartgill and Val Compton revealing what the countryside and the nature reserve means to them.



Visiting the Museum of English Rural Life

The Museum of English Rural Life can be used as a research hub so children can research information to argue their case.

Galleries to help students to research their roles include:

	Galleries useful for researching roles (relevant gallery area in brackets)	Tips/information
Farmer	Town and Country (Animal Health) A Year on the Farm	Farming is represented throughout the whole museum. Find objects and information about how the land was farmed, and how selective breeding has helped produce more milk, meat and crops.
Home owner	Making Rural England Town and Country (Village Idyll; Rural Healthcare; Into the Country)	There is the opportunity for students to learn about how home life has changed including work, technology and gardening. There is a 1930s dolls house representing a middle-class house built for those moving out into the semi-rural suburbs (Town and Country: Village Idyll).
Conservationist	Forces for Change A Year on the Farm	Characters such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Hindle, Newbury bypass protester (Town and Country: Village Idyll) • George Baylis, one of the first farmers to use fertiliser (Forces of Change) • Eve Balfour, one of the instigators of organic farming (Forces for Change).
School teacher	Town and Country (Into the Country; Village Idyll) Making Rural England (Children and Play) A Year on the Farm	Students will need to look for objects and information related to children and play, for example, about evacuation and summer holidays (harvest time) to develop an understanding of rural life for school children and teachers.
Fertiliser/ pesticide manufacturer	Forces for Change A Year on the Farm	George Baylis, one of the first farmers to use artificial fertiliser (Forces for Change).
Village shop owner	Making Rural England (Showing Progress) Town and Country (Dairy to Doorstep) A Year on the Farm Forces for Change	Throughout the museum you will find objects and information about the changing technologies and types of jobs related to producing and selling/ delivering foods.

What next?

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Holding the debate

What is the future of the countryside for your character?

- Each group needs to prepare important points they wish to make.
- They might like to represent some of these points as visuals on a screen or on paper.
- Each group gets a chance to speak to the rest of the class without interruption.
- During this time the other groups are listening and noting down questions to ask.
- Give each group the opportunity to answer questions from the other groups.

Tips for students:

- In addition to planning and presenting the information you have gathered you will need to debate the issues and argue for a particular point of view
- **Listening** – you will need to listen carefully to the other talks and to your own group members when they are speaking. This is extremely important for the next part of the exercise.
- **Questions** – when listening to others it is very important to think about questions you want to ask. These could be to clarify points made or if you have a reason to disagree with something. Additionally, you should also plan to answer questions after your presentation, so think about the areas that you may be asked about.
- **Taking notes** – to help with asking questions when you are listening, take notes about things which interest you. There's no need to take a note of everything said; just the most important or controversial points.
- With any talk there should be a number of key 'take-home' points. For your own talk, these should represent your point of view or the argument you are presenting. When listening make sure you identify the main points being made and ask for them to be clarified, if you are not sure.



Drilling spring cabbage, Bedfordshire, 1993

You are a farmer and own a herd of cows just outside Reading. You sell your cows for meat and grow crops such as oil seed rape (which produces cooking oil) and maize or sweetcorn (which produces food for farm animals such as cows, and cover for game birds such as pheasants). You farm your land intensively, ensuring you are growing crops across all your fields. You use fertilisers to make your crops grow well and pesticides to kill all the insects that would eat them. Each spring you have some fields of grass grown for silage. Grass is grown quickly, helped by fertiliser. When it is cut it is wrapped in plastic and ferments over the year, providing your cows with delicious and nutritious food in the winter. Your grassy fields can produce two or three crops of grass each spring saving lots of money on buying animal feed.

Things to consider

- How does your intensive farming contribute to food production?
- Where do your animals and crops go after they have left your farm?
- Where does your meat and crops go after they have left your farm?
- Looking ahead to the future, how might farming cows or crops change? What might make it easier? What might make it more challenging?



A living room in 1954

You are a person in your late twenties wanting to buy your first house in the village where you grew up. Many of the houses in your village have been bought by people who already have homes; they are renting out these houses or using them as a second home. As a result there are very few houses in your village that you can afford. You have been saving hard for a deposit and now have enough to buy a one-bedroom house. However, the nearest affordable houses are ten miles away from your village.

Things to consider

- What has caused houses to be in short supply and so expensive? Local people in villages and towns are often against new housing developments. Why is this? What are they concerned or worried about?
- Many areas of the countryside are protected as greenbelt. What is greenbelt and why is it important?

Conservationist



Eva Balfour, one of the first people to start organic farming in the UK, Suffolk, 1934

You are a conservationist working on a local nature reserve which has a pond, woodland and grassland. The site provides and excellent habitat for wildlife including butterflies, birds and mammals such as hares. The nature reserve is surrounded by farmland, much of which is intensively farmed and there is very little wildlife living there. A mile away there is another piece of woodland with similar animals. You are keen to work with local farmers to connect your nature reserve with the woodland by planting a hedgerow. This will form a corridor for wildlife to move along between the two habitats.

Things to consider

- What do we mean by intensive farming? How is it positive for farmers and for food production? How might it be less good for wildlife? Is there a compromise? Can farmland be intensively managed and still leave space for wildlife?
- Joining up nature reserves and great places for wildlife helps to form an ecological network. Find out what an ecological network is and why conservationists are now managing our countryside with ecological networks in mind.

School teacher



Children and their teacher at Aldbury School, Tring, Hertfordshire, 1946

You are a school teacher in a small rural village school 15 miles from Reading. The school has only 17 pupils and they are taught by you and the headteacher. Your single class has children ranging from year 3 to year 6. You have been teaching here for 15 years and seen the school classes get smaller and smaller. Each year fewer children join the school and the local authority is threatening to close your school as it has become too expensive to run. The next nearest, larger primary school is 10 miles away and many of your pupils come from nearby farms. You also have a love for wildlife and attract birds to your school and your garden. Over the past 15 years you have noticed that crops are now planted in the winter, everything is sprayed with pesticides and there are fewer farmland birds such as the skylark and yellowhammer, to see and hear.

Things to consider

- What is the future of small rural schools? What will happen when school classes begin to rise again if the birth rate increases?
- How will the children get to a larger primary school?
- What will you do when you lose your job at this school?
- Why are crops planted during the winter?
- What effect does spraying have on insects that birds eat? Why are there fewer birds living in the countryside?

Fertiliser and pesticide manufacturer



Spraying crops, 1966

You are the manager of a local fertiliser and pesticide factory. Over the past 30 years your business has boomed as farmers have been buying your products to produce more crops and control the insects and diseases that destroy them. In recent years the continued use of fertilisers and pesticides has come into the public eye; the public are concerned by fertilisers leaching into rivers and certain pesticides killing important pollinators such as bees. There have also been concerns that some of these chemicals remain on our foods when we eat them. Your job is to produce more of these chemicals and to increase your profits each year. At the moment your business is doing well, but for how much longer?

Things to consider

- Why do farmers need fertilisers added to their farmland? What sorts of insects do they regard as pests?
- Find out more about pesticides that cause the death of bees. There have been lots of disputes as to whether the chemicals pesticide companies use really effect bees. Why is this? What have the companies got to lose?
- If we lose our insects, and in particular our pollinators, what effect might this have on our flowering plants, crops and food we eat? (Cereal crops such as wheat are pollinated by the wind not bees.)
- What could manufacturers like yours do to reassure the public?

Village shop owner



Shopkeeper selling bacon, 1959

You are the owner of a local village shop that has been operating for 15 years. You sell local produce, including organic foods, from nearby farms and basics such as milk, bread and newspapers. You have excellent relationships with local farmers and have known many of them all your life; you went to school with some of them. You have many loyal customers although you have seen a decline in the number of people visiting your shop over the past 12 months. This has coincided with the opening of a larger superstore 5 miles away in the town.

Things to consider

- Why are you seeing a decline in the number of customers when a superstore has opened nearby?
- How might you continue to attract new customers and keep your loyal customers for years to come?
- What would you do if you had to close?
- What effect does the closure of small shops and post offices have on village life?
- How might people without cars or those who are elderly or live by themselves get to shops further away?

MERL galleries

