

Farming

Farming near the mountain tops

Summer school work!



Ancient farmhouse

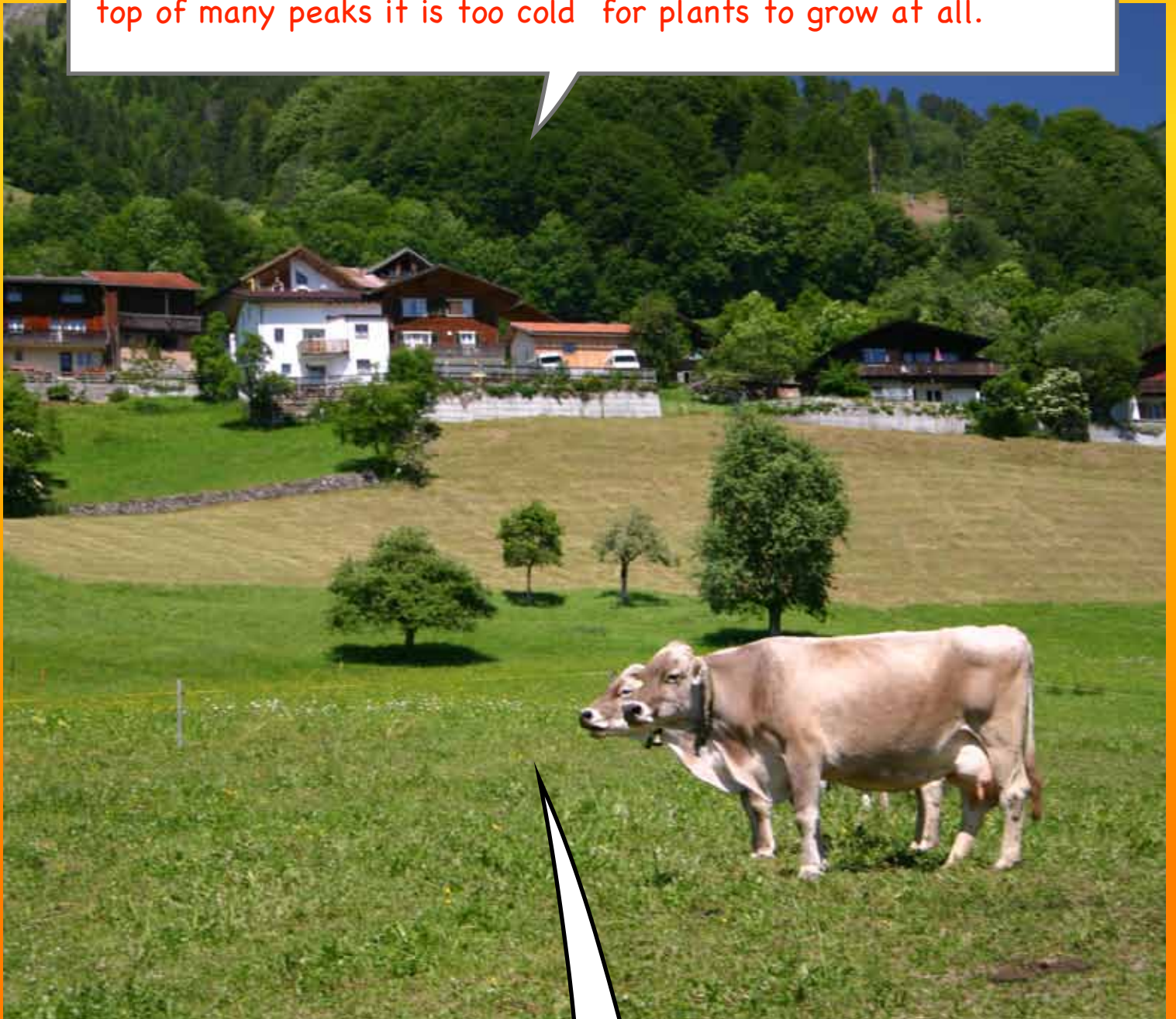
Animals indoors in winter



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

Farming

Mountain farmers have always had to be tough. As you go up a mountain it becomes colder, so plants grow more slowly. At the top of many peaks it is too cold for plants to grow at all.



In mountains seasons change dramatically. It can be warm and sunny in summer, but often it is rainy, too. It is always cold and snowy in winter. Spring and Autumn are short. So farmers have to adapt. This is how they do it.

Farmers have always tried to make the most of land. The most sheltered and warmest place is the valley bottom. Above that there are often steep slopes cloaked in forests. But when you go higher still, it is too cold for trees, but grasses can still grow in the few summer months when the snow has melted. Crops cannot grow at all, so farmers must rely on animals and grass.

How do you make use of these two areas of grass? Farmers live in the valleys and use the high meadows for grazing the animals while they grow grass for hay in the valleys. They will need that hay to feed their animals during the long winter months.

The problem is looking after the animals on the high meadows. For thousands of years old people and children walked up to these high pastures each year and stayed with the animals in specially built alpine huts until the snows came. They would collect milk from the cows and goats and make cheese.

Meanwhile those who stayed in the valley would grow grass for hay and harvest it for use during the winter. Then, as autumn approached, the children and old people would bring the cows, goats and cheese back down to the valleys. The animals would then spend the winter in byres under the farmhouses eating the hay.

Long stays in the mountains were needed because people had to walk, and they could not go from valley to high pastures in a day. Nowadays farmers can go and tend their animals each day by driving to the pastures. And the children don't have to spend the summer on the mountains. They can go to - school!





Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'hay'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'hay' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'hay'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'hay'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'hay' means.



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: problem	challenge

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

There is nothing wrong with rewriting; even the best authors rewrite their work.

123
4

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

Animals have to live in byres under the farmhouses during winter.

Farmers have a problem of getting food for their animals during the long winter.

They lived in the meadows looking after the animals until autumn.

So the farmers send their animals to the high meadows as soon as the snow has melted.

While the animals are grazing on the high meadows, the farmers harvest grass for hay in the valley fields.

For thousands of years children and old people went up to the high meadows each spring.

In the Alps there are long, snowy winters and only short summers.



Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



1 Where is the hay made?

2 Where do animals go in summer?

3 Who makes the hay?

4 Where was cheese made?

5 Who went up the mountains with the children?



Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

Children helping gather in hay after school is done.



1 Why do farmers have to use the high meadows?

2 What would happen if they did not use the meadows?

3 Why don't modern children live in mountain huts during the summer?

4 Why did the children not simply go back home each day?



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 Was it a good idea for families to split up each spring?
- 2 Would you want to spend your summers in the high pastures? Give your reasons.
- 3 What forced farmers to send their children to the high pastures?
- 4 Can you make any conclusions about how much land there is to grow grass in a mountain area?
- 5 Children no longer use the alpine huts. Do you think this is good for the tradition of the mountain areas?





Talking it through

Cows indoors in winter under a farmhouse.

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



Discussion topic: Farming in the winter

In the winter snow lies thickly all about and it is impossible for animals to be outside. So they have to be kept indoors. Many are kept in the ground floors of the farmhouses because it can be impossible to get out of the house in winter. What might some of the benefits and problems be?



Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



The haunted farmhouse

You and your family have just rented an old Swiss mountain farmhouse for the summer. In the past animals were kept in the byre on the ground floor (see page 11). Suddenly you hear a gentle mooing of cows from the byre... Now continue the story.

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