

## Walter the bird scarer

**Children had many jobs to do in the countryside. Here Walter tells you about his job and the jobs of other children who live in the countryside.**

“Hello. I’m Walter and I’m nine years old. It is early spring and I am alone in this field. I haven’t seen anyone for ages. I am here to scare away birds which come to feed on the newly growing corn. There’s a flock of rooks arriving now.

“Shoo aller you birds, Shoo aller you birds. Sorry, that’s what I shout and you see they have gone into the next field. Tom is working there. He is a bird scarer too but he has got a rattle. He spins it round and it clatters away. See the birds are up in the air again.

“My brother Henry ploughed this field a few weeks ago. He is eleven. When he is ploughing he leaves home at half past five, goes to the farm, cleans out the stables, gets the horses out, has his breakfast of bread, cheese and cider then he is off to the fields. He ploughs till noon then has a quarter of an hour for his lunch then he is back ploughing again until three. Then he takes the horses back to the farm, feeds them and gets their stable ready. He’s home for about seven and has a meal with us of potatoes and bacon then he’s off to bed by eight o’clock.

“Before Henry ploughs the fields, a gang of about forty children go over them and collect stones so the plough won’t be harmed. The children are only about eight. A man comes with them. He has a whip to keep them in order. Later in the year the children work at weeding the fields.

“When the corn is grown, everyone comes from the village to help get the crop in. The men sweep their scythes through the corn and cut it down, the women and children follow behind gathering the corn into sheaves.

“When the corn has gone to the miller, some of the straw is used by young children. My sister, Martha, who is only three, works at plaiting the straw so it can be used to make straw hats for rich people to buy.

“Another job we all do in autumn is collect acorns which have fallen from the oak trees. We sell them to the farmer for his pigs.

“Oh are you going? Well it was nice to talk to you. I can work ten hours in this field and never see any one. I get so bored I carve pieces of wood just to pass the time.

“Goodbye.”

## Walter the bird scarer

### Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

### Resources

Copies of the worksheet.

### Using the worksheet

You may like to use this worksheet earlier if you are considering the movement of people from the countryside to the town. The aim of the activity is to show that children did not live an ideal existence in the countryside as many Victorians were encouraged to believe. Children were set to work as soon as they were able and carried out a range of jobs. They often worked with their parents and when they moved into towns they continued to work with their parents in mills and mines.

The rattle referred to in the text is rather like an old fashioned football rattle. The call Walter makes is similar to a real call made by bird scarers. If you are having a Victorian day, one of the students may like to dress up as a bird scarer – just ordinary Victorian clothes and use an old football rattle or make the call Walter uses.



### Younger students

#### Questions (and answers)

Write these questions on the board for the students to try. (Answers are in brackets.)

1. How may a bird scarer scare away birds? (By shouting “shoo aller you birds” or by using a rattle.)
2. Name a kind of bird that is scared away. (Rooks)
3. What is the difference in age between (a) Walter and Henry (2 years), (b) Walter and Martha? (6 years)
4. How many hours is Henry away from home when he is working as a plough boy? (Thirteen and a half hours.)
5. If you were nine, what jobs might you have done in the countryside? (Scaring birds, collecting stones from the fields, gathering the cut corn into sheaves, collecting acorns.)

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Perform a simple calculation on information in the text.

### Older students

#### Questions (and answers)

Write these questions on the board for the students to try. (Answers are in brackets.)

1. What are the farming activities described in the text? (Ploughing, harvesting.)
2. Which job is done in the field before ploughing and who does it? (Picking up stones is done by a group of children aged around 8.)
3. Look at your answers to Activity 3 B. How does Henry's day as a plough boy compare with (a) Edith's day in the mill, (b) your school day?

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Perform a simple calculation on information in the text.
- Compare daily timetables from the past with the present.