

‘TOP OF THE CROPS’

‘Top of the Crops’ is a short radio play for Key Stage 3 pupils, written by Andy Merriman. The action is set mainly around class 8P in Clyde secondary school. It is not a complete story but rather a series of scenes, intended to motivate pupil research, and then lead on to informed discussion. It raises questions such as:

- Is organic food better for your health?
- Is organic farming better for the environment?
- Can organic farming feed a growing world population?

It is envisaged that the performance of the play will not only include the participating pupils but should involve as many of the class as possible. The sound effects (F/X) can either be performed by the pupils mimicking the sounds or by obtaining the real objects.

Users should feel free to adapt this script in any way they see fit, for example bringing in local issues, local humour, etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

JADE ROWE - Popular. Eco friendly, but still learning! Principled but sensitive to other viewpoints.

MRS ROWE - **JADE’s** mother. Strong and very opinionated!

MICHAEL ROWE - **JADE’s** eight year old brother.

TONY FLOWERS - Supermarket Manager. Smarmy. Condescending.

SUPERMARKET ANNOUNCER

MRS PHILPOTT - Form 8P Teacher

FORM 8P STUDENTS

SARAH - **JADE’s** adversary. Confident. Self obsessed.

DANIEL - A devotee of the internet.

JORDAN - **DANIEL’s** best friend.

SCENE ONE:

INT. THE ROWE'S FLAT. EVENING. JADE, MICHAEL, AND MRS ROWE ARE HAVING SUPPER.

FADE UP.

F/X GLASSES, CUTLERY CLINKING, AND GENERAL EATING AND DRINKING SOUNDS THROUGHOUT.

MRS ROWE (COMING ON) Here you are, you two.

MICHAEL Mmm. Thanks mum!

JADE What is that? Chicken nuggets?

MRS ROWE And oven chips. You like chicken nuggets, Jade.

JADE Yeah - like I'm six really six years old, mum and I also love the Tweenies and Teletubbies.

MRS ROWE Well, Michael likes chicken nuggets. And I didn't have time to go to the supermarket. I got these out of the freezer.

JADE Mum, I really can't eat these. They're disgusting. Anyway, I'm thinking of becoming totally vegetarian.

MRS ROWE What's brought this on?

JADE I've been thinking about it for a while. But I had another argument with Sarah at school today.

MRS ROWE Now what has she said to upset you?

JADE We were talking about factory farming and I told her how cruel it is. She said it was just "tough luck" and that the only reason some animals were put on Earth was for people to eat them.

MRS ROWE Oh dear.

JADE And she also said that I wasn't a real vegetarian because I still eat chicken.

MRS ROWE Well, it doesn't mean that you have to . . .

JADE . . . I've made my mind up. And it's not just a personal thing. Vegetarianism is an answer to world hunger – we should produce food that we eat ourselves instead of feeding farm animals.

MRS ROWE Yes fine, but I've got to feed my own livestock – that's you two - and that's all the food I've got for now. So, you'll just have to become a vegetarian tomorrow after I've been to the supermarket. Is that alright?

JADE (CONFIDENT) I think we need to eat more healthily. It's 'Organic Food Week' at school, so this is a good time to start.

MICHAEL (UPSET) No. Not now! I want to eat my chicken nuggets.

MRS ROWE (PATIENT) You can eat your nuggets, Michael. But, okay, Jade, you're right about 'healthy' food. Tomorrow, after school, you can come with me to the supermarket.

MICHAEL And what about me?

MRS ROWE You can stay at home with your dad.

MICHAEL (DISAPPOINTED) Ohhhh.

MRS ROWE That's because last time I took you to the supermarket, you were really naughty. It was terrible. Jumping in and out of all those shopping carts.

JADE Yeah, well I've always known Michael was off his trolley.
(LAUGHS)

FADE DOWN.

SCENE TWO:

INT. SCHOOL CANTEEN, THE FOLLOWING DAY. JORDAN AND DANIEL ARE HAVING LUNCH.

FADE UP.

F/X KNIFE AND FORK ON PLATES. BACKGROUND CHATTER.

DANIEL Man, this food is horrible.

JORDAN I thought at least our canteen would be safe this week.

DANIEL It's this organic business. It's all Mrs Philpott's idea. She's Eco mad.

JORDAN Nearly all this food is green.

DANIEL Even the meat.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH}

JORDAN And it doesn't taste any better than ordinary food.

DANIEL Tastes worse, I reckon. Probably all that manure.

JORDAN What?

DANIEL Yeah. In organic farming they don't use chemicals or pesticides, they use manure – or fertiliser - that's the polite word for it.

JORDAN (GIGGLING) I thought manure was the polite word for it.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH AGAIN)

JORDAN But don't you get maggots in your fruit without pesticides?

DANIEL Yeah, but it could be worse.

JORDAN What could be worse than taking a bite out of your apple and finding a worm?

DANIEL Finding half a worm, I suppose.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH)

DANIEL Anyway, it's healthier than eating chemicals and organically grown food is friendlier to the environment. And it's better for the animals.

JORDAN Really? How come you know so much about it?

DANIEL I looked up on a website, *everyclodhasasilverlining.co.uk*

JORDAN Cool.

DANIEL And the other thing is – it’s organically grown food - not organic food. All plants are organic. After all, we don’t have plastic food, do we?

JORDAN You’ve never tasted my mum’s cooking.

DANIEL The only trouble is, the vegetables end up with funny shapes -

JORDAN Oh, I wouldn’t like that. I don’t like being surprised by food. You don’t get that with a burger. You know where you stand with a burger it’s always the same shape.

DANIEL We have to consider the wider, ecological impact of farming systems. A growing world population requires increasing food production in such staple foods as rice, grains, potatoes. I mean Mars Bars aren’t going to solve malnutrition in the third world – although, don’t get me wrong, I’m fond of Mars Bars although not as much as . . .

(SCHOOL BELL SOUNDS)

JORDAN Phew! Saved by the bell.

FADE DOWN

SCENE THREE:

INT. SUPERMARKET. LATER THAT DAY.

FADE UP.

F/X BACKGROUND ATMOSPHERE.

TANNOY ANNOUNCER: Good morning, and welcome, ‘Happy Shoppers’, to Roseburyway’s. And here is today’s special bargain: Yes, shoppers, if you purchase a video of Titanic, you will receive an iceberg lettuce as a free gift. Ha ha! On a more serious note I’m afraid to say, we have a lost child, a small boy who answers to the name of Brooklyn. He is wearing a red and white football shirt with the number seven on the back. Could his parents, please collect him from customer service - if he is not claimed by four o’clock, we will have to put him on the transfer list!

Finally, we have a message for the owner of a grey Volvo estate, number FLA 246878647839478562833664. Your car is okay but the number plate is blocking one of our exits. Happy Shopping!

MRS ROWE Now what exactly do you want, Jade?

JADE How about buying some organically grown vegetables? I’ll make a casserole for us all tonight.

MRS ROWE Fine, now let’s have a look. This seems to be the right aisle. Mmm not much here, is there?

JADE No, there isn’t.

MRS ROWE This produce doesn't look very nice. And look at the prices!

JADE It's not what it looks like, mum, it's what it tastes like that matters.

MRS ROWE No, this is pathetic. They must have some more organic produce somewhere else. Maybe they keep it in the freezer?

JADE (PATIENT) Mum, the whole point of organic food is that it's fresh.

MRS ROWE Yes... well... anyway... let's ask someone for help.

JADE (TIGHT LIPPED) Mum!

MRS ROWE (CALLING) Excuse me! You, over there! Yes you!

JADE Oh no!

MRS ROWE Do you work here?

TONY FLOWERS (COMING ON) Actually, I'm the manager. I'll get you one of my assistants.

MRS ROWE No, you'll do.

FLOWERS Oh okay. So, what seems to be the problem?

MRS ROWE There's hardly any organic vegetables here and what there is is very expensive.

FLOWERS Well, you've got lettuce, tomatoes, carrots or swedes. And to be honest, we've found that sometimes too much choice can confuse customers like yourselves.

MRS ROWE It takes more than a swede to confuse me, if you don't mind.

FLOWERS In any case, we don't get a huge demand for organic food.

MRS ROWE I'm not surprised, at those prices!

FLOWERS Well, organic farming methods are expensive and I'm afraid that's reflected in our retail price.

MRS ROWE So, it's expensive to eat healthily. I see... less chemicals – more cost!

FLOWERS Well, it's not us that's making a big profit, believe me. And as for chemicals, I think you'll find that organic foods are not completely free of pesticides.

JADE Organic food is definitely better for you.

FLOWERS Look, I can assure you that our non-organic produce is just as high in nutrient content as these organic vegetables.

JADE (TO MRS ROWE) Ask him about bio diversity.

MRS ROWE Yes! Okay, (TO FLOWERS) what about bio diversity?

FLOWERS What exactly do you mean by that?

MRS ROWE (TO JADE) Mmm... what does it mean?

JADE Er... um... I don't know - we haven't done it at school yet.

FLOWERS Well, I suggest young lady that you get your facts right before you come in here and causing trouble.

MRS ROWE She is not causing trouble.

JADE (INDIGNANT) Aren't you at all concerned about the Third World? The only hope of the world's poorest peoples avoiding starvation is by producing their own food.

FLOWERS On the contrary, organic farming is unlikely to be able to feed the world. With the world population doubling every thirty years, we need pesticides to save the crops from insects and disease.

JADE That's just rubbish.

MRS ROWE Yes. And I still say that pumping our bodies full of chemicals can't be good for you.

FLOWERS Let me tell you, obesity is more of a health problem. And I have to say, madam, that you could do with losing a few pounds, if you don't mind me saying so.

MRS ROWE Actually, I do mind . . .

FLOWERS . . . Yes, why don't you try our luxury slimquick, low calory range? Over there in aisle 23.

MRS ROWE What?!

TANNOY ANNOUNCER Would the manager, Tony Flowers, please make his way to the freeze dried hedgehog section where it is expected he will be rude to more of our customers. Thank you, 'Happy Shoppers'.

FLOWERS (GOING OFF) Must go. Duty calls. Bye!

MRS ROWE (QUIETLY ANGRY) What a cheek! So much for 'Happy Shoppers' That man didn't exactly have me 'laughing in the aisles'.

JADE Yeah. He's definitely past his sell-by date.

FADE DOWN

SCENE FOUR:

INT. FORM 8P CLASSROOM. THE FOLLOWING DAY.

FADE UP.

F/X BACKGROUND CLASSROOM BABBLE.

MRS PHILPOTT Right, Jade, now try tasting the bread.

JORDAN Miss, Miss, her blindfold is coming off. She can see which is organic and which isn't.

JADE Shut up Jordan. Of course, I can't see. (TASTING) Mmm that's delicious. I think this is definitely the organic bread.

MRS PHILPOTT Sarah, you try.

SARAH Eugh! Yuck. Disgusting! That's musty and horrible. Definitely organic.

MRS PHILPOTT You're both right, although you don't exactly agree on the taste. That is the organic bread. Now, I've got some cheese for you to try.

SARAH (SNOTTILY) Mrs Philpott, you know I'm not allowed to eat too much dairy produce.

MRS PHILPOTT (CONFUSED) Did I? Do you have an allergy?

SARAH I don't want to get spots – I might end up with a complexion like Jade's. (INSINCERE)
Sorry, Jade.

JADE Oh, yes, I'm sure you are.

SARAH Anyway, Mrs Philpott, I think we've all had enough of these games. Aren't you going to do some proper teaching?

MRS PHILPOTT Thanks for that, Sarah. Very helpful. Okay, never mind about the cheese - we're running out of time anyway. Right then, last test. Jordan, Daniel, put your blindfolds on.

JORDAN Can I put my. . .?

MRS PHILPOTT . . .No, don't use your tie, Jordan.

JORDAN Sorry, Mrs Philpott.

MRS PHILPOTT Right, you each have two jugs – see if you can tell which one contains the organic milk.

DANIEL Oh no, I hate milk. I'd rather have an apple with a maggot in it.

MRS PHILPOTT (STOICAL) Just drink the milk. Both of you.

(JORDAN AND DANIEL NOISILY FILL AND DRINK FROM THEIR GLASSES IN BACKGROUND THROUGHOUT.)

MRS PHILPOTT Right, let's recap, 'Organic Farming' is a farming system which avoids the use of man made fertilisers, pesticides, growth regulators and livestock additives.

SARAH Mrs Philpott, I've important got something to say about this.

MRS PHILPOTT (RESIGNED) Yes, I'm sure you have.

SARAH Well, it's all very well, but it could mean that people will eat less fresh food and vegetables because they're too expensive.

DANIEL Yeah, but think of what it costs to pay for agricultural subsidies or sort out mad cow disease which was caused by intensive farming practices.

(PAUSE) I think . . .

MRS PHILPOTT Well done, Daniel.

JORDAN (TO DANIEL) Well done, the internet, she means.

SARAH (FIRMLY) The trouble with organic farming is that it requires more land.

JADE That's just not true. There is a much better food output per acre from market gardens and allotments

SARAH Who would want to spend their time knee-deep in manure on a grubby little allotment?

MRS PHILPOTT Actually, I have an allotment, Sarah and I really enjoy working on it.

SARAH (UNDER HER BREATH) Well, that doesn't surprise me. Anyway, I think that the future is in G.M. crops. According to my website (READING) "genetically modified crops improve yields by reducing pests and diseases and also enable new land to be used for agriculture."

JADE (INSISTENT) Sarah, we still don't really know the effect of herbicides and pesticides on the animal food chain.

SARAH So tell me, oh green goddess, what do you think about the risks from pathogens in animal waste?

JORDAN What's a pathogen?

DANIEL I know - it's a Greek temple .

SARAH That's the Parthenon, you idiot.

JORDAN Don't call him an idiot

SARAH Well . . .he is.

DANIEL I'm not!

(GENERAL HUBUB FROM ALL THE CLASS)

MRS PHILPOTT Hey stop that! All of you. Now where was I?

SARAH (SMUG) I know. I think you were about to set us our half-term homework.

(EVEN MORE UPROAR FROM THE CLASS. SHOUTS OF "OH NO", "SARAH, BE QUIET" ETC)

MRS PHILPOTT Quiet! Please!

NOISE SUBSIDES

MRS PHILPOTT Thank you. Yes, during the holiday, I want you all to start to grow something - in an organic way - at home.

JORDAN But, Miss, I don't have a garden.

MRS PHILPOTT All you need is a window box, Jordan. You could grow a lettuce to start off with.

SARAH (SARACSTIC) Oh very exciting.

JORDAN I don't like lettuce.

MRS PHILPOTT Well you could bring the lettuce to school – and maybe sell it. It might be the start of a small market garden.

JORDAN Mmm. Now I'm interested. . .

DANIEL Mrs Philpott, we've finished all the milk – it was really creamy.

MRS PHILPOTT Both jugs?

DANIEL Yes.

MRS PHILPOTT Ahh . . .well . . .you see both jugs have organic milk in them.

JORDAN Hey that's not fair! We were meant to decide. (PAUSE) Still, it was delicious – even I liked it.

JADE There, Sarah, organic milk what do you think of that?

SARAH It's pimple time . .

DANIEL (CONSIDERED) And if Jordan liked it – everyone else would too.

JORDAN That's it! Perhaps we should grow organic milk instead of lettuce. We'd make loads of money.

MRS PHILPOTT Well . .

DANIEL . . .Miss, I've just got one more question.

MRS PHILPOTT (PATIENT) I know. We didn't explain about pathogens, did we?

DANIEL No, it's not that. I just wondered if you know where we could get an organic cow from?

FADE DOWN