

No strawberries and cream for fruit pickers

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Pre-reading 1

Look at the headline. What do you think the article will be about?

2 Pre-reading 2 Key Words

Predict the meaning of these words from the text by matching them with the definitions.

a polytunnel a dozen a walking frame to witness something
defiance to cheer somebody on to object to something
to descend on (a place) to spring up a migrant

- _____ to say that you disagree with something
- _____ to see something happen
- _____ an open refusal to obey; a strong protest
- _____ to encourage somebody to continue what they are doing
- _____ twelve, or about twelve
- _____ someone who moves to another country to work or live
- _____ to appear suddenly and unexpectedly, as if by magic
- _____ a metal support that helps old or disabled people to move
- _____ a long, transparent polythene cover to protect growing plants, tall enough for people to work inside
- _____ to arrive somewhere in large numbers

Now read the first four paragraphs and see if you were right.

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- ¹ When Val Salisbury walked down her lane in Herefordshire, in southern England, and into a giant plastic polytunnel where dozens of Ukrainians, Lithuanians and other east Europeans were picking strawberries, the workers were surprised. She was, after all, a 69-year-old Englishwoman using a walking frame. But when she started pulling up the plants and throwing them to the ground, they realised why she was there.
- ² Mrs Salisbury herself was surprised by what the east Europeans did next. According to some of the people who witnessed her act of defiance against S&A Davies, Europe's largest strawberry grower, the workers started clapping, and then cheered her on. By the time the farm manager had arrived, Mrs Salisbury was a hero. A hero, not just for those people in the county of Herefordshire who object to thousands of acres of plastic-covered farmland, but also to an army of workers from all over eastern Europe who pick fruit for British supermarkets.

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- ³ “I felt so much better after my protest,” said Mrs Salisbury last weekend. “We don’t need these bloody strawberries and these polytunnels in Herefordshire”.
- ⁴ Welcome to the English strawberry fields, where the beginning of summer sees at least 5,000 people from eastern Europe descend on Herefordshire and Worcestershire to pick fruit. This year two villages, each of more than 1,700 people, have sprung up without planning permission, each with 400 or more caravans, football pitches, internet cafes and even saunas. The pickers are welcomed by the majority of local people, but there is concern that the migrant labour force is being exploited. Last weekend an informal survey of 50 people working in the tunnels suggested that many pickers are as angry as Mrs Salisbury. Those who spoke English said they were being paid less than they expected, that they had to wait for payment, that the accommodation was expensive, that they had paid too much to get there, and that the management were profiting excessively from their stay.
- ⁵ “In Lithuania I earn two hundred pounds a month,” said Mindaugas, a Vilnius policeman. “I thought I could earn more here. It looks like I am not going to. It cost more than I thought to get here; it costs more to live.”
- ⁶ “None of us like strawberry picking,” said Svetlana, a Ukrainian student. “Today I have earned £23. But I must pay £35 a week to live in a box with three other people. Perhaps I earn £150 in a week, but when I have paid for food, accommodation, tax, everything, maybe I have £70 for a six days. It’s not good”.
- ⁷ “The money is bad,” said Artur, a waiter from the Czech Republic. “We waited days to have work. Last year we heard there was a strike here; perhaps there will be one this year, too. It is like a prison. I have been given a yellow card already. One more and I am sent home.”
- ⁸ Documents drawn up by S&A Davies and seen by the Guardian set out the terms and conditions for workers, who live four or five to a room. They must pay £26.25 a week for accommodation, £3 a week for sewage and waste collection, £2.25 for electricity and £2.75 for leisure facilities, including a TV set, football pitch and disco. For £30, they have access to medical and translation advice.
- ⁹ The documents state that pickers can be sacked for eating a single strawberry, for stopping work, going to the toilet in a hedge, or for smoking indoors. If rooms are not “clean and tidy”, the workers can be asked to leave. If they want to invite a visitor to the camp, they must ask permission two days in advance. “I have never been anywhere like this,” said Irynya, a Ukrainian housewife. The company said they guaranteed pickers £5.05 an hour when there was work, and a bonus if they met targets. But they said that at the start of the season or in bad weather they could not guarantee hours. “When 3,500 people turn up, it’s hard to get everyone going at the same time. We reduced the accommodation charge to £10 when it was raining, two weeks ago,” said Graham Neal, a manager with S&A Davies.
- ¹⁰ Mr Neal blamed agents in east European countries for sending them unsuitable workers. “The old student agriculture workers quota scheme meant we could go to an east European university and know people’s history and character. We had superb people. Now the government says that we must recruit EU people. Some countries ... have sent over their unemployed drunks,” he said.
- ¹¹ As a final irony, the east Europeans cannot afford to buy the fruit they pick. “Yes, we like strawberries but we cannot pay for them,” said Linas Petraitis, a Ukrainian buying cheap white bread and margarine in the local supermarket. “When you eat one, just think of us in the tunnels.”

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3 Post-reading Point of view

Do you think the writer sympathizes more with the workers or with the management of the strawberry farm? Why?

4 Detailed comprehension

Are the following statements true or false?

1. Mrs Salisbury was fit and healthy.
2. She didn't want the countryside covered with plastic.
3. None of the local people agree with her.
4. The workers were angry that she was destroying their work.
5. There is nothing for the workers to do in their free time.
6. Some local people think the management are making an unfair profit out of the workers.
7. The migrants' working conditions are severe.
8. Doctors and interpreters are provided free.
9. There is not always enough work for everyone.
10. The S&A Davies manager is critical of all European workers.

5 Vocabulary 1 Word search

Find words in paragraphs 7-10 that mean:

1. _____ When workers refuse to work, to protest about their conditions (7)
2. _____ A sign or warning (originally from football) that you have done something wrong, and may be dismissed (7)
3. _____ Waste material from the toilet (7)
4. _____ Dismissed (8)
5. _____ Promised (to pay) (8)
6. _____ Reached the totals set (8)
7. _____ A number that is officially permitted (9)
8. _____ Find and employ ((9)
9. _____ A strange or funny situation where things happen in the opposite way to what you would expect (10)

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6 Vocabulary 2 Phrasal Verbs

1. See if you can remember the missing particles in these phrasal verbs.

1. pulling _____ the plants
2. cheered her _____
3. descend _____ Hertfordshire
4. two villages have sprung _____
5. documents drawn _____ by S&A Davies
6. set _____ the terms and conditions
7. when 3,500 people turn _____

2. Now match numbers 1, 5, 6 and 7 to these definitions:

- a) prepared and written
- b) explained clearly in writing
- c) arrive (sometimes unexpectedly)
- d) removing, roots and all

3. Check your answers in the text.

7 Interpretation and discussion

1. Do you agree with the idea of richer countries importing workers from poorer countries to do manual jobs?
If so, under what circumstances and conditions?
2. With a partner, take the roles of:
A. a migrant worker
B. the manager of the fruit farm

Try to reach an agreement about wages and conditions.

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Key:

2. Pre-reading 2 Key Words

1. to object to sth
2. to witness sth
3. defiance
4. to cheer sb on
5. a dozen
6. a migrant
7. to spring up
8. a walking frame
9. a polytunnel
10. to descend on (a place)

3. Post-reading Point of view

The writer appears to sympathize more with the workers. He gives lots of space to various individual workers, their complaints, and the unpleasant conditions of their contracts. He gives much less space to the manager, and gives the last word to one of the workers, repeating and explaining the point made in the title.

4. Detailed Comprehension

1. False; she used a walking frame
2. True
3. False; *'a hero not just for those people in Herefordshire who object...'*
4. False; *'the workers started clapping, and then cheered her on'*
5. False; *'football pitches, internet cafes and even saunas'*.
6. True
7. True
8. False; *'for £30 they have access to medical and translation advice'*
9. True
10. False; *'We had superb people. Now ... Some countries ... have sent over their unemployed drunks'*

5. Vocabulary 1 Word Search

1. a strike
2. a yellow card
3. sewage
4. sacked
5. guaranteed
6. met targets
7. (a) quota
8. (to) recruit
9. (an) irony
10. a strike

6. Vocabulary 2 Phrasal Verbs

1. pulling **up** the plants
 2. cheered her **on**
 3. descend **on** Hertfordshire
 4. two villages have sprung **up**
 5. documents drawn **up** by S&A Davies
 6. set **out** the terms and conditions
 7. when 3,500 people turn **up**
2. 1-d; 5-a; 6-b; 7-c