

Sonic Postcards

Source: TES
Regional area: UK Wide
Date: January 7th 2005
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Hear where they are coming from

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Quack quack. Clip-clop, clip-clop. Whoosh. There is no sand, no sea, no striking views from a hill. And there is no jaunty "wish-you-were-here", scribbled between beach-front margaritas. But pupils from Nettleham junior school believe that their collection of atmospheric sounds reveals more about their Lincolnshire village than any conventional postcard.

The Year 6 pupils spent several weeks exploring their home town. Using a digital-media player, they recorded any sounds that they felt represented local life.

These were then taken back to school and edited into a series of sonic postcards: two-minute soundbites of rural Lincolnshire.

Composer Duncan Campbell was brought in to help pupils select which sounds best represented their environment.

He took them on walks around the village, encouraging them to stop and listen. Together, they listened to the rattle of a butcher's metal curtain, the chime of church bells and the crisp crunch of autumn leaves.

"The world is getting homogenised," he said. "You have to work very hard to find things that are different. You need to start noticing what's nearby and underfoot."

The Nettleham project is part of a national scheme, run by Sonic Arts Network, an educational organisation. Thirty schools around the country have been asked to develop similar postcards, which they will email to one another.

Becca Laurence, project manager, said: "We live in a visual world, so sound often gets overlooked. This opens a window into other people's worlds and the way they live."

Nettleham pupils have already received one postcard from another school: a cacophony of voices and car engines sent by Langley grammar, in Slough.

Eleven-year-old Lindsay Campbell said: "There's more talking. I think people probably talk a lot in Slough."

David Gibbons, Nettleham head, believes such appreciation of the aural environment requires a high degree of skill. "Pupils argued about whether a sound signified Lincolnshire, the village or the school," he said. "Becoming aware of sound gives you a broader view of your environment."

