

Sam's Clothes

A story written by Jennifer Rudd for the NERC-funded "Recycling+: Environment and Global Citizenship in the New Curriculum for Wales"



It was the year 2022 and everybody was starting to talk about how they could protect the planet.

In class 1F the children were talking about their clothes. They wanted to know how clothes were made and whether they were good for the planet or not.

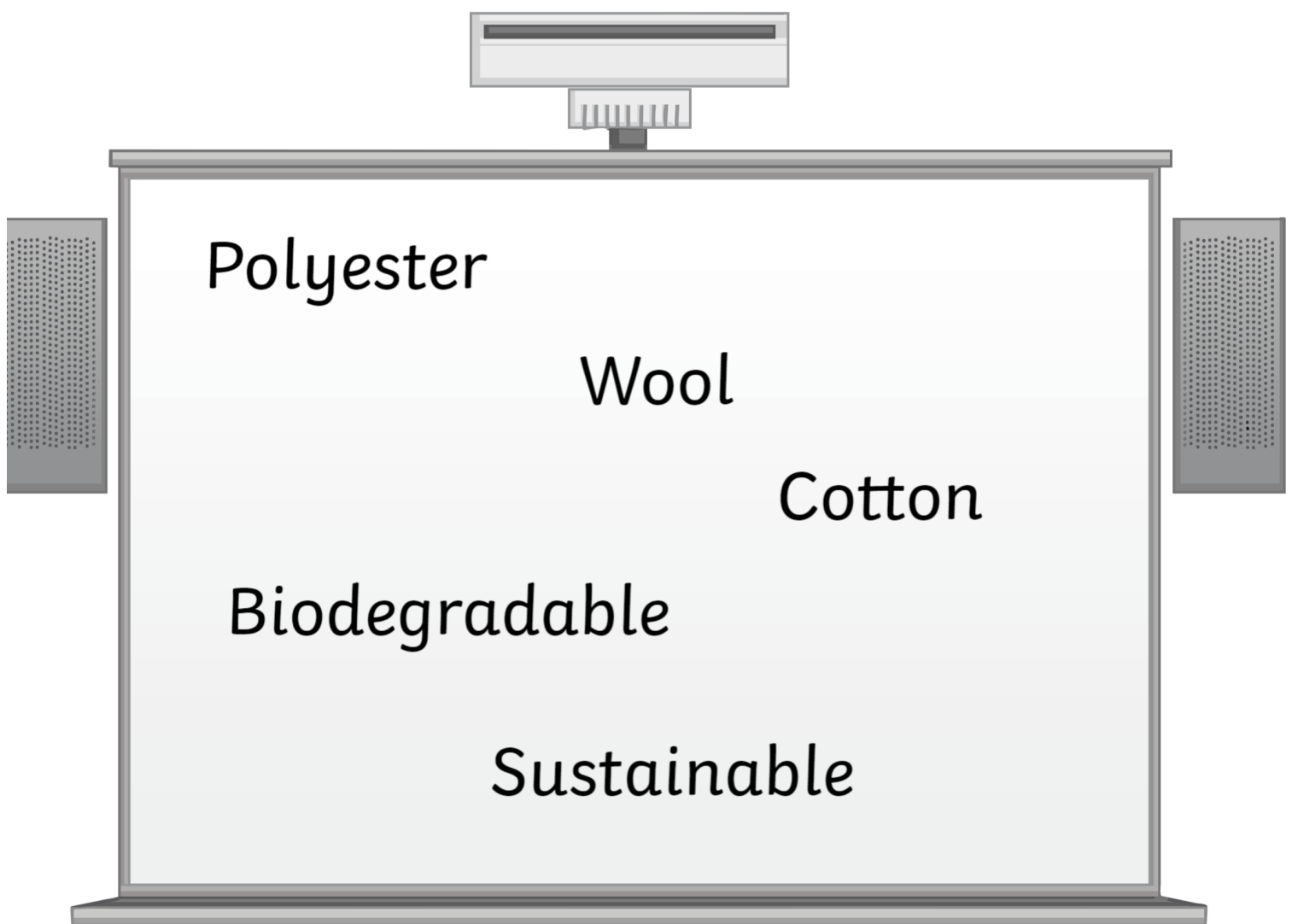
"I'm wearing my favourite blue t-shirt" said Ceri. "I'm wearing my new yellow shorts" said Bobby proudly.



Sam sat in the corner quietly. Sam didn't get new clothes. Sam hadn't ever been clothes shopping and only got things passed down from cousins, siblings or friends.



As the rest of the class talked excitedly about what they were wearing and where they bought their clothes from, the teacher started writing lots of new words on the board.

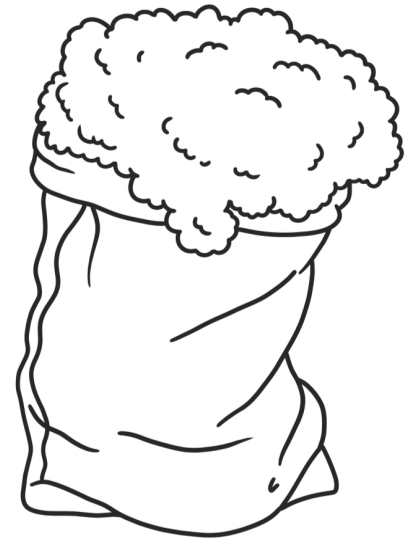


One by one the children stopped talking. What could all these words mean?

"Who knows what wool is?" the teacher asked. Sam knew the answer but Sam didn't want to say.

Alex piped up "It comes from a sheep, but what does that have to do with clothes?"

"Sheep's wool can be turned into clothes" said the teacher. "First the sheep is sheared and the wool is put into a bag. Then the wool is cleaned and turned into long strands, which get wound up into a ball. Dye can be added to turn the wool different colours. The wool is then knitted to make hats, jumpers and scarves to keep people warm."



"When the jumper or hat or scarf is finished with it can be put into a compost bin and it will break down into soil. This means wool clothes are



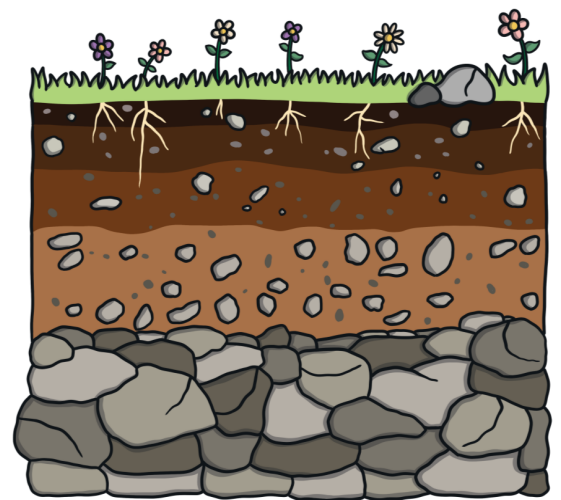
biodegradable."

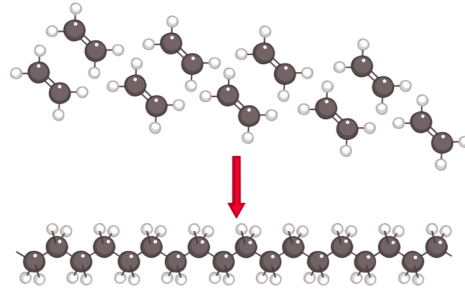
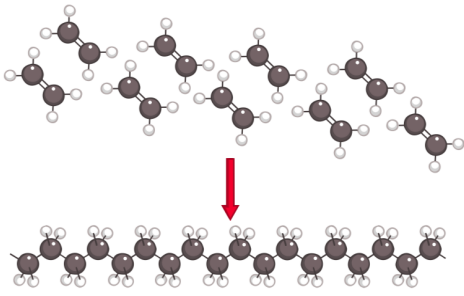
All the children started muttering the word "biodegradable".

Sam looked down and remembered Granny knitting the jumper for cousin Jon and then when he grew out of it, the jumper was given to Sam.

A bit nervous, Sam put a hand up....."so is biodegradable good for the planet?" Sam asked.

"Yes!" said the teacher with a smile. "It means that no waste is created and the biodegradable clothes feed the ground as they break down."



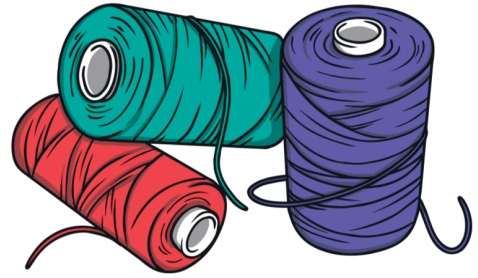
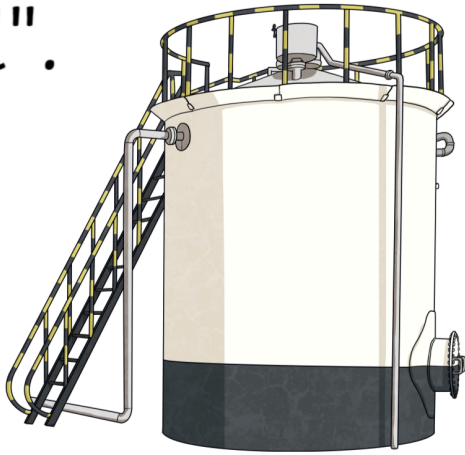


Sam felt a bit better about the jumper passed on from Jon now. But what about the trousers that cousin Susan used to wear? Sam twisted around to look at the label in the trousers.

"Poly.....pol..y...es...ter" - it was a hard word to read.

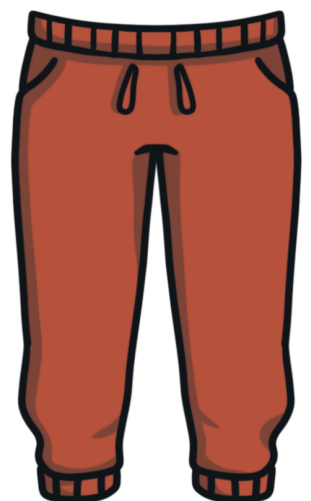
"Sam, are you saying polyester?" the teacher asked. Everyone turned to look at Sam, twisted around trying to read the trouser label.

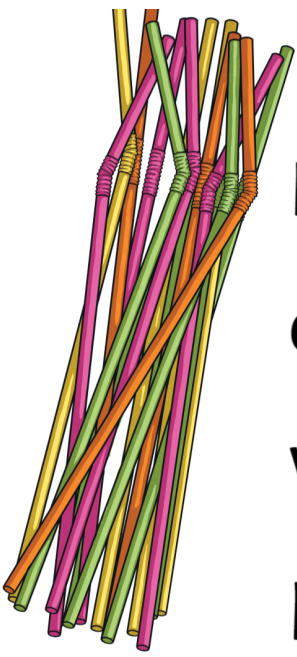
"Uh, yeah" Sam mumbled, sitting up properly. "Excellent!" exclaimed the teacher, "that's the next word on our board".



"Polyester is made from oil, a bit like the stuff you put in your car. Oil is made over millions of years from animals, dinosaurs and plants that have broken down. The oil is turned into long thin strands of plastic.

These strands are then brought together to make clothes."



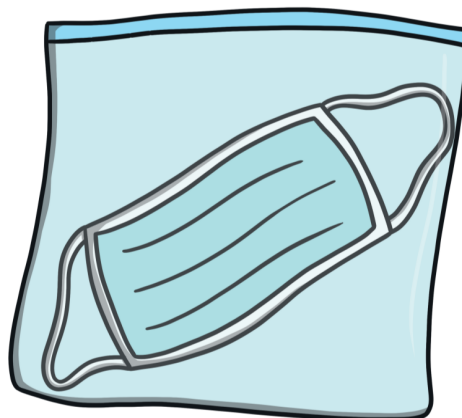


None of the children in the class could believe what the teacher was saying. "So, are we wearing plastic?" asked Bobby.

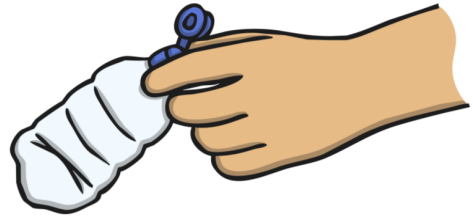
"Yes," answered the teacher.

The class didn't feel very good about that and neither did Sam. They all knew that plastic was bad for the environment.

"What do we do?" asked Chris, hoping the teacher could tell them something that would help them help the planet.



The teacher held up a plastic bottle
in one hand



and a jumper in
the other.

"How do you think these two things are
connected?"

The class looked completely confused.

"Some clothes are made from recycled
plastic bottles!" said the teacher
excitedly. "This means that there is less
plastic waste in the world and it means
less oil is needed. Recycling old plastic
into clothes is more *sustainable* than
using oil to make new plastic."



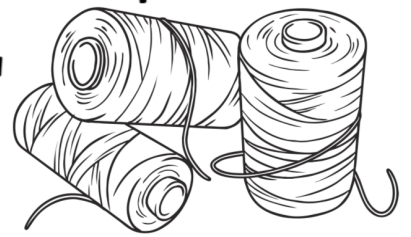
The class liked the sssss sound in sustainable. "Sssssss" some of the children said, whilst pretending to be snakes on the carpet. Sam liked sustainable too, both Sam and sustainable started with "s".

The teacher got the children's attention again. "There's one more word on the board. Can anyone read it?"

Sam was feeling brave now and put up a hand. "Cotton." Sam said with confidence.

"Yes," said the teacher, "Well done.

Cotton grows in fields in hot countries like China, India and America. The cotton grows as fluffy bolls which are picked and then spun into thread to make clothing."

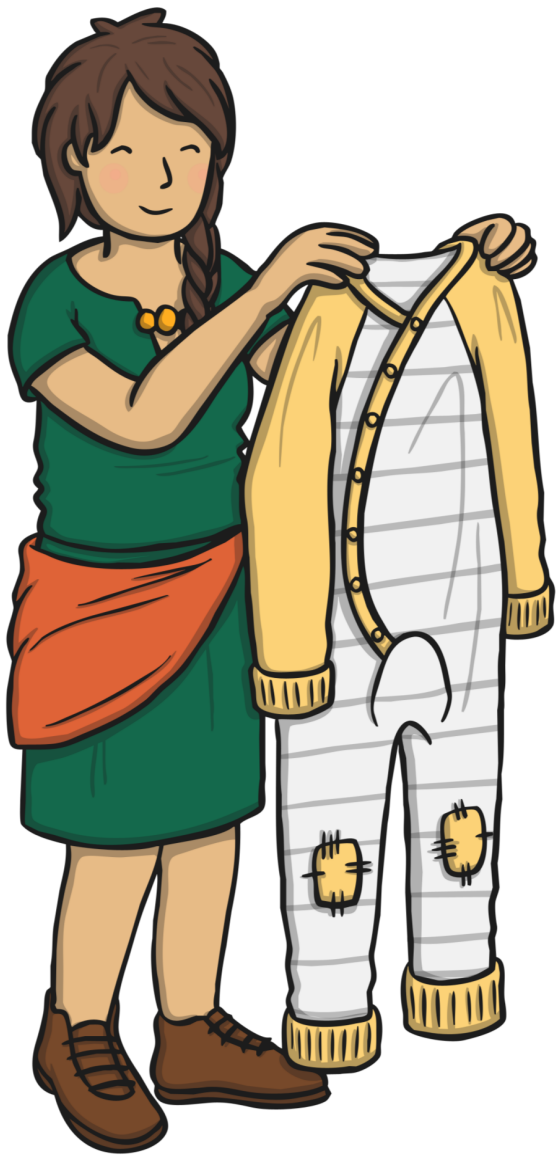


"Plants are good for the planet aren't they?" said Rowan.

"Yes they are," replied the teacher. "But cotton needs lots and lots of water to grow and that isn't very sustainable."



"So what are we supposed to do?" said Morgan. "It doesn't seem like many of our clothes are helping the planet."



"The best thing we can do," the teacher said encouragingly, "is make the clothes we have last as long as possible." She held up an outfit with patches on the knees. "This had holes in the knees. I sewed some patches on to make it last longer"

Sam looked at the jumper from Jon and the trousers from Susan. The trousers had patches on and Sam had always felt embarrassed. Now Sam felt proud, these clothes were helping the planet.



The teacher was talking again: "we can also make sure that when we grow out of clothes, we pass them on to our siblings, cousins and friends"



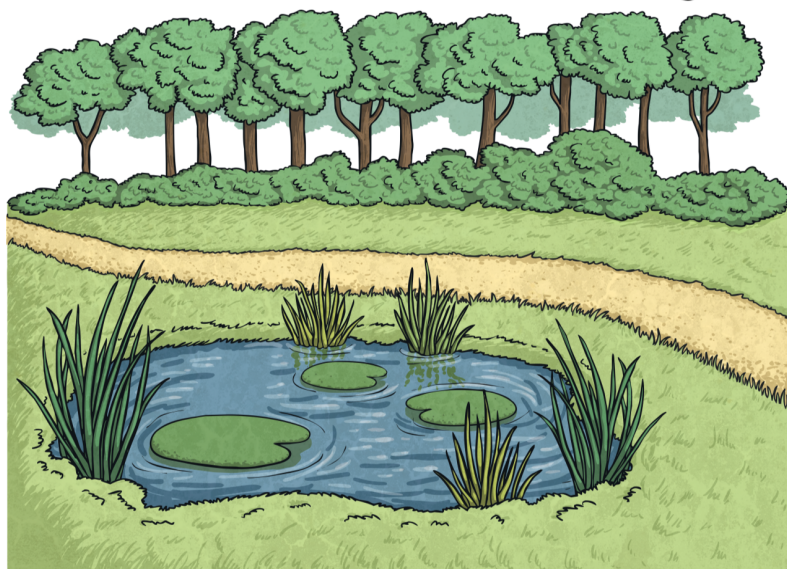
"and instead of buying new clothes we can visit charity shops. This is where people have given away clothes they don't want anymore."



The whole class was very happy to know that they could wear clothes that helped the planet. Everybody had ideas of what to do with their clothes and where to get their next ones.



Sam was now really proud because all of Sam's clothes helped the planet. They had all been given by other people, mended or were made of wool.



As all the other children in the class talked excitedly about passing their clothes on to younger siblings or asking their parents to take them to charity shops, Sam looked out of the window at the grass and the trees and the birds and promised to keep looking after them all.