



MERCURIAL PICTURES PRESENTS H IS FOR HARRY IN ASSOCIATION WITH POSTCODE FILMS
 DIRECTORS EDWARD OWLES & JAIME TAYLOR PRODUCER JON MCGOH EDITORS MATTHEW SCHOLDS & EMILIANO BATTISTA
 ORIGINAL MUSIC MIKE BROOKES & PABLO SCOPINARO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS FOR BUNGALOW TOWN RACHEL WEXLER AND JEZ LEWIS

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H is for Harry





MERCURIAL PICTURES

Mercurial Pictures Presents

H is for Harry

A Film by Ed Owles & Jaime Taylor

www.hisforharry.com

in Association with **Postcode Films**

and Executive Produced by **Bungalow Town**

World Premiere: 6th September 2018

UK Theatrical Release Date: 7th March 2019

Running Time: 86 and 53 minutes

Trailer: vimeo.com/288524874

UK Distribution:

Managed by **Mercurial Pictures** // Jon McGoh
in Partnership with **Dartmouth Films**
Somerset House, Strand,
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Download Stills: <http://bit.ly/2M0w6MP>

SHORT SYNOPSIS

What does it take to change a child's life? H IS FOR HARRY is a coming of age story about Harry, a charismatic 11-year old boy, who arrives at secondary school in suburban London unable to read or write. With the help of Sophie, his extremely dedicated teacher, can he and his family overcome his illiteracy and years of feeling excluded from learning and opportunity?



LONG SYNOPSIS

“What are you going to be doing when you’re 25 Harry?”

- Sophie

“Tryin’ to stay alive”

- Harry

H IS FOR HARRY is the story of the relationship between one charismatic boy, Harry, and his teacher, Sophie. Harry arrives at Reach Academy in Feltham as the third generation in his family to be illiterate. Sophie, in her first year as a qualified teacher, runs a specialist English group where she meets Harry and tries to help him catch up so that he can re-join his friends.

H IS FOR HARRY shows Harry from his first day at school and throughout the school year as we see him struggling to read and write in Sophie’s class. We meet Grant, Harry’s father, who fights tooth and nail to keep Harry in school, as they attend regular meetings about both Harry’s progress and misbehaviour in school. We feel Grant’s frustrations as he is unable to help his son learn. Grant hopes Harry can stay in mainstream school, the only place he believes can ‘save him’ from a life of illiteracy and poverty.

By intimately portraying Harry’s journey towards adulthood, brimming with humour and heartache, we show the world from the child’s point of view. Depicting the often-unnoticed impact that poverty can have on a child’s future, H IS FOR HARRY is at the crux of current debates about society’s growing inequality.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT / NOTE TO PRESS

Why we made the film

We make films because we believe in the power of telling stories from the perspective of people you might not normally see or hear. In debates around educational inequality and social mobility, the child's voice is often conspicuous by its absence, so we wanted to make our film firmly from Harry's point of view. In his story, and that of his father Grant, we gain a snapshot of a cycle that we often only hear about in statistics and reports. As Grant says: 'It's just repeat, repeat, repeat. My dad's had it, I had it, and now my son's gonna have it.'

We believe that constructive public debate and the making of good policy happens best through empathy with those who experience the impact of public policies - in this case a child and parent in a low income community.

Our Approach: empathy, not blame

Harry's story is hard to watch at times and can stir emotions, not least anger at his predicament and those of his classmates. It is tempting to try and find a focus for that anger. We think it's really important to avoid the 'blame game', which offers perhaps some catharsis, but no sustainable solutions. It is common in public debate to find a scapegoat: the parent, the school, the local authority, central government or even the child. Harry's story reveals a complex, systemic issue to which there is no easy answer.

We live in a country where children from the poorest backgrounds arrive at school many months behind their peers and rarely catch up, where one in five children leave primary school unable to read properly and where, unsurprisingly, social mobility has stalled. These sad facts are in evidence up and down the country. As a teacher in the film says: We have had children come to us this year in Year 7 [aged 11] who can't tell the time, can't tie their own shoelaces and struggle to spell their own name.'



Vilifying individuals or organisations is not going to make the difference that is needed. What is required is a nuanced debate about the issues and deep thinking about why the system is having these tragic outcomes.

The Film's Message

The film touches on many topics that we hope will resonate with audiences; including social mobility, marginalised communities, illiteracy, inclusion, special educational needs, schools, and teaching practice. If we were to offer a single message from Harry's story, it would be based on the final scenes in the film when Harry spends time with the primary and nursery pupils. These scenes are an opportunity for the audience to reflect on what might have been had Harry had a different start in life, with a greater level of support in his early years.

Our reflection, having watched Harry's story over the years and knowing the national statistics around these issues, is that an early, holistic approach combined with sustained support throughout a child's school years is required to have the best chance of breaking the cycle for children like Harry.





“When I’m older, I don’t want to be the person who’s left out, living on the streets, basically the aim for me is like to have a better life than my dad. He was like worser than me always getting kicked out of every single school...”

- Harry





CONTEXT

H IS FOR HARRY is a film for our times. As a white working class boy, the segment of society which statistically does the least well at school, Harry's story is emblematic of many such children and communities that feel left behind. Whilst there are multiple statistics surrounding this issue, seldom do we actually see or hear from the children themselves.

Barack Obama once said that 'education is the civil rights issue of our time'¹ and, in Harry, we have a character who embodies the injustice in the education system. How can it be that, in 2020, a child can be the third generation in his British born-and-bred family to go through the education system and come out illiterate?

At one point in the film, Harry challenges his dad: 'You did okay' [despite being illiterate], only for his father to say 'it's not like when I was at school – these days you need to be able to read and write to get on in life.' His father's hopes and dreams for his son are defined by his own experience – he just wants him to learn to read and write - and he also recognises that the world is changing.

¹ The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2017/live-updates/trump-white-house/real-time-fact-checking-and-analysis-of-trumps-address-to-congress/obama-also-called-education-the-civil-rights-issue-of-our-time/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b32c117f78fc

White working-class boys are the worst performing demographic group in the UK education system. To take just one statistic; whereas approximately 60% of the overall population secure at least five GCSE grades at the government's expected standard, only 26% of white working class boys on free school meals achieve this level.²

Harry's father, Grant, talks about how the education system has let him down and is now letting his son down, whilst in the background he loyally flies the St George's Cross in his garden.

We are passionate about the topic of educational disadvantage and have dedicated ourselves to telling this story for the past four years. Our approach has always been to place the child's point of view at the centre of the film with no talking heads and no narration. This choice stems from our underlying belief in the power of empathy and that good public policy is dependent on understanding the 'end users' of those policies. A politician in Westminster, a business owner in Southampton or a parent in Bolton will engage more in this topic by hearing directly from children and young people themselves than they will by being told what to think by experts, reports and statistics.

Children like Harry don't want to lag behind their peers. They want progress, positive futures and a job they can be proud of. We must ensure that important debates at national and grassroot levels do not become disconnected from the direct experience of children.

A politician in Westminster, a business owner in Southampton or a parent in Bolton will engage more in this topic by hearing directly from children and young people themselves.

Stories like Harry's resonate powerfully and can be profound catalysts for change.

² The Sutton Trust, 'Class Differences' Report: <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/class-differences-ethnicity-and-disadvantage/>



KEY STATISTICS

- **1 in 5** children in England cannot read well by the age of 11.³
- **1 in 8** disadvantaged children in the UK don't own a single book.⁴
- **18% of 15 year olds** in England and Scotland, **15% of 15 year olds** in Northern Ireland and **21% of 15 year olds** in Wales do not have a minimum level of literacy proficiency.⁵
- **Only half** of children in the UK enjoy writing.⁶
- Children born into communities with the most serious literacy challenges have some of the **lowest life expectancies**.⁷
- Children with reading difficulties are at greater risk of developing **mental health problems** later in life, including depression, anxiety, behavioural problems, anger and aggression.⁸

3 The Reading Agency, Reading Facts: <https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/>

4 National Literacy Trust Report December 2017: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/1-8-disadvantaged-children-uk-dont-own-single-book/>

5 The Reading Agency, Reading Facts: <https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/>

6 National Literacy Trust website: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/>

7 National Literacy Trust website: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/>

8 The Reading Agency, Reading Facts: <https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/>



A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE FILM BY DIRECTOR JAIME TAYLOR

I come from a very similar place to Harry's neighbourhood, with the same levels of poverty and the problems that come with that. Looking at my school year group today: some have never worked, some are already grandparents in their thirties, some ended up in prison, one is a prostitute, a couple are drug addicts. Others haven't fared quite so badly but they certainly never reached their potential. They weren't even aware that they had the potential or agency to create any kind of future for themselves. None of us were.

Because the worst, most debilitating effect of poverty on young people is the lack of confidence and headspace to imagine that life could be different. I got away from my hometown to escape that crushing sense of inevitability that life would always be that way, and it was for these reasons I became a teacher and continue to work in education today. Is it possible to press the reset button on these children's lives? To help kids break free from poverty? And is it actually right to do this?

Opportunities should exist everywhere for our kids. It's not right that often the only option is to sever ties to family, friends and community for good - as was the case for me. In communities even subtle differences - your changing accent, "speaking different" - can have a huge impact on relationships.

We've been present through the highs and lows of the school year - capturing the small details that reveal an enormous amount: the facial expressions of children who have never been told before that they are important. H IS FOR HARRY is a 'coming-of-age' film to encourage a discussion around education and the extent to which it can perform the miracles each new government promises.



Jaime Taylor, Co-Director

Jaime Taylor, Co-Director of H IS FOR HARRY

FURTHER INFORMATION

Where are they now?

Harry remained at the specialist school that he moved to at the end of the film, taking functional English, Maths and Science classes. He took his exams in summer 2019 and is now exploring his options for further education, including the possibility of an apprenticeship. He's desperate to earn his own money, travel as much as possible and regularly meets the film team for a catch-up at Nando's on Feltham High Street.

Grant says in the film "I try to stay in my bubble... how am I going to know where I'm going if I can't read?" yet following his attendance at the film's festival premiere in central London, which was a really positive experience, Grant applied for his and Harry's passports and they have since visited France twice and Spain. Grant is also continuing his reading and writing lessons from home to improve his literacy skills.

Meanwhile, Sophie has bought a house in Feltham and remained Head of Year for the class we see in the film. They took their GCSEs in summer 2019. She is now on sabbatical, having adopted a child.

Background on the school

Reach Academy Feltham was founded in 2012, received an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating in 2014 and received its first GCSEs in 2017, ranking 16th in the country by Progress 8. The school is in an area of high deprivation with 46% of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium and Harry's neighbourhood has been identified as a Higher Education 'cold spot,' with only 20% of children progressing to Higher Education. The school was full with 60 pupils in every year from Reception to 6th form as of 2019. It also has a nursery with 2-4 year olds.

Harry walking home from school



The school is highly inclusive, with almost 5% of pupils holding an Education, Health and Care Plan, which is far higher than typical mainstream schools and has the highest number of Looked After Children in its Borough. Reach Academy has been visited by the Prime Minister, the Duchess of Cambridge, The Mayor of London and a number of ministers.

The school has continued to develop the **Reach Children's Hub** which has received significant investment from Save the Children to develop a blueprint to support vulnerable families with children aged 0-5 years old as well as Feltham Futures funding to help young people plan for after they leave school. You can read some reflections about the need for the **Hub** [here](#).

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

“Documentaries help create culture, and culture leads change”

- Impact Guide, Doc Society

All children deserve the best start. Our background should not dictate how well we do in life. It's not right that children growing up in poorer communities do not achieve the same educational outcomes as those who do not. It doesn't have to be this way.

Early intervention transforms children's lives. We are using the film as a call to action for parents, carers, teachers, children, young people, community leaders and policy makers to help make the changes needed to improve educational disadvantage.

We are using H IS FOR HARRY to ignite discussion, drive social action and grow an existing community of support and activism.

We will continue to partner with a number of charities and initiatives to maximise the impact of the film alongside sharing our **Vision for Change** and supporting schools and wider settings to host their own screening and discussion.

For more information, and to download the H IS FOR HARRY Screening Guide and CPD Toolkit, please visit: www.hisforharry.com/takeaction

VISION FOR CHANGE

The H IS FOR HARRY Vision for Change, and wider campaign supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, seeks to unlock opportunities for all children through the following calls to action:

A - **ABOLISH** illiteracy

B - **BEGIN** with the voice of children, young people and families

C - **CHAMPION** early intervention

D - **DELIVER** support all-through a child's life

E - **END** the blame narratives and show compassion

With more and more families being swept into poverty because of low pay, high housing costs and cuts to social security, we need to ensure all children have the best chance to get on in life, whatever their circumstances.

By sharing the Vision for Change with local schools, community groups, churches, local leaders, charities and media, we can collectively make more impact at national and grassroots level.

To download the Vision for Change, please visit: hisforharry.com/takeaction

Harry after school in the local park



THE FILMMAKERS

Co-directors Edward Owles and Jaime Taylor co-founded and run **Postcode Films**, an award-winning documentary production company.

Jaime was a teacher until 2009 when she decided to move into filmmaking. She has worked as a development producer with the BBC and Producer with Century Films on the BAFTA-nominated, RTS and double-Grierson winning 'The Secret History of Our Streets', described in the Guardian as "wonderful...it prodded your brain awake as it broke your heart."

Ed has shot and directed films across the globe for the last 12 years for broadcast, festival and online. His previous feature documentary 'The Auction House: A Tale of Two Brothers' screened at festivals around the world and was described by The Hollywood Reporter as "tremendously vivid and expertly entertaining."

Mercurial Pictures was founded in 2015 by Jon McGoh to create socially-engaged films that share a vision for a better world, informed by empathetic, nuanced storytelling. Jon was part of Sheffield DocFest's flagship Future Producer Program. As a Governor at Reach Academy, Jon was essential in building trust and access for the Directors.

Isla Badenoch is the Creative Producer of H IS FOR HARRY. Isla is a filmmaker and artist. She previewed for film festival Sheffield Doc/Fest for 6 years, has written articles for The Guardian, produced audio installations for London's Science Museum, developed an Arts Council Funded VR Opera and is a BFI NETWORK x BAFTA Crew participant 2019. Isla is currently directing films funded by BBC Arts, Arts Council and BFI Doc Society.

CREDITS

Directors: Jaime Taylor and Ed Owles
Producer: Jon McGoh
Executive Producer; Rachel Wexler and Jez Lewis
Creative Producer: Isla Badenoch
Editors: Matt Scholes and Emiliano Battista
Composers: Mike Brooks and Pablo Scopinaro
Post-Production: RoundTable

KEY PRODUCTION TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Executive Producer

Rachel Wexler is a producer and exec producer at multiple-award winning Bungalow Town Productions, making distinctive docs for a worldwide audience. She devised & runs the Future Producers programme with Sheffield Docfest & Creative Skillset.

Executive Producer

Jez Lewis is a producer and executive producer at Bungalow Town Productions, with a strong track record in theatrical, festival and other forms of distribution as well as worldwide broadcast.

Editor

Matt Scholes won accolades in 2015 for the BAFTA nominated 'A Syrian Love Story' voted by the Guardian as the 3rd best film of 2015 and described as an 'unmissable documentary.' Matt is based in New York and London, where he edits films for broadcast, theatrical release and online.

Editor

Emiliano Battista is an award winning editor of feature documentaries, dramas and television programs. His films include '3 1/2 minutes' (Special Jury Prize Sundance 2015, HBO), 'How is your Fish Today?' with Chinese novelist and film-maker Xiaolu Guo (Sundance 2007) and the films of Eva Weber ('The Solitary Life of Cranes').

Composers

Mike Brooks and Pablo Scopinaro specialise in writing scores for film, TV and games. They possess a unique creative sensitivity and passion for storytelling. Pablo is currently completing a Masters degree in Composing for Film and TV at the prestigious National Film and Television School (NFTS).



H is for Harry

QUOTES & FEEDBACK

From the Contributors

'One of the best nights of my life' - Grant, Harry's Dad

"What a fantastic evening. Great film. You made us laugh, you made us cry. You showed the true colours of a caring school with fabulous teachers. Well you did great and I hope the film continues to be shown for a long time to come. Stay in touch. Morgan and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience."

- Parent of Morgan, a secondary character

VIP's / Outreach Partners

"Incredibly important subject, powerfully delivered, great to provoke an essential conversation"

"There is no more important film in this year's festival"

"Compelling and tragic"

"A powerful insight into the challenges face by children left behind by school"

"A reminder of how far we've come, and how much furthers we've got to go"

Further details available upon request.

Audience Response

"Funny, moving, emotional, shows the dedication of teachers in difficult circumstances"

"Captivating, thought-provoking, poignant with the perfect balance of humour"

"Searing social cinema with nuance and heart; absolutely vital viewing"

"An important film that shows how overwhelming it can be for children and adults with impaired literacy. How it can affect all those around them and the strategies schools have in supporting them, even with fantastic teachers"

"A beautiful, complex observational piece that tells a very different story without lecturing"

"An honest portrayal of the challenges facing children in the UK today"

"Kept almost crying, at the raw difficulty of Harry's situation in its complexity"

COVERAGE OF THE FILM IN NATIONAL AND INDUSTRY PRESS

“Shines a light on a scarcely believable fact” - [The Observer](#)

“An intimate insight...into a national problem” - [The Telegraph](#)

“Casting a spotlight on one of the biggest education scandals in Britain...heartbreaking”
- [The Sunday Times](#)

“Wonderfully moving” - [BBC Radio London](#)

“An energetic and urgent documentary” - [Talha Burki, The Lancet Journal](#)

“The inspirational story of a teacher reaching his or her students to help them succeed and elevate their low expectations of themselves, amidst the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that society erects, is the stuff of Hollywood” - [Film Inquiry](#)

IntoFilm: [‘Literacy and the class divide in documentary ‘H is for Harry’](#)

Open City Documentary Festival: [‘Insights from Ed Owles on Impact and Engagement’](#)

School Library Association: [H is for Harry – and thoughts on literacy, libraries and laureates](#)

The Beanstalk Charity Blog: [‘Why ‘H is for Harry’ will be shedding the light on illiteracy this World Book Day’](#)

TES Article: [‘Harry’s story shows the challenge of illiteracy’](#)

[NAHT School Leadership podcast](#) with the directors.

Watch Feltham MP [Seema Malhotra](#) mentions the film in House of Commons resulting in an [Early Day Motion](#). An article was also included in [HOUSE Magazine](#).

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) @HisforHarryFilm / #HisforHarry

Interested in becoming a partner and advocate for H IS FOR HARRY?

Contact us: info@hisforharry.com

His for Harry

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