



BFI FAMILIES

FAMILY FRIENDLY FILM SCREENINGS,
ACTIVITIES AND WORKSHOPS



KES

What's it about?

Young Billy lives in a South Yorkshire mining community where he endures harsh treatment at home and at school. His life changes for the better, however, when he starts looking after a young kestrel and ultimately finds a skill that he's interested in pursuing. *Kes*, both funny and bleak, is an uncompromising look at unlocking potential, and a true classic from one of the UK's finest directors.

The kestrel in ‘Kes’

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

‘We never thought of the kestrel as a symbol,’ Ken Loach claimed in *Loach on Loach*. But it is impossible to watch the British filmmaker’s humanist 1969 tale – of how the limited horizons of teenager Billy Casper are briefly opened when he trains a kestrel – and think of the falcon as anything but a symbol of freedom. While the fate of many working-class boys like Billy lies underground in one of Barnsley’s collieries, his kestrel demonstrates her mastery of the sky, soaring and swooping high above.

It’s said that the eagle is the raptor of the emperor, the peregrine that of the prince, while the smaller, more abundant kestrel is ‘used by persons of a lower rank’, according to J.E. Harting in *The Ornithology of Shakespeare* (1871). Hence the title of Barry Hines’s book, on which *Kes* was based: *A Kestrel for a Knave*. Harting even suggests its name could derive from ‘coystril’, meaning knave or peasant. While *Kes* doesn’t feature in the film as much as the title suggests, she gets her close-up when Billy shows her to his teacher, and it’s impossible not to share his reverence for this small chestnut-brown assassin.

Richard, Barry’s brother, a self-taught teen falconer, inspired the novel and trained the three kestrels that performed in the film – Freeman, Hardy and Willis (Hardy proved the most competent and willing actor). One of the three birds was even plucked from the same nest hole in Tankersley Old Hall that’s seen in the film.

Kes came at a time of renewed concern for falcons and the environment, with J.A. Baker’s *The Peregrine* and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* recently published. *Kes* reportedly sparked a craze for training kestrels (Richard Hines tells in his autobiography how he rescued one caught on an electricity pole by its leash). But since 1970 UK kestrel numbers have fallen 44 per cent, due to urbanisation and pesticides.

After the film’s success, Disney asked to adapt Hines’s novel, but wanted *Kes* to survive at the end. Hines declined the rights. Many readers may be happy to know that Freeman, Hardy and Willis were hacked back to the wild, just as Richard’s kestrel, the original *Kes* who inspired the book and the film, was.

Isabel Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, September 2021

KES <i>Director:</i> Kenneth Loach ©: Woodfall Films Ltd <i>A Kestrel Films production</i> <i>Released Through:</i> United Artists <i>Presented by:</i> Woodfall Films <i>Producer:</i> Tony Garnett <i>Production Supervisor:</i> David Griffith <i>Assistant Director:</i> Keith Evans <i>Continuity:</i> Penny Eyles <i>Adaptation:</i> Barry Hines, Kenneth Loach, Tony Garnett <i>Based on the novel</i> Kestrel for a Knave <i>by:</i> Barry Hines <i>Director of Photography:</i> Chris Menges <i>Lighting:</i> Lee Electric (Lighting) <i>Editor:</i> Roy Watts <i>Art Director:</i> William McCrow <i>Wardrobe:</i> Daphne Dare <i>Music Composed/Conducted by:</i> John Cameron <i>Sound Recording:</i> Tony Jackson, Gerry Humphries <i>Sound Recorded at:</i> Twickenham Film Studios <i>Sound Editor:</i> Peter Pierce <i>This film was also made by:</i> Peter Allchorne, David Clarke, Michael English, Arthur Evans, Paddy Holman, John Matthews, Michael Messenger, Eddie Price, Franco Rosso, Nicola Webber, Michael Barnett, Harry Daly, Jane Harris, Sean Hudson, Robert Matthews, Ray Orton, Edward Riley, Fred Ruff, Eric Wicks, Harry Bell, Jim Duffy, Terry Lewis, Mike McDuffie, Bert Payne, Anne Robinson, John Williams, Tony Woodcock <i>uncredited</i> <i>Technical Adviser:</i> Richard Hines	Cast: David Bradley (<i>Billy Casper</i>) Freddie Fletcher (<i>Jud Casper</i>) Lynne Perrie (<i>Mrs Casper</i>) Colin Welland (<i>Mr Farthing</i>) Brian Glover (<i>Mr Sugden</i>) Bob Bowes (<i>Mr Gryce</i>) Bernard Atha (<i>youth employment officer</i>) Laurence Bould Ted Carroll Agnes Drumgoon Desmond Guthrie The 4D Jones Joe Miller (<i>Mrs Casper’s friend</i>) Julie Shakespeare Geoffrey Banks (<i>maths teacher</i>) Duggie Brown (<i>milkman</i>) Stephen Crossland (<i>schoolboy</i>) David Glover (<i>Tibbutt</i>) Martin Harley (<i>younger boy</i>) Joey Kaye (<i>pub entertainer</i>) Robert Naylor (<i>MacDowall</i>) George Speed (<i>schoolboy</i>) Zoe Sunderland (<i>librarian</i>) Eric Bolderson (<i>farmer</i>) Beryl Carroll Billy Dean (<i>fish and chip shop man</i>) John Grayson Trevor Hesketh (<i>Mr Crossley</i>) Harry Markham Frank Norton (<i>schoolboy</i>) Leslie Stringer UK 1969 111 mins
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BFI FAMILIES

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Mon 14-Wed 16 Feb 10:30-16:30

Song of the Sea

Sun 27 Feb 13:10

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