

# Children of Winter

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**Age: 9-11**

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# Children of Winter

By Berlie Doherty

These programmes are available as audio on demand from the School Radio website. Refer to dates below to find out when each one is available.

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## Introduction

*Children of Winter*, first published in 1985, is by children's writer Berlie Doherty, who has twice won the prestigious Carnegie Medal. Many of her books have been adapted for radio and television. Set in 1665 in the village of Eyam, which is in the grip of the plague, the story raises a number of moral issues. With supported reading, the story is accessible to a wide range of children from Key Stage 2 onwards. The book is abridged in ten 15-minute episodes and is as faithful to the original text as possible.

### **Using the recordings and activities:**

Ten semi-dramatised readings make the book accessible to the full ability range at Key Stage 2 and 3. The episodes and activities have been structured to fit into the Literacy Hour. They can be used as the shared reading start to the session, followed by more whole-class work. Extracts from the text have been carefully selected for close textual analysis. These can be photocopied to A4 size for independent, pair or small group work (or put onto an OHP). The activities are designed to be flexible and allow for a range of pupil groupings and differentiation.

Teachers can match their use to fit the specific needs of their class and National Curriculum requirements.

### **Classroom management:**

It is not necessary for every child to have a copy of the book. A small set of at least six copies should enable children to work successfully in groups or individually. Allow access to the book for reference.

Headsets will enable groups of children or individuals to listen to the episodes again without disturbing others and to access the text independently.

It will enrich the children's experience if other resources are provided to support the study of *Children of Winter* (see 'Resources' below).

### **Activities:**

#### **BEFORE LISTENING/READING**

These prepare pupils for studying the book by considering the writer Berlie Doherty and her work. They look at the background information on the historical setting and predict what might happen.

#### **DURING LISTENING/READING**

These focus the pupils' attention on key incidents, events and characters and help their concentration and comprehension.

#### **AFTER LISTENING/READING**

These encourage the children to reflect on what they have heard and read, express their own responses to the story and its characters and deepen their understanding of how the story has been structured.

### **Resources:**

A Parcel of Patterns by Jill Paton Walsh (another version of the Eyam story)

The Story of Eyam Plague, with a 'Guide to the Village', by Clarence Daniel and

Eyam Plague 1665-6 by John Clifford (both available locally in Eyam)

Eyam Museum: [www.eyammuseum.demon.co.uk](http://www.eyammuseum.demon.co.uk)

**About the author:**

Berlie Doherty was born in Liverpool and lived by the sea in Hoylake from the age of four. She won a scholarship to a convent school and went on to read English at Durham University. She trained as a social worker and later as a teacher, working in both professions and as a schools broadcaster for BBC Radio, before becoming a full-time writer in 1983.

She inherited stories from her father, who shared them with her at bedtime and later encouraged her to write for the local paper, as well as magazines: 'I grew up with the belief that writing was an everyday thing, the habit of a lifetime, that the typewriter was part of the furniture of the house, and that the next step after daydreaming was writing the daydreams down.'

In 1982, Berlie Doherty wrote her first book, *How Green You Are!* while working as a teacher. She read the story to one of her classes, chapter by chapter. This close collaboration with young people is a feature of Berlie Doherty's work, and one she has used whilst writing a number of her books. When the book was published, she gave up her teaching job to become a full-time writer.

Berlie Doherty describes the process of writing as 'I remember and let's pretend':

'I remember is where you start; it's what gives the story vitality and truth. Let's pretend is what the imagination does with it, the lies that a story-teller is allowed to tell.

She talks about the writing of *Children of Winter*: 'I got the idea for writing this story when I was working with a group of children from a Sheffield school... We spent the day in a very old barn, Bowsen Barn, near High Bradfield... This barn had a very strong atmosphere of the past, and the children used it as the setting for some wonderful ghost stories. At the end of the day, when we were reading our stories round the flickering light of a gas lamp, I said, "I've got a feeling that somebody used to live here a long time ago. Who do you think it could have been?" One of the children said, "It could have been somebody sheltering from the Great Plague." I knew, straight away, that I was going to write a story about it, and that I would set it in that very barn... Round the back of the barn was a little stream, which became the trickle stream of my novel, and in front was a log – my thinking log! Also, at the threshold, was a stone with figures carved on it. That gave me the idea for the drawing Dan does on the slate. *Children of Winter* is a made-up story, but, like *Street Child*, it is rooted in the real past, in real lives, and hopefully it helps us to remember them.

**Some other books by Berlie Doherty:**

*How Green You Are!* (Methuen, 1982)  
*The Making of Fingers Finnigan* (Methuen, 1983)  
*White Peak Farm* (Methuen, 1984)  
*Children of Winter* (Methuen, 1985)  
*Granny was a Buffer Girl* (Methuen, 1986)  
*Tough Luck* (Hamish Hamilton, 1987)  
*Paddiwack and Cosy* (Methuen, 1988)  
*Spellhorn* (Hamish Hamilton, 1989)  
*Dear Nobody* (Hamish Hamilton, 1991)

*Snowy* (HarperCollins, 1992)  
*Street Child* (Hamish Hamilton, 1993)  
*The Vinegar Jar* (Hamish Hamilton, 1994)  
*The Golden Bird* (Heinemann, 1995)  
*Daughter of the Sea* (Hamish Hamilton, 1996)  
*Running on Ice* (Mammoth, 1997)  
*The Midnight Man* (Walker Books, 1998)  
*Street Child* (dramatisation, Collins, 2000)  
*Holly Starcross* (Hamish Hamilton, 2001)  
*Coconut Comes to School* (Collins, 2002)

**Questions we asked Berlie about *Children of winter*:**

*How long did it take to write?*

Usually a story of this length would take several months to write. *Children of Winter* was different – as soon as I got the idea for it, I started writing it, very fast, and within two or three weeks the whole story was written. I couldn't quite believe this, so I put it away in a drawer for a few months, as I was working on another novel at the time. My publisher had told me that children don't like historical fiction, so I decided not to send it to them. But when I brought it out of hiding again and reread it, I knew that it did work, and sent it to them to look at. That was twenty years ago, and it has never gone out of print.

*Which was the most difficult part to write?*

I don't remember having any problems with the story, but I did have to think carefully about how three children could actually manage on their own in a situation like this. I also had to decide whether to tell the story of the plague in Eyam, and decided to concentrate just on the children in the barn. I certainly found parts of it upsetting to describe, as when the children see their mother and Maggie Hoggs on the other side of the stepping stones. After I had finished the book, I came across an enclosure of graves in Eyam, the 'plague village' in Derbyshire. They're called the Riley Graves, but they mark the place where the entire Hancock family was buried by their mother. When I saw it, I thought that they could have been Mistress Hoggs's children.

*Why did you set the book in the present and then use flashback to go back in time?*

The setting for the story is a real cruck barn, which I visited with some school children on a writing day. As soon as I went into the barn, I felt as if I were stepping back into the past, and it was through talking to the children about what this past might be that I got the idea for the book. So it was a natural decision to begin with present-day children, only I changed them from a class of children to a family.

*Which is your favourite part?*

When little Dan goes to comfort Clem.

*Is there anything you would change about the book?*

No. If I were to write it now, as a more experienced writer, I would probably approach the subject differently, and certainly my writing style has changed, but I really don't know whether it would make the book better or worse!

*What are the themes of the book?*

Survival. It could just as easily have been a story about refugees or victims of a natural or political disaster. There is a very famous and brilliant novel by William Golding called *Lord of the Flies*, which tells the story of children trying to survive on an island. They end up breaking into gangs and trying to kill each other. I wanted to see whether children would be able to survive the physical and emotional hardships of the situation by being mutually supportive. In a way, all three of the children in *Children of Winter* become stronger as a family and as individuals by the time the plague is over.

*What would you like your readers to gain from reading the book?*

Most of all, I hope they enjoy the story. I hope they can imagine themselves in the situation and identify with the characters and care about them. I hope it makes them think about the past and the people who lived then, children like themselves, with the same hopes and fears that they have.

### **Background - Eyam and the plague:**

The small village of Eyam in the Derbyshire Dales is known as the 'plague village'. It is famous for what happened there in 1665, when it was infected by bubonic plague. Bubonic plague swept across Europe and Britain in the fourteenth century and became known as the Black Death. Three hundred years later, there was a resurgence in London of what was then called the Great Plague. It was at this time, in 1665, that the disease spread from London to Eyam.

Bubonic plague is a highly infectious disease of rodents, especially rats. Rat fleas get infected with the disease and pass it on to humans by biting them. It is thought that the disease was brought to Britain by rats on ships. Piles of rubbish attracted the rats, and they also built their nests in houses. Symptoms of the disease are extreme exhaustion, chills, delirium, a rash and inflamed swellings like boils in the armpit or groin. In the seventeenth century, no one knew what caused the disease or how to cure it. Medicine was very primitive and thousands of people died.

To stop the disease spreading, as soon as a case was known the house was closed and nailed up and a red cross was painted on the front door. At night, carts went through the streets collecting the dead bodies. The driver would shout: 'Bring out your dead!' The corpses were buried in huge graves.

In September 1665, the plague spread from London to Eyam by fleas in a bolt of cloth being sent to a tailor, George Vicars. He died within four days of receiving the cloth. A month later, more than twenty villagers had died, and the disease was still spreading. The Rector, William Mompesson, persuaded the villagers to cut themselves off from the outside world to avoid spreading the plague. Though a few people left, most stayed. Of the 350 villagers, 257 died from a total of 76 families before the disease stopped in October 1666. Some families were wiped out.

During the period of isolation, food was left at the parish boundary high up on the hill above the village. Coins for payment were put in small holes in boulders, filled with vinegar as a disinfectant.

By the end of 1666, the villagers who remained returned to their traditional trade of lead-mining and the village was gradually filled with people again. Eyam has won a place in history because of the bravery of its people who sacrificed themselves to protect others. The story of Eyam is the story of survival against all odds.

Once the children have heard the whole story, they could compare the information from the story with what they learnt from the background information using a simple grid like the one below.

What did you discover about?	Background information	Children of Winter
Causes of the plague		
Symptoms of the plague		
How people's lives were affected by the plague		
Life in the 1660s		

**Do you know?**

Do you know that a well-known children's nursery rhyme has a special significance to Eyam?

Ring a ring of roses  
 A pocketful of posies  
 Atishoo! Atishoo!  
 We all fall down.

With only one clue – a ring of roses was a rash on the chest – can you work out how this nursery rhyme related to Eyam and what happened there? (A rash on the chest was the first sign of the plague, the posies were sweet smelling herbs believed to ward off the disease and sneezing was the final stage of illness before death.)

**Activities:**

**Before listening/reading**

**About the author:** using the information provided and a sample of Berlie Doherty's books, talk about her work. Have the children read any of her books?

**Look at the picture cover of the book** (and different versions, if you have more than one edition): read the introduction on the back cover and consider the title. Ask the children to speculate from the evidence what kind of story they think it is. What do they think it will be about? If the edition of the book has drawings, look at them and try to work out what is happening in the pictures.

**Background information:** using the information provided, talk about the plague and the story of the village of Eyam. What do the children already know about the plague and have they heard about Eyam?

Look at the chapter headings in the book: compare them with the episode titles. Do they give any clues as to the story? How do the episode titles relate to the chapter headings?

Class discussion: explore the theme of survival and separation. How would the pupils feel if they had to leave their parents? What would they need to survive – what provisions and resources, skills, personal behaviour, attitudes and beliefs?

### During listening/reading

It is important to provide opportunities for discussion after listening to each episode to check that the children have understood what is happening and to enable them to express their opinions and views.

The story so far: a synopsis of each episode is provided in these teacher's notes and a brief summary is provided in the recordings.

Before listening to each episode, ask the children to speculate on what they think is going to happen. Does the episode title offer any clues?

To help the children concentrate while listening, ask them to listen out for particular points or information about the characters or main events.

After listening to the first episode, list the key characters. Leave enough space to write notes about each one. These can be added to after each subsequent episode.

After each episode, list the main action and note the backdrop of weather and nature.

Refer to the book and compare the chapters with the episodes. Is there more information in the book? Do the children understand more from listening?

### After listening/reading

These activities offer a range of ideas to consolidate the children's understanding and response to the story. The events of the story take place over a space of time, from autumn through to spring. Construct a timeline or wheel, logging the action, weather and conditions. The passing weather and seasons are important to the children in the story.

Dialect: the characters of *Children of Winter* speak in Derbyshire dialect. What do the following phrases mean? How did they sound when you heard them on the recording?

'Aye. 'Tis time. 'Tis time an' all.'

'I don't know for sure.'

'Art tha afeard?'

'I've some'at to tell thee, and tha must be brave.'

'Dost thou understand?'

'What tidings has tha of my mother and father?'

'What ails her?'

Can you find any other examples in the book?

Do you speak in dialect? Can you give examples of words and phrases that you use?



**Choose your favourite character from the book and write a description saying what you know about him or her from the story.**

**Write about the book to help other children decide whether or not they would like to read it. What's the plot? Who are the characters? What's good about it? Why did you enjoy it?**

**Imagine you are one of the children in the story and write a number of diary entries covering the time you spent in the barn.**

**In small groups, choose a key passage from the book and prepare a dramatised reading for the class.**

**Skim and scan relevant sections of the book to find information to enable you to draw a map showing the features of the landscape and the barn and village (the opening pages of chapter 4 are particularly helpful). Label the map to show where all the key places are where the action takes place. (The Egmont paperback version illustrated by Ian Newsham has a very good map/drawing that could be used for less-able children to label.)**

**Throughout the story there are many examples of the contrast between the cold wintry scene outside and the warmth and light of the barn. Write a description that contrasts a cold wintry scene outside with a cosy interior.**

**Throughout the story are numerous references to light. Go through the book and make a note of all the phrases. For example: 'candle flame shadows on the ceiling' (p. 50); 'black shadows thrown by the candle stretching and leaping like the fingers of the night' (p. 123); 'sunlight like gold blazed through' (p. 107). Use them to make a poem.**

**The ending of the story is unclear. What do you think happens to Catherine, Tessa and Dan? Write your version of the ending.**

**What questions would you like to ask Berlie Doherty about the book?**

**Dear Author... write a letter to Berlie Doherty telling her what you thought about Children of Winter.**

**Storyboard: tell the plot of Children of Winter in five to seven pictures, with a few sentences as captions. The captions could be quotations from the book.**

**Design and make a bookmark for *Children of Winter*. Include three key quotations from the book as part of the design.**

**Who said it? In groups, pupils prepare a quiz, selecting ten quotations from the book. They should be chosen to reveal character or to relate to a key incident.**

**I'd like to ask... what comments or suggestions would pupils like to make to particular characters about their past or future actions?**

**Acknowledgements:  
David Higham Associates Ltd**

**1: The old cruck barn***Chapter 1 (pp. 9-22)***Synopsis:**

The story starts in the present, with the three children (Catherine, Patsy and Andrew) setting out for a walk across the Derbyshire moors to visit their gran. During a rainstorm they get separated and seek shelter in an old cruck barn. They are transported back in time to 1665, when they become Catherine, Tessa and Dan Tebbutt, who are sheltering from far more than a rainstorm.

**Comprehension:**

Where is Catherine travelling to and from?

How does the family become separated?

Where do the children shelter? What is it like?

What are the present day names of the children? What do their names become in the game?

Why do you think Catherine's name does not change?

What two important facts do we learn about Catherine's and Patsy/Tessa's personalities?

What do you think is happening to Catherine? What does she think is happening?

**Activities:**

Think about episode 1 and use Chapter 1 to help you make a list of all the clues that indicate a link with Catherine's past. To what questions arising out of this programme are you hoping to find the answers?

**Extract 1 for close reading:****Objectives:**

- To investigate how settings and characters are built up from small details, and how the reader responds to them (Y4 T1 1)
- To analyse the features of a good opening and compare a number of story openings (Y5 T1 1)
- To articulate personal responses to literature, identifying why and how a text affects the reader (Y6 T1 3)
- To analyse the success of texts and writers in evoking particular responses in the reader (e.g. where suspense is well built) (Y6 T2 8)

## 2. Alone

*Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 23-36)*

### **Synopsis:**

The children have been transported back 300 years to 1665. They have been left in an old barn away from the village to protect them from the plague. They must stay there and not let anyone in until a message comes to tell them it is safe. Catherine realises this may not be for a long time.

### **Comprehension:**

What signals does the writer give us to tell us that the story is now in the past? Why do the children think they have been sent to the barn? What does their mother tell them?

What time of year is it? What is the weather like?

Why doesn't Catherine's mum want her to wake Dan?

What is it like inside the barn

Why must the children burn the blanket?

### **Activities:**

Why do you think the writer chose to use flashback rather than set the story in the past to begin with?

Discuss the difficulties and responsibilities they will have to face: separation from parents, temptation to return home, problems of surviving winter, getting ill, looking after each other. Can you think of any more?

How would you cope if you had to leave home? What would you want to take with you to help you survive? What would you miss most?

Imagine you are Catherine's mother and write an entry in her diary describing her visit to the children.

### **Extract 2 for close reading:**

Objectives:

To investigate how settings and characters are built up from small details, and how the reader responds to them (Y4 T1 1)

To understand how the use of expressive and descriptive language can, for example, create moods, arouse expectations, build tension and describe attitudes or emotions (Y4 T2 4)

To understand the use of figurative language in poetry and prose, locate use of simile (Y4 T2 5)

### 3: Making a home

#### *Chapter 4 (pp. 38-49)*

**Synopsis:**

Catherine has promised her mother that she will keep Tessa and Dan safe in the old barn and will let nobody in. The children settle down to their new life and make the barn into a home.

**Comprehension:**

What does Dan find? Why is this useful to the children?

Why do the girls sort out the apples?

As she does the chores, what memories do they bring back to Catherine?

How does Catherine feel when Tessa and Dan bring the log? Why do you think she feels like that?

What does it tell us about the difference between the children and their attitude to what is happening to them?

What must they not do on the thinking-log?

What advice did their mother give them about coping?

Why were they reluctant to open the bundle?

Why does Catherine cry when they burn the blanket?

How does Dan cheer her up?

**Activities:****THE BARE NECESSITIES OF LIFE**

The children have some of the provisions they will need, but they also have to find other food to supplement their supplies. Give examples of food that they find for themselves. You can add to this list as the story develops.

Make a list of all the necessities that they have or find. Put them in order of priority.

Can you think of any other things that would have been useful?

Why are the candles so important?

Although Dan is the youngest, he proves very resourceful. Give at least two examples of things that he does in this episode that are helpful. What does it tell us about the kind of boy he is?

The bruised apples remind Catherine of the people diseased with the plague.

What do the apples make Tessa think of? What is the difference in their attitudes? Why do you think this might be?

*'There was precious little to remind them of home.* How did the things inside gradually remind them of home? Write a description of something that would remind you of your family and home. Do you think present-day children would be able to cope as well as Catherine, Tessa and Dan?

**Extract 3 for close reading:****Objectives:**

To identify social, moral or cultural issues in stories, such as the dilemmas faced by characters (Y 4 T3 1)

To investigate how characters are presented, referring to text (Y5 T1 3)

To understand how the use of expressive and descriptive language can, for example, create moods, arouse expectations, build tension and describe attitudes or emotions (Y4 T2 4)

To understand the use of figurative language in poetry and prose, locate use of simile (Y4 T2 5)

**4: Ghost**

*Chapter 5 and beginning of Chapter 6 (pp. 50-61)*

**Synopsis:**

Catherine, Tessa and Dan are settling down to their life in the barn. Most of the time they are too busy to worry, although Catherine is still feeling the weight of the responsibility. They have a scare when they think there are rats in the barn. At the end of the episode Dan notices that only seven of the village's chimneys are smoking.

**Comprehension:**

Why does Catherine snap at Tessa when she asks about the future?

What does Dan think the mysterious noise is?

Why are the girls more scared than him when they think it is rats?

What does it turn out to be?

Why does the writer use humour in this episode?

What do they do as a result of the scare?

What wild food does Dan find?

Why does Dan go down near to the river?

What does he see?

What is the significance of this?

**Activities:**

*'And it would stop that new fear, perhaps. Facing the fear. That was something new to think about, too.'* What does this mean? What is Catherine afraid of? She comforts herself and the others by thinking of what their mother would say.

What things do they think their mother would have said?

Write a description of a day in the life of one of the children. If you choose Dan, remember to include his wanderings in the surrounding area and the food he finds. If you choose Tessa, include the thoughts and feelings she has when she milks Cloudy. If you choose Catherine, think about the responsibility that she carries and worries about.

**Extract 4 for close reading:****Objectives:**

To investigate how settings and characters are built up from small details, and how the reader responds to them (Y4 T1 1)

**5: A gift from home***Most of Chapter 6 (pp. 62-71)***Synopsis:**

Catherine and Tessa go down to the river to see how many chimneys are smoking, but they cannot work out if one of the chimneys is their own home. Catherine spots a bundle right on the edge of the river. To their disappointment the bundle contains only eggs. Catherine is overwhelmed with tiredness and persuades Tessa to go back to the barn for the candle so they can cook the eggs at the river, near home. While Tessa is gone and Catherine is asleep their mother comes to the edge of the river to look longingly at her daughter – although she dare not come close. When she hears the other children coming she hides from view. The children build a fire and cook the eggs. They do not know they are being watched by two women: their mother and Maggie Hoggs – a villager crazed with grief, having lost all six of her children to the plague. She sets out to wade across the river to the children. Their mother comes out of hiding and she too wades into the river to try to stop Maggie Hoggs reaching them.

**Comprehension:**

Why do the girls go down to the river? What is the significance of smoking chimneys? What do they fear may have happened?

What did Catherine fear would have prevented her father from sending them a message?

Why does Tessa shout at Catherine?

What made Tessa change her mind?

Why is Catherine so tired? Why does she want to cook the eggs by the river?

Which two women are watching the children?

What was the children's reaction to Maggie Hoggs's behaviour?

How do you think they felt as they ran away?

**Activities:**

Until now, the story has focussed on the children and their life in the barn. They have kept away from the river and the village as they were told. This episode shifts the action and the focus. Why does the writer do that? What effect does this have on the characters and the development of the story? How does the reader react?

This episode also shifts the viewpoint. Until now, we have seen the action through Catherine's eyes, from her point of view. Here we see Catherine through Tessa's eyes. What does Tessa notice that she has not seen before? How does this affect her? Write an account of the dream that Catherine might have had as she lay sleeping by the river. Make a list of Tessa's thoughts as she goes all the way back to the barn.

**Extract 5 for close reading:****Objectives:**

To explore narrative order - identify and map out the main stages of the story: introductions, build-ups, climaxes, conflicts, resolutions (Y 4 T1 4)

To understand how settings influence events and incidents in stories and how they affect characters' behaviour (Y4 T2 2)

To identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects the reader's response (Y5 T3 2)

**6: Theft at dawn**

*end of Chapter 6, Chapter 7-8 (pp. 70-80)*

**Synopsis:**

The children's mother rescues them from Maggie Hoggs and the children return to the barn very frightened by the episode. They sleep badly and long for home and their mother. The following morning the weather reflects their mood: winter has truly arrived. It is bitterly cold and the trickle stream is frozen. Catherine decides to go back to the river to collect the remainder of the eggs, but she discovers they have all been smashed. Catherine runs across the river and steals two hens. The children are feeling the cold and Dan finds some sheepskins in the barn. They use them to make clothes. The snow comes and with it the opportunity for some much needed fun.

**Comprehension:**

What effect has the scene at the river had on the children?

What has happened to the weather? How does this affect the children at the beginning of the programme?

There are two reasons why Catherine goes back to the river. What are they?

What has happened to the eggs? Who do you think was responsible?

What does Catherine not do in her anger and what does she go on to do?

What were the dangers in what she did?

What does Dan find? Who do they belong to? What do the children do with them?

What effect does the snow have on the children? Why doesn't Catherine join in to begin with?

**Activities:**

Draw a graph from low to high to show how the children's moods alter in this programme.

The weather is important in this book and the author uses it to achieve a number of things: to provide a sense of time passing, to develop the plot by making life more difficult and challenging for the characters and to symbolise the children's moods. Find examples from the text to demonstrate these different uses in this programme and others.

In groups of three, improvise the scene when Catherine returns to the barn and tells Tessa and Dan the story of stealing the hens. Write the dialogue out as a script and perform it to the rest of the class.

Write a detailed description of the snow from either Tessa or Dan's point of view, bringing out their feelings about it.

**Extract 6 for close reading:****Objectives:**

To compare and evaluate a novel or play in print and the film/TV version (e.g. treatment of the plot and characters, the differences in the two forms) (Y6 T1 1)

This activity is based on comparing the text in the book with the script for the radio recording. This could also be done with other episodes.

**7: A meeting in the woods**

*Chapter 8 and beginning of Chapter 9 (pp. 80-89)*

**Synopsis:**

Wandering in the woods Tessa meets Dick Mossop - a villager and an old friend of Catherine's - who is out snaring rabbits. Dick hardly recognises her and she explains where they are living. He tells her what is going on in the village, although he has no news of her family. He shows her how to skin and gut a rabbit and lets her take one. He also promises to leave a message for her parents and to bring a reply – but she never sees him again.

**Comprehension:**

Who or what did you think Tessa was going to meet in the woods?

What is the first thing that Tessa finds? What is her reaction to it? What do you think Dan's reaction would have been?

What does Tessa do when she hears the whistling? Why?

Who does Tessa meet? Was he a threat to Tessa? How?

What does he see when he looks at Tessa? Why doesn't he recognise her? What did he think had happened to her and her brother and sister?

What does Tessa say when he asks her if she is afraid?

What does Dick tell Tessa about conditions in the village?

When Tessa first refuses the rabbit, what is his response? Why does he feel like that? Why does he change his mind?

Why can he not give her any news about her family?

What message does Tessa ask Dick to take to her parents? Does this seem an odd message to send? Why do you think she sent that message?

What do you think happened to Dick Mossop?

How does the closing scene of this episode make you feel?

**Activities:**

This is a very important episode in the development of character and story.

Make a list of all the things that you learn, including what you learn about Tessa.

How does the writer use this scene to add to the suspense?

*'Dick watched her go, and then went back down to the village, wondering how he was going to tell his mother that he had only one rabbit for them instead of two.'*

Imagine that you are Dick and write or tell what you said to your mother when you got home.

In Programme 4, Catherine talks about 'facing the fear'. Make a list of the things that have frightened Tessa and compare them with a list of the things that frighten Catherine. What things does Catherine's mother say will frighten them? (Programme 4)

**Extract 7 for close reading:**

Objectives:

To explore narrative order: identify and map out the main stages of the story: introductions, build-ups, climaxes, conflicts, resolutions (Y 4 T1 4)

To identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects the reader's response (Y5 T3 2)

To change a point of view (e.g. tell an incident or describe a situation from the point of view of another character or perspective) (Y5 T3 3)



**8: The end of the dancing**

*the remainder of Chapter 9 (pp. 88-100)*

**Synopsis:**

The children are warmed and cheered by the rabbit stew they make, although it brings back strong memories of home and their previous life, especially for Catherine. They entertain themselves in the barn with dancing and music and so, at first, they do not hear the knocking at the barn door. It is Clem, the shepherd, who has come to seek shelter in his barn because he is ill. Tessa and Dan rush to let him in, not realising the danger. Catherine is torn between helping Clem and protecting herself and the others. When Clem tells them that he has been to the village her worst fears are confirmed. The one thing that she and her mother have struggled to prevent may have finally happened – the plague may have come from the village to the barn.

**Comprehension:**

What memories does the mention of Dick Mossop bring to Catherine?  
Why does Catherine offer to deal with the rabbit? Why in the end can't she?  
What cheers up Catherine?  
What does Tessa do to send Dan off to sleep? What does this tell us about Tessa?  
Who do the children think is knocking at the door?  
Why do Tessa and Dan not understand the danger? What does that tell us about them?  
What is Catherine's dilemma?  
What does Clem tell them about his visit to the village?  
What had Clem done by coming to the barn? What do you think is going to happen to Clem and the children?

**Activities:**

Write the diary entry that Catherine might have written after the dance with Dick Mossop.  
Write a description of Tessa and the singing and dancing from Dan's point of view.  
The children are faced with a moral dilemma. Do they help Clem and risk themselves? Or do they leave Clem to suffer? Decide what you think and write down the arguments to support your view.  
Think about what the opposing views might be. Have a class discussion about it. Do other people's different views make you change your mind?  
Work out a plan for how the children could help Clem and keep themselves safe.

**Extract 8 for close reading:****Objectives:**

To understand how the use of expressive and descriptive language can, for example, create moods, arouse expectations, build tension, describe attitudes or emotions (Y4 T2 4)  
To understand the use of figurative language in poetry and prose, locate use of simile (Y4 T2 5)  
To take account of viewpoint in a novel through, for example, identifying the narrator, explaining how this influences the reader's view of events, explaining how events might look from a different point of view (Y6 T1 2)

**9: Another mouth to feed***Chapter 10 (pp. 101-12)***Synopsis:**

Dan comes up with a plan to help Clem while still protecting Catherine, Tessa and himself. They decide to put Clem in the pen and bring the animals into the barn. They clean out the pen, build a fire in it and give Clem sacking and a blanket. Clem's illness comes and goes. The children continue to worry while looking after him as best they can. The weather has been changing and the stream thaws. The girls go for a walk, feeling encouraged by the hint of spring in the air and see plenty of smoke coming from the chimneys in the village. But while they are gone Clem's illness gets worse...and Dan goes into the pen to help him.

**Comprehension**

What is the plan that Dan comes up with?

How is Clem?

What is happening to the weather? What is the sign that will tell them that the year has turned?

What does Tessa think Clem needs? Why can't they give it to him?

What are the things the girls notice on their walk? What do you think the smoke from the village means?

Why does Dan go to Clem's help? What does Clem say to Dan?

What effect does this have on Dan? Does he realise the danger in which he has put himself?

What do you think is going to happen to Clem?

What do you think is going to happen to Dan?

**Activities:**

The three children all respond differently to their circumstances, depending on their personality, age and gender. Catherine, as the eldest, has all the responsibility. She is thoughtful and imaginative. She has also helped her mother in the house and knows how to do domestic jobs. Tessa is lively and cheerful. She helps the children to keep up their spirits. Dan, although the youngest, is very practical and useful and finds food for them.

Referring back to previous episodes, find evidence of the children's different contributions to their life in the barn. How important do you think these things are to the children's survival?

Write Clem's account of either:

- his arrival at the barn and what he found there
- how the children helped him
- the scene where Dan goes into the pen to help him.

**Extract 9 for close reading:**

Objectives:

To identify the main characteristics of the key characters, drawing on the text to justify views and using the information to predict actions (Y4 T1 2)

To explore narrative order (Y4 T1 4)

To identify social, moral or cultural issues in stories (e.g. the dilemmas faced by characters) (Y4 T3 1)

**10: Coming back**

*Chapters 11 and 12 (pp. 113-28)*

**Synopsis:**

The smoke seen by the girls was coming from a big bonfire in the village, made by the villagers who are burning all of their possessions. The girls seek shelter from the rain in the barn, where Dan is asleep. In their haste they forget to bring in Cloudy – their cow- and also the hens. The following morning Tessa discovers that Cloudy has gone and Catherine discovers that Clem has gone too. She also finds Dan's shirt in the pen. The girls question Dan and realise what he has done. He is feeling ill and gradually worsens. The girls try to comfort Dan but Catherine is overwhelmed with dark thoughts. She tries to keep busy and positive.

In the morning they wake to discover that their candle has gone out. Before they can despair there is a knocking at the door and a voice shouts: 'The plague is over!' As the shutters open the children are transported back into the present and their parents are waiting to greet them.

**Comprehension:**

Why are the villagers burning their belongings? What is the significance of the fact that they seek shelter in each other's houses?  
Why did the girls forget to fetch in Cloudy and the hens?  
Where do they go? What do you think the writer is trying to signal to the reader?  
How does Tessa feel when she discovers that Cloudy has gone?  
Who does Catherine discover has gone? What else does she find?  
What is her reaction?  
How does Tessa react?  
What is the weather doing?  
What does Catherine think is going to happen to Dan? How does she try to stop herself thinking dark thoughts? What thoughts comfort her?  
What does Tessa do?  
What is the significance of the candle going out? What do you think has happened?  
How do you explain the children's clothes and the father's reference to the old fellow?  
What do you think happens to Catherine, Tessa and Dan Tebbutt?

**Activities:**

Make a list of the ways in which the writer builds the suspense in this episode.  
What do you think of the ending of the story? Are there any unanswered questions?  
Which is your favourite part of the story? Why?  
Who is the most important character in the story? Why?  
Make a character profile for one of the characters, using references from the book to show what they're like. Think about the character's actions.  
Choose another novel by Berlie Doherty and compare and contrast the story.

**Extract for close reading:****Objectives:**

- To investigate how settings and characters are built up from small details, and how the reader responds to them (Y4 TI 1)
- To understand how the use of expressive and descriptive language can, for example, create moods, arouse expectations, build tension, describe attitudes or emotions (Y4 T2 4)
- To understand the use of figurative language in poetry and prose, locate use of simile (Y4 T2 5)
- To analyse the success of texts and writers in evoking particular responses in the reader (e.g. where suspense is well built) (Y6 T2 8)

**Extract 1: The old cruck barn (page 9)**

It seemed to Catherine that from the moment they set out on their journey she knew that it was going to be a very special one. The bus climbed slowly away from Sheffield and up into the hills of Derbyshire, stopping here and there to let on hikers and villagers and people from remote farms, and every time it lurched forward again on its familiar journey she felt a strange thrill of excitement and dread.

She pressed her face against the cold glass and stared out at the green valley now lying far below, at the little clusters of grey buildings that showed only by their smoking chimneys that people lived in them. What was it like, before the roads were built? People must have spent weeks and weeks in their own homes and fields, never seeing another soul...

**Questions about the text:**

1. Underline or make a list of all the clues that the writer uses to build suspense. How does it make you feel? Do you want to read on? Do you have any idea of what might happen?
2. Make a list of adverbs and adjectives that the writer uses to describe Catherine's journey. Descriptions appeal to our senses and enable us to build up a picture and a feeling. Which senses does the writer use here? How does she create contrast?
3. What impression do you get of Catherine? What clues can you find about the type of person she is?
4. Do you think that this a good opening to a story? Why? Compare it with other story openings by Berlie Doherty or other writers. List five elements that make a good opening.

**Extract 2: Alone (pages 28 - 30)**

The wind tossed her voice away from her so that even she couldn't hear it, and below her the great trees crashed their branches together in the storm's fury. The colours of autumn showed up in all their intensity in that strange wet light.

A few yards below her Catherine could see a bush with berries as bright as blood. She clambered down to it and snapped off one of the branches, then made her way slowly back to the barn. By the door there was a large boulder. She climbed up on to it and pushed the end of the branch as far as it would go into a crack between two of the small stones that made up part of the wall of the barn.

'There!' she said. 'Tha can keep away now evil spirits! We want none of thee here.'

The wind mocked her with its great roar so that even as she jumped down from the boulder the berries were torn from the branch to drop one by one to the ground. Maybe some berries still clung to the small twig that were cupped in the little hollow that she'd found for them. Catherine didn't have the heart to look. Rain spat from the dark sky.

Catherine was thankful for the lull that came as she opened the barn door and for the dry warmth of the place, and the kind light of the fluttering candle.

**Questions about the text**

1. How does the writer describe the weather so that it seems as if it is attacking Catherine personally? Look closely at the verbs she uses.
2. What does the writer mean when she says, 'The colours of autumn showed up in all their intensity in that strange wet light'?
3. What does it tell us about Catherine when she puts the branch in the wall of the barn? What is she trying to say?
4. What senses does the writer use to create a mood here? Look for sensory words in the text? Can you find the similie she uses?
5. Look at the adjectives and adverbs that the writer uses to describe the storm. Compare them with the words that she uses to describe inside the barn. How does she create a strong comparison?

**Extract 3: Making a home (page 49)**

Their fire was almost out now, just flakes of white ash with a red glow in the centre. They went back into the barn, which felt warm and welcoming after the chill that had crept up outside. Yet with the light from the one candle it had a sort of bedtime gloom that encouraged first Dan and then Tessa to snuggle their blankets round them in the straw.

Catherine sat on the thinking-log for a long time, watching the flame dance on the candle and the long shadows leap across the walls and the raftered ceiling of the barn. Yes, they had got through today all right, and they would get through tomorrow, and the next day and even the next. But what then? Could they ever think of the barn as their home? She thought of her mother, sorrowing and poised for leaving them so many hours ago in the field outside the barn, and she thought of the promise she had made to her to keep them all there till word came for them that it was safe to go back home.

'Please, God, help me to do that,' she prayed. 'Help me to keep my promise.'

**Questions about the text**

1. As the eldest, all the responsibility rests on Catherine. She has to honour the promise that she made to her mother. How does the author show us that Catherine is aware of her responsibilities and worries more than the others?
2. What kind of picture and atmosphere does the writer create for this scene?
3. How does she do this? Look at the descriptions and the contrasts.
4. What is the image of light that she uses?
5. What do we learn about Catherine from this extract?

**Extract 4: Ghost (page 57)**

There was plenty for them to do over the next few days. They lost count of the time, and some of the day itself. They ate when they were hungry, and once a day they lit a straw taper at their precious candle and used it to make a fire of twigs on the hearth they had fashioned. They cooked fat potatoes on it, which they ate sometimes with slices of salt beef, and sometimes with cheese. There was always milk for them, and water from the trickle stream where they washed their bodies and, sometimes, their clothes. But once the weather became too damp to dry things they stopped washing their clothes, and grew used to the smell. They stopped washing themselves too, except for their faces in the morning, and their hands when they were too mucky to eat with.

**Questions about the text**

1. What details does the writer give us to tell us about the children's daily lives? How are the children beginning to change?
2. Would you have liked to live in the barn?
3. Are there any parts of their lives that you find attractive? Are there any aspects that you think are awful?
4. Why do you think the writer tells us about the weather becoming damp? What effect will this have on the children and the story?



**Extract 5: A gift from home (page 65)**

Catherine sat down again. The emotions and the disappointments of the morning were more than she could take now. Why were there so many problems? Nothing was simple any more. If Mother and Father were here, they would think up the answers for her. She was tired of having to think of everything for herself. She didn't know if she could go on doing it for much longer.

What she did know was that she didn't want to go back up to the barn just yet. She wanted to stay down here as near as she dared to her own home, and to cook the eggs that her mother had sent for them.

The answer came to her all of a sudden.

'We can bring down the lantern from the barn, with the candle alight in it,' she said. 'Bring it carefully, so we don't lose the flame. We will light a fire with that.'

Tessa replied, 'But it will take hours for us to go all the way there, and to come all the way back down again.'

'Tessa! Please!'

Catherine wished she was Dan, six instead of thirteen. She wished Tessa was the oldest.

**Questions about the text**

1. This is a significant moment in the story and the development of Catherine's character. What do we learn about her in this scene?
2. What do we learn about Tessa? How are Catherine and Tessa different from each other?
3. How does this moment affect the story, the development of the plot?
4. Why is it important in what it tells the reader about Catherine?
5. How does this affect the reader?

**Extract 6: Theft at dawn (page 70)**

**'Don't touch her! Go away, children. Go!'**

**The children's mother ran to the very edge of the river and waded in after Maggie Hoggs, who was stumbling now in the strength of the current.**

**'Mother!' shouted Tessa.**

**'Go, children!' their Mother begged. 'This woman is mad with grief. She doesn't know what she's doing. She's lost all her children in the plague, God help her.'**

**'Let me touch them. Let me breathe on them the breath my children breathed on me!'**

**'I beg thee children, go! She will harm thee for sure in her madness!'**

**Questions about the text**

1. The radio version printed here is very short and dramatic. How did you feel when you heard it? Which part had the biggest impact on you?
2. Why do you think Berlie chose the words 'Let me breathe on them the breath my children breathed on me...' How do these words make you feel?
3. Make a list of the verbs used in the extract. What mood do they create?
4. Read the same extract in the book on pages 67-71. How does it compare?
5. List the changes between the two versions and give reasons for them.
6. The writer who abridged the book for radio chose to split this incident across two programmes. Why do you think he did that? What effect does it have on the listener?

**Extract 7: A meeting in the woods (pages 82 – 84)**

He stared at her, saw how she quivered, and how wide with fear her eyes were. He dropped his hands to his sides and squatted down again on his haunches, as though to show her that he meant her no harm.

'What's tha name, child?'

'Tessa Tebbutt. And I know thee. Dick Mossop, as made our carts.'

'Tess Tebbutt? Is that right?'

He looked in disbelief at her matted hair, her dress torn and undarned, the unwashed sheepskin round her back and on her feet; her face thin and pale and streaked with dirt.

'I wouldn't have known thee, Tess,' he said. 'But then I thought tha'd gone months since. Died. I thought all the Tebbutt children had died.'

'I'm with Catherine and Dan in the shepherd's barn,' said Tessa.

Dick whistled sharply, narrowing his eyes as though he still couldn't tell whether he really saw Tessa Tebbutt or not.

'In the top field barn, tha says? And wi'out tha mother and father?'

'My grandma was ill. They couldn't come with us. I haven't seen my mother since... before the snow. I haven't seen my father .. since... since...'

Tears blurted into her eyes as she sought in her confusion to remember how long ago it was that she last saw him.

'Since the day the wind blew.'

**Questions about the extract**

1. This extract is a very important part of the story.
2. Why is Tessa so afraid?
3. How does Tessa appear to Dick? What does he see? How does he react to her?
4. What effect does that have on the reader?
5. What are the images of weather Berlie uses?
6. How does the writer convey Tessa's sense of passing time?

**Extract 8: The end of the dancing (page 91)**

They stood round the fire to eat it, nursing the hot bowls of broth in their hands. The dark sky was spiked with stars. They could hear beasts howling miles away on the hills, in other valleys, but they weren't afraid of them. They could face anything now, Catherine thought, when the warmth of the meal crept through her body and filled her with well-being. Things would be all right. They would bide their time, and all would be well for them.

But they were tiny black figures on the huge whitened earth. The small fire soon burnt itself out. The meal was soon eaten. Then the noises of the night started up again to alarm them. Then, indeed, the little barn seemed a small place to shelter in.

**Questions about the text**

1. Look at the writer's use of words. What sensory words can you find that the writer uses?
2. Can you find the two powerful images the writer creates? Underline them.
3. What would the extract be like without them? What effect do they have on the reader?
4. How does the writer create contrast?
5. Notice the change of point of view between Catherine and the author?
6. Why do you think the writer puts her own view in here? What does she want us to think about the children and their situation?

**Extract 9: Another mouth to feed (pages 110-12)**

He stood watching the shepherd doubtfully. The man's skin gleamed with sweat. Dan edged the bowl to him but Clem didn't even see it.

It seemed to Dan the longest moment of his life, till he decided what he must do. He crept into the pen and sat down in the straw beside Clem. Then he took the bowl up, raised Clem's head into his lap, and moistened his dry lips with water.

Clem was calmer now, and seemed to be drifting off into a sleep. Dan settled him down into the straw and crawled out of the pen to fill up his bowl with fresh water. The rain soaked him before he reached the trickle stream.

By the time he reached the pen again his shirt was drenched. Clem was awake, staring at him with unseeing eyes.

'I'm as wet as a fish, Clem,' said Dan. 'But tha's hotter than fire, poor Clem.'

He stripped off his wet shirt and rolled it up, and then used it to wipe the sweat away from Clem's forehead and neck. He could see how comforting the cool cloth was to the man.

Clem drifted back to sleep, for just a few minutes, and when he woke up again his eyes were clear. He looked up at the boy for a long time, taking him in, taking in where he was, and what Dan was doing there with him.

'God bless thee for this,' he whispered.

'Are tha better?' Dan asked.

Clem closed his eyes as if to sleep again.

'Much better. But I must ask thee to go, Dan. Now. And never, ever, come in here to me again.'

**Questions about the text**

1. How does the writer describe Dan's response and the point at which he makes his decision?
2. Underline the verbs the writer uses. How do they help to create atmosphere?
3. The writer uses contrasts to build the picture. What are contrasting words/phrases can you find?
4. What does Clem think about what Dan has done?
5. Referring back to other parts of the story, list the reasons why Dan did what he did.
6. This scene is a very important part of the story. How does the writer create the atmosphere and tension? Why is it so important?

**Extract 10: Coming back (pages 122-3)**

So she placed the bowl on the ground, behind the table-stone, so only the yellow glow from the light could be seen. Huge shadows leapt like goblins across the ceiling as the draught from under the door made the flame flatten and twist. Dan hid his head in Tessa's side. She stroked his hair, and the low sound of her singing soon drifted him to sleep. Catherine stayed on the thinking-log, lost now for tasks, but afraid to go to sleep. How long would it be, she wondered, before the fever took over Dan's little body with its terrible strength? And then what? The sleep of peace that would take him away from them for ever?

She made herself think of spring, and collecting primroses from the woods to bring into the barn. She thought of finding mushrooms in the dewy grass, and cooking them on the fire before the sun was fully risen. And she thought of nesting swallows busy in the rafters of their barn; making their home there.

But it was hard to think these thoughts with the wind shrieking like a mad thing outside and the black shadows thrown by the candle stretching and leaping like the fingers of the night on the walls of the barn, and Dan shivering in his straw.

**Questions about the text**

1. Look at the words and phrases used by the writer. She uses adjectives, adverbs and similes to create a strong atmosphere. Make a list of the key words, phrases and similes.
2. The writer also uses contrast to great effect? What are the contrasts that she uses in this scene?
3. The weather has played an important part in the story and here again it is used to reflect Catherine's state of mind. How does the writer achieve this?

Three winters, three winters, three winters; they come The long winter and its children walk the world. We pathfinders, we wardens, we wraiths We children of the long winter. The vastness of the cold imposes itself on anyone caught within, but not us. Never us. Winter is the only home and mother we know. Life has taught us that; we live as wraiths do. Flickering shadows out on the ice.