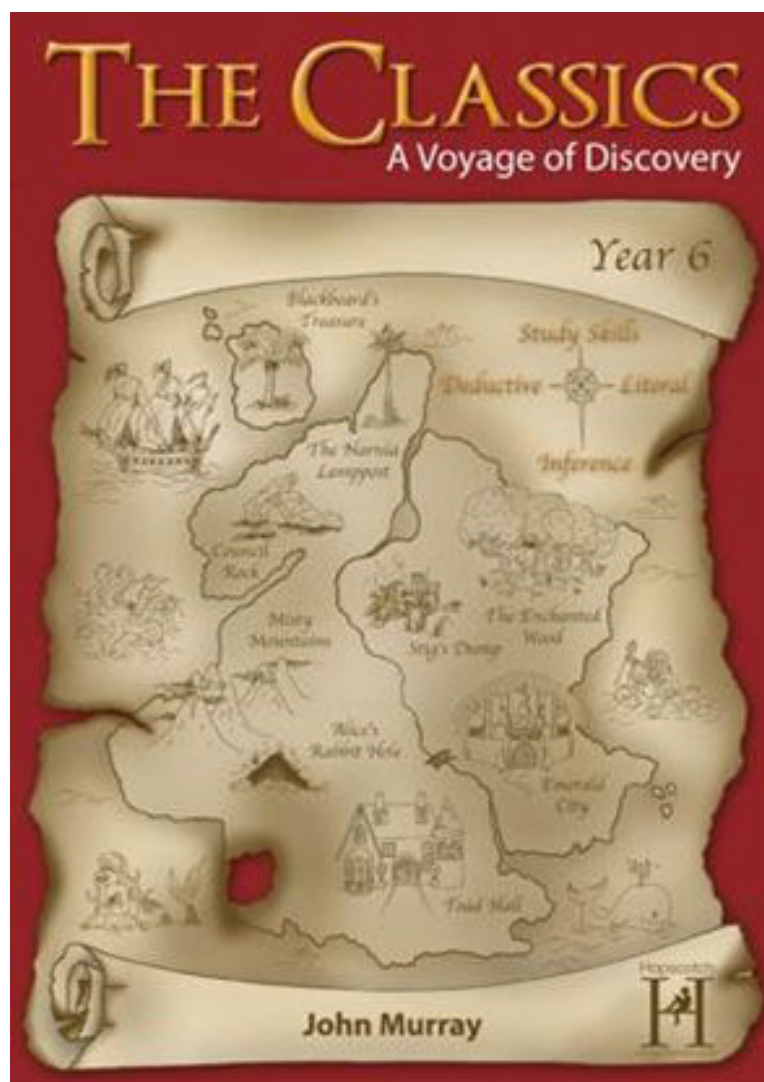


# The Classics

## Year 6



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# Street Child

Berlie Doherty



1993

## Literal Questions

- In which city is this story set? Find it on a map of Britain. [London]
- Where were runaway boys kept if they were caught?  
[In the shed in the yard]
- What creature does Jim imagine he is that would 'never be caught'?  
[A bird] Draw your answer.

## Deductive Questions

- Reread the first sentence. Highlight the word that tells us this story is not set in modern times. [Workhouse]
- Is this scene set during the day or at night? How do you know?  
[Night – 'the boys lay in their boxes pretending to be asleep', Old Marion needs a candle to light her path]
- On a scale of 1–10, how brutal a man do you think Mr Sissons is? [9–10]  
Why do you think this?  
[He beats defenceless children]

## Inferential Questions

- Is escape easy or difficult? Why do you think escapees who were caught were 'locked in the yard'? [Difficult – many were caught and placed in the shed as a public example and warning to others]
- The fact that Jim still dreams of escape and freedom tells us what about his character and the conditions he finds himself in?  
[He is determined enough to escape his terrible surroundings]
- How old do you think Old Marion is? Draw how you imagine her to look. Why have you drawn her like this?  
[Elderly – walks slowly and wheezes as she breathes]

## Essential Vocabulary

- Highlight the word 'fly' in paragraph one. Why do you think Berlie Doherty chose to use this verb here?  
[Suggests limitless freedom which is what Jim dreams of]
- Circle the fast word in paragraph two. [Pounced] What does the use of this word suggest about Mr Sissons?  
[He is like a cat preying on helpless mice-boys for fun, he is a dangerous man to be around]
- Find two words to describe how Old Marion walked 'her candle-path around the room' in paragraph 3. What do these two words suggest?  
[Crept – slow and quiet, wheezed – ill health, breathing problem]
- In the last paragraph, there are several words that are repeated. What are they?  
[run, run and long, long]  
Why do you think these words have been written twice?  
[To emphasise how desperate he is to escape]
- What word does Berlie Doherty choose to end this chapter with? [Home] Underline it and then draw your answer. Why do you think she did this?  
[Home is associated with warmth, love and security, all of which Jim dreams about and needs]

## Evaluative Questions

- How desperate do you think Jim is to escape the workhouse?
- Do you think he will escape? Why?
- Jim's story is a true one. Why do you think Berlie Doherty wanted to write about Jim's experiences in this way? Do you think this is a good thing or not? Why? Why not?

# Street Child

by Berlie Doherty

Jim had no idea how long he had been at the workhouse when he first thought of trying to escape. At first it seemed an impossible idea, as impossible as making the pump in the yard turn into a tree and blaze out with leaves and blossoms. He remembered the runaway boys locked up in the shed in the yard for everyone to see. Even so, he had to try. One day, he promised himself, he would go. He would watch out every moment, sharp as a bird, for a chance to fly. And when he did he would never be caught.

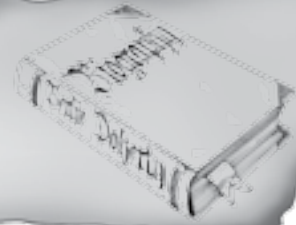
He was almost too afraid to allow himself to think about it, in case Mr Sissons pounced inside his thoughts and strapped him to a chair and beat him as he beat other reckless boys.

It was only at night that he let himself imagine escaping, and it was as though he was opening up a box of secret treasure in the dark. Old Marion crept and wheezed her candle-path around the room where the boys lay in their boxes pretending to sleep, and Jim let his thoughts wander then. He would escape. He would run and run through the streets of London until he was a long, long way from the workhouse. He would find a place that was safe. And he would call it home.



# BERLIE DOHERTY

[1943 – ]



## Learning Objective:

- To be able to use a range of reading strategies in order to answer a set of true or false questions

## Warm up Questions:

- How would you define what a biography is?
- Why might somebody want to write a biography?
- What sorts of things might a writer want to include in their biography?
- Why might they want to include these things?

## Answers:

- |   |                         |    |                         |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|----|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | <input type="radio"/> T | 2  | <input type="radio"/> T | 3 | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 4 | <input type="radio"/> T | 5  | <input type="radio"/> F | 6 | <input type="radio"/> F |
| 7 | <input type="radio"/> F | 8  | <input type="radio"/> T | 9 | <input type="radio"/> T |
|   |                         | 10 | <input type="radio"/> F |   |                         |

## Main Activity:

### Step 1: Preview the text

Read the biographical extract about the life of Berlie Doherty. Highlight any names, dates or events you think are important and might be asked about. Why do you think the writer has included this information? What questions do you think you will be asked? Why? Jot down some of your ideas on the back of your worksheet.



### Step 2: Do the activity

Read each of the statements regarding the extract you have just read. How do they compare to your own ideas? When you read each statement, underline the key words in the statement itself. Ask yourself: What is the statement really asking me? Where will I find this answer in the text? Are there any clues in the question that can help me find my answer more quickly? Should I skim or scan the text to find my answer? When you have done so, shade the correct True or False box on your worksheet. Use green if it is true and red if it is false.



### Step 3: Review the text

When you have finished compare your answers with a partner. Have they shaded in the same boxes as you? Why? Why not? Together, discuss why you agree or disagree with each other and find evidence in the text that supports your opinion. If you have time, write two more true or false questions of your own and give them to your partner to answer.

## Evaluative Questions:

*Reflect upon Berlie Doherty's life:*

- How influential do you think her father's encouragement to write to the *Liverpool Echo* as a child was when deciding to become a full-time writer as an adult in 1983?
- Why do you think the writer of this piece describes her decision to become a full time writer as 'brave'?
- Do you think the beautiful Peak District still influences her writing today? Why do you think this might be the case?

Website: [www.berliedoherty.com](http://www.berliedoherty.com)

# BERLIE DOHERTY

[1943 – ]



Encouraged from an early age to write for the children's page of the *Liverpool Echo*, Berlie Doherty has become one of Britain's most treasured children's authors, creating modern classics such as *Spellhorn* (1989) and *Street Child* (1993).

Like her father, himself an avid writer, Berlie would often be seen carrying a notebook around with her and spend many a day putting her ideas and imagination down on paper.

She loved reading too! However, popping down to a book shop to pick up the latest instalment from your favourite author was not an option for most children growing up in post-war Britain. Choice was limited, money was tight and there weren't really many authors who wrote specifically for children at this time.

Nevertheless, after flicking through the pages of Arthur Ransome's classic *Swallows and Amazons* (a book borrowed from her local library) it was as if the door to an exciting new world had been unlocked.

In 1983, having taught for two years in a large comprehensive and spent another two working for schools radio, Berlie made the brave decision to become a full-time writer. With three children to bring up alone it was not an easy decision to make, but make it she did and she has not looked back since.

She presently lives in Edale, Derbyshire, and the picturesque surroundings of the Peak District have, at times, influence her work. Two of the TV series she has written, *White Peak Farm* (1988) and *Children of Winter* (1994), are set in the countryside she loves. The fantasy picture book *Blue John* (2003) followed a captivating visit to the Blue John Cavern at Castleton. Even before moving there, "I used to find myself driving out into Derbyshire nearly every day, perhaps to walk or to find a lovely spot by a river to sit and write."

Let us hope that wherever she may be, she continues to bring children happiness through the pages of her books for many years to come.

Berlie Doherty was born in Liverpool.

True

False

She once worked as a teacher.

True

False

She decided to become a full time writer in 1993.

True

False

Her picture book *Blue John* was published in 2003.

True

False

Berlie Doherty wrote the book *Swallows and Amazons*.

True

False

As an adult, she has always lived in the Peak District in Derbyshire.

True

False

After WWII, there were lots of children's authors around.

True

False

She first borrowed *Swallows and Amazons* from a local library.

True

False