

Children of Winter by Berlie Doherty Group Reading Prompts

- Prior to reading
- What do you expect a book called 'The Children of Winter' to be about?
- Discuss the front cover. What type of story do you think this will be? What makes you think that?

- Chapter 1 The Old Cruck Barn
- How does Berlie Doherty capture the reader's interest in this opening chapter?
- Who do you think the main character/s will be?
- How do you think Catherine is feeling about her day out? What makes you think that?
- How does Berlie Doherty build suspense in this chapter? Identify and discuss the effect of some key words and phrases.
- What are the children's names? What names do they have in 'the game'? And why do you think Catherine's name remains the same?
- What questions do you have about what you have read so far?
- What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?
- Have you changed your mind about the type of story you think this will be?

Chapter 2 The First Day

- What emotions did you experience when you read this chapter?
- Reread the end of the last chapter and the beginning of chapter 2. How do you know that the story is now set in the past? What clues does Berlie Doherty use to help you understand what has happened?
- What do you notice about the way the children speak? Who does their speech differ from that used by the children in the present day?
- Why is this chapter called 'The First Day'?
- What are your first impressions of each of the children? How do you think they will behave in this story?
- What do you imagine it will be like for the three children living alone in the barn? If this happened to you, what would you like and what would you dislike about having to live like this?
- What difficulties do you think the children will have to overcome?

Chapter 3 – Alone

- How do you think the characters are feeling in this chapter? How do you imagine you would feel in this situation?
- '*Catherine suddenly guessed her mother's thoughts.*' What does Catherine imagine her mother is thinking?
- What does *stricken* mean? Use a dictionary to check your understanding? Were there any other unfamiliar words in this chapter?

Chapter 4 – Making a Home

- What do the apples remind Catherine and Tessa of?
- What differences are there in the way the children approach the chores and making a home?
- How do the children feel when they burn the blanket from home? Why?
- Why do you think the children have not grown potatoes before this year?
- Find examples in this chapter of the children thinking about home and their mother. What sorts of things remind them of home?

Chapter 5 – Ghost

- When he returns to the barn after the visiting the place by the trees, Doherty describes Dan as lying 'like a fish between the two girls'. How effective is this simile? Reread the paragraph when you have discussed your answer to this question.
- Why do you think Catherine tells Tessa 'No more questions about tomorrow and after that and that.'?
- Have you ever been in a really dark place? Perhaps you have had to use candles in a powercut? What was it like? Exchange 'stories' with a partner.
- What do the children learn from this 'ghost' episode?
- Do you think the children are coping on their own? Why do you think that?

Chapter 6 – A Gift from Home

- Why are the children so concerned about the number of smoking chimneys?
- How does Catherine solve the problem with the eggs? What does this episode show us about the development of her character?
- Why do you think Maggie Hogg reacts so angrily to the children? Do they respond as you would expect them to? Why? Why not?
- How well are the children coping with their situation?

Chapter 7 - Theft at Dawn

- What evidence is there of the onset of winter? What new problems does winter bring? What changes do you notice in the wintertime where you live?
- What do you think has happened to the eggs when Catherine returns to retrieve them?
- Why does Catherine steal Mistress Hogg's hens? In your view, do you think she was right to do this?

Chapter 8 – A Meeting in the Woods

- What effect does the changing weather have on the children's mood?
- Why doesn't Dick Mossop recognise Tess at first?
- What feelings does Dick experience when he meets Tess? Find evidence in the text to support your views. Why do you think he feels like that?

Chapter 9 – The End of Dancing

- Why does Catherine get upset at the beginning of this chapter? Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.
- How do the children keep themselves entertained during the long winter nights? How is this similar or different to the ways in which entertain yourself at home? Do you think you would enjoy nights in the old cruck barn?
- What do we learn about each of the children from the way they respond to Clem's arrival?
- What do you think will happen next? What would you do, if you were in this situation?

Chapter 10 – Another Mouth to Feed

- In what ways is Dan's solution to the problem with Clem similar or different to what you expected to happen next?
- Describe the changes in weather in this chapter. How do the children know that it is the beginning of spring?
- Do you think Dan does the right thing by helping Clem? Why do you think that?
- What do you imagine Clem thinks and feels about his situation? Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.

Chapter 11 – Candle-light Vigil

- Why are the villagers burning furniture and what is the significance of them sheltering from the rain in each other's houses?
- How does Berlie Doherty build suspense in this chapter?

- Why do you think the light goes out at the end of this chapter?
- Who do you think is calling Catherine's name?
- What do you think will happen next?

Chapter 12 – Coming Back

- Were there any surprises in this chapter?
- What do you think happened to the children?
- Now that you have finished reading, does this book remind you of any other books that you have read?

After reading

Discuss these questions with a partner and then write your final reflections on this book in your reading journal.

- What did you most enjoy about reading this book?
- Was there anything you found most difficult?
- What questions do you still have after reading?
- What have you learned from reading this book?