

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Street Child by Berlie Doherty (HarperCollins)

1. Explore it

Read the extract from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet:

Jim Jarvis hopped about on the edge of the road, his feet blue with cold. Passing carriages flung muddy snow up into his face and his eyes, and the swaying horses slithered and skidded as they were whipped on by their drivers. At last Jim saw his chance and made a dash for it through the traffic. The little shops in the dark street all glowed yellow with their hanging lamps, and Jim dodged from one light to the next until he came to the shop he was looking for. It was the meat pudding shop. Hungry boys and skinny dogs hovered round the doorway, watching for scraps. Jim pushed past them, his coin as hot as a piece of coal in his fist. He could hear his stomach gurgling as the rich smell of hot gravy met him.

Mrs Hodder was trying to sweep the soggy floor and sprinkle new straw down when Jim ran in. 'You can run right out again,' she shouted to him. 'If I'm not sick of little boys today!'

'But I've come to buy a pudding!' Jim told her. He danced up and down, opening and closing his fist so his coin winked at her like an eye.

She prised it out of his hand and bit it. 'Where did you find this, little shrimp?' she asked him. 'And stop your dancing! You're making me rock like a ship at sea!'

Jim hopped on to a dry patch of straw. 'Ma's purse. And she said there won't be no more, because that's, the last shilling we got, and I know that's true because I emptied it for her. So make it a good one Mrs Hodder. Make it big, and lots of gravy!'

He ran home with the pie clutched to his chest, warming him through its cloth wrapping. Some of the boys outside the shop tried to chase him, but he soon lost them in the dark alleys, his heart thudding in case they caught him and stole the pie.

If there are words you don't know or understand in this context, like shilling or pudding (not a dessert in this case) you could look them up in a dictionary, if you have one or use an online version, e.g., <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>.

What is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?

Think about how this story opening makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How? Think about how it is written. Do any parts of the extract really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like best? What do you like about them? Do they look or sound interesting? Do they help you make a picture in your mind?

Think about Jim. What do you think you know about him and the reasons he has gone out to buy the pie? What can you tell about his life from the words that you see? How can you tell? How would you describe him? How do you think Mrs Hodder treats Jim, and why do you think she behaves like this? What clues do you get to the time and place the story might be set?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, or ask someone to read it to you, or maybe record it for yourself so you can play it over again. After you have read the extract a few times, think about what you can see in your imagination – people, places, objects or events, whatever stood out most to you. Then take a pen or pencil and a bit of

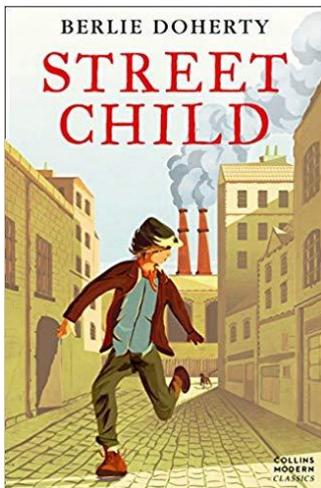
scrap paper. You can use the back of an old envelope, letter or cereal packet; whatever is to hand if you don't have paper. Draw what you see in your imagination; anything that captures the place and the mood of this story opening. Remember, everyone has their own ideas and imagines things their own way. This is a good thing!

Add to your illustration any words and phrases that have helped you make your picture, which might come from the passage or from your own imagination.

3. Talk about it

- Why do you think Jim's mother has sent him out to buy the pie? Who do you think will eat it?
- Jim himself has counted out his Ma's last coins to pay for the pie: do you think this is significant? Do you think it would be usual for him to look in his Ma's purse? Do you think Jim knows what the significance might be? What is the impact of the word 'last'? Why is this adjective important?
- What emotions do you think Jim might feel as he looks through his Ma's purse, as he asks for the pie, as he rushes it home?

4. Imagine it



The novel this extract comes from is called *Street Child*. From what you have read so far, and what you can now see on the cover, when do you think the book may be set? What gives you this idea?

What do you think a 'street child' might be? Does the cover give you any clues? What do you think life might be like for a street child? What might the challenges be? What might they need to think about, in order to survive?

The cover calls the book a 'modern classic' What do you think this description means? What do you think makes a book a 'classic', and what might make it a 'modern classic'? Can you think of other stories you have read or seen on TV or the cinema that can be called classics?

If you have books or access to the internet, you might wish to find out more about what life was like for poor children in Victorian times, when Jim lived.

5. Create it

It sounds as if Jim is being sent out to buy what might be the family's last good meal. Imagine that you have to choose the last good food you and your family are going to share for some time: what would you choose?

- Would it be a healthy balanced and filling meal or a treat? Would it be sweet or savoury?
- Who would you want to share it with? How would you make sure everyone invited had something they enjoyed?

You could talk with family and friends about your choices. Write out a menu for this final feast, describing each of the dishes in detail, and drafting an invitation to all the people you would like to eat this with you.