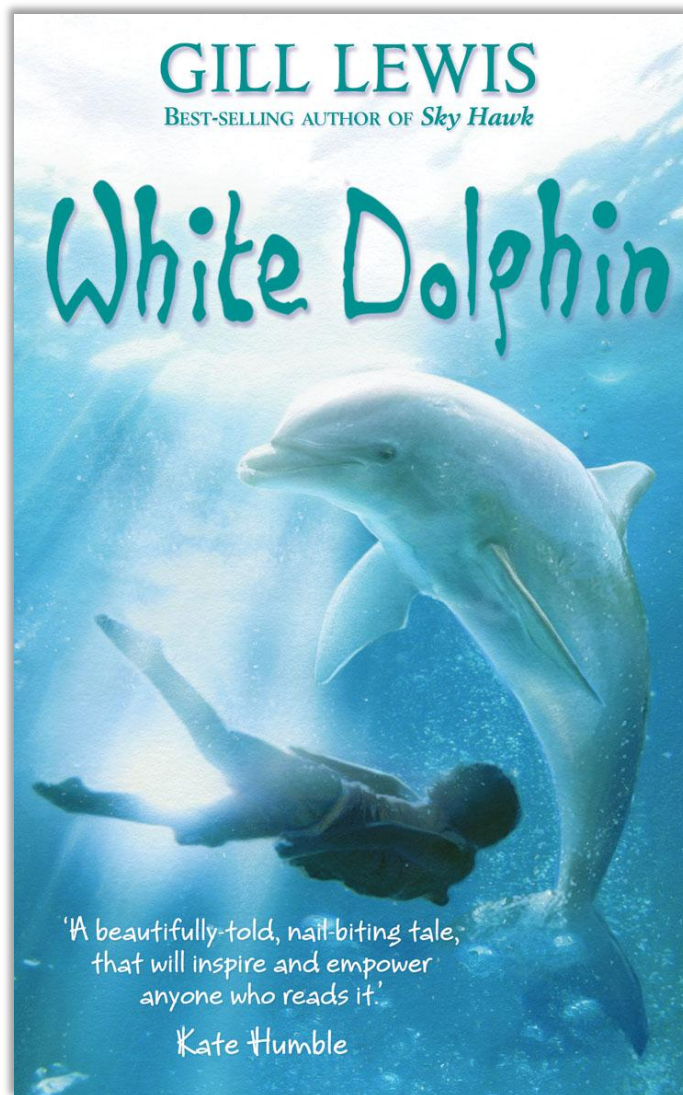


The World of White Dolphin

Ideas for exploring Gill Lewis's novel with pupils
in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 (P5, P6 and S1)



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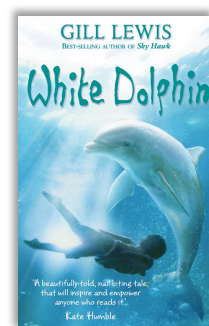
Introduction

Gill Lewis's second novel focuses on a child who is passionate about wildlife and the environment, and who is helped through emotional trauma by saving a particular wild creature. In this it is similar to her first novel, *Sky Hawk*, but the setting has shifted from the Scottish Highlands to Cornwall, where Gill Lewis explores an entire community, its tensions and divided loyalties, and its part in the story of an injured white dolphin calf.

Like *Sky Hawk*, *White Dolphin* is ideal as a class reader for upper primary or lower secondary pupils, as a text for a reading group, or the focus of a project for pupils transferring to secondary school. It encourages children to think about issues such as:

- Humans' relationship with the natural world and our responsibility to care for it.
- The choices that have to be made in towns where many people make their living from the sea.
- The challenges and benefits of living all year round in a place where people go on holiday.
- How sharing ideals with a lost loved one is a way of keeping them with us.
- How to accept when someone or something precious is finally lost.
- Our attitudes to disability and special educational needs.

To follow are ideas for using the book to spark research, creative arts, and discussion.



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Synopsis

Kara lives with her father Jim in a fishing village in Cornwall. Her mother, a marine biologist, disappeared a year ago on a dolphin-saving expedition to the Solomon Islands but Kara believes that she will return. This faith is strengthened by a rare sighting of a white dolphin calf, which she sees as a sign that her mum is still out there.

Kara and Jim have been taken in by Kara's aunt and uncle but money is tight so Jim is forced to put the family boat, named *Moana*, up for sale. Kara is very unhappy about this, as *Moana* is one of her last links to her missing mother.

Kara breaks the nose of the school bully, Jake, whose father, Dougie, owns the fishing trawlers that employ her uncle. Kara's mother had successfully campaigned for a ten-year dredging ban to conserve the local coral reef, which is about to expire. Dougie blames Kara's mother for the loss of his elder son, who drowned whilst fishing beyond the ban limit. Jake vows that his family will destroy Kara and her father, and soon afterwards Jim's lobster pots are sabotaged.

Kara meets a new boy at school, Felix, who has Cerebral Palsy. They do not hit it off and when Felix's father offers to buy Jim's boat, Kara is determined to put him off sailing so that she can keep *Moana*. Much to her surprise, Felix takes to sailing easily, finding that his mobility difficulties are lessened at sea. Kara is relieved, however, when his father decides not to buy *Moana*, opting instead for a more manageable dinghy that Felix can sail singlehanded.

Kara finds the white dolphin calf trapped in a fishing net, beached and in distress. With help from Felix, his father, and the marine rescue team, the calf is cared for in a tidal pool, but becomes separated from the mother dolphin, meaning that it might have to be put down as it cannot be returned to the wild alone. In a daring night dive, Kara finds the mother dolphin and leads it to the tidal pool.

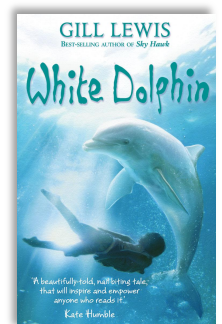
Meanwhile Kara is unable to find the password for her mother's dolphin-shaped memory stick, which she believes holds a crucial message.

Felix mobilizes support for a local fishermen's boycott of dredging, using the plight of the white dolphin to attract media attention. At a public debate, Dougie has almost swayed the crowd against the conservationists when Felix, who has found the password for the memory stick, delivers the campaigners' master stroke: Kara's mother's final documentary about the long-term ill effects of sea dredging.

Soon afterwards, the dolphin calf is returned to the sea with its mother and Felix shows Kara a photograph of her mother before her last dive. It is now almost certain that she died in a diving accident that was covered up.

Public opinion has turned against Dougie, but he persists in dredging the bay regardless and sacks Kara's uncle for refusing to join him. Kara discovers that Dougie has bought *Moana* for Jake to sail in the local regatta, and that the white dolphin's mother has been drowned in one of Dougie's nets.

The regatta is cancelled due to a predicted storm, but Jake and his friend Ethan insist on taking *Moana* out to sea. Felix and Kara follow in the dinghy and save Jake and Ethan when they run into trouble. Grateful not to lose his surviving son, Dougie promises to stop dredging and to research dolphin-friendly fishing.



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Themes for exploring *White Dolphin*

1. Behind the picture postcards: life in a tourist centre

Things to write/talk/think about:

How do the visitors to Kara's village affect the lives of the people who live there?

What difference do they make to, for example:

- Jobs?
- Housing?

Fishing is the main source of income for Kara's family and for many people in her village. How can they continue to make a living while ensuring they can make a living in the future?

Hold a debate on the same lines as the one held at Kara's school. What could you add to the arguments of:

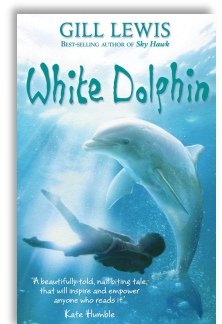
- Carl from the Marine Life Rescue Team?
- Dougie Evans?
- Kara, who asks: 'Will we still be fishing here in another hundred years?'

Think about where you live and what most people there do for a living, or used to do. What is the equivalent of the fish in your community? What is the environmental issue that would create the most concern? Set up a debate about it.

Think about where you enjoy going on holiday. Can you imagine what it would be like living there all year? Do you know anyone who does?

Create and display/share:

Use Gill Lewis's detailed descriptions to map Kara's village, the harbour and coastline, including all the landmarks mentioned in the novel.



2. Humans' bond with dolphins

Things to write/talk/think about:

Various characters in the book believe that humans and dolphins can communicate in different ways. Gather the evidence for this from statements made by:

- Kara.
- Kara's mother.
- Miss Penluna.
- Mrs Carter.
- Carl.

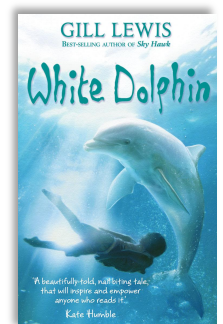
How do these individuals' views of dolphins differ?

Why is the white dolphin calf particularly special to Kara at this point in her life?

The white dolphin calf doesn't have a name until Kara's cousin Daisy names her Angel. Why do humans like to give animals names?

Create and display/share:

Dolphins appear in folk tales and legends of many cultures. Using reference books and the internet, collect examples with illustrations or illustrate them yourself.



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3. Getting the message across

Kara and Felix disagree about whether to focus their publicity campaign against dredging on Angel. Felix says: ‘What d’you think people want to read about, “Save the Sea Squirt” or “Save the Dolphin”?’

Things to write/talk/think about:

- Outline reasons for and against attracting more public attention to Angel.
- Why are some of the audience at the public meeting in Kara’s school more interested in Angel than in the facts about the coral reef?

For the reasons outlined in section 2, dolphins are appealing creatures to the public.

- What does it mean when tinned fish is advertised as “dolphin friendly”? Why has the manufacturer described it in this way?
- Which creatures that are less appealing might also need public support?

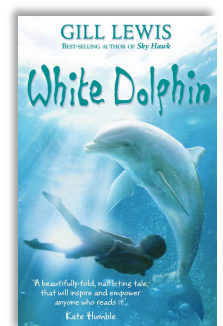
Create and display/share:

For example, the panda and the boa constrictor are both in danger of extinction.

- Which of them has the most attractive image?
- Why do you think this is?

Design/create an advertisement to campaign for support for the “least attractive” creature (depending on resources, this could be a poster, a web page, a PowerPoint presentation, a podcast, or a short film).

Collect existing campaign materials on the issues explored in the novel related to fish stocks and the dangers of net fishing. How might you adapt the materials to get the same message across to your school community?



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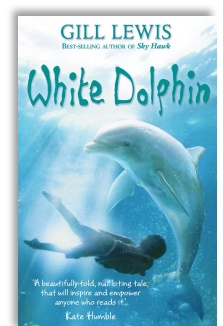
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4. Finding what was lost

Throughout the novel, Kara's mother is a presence although we do not meet her in person.

Things to write/talk/think about:

- What does Kara's behaviour in the opening chapters tell us about the effects of her mother's absence?
- What are the most important things in Kara's life and how are they threatened?
- Why does Kara approach Miss Penluna in an effort to make contact with her mother?
- What helps Kara to accept that her mother will not be returning?
- Who else in the novel is dealing with a loss and how does this affect their behaviour?



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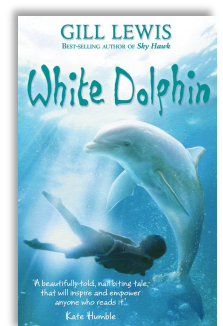
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5. Gifts and talents

Compare Kara and Felix's abilities. What are they good at and what do they struggle with?

Things to write/talk/think about:

- What does Kara say about her experience at school?
- Why might it be hard for her to concentrate on school work?
- Why does Felix find his life in Cornwall frustrating at first?
- What talents does Felix have that are useful to the campaign against dredging?
- How is he able to help Kara get news of her mother?
- What does Felix learn and achieve during his time in Cornwall?
- What does Kara learn and achieve?
- What is the most significant contribution they each make to the campaign?
- What special gifts does Miss Penluna have and how is she regarded by the village community as a result?



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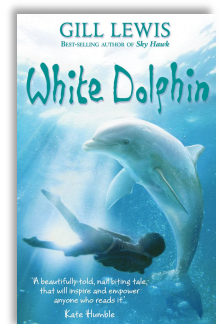
6. Attitudes to disability

Research the effects of Cerebral Palsy before attempting this section.

Things to write/talk/think about:

Which aspects of Felix's life does his condition affect and which does it not affect?

- Why is Felix angry when Daisy supports him against Jake and Ethan in the ice cream shop?
- What do we learn about why he has moved to Cornwall?
- What do we learn about his family life and his relationship with his parents? What is different about his relationship with his father and his mother?
- What is the most useful approach for Felix from people who want to understand or help him?



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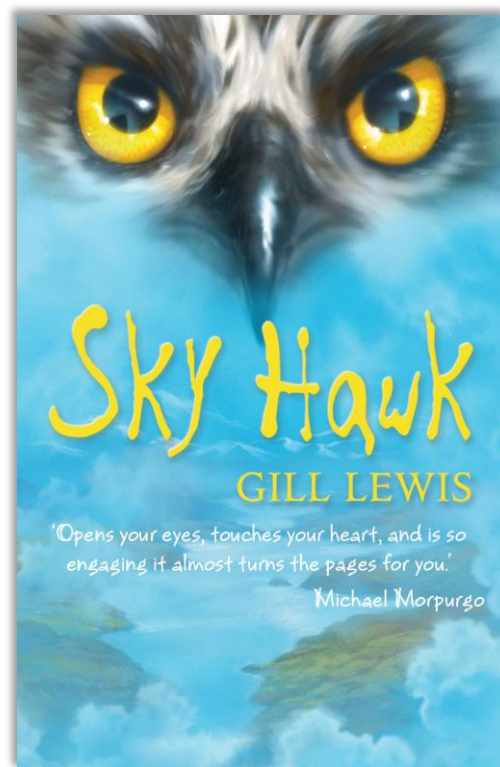
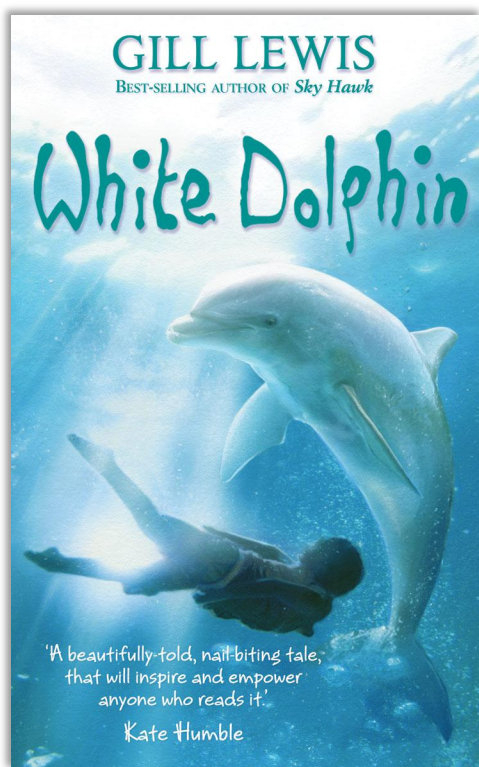
About the author

Gill Lewis spent much of her childhood in the garden where she ran a small zoo and a veterinary hospital for creepy-crawlies, mice, and birds. When she grew up she became a real vet and travelled from the Arctic to Africa in search of interesting animals and places. She worked in Cornwall for several years and spent many hours of her spare time in the cold Atlantic, learning how to fall off a surfboard.

Gill now writes books for children. Her debut novel, *Sky Hawk* was published to much critical acclaim and has been translated into twenty languages. The publishers of *Sky Hawk* generously sponsored a satellite-tagged osprey through the Highland Foundation for Wildlife, fulfilling Gill's dream that her writing could contribute directly to wildlife conservation.

She lives in the depths of Somerset with her husband and three children and writes from a tree house in the company of squirrels. She still loves to visit Cornwall, but prefers to take the bodyboard to tame the waves instead.

Visit www.gilllewis.com for more information about Gill.



***Sky Hawk* reading notes** are also available via the Oxford University Press website: www.oup.com/oxed/children/resources