

Philip Prowse

The author and his work



Philip Prowse is a teacher who loves writing. Philip's main career has been as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as a trainer of other EFL teachers, and as a writer of course materials for English language teaching (ELT).

Throughout his career, Philip has always believed that reading lots of story-length texts in English is one of the best ways for students to acquire vocabulary (to learn new words) and to increase their fluency (their ability to use these words easily and with confidence). Reading is one of the best ways to do this because it means the students take pleasure in learning rather than feeling that learning English is hard work and something that they have to do.

Because of his interest in reading, Philip has written – besides several important and well-known English Language courses – many stories for foreign learners to read. He has encouraged other teachers to write stories too.

Philip was born on June 9th, 1947, in Cornwall in the south-west of England. His mother was a

teacher and his father was a radio operator with the Royal Air Force. Philip studied English Literature at Cambridge University from 1965 to 1968. He was also one of the editors of the poetry magazine *Solstice*. After he received his degree from Cambridge, Philip started working for the British Council. He also got married. He had met his wife, Lena, a student from Sweden, at Cambridge. They were married in 1968.

The British Council is a British government organization. It is concerned with teaching people about the English language and about British culture. Philip's first job for the Council was in Birmingham, which is Britain's second largest city. Here he taught academic English to foreign students at the University of Birmingham. He also taught English Language to immigrants from the Indian sub-continent.

In 1969, the British Council sent Philip to Egypt, where he worked as an adviser in ELT at a centre for training teachers. He then went on to run a British Council centre in Coimbra in Portugal. Philip enjoyed teaching and teacher training in both countries, but he also enjoyed the challenge of learning about their different cultures.

After two years in Portugal, Philip and Lena moved back to England, where their daughter Morwenna was born. Philip spent a year completing an MA degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex. Then in 1974, the British Council sent him to Greece. In Athens, his job for the Council made him responsible for their ELT teacher training programme. He also taught at Athens University. It was in Greece that Philip and Lena's son, Martin, was born.

Philip's job soon changed again. This time, he and his family moved to Warsaw, to be the British Council's English Language Officer in Poland. After three very interesting years in Poland, where Philip learned a lot about the arts, especially opera and ballet, as well as language teaching, the Prowse family returned to England. Philip had begun to write, together with several colleagues, an important course which was titled *Main Course English*, and he needed more time to work on this. He resigned from the British Council and worked as a full-time writer for a year.

Philip's next teaching job was at Bell College in Saffron Walden, Essex. Here he taught Chinese postgraduate students and nurses from Namibia. Philip remained at Bell College until 1993, becoming Director of Studies and later Principal. During his time there, the college developed a large programme of short courses for overseas teachers of English, and Philip was very closely involved in this.

Since 1993, Philip has worked as a freelance writer and trainer. He contributes to MA courses at a number of universities. He teaches courses, mostly in Cambridge, where he lives with his family. He also travels widely, and regularly speaks and leads workshops at conferences all over the world.

Most of Philip's course materials have been co-written with his colleague, Judy Garton-Sprenger. Together they have written such important courses as *Shine*, *Wonderful World*, (with Mariela Belenda and José Luis Morales), and *Insight*. But apart from courses, Philip also writes graded readers for foreign learners. Philip's first reader of this kind, *Bristol Murder*, was written in Portugal, in 1972. John Milne, who created the famous series of Heinemann Guided Readers, asked Philip to try to write a story for the series. The book was a success and is still in print. It is now published by Macmillan.

The idea for the book came to Philip when he was thinking about cowboy stories. 'The hero of the story is a lorry driver,' he says. 'I thought that the lorry driver of today is a bit like the cowboys we know from Hollywood movies. He's a big, strong character who rides into town and puts right whatever is wrong.'

(For a list of Philip Prowse's readers which have been published by Macmillan, please see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)

Philip's next reader, also written in Portugal, was *The Woman Who Disappeared*. This time, the idea came from thinking about the private detective stories of Raymond Chandler and the movies which were made from them. Philip's hero is Lenny Samuel. Like Chandler's hero Philip Marlowe, Lenny is a private detective in California.

Over the following twenty-five years, Philip wrote four more stories about Lenny Samuel – *LA Detective*, *LA Raid*, *LA Winners*, and *LA Movie*. A different kind of story, also written for this series was *Death of a Soldier*. This was a story about the fighting in Northern Ireland and its effect on ordinary people's lives. Although this reader upset some people in Britain when it was first published, its story is relevant to any country where people fight each other because of their history and beliefs.

'Writing fiction is such fun,' says Philip. 'When I start, I never know where the story will take me. And it is wonderful to know that my books have been read by more than a million people, all over the world.'