

## A different kind of reader

### Antoinette Moses



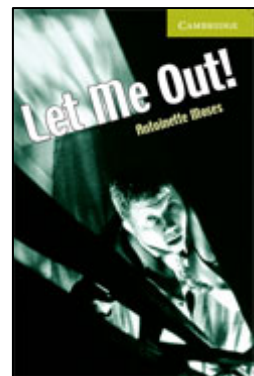
From time to time, over the past two years, I have put aside my novel and other works in progress to write short works of original fiction for the *Cambridge English Readers* series.

The aim of this series is to allow the learner to read a book quickly and with enjoyment. Vocabulary and grammar are simplified, but they are nonetheless subservient to the content of the books.

Readers such as these are used by students and teachers in the classroom – and outside it – for a variety of purposes. There are the obvious aims: familiarisation with the English language, learning vocabulary, and gaining awareness of English idiom and grammatical usage. There are also more subtle reasons: an enjoyable book will allow the learner to read more quickly without thinking too closely about what they are reading, and the learner will read beyond the level of what they are being taught and make intelligent guesses at meaning from context.

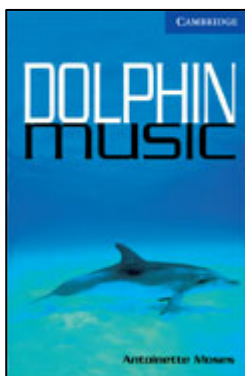
An important factor for me in writing these readers is that I may be helping to create a new generation of people who enjoy reading books, as well as helping learners to develop their English language skills. The ability to read an entire book encourages students greatly.

There are differences between writing readers and writing fiction for native speakers, but the creative process is much the same. Content should always precede linguistic considerations. All readers should reflect what students would want to read in their own language. The stories have to be 'page-turners'.



Plot and narrative drive are crucial. This is why genre fiction works so well for readers. Chandler's axiom 'If in doubt, have a man with a gun come in the door' is a useful principle. One reason I enjoy writing readers is it means that I can experiment with different genres in a way that I could never do in mainstream fiction. You can enjoy developing that plot you've hidden away in your desk drawer, or write the science fiction story that you jotted down, but thought you would never have time to write.

But readers are not just plots. As Geoff Dyer comments, 'No one reads Chandler for the plots – Chandler didn't write Chandlers for the plots... The genre's allure is stylistic.' The challenge in writing readers is to ensure that 'simplicity of the language' does not mean 'boring writing'. Style matters at any language level and should not be sacrificed in one's attempt to make the story intelligible. Character, atmosphere and imagery are all important. When students are struggling with a foreign language, they need to be involved with the characters and their world, or they will soon give up on them. Style helps to build the atmosphere.



I believe strongly that you must never write *down* to a language level, but write up to the level of the student. An elementary language level should not be equated with lack of intellectual maturity. It's not always easy. However, I have written a reader for beginners (with a restricted vocabulary of 400 words) about a serial killer and still managed to include a bit of metaphysical speculation! The language I wrote was simple, but it was structured to fit the character.

Of course, there are classroom restrictions with readers, such as avoiding taboo subjects. However, the pleasure of writing these short fictions far outweighs any problems in their construction. In addition to this, there is the pleasure of receiving feedback from teachers and students who have enjoyed your books.

Writing readers is, indeed, a rewarding occupation that I would recommend to any writer.

Based on an article originally published in [Spiked Magazine](#)

