



## Anne Collins

**Anne Collins has written over thirteen Macmillan Readers titles. We asked her about her life, and her thoughts and processes when writing Graded Readers.**

**I heard you live in the Middle East now. Why do you live there? What are you engaged in?**

I work in Qatar, working for the British Council.

**How many books and what kind of books have you written?**

I've written about fifty Graded Readers. Some are adaptations of classics or movies, some are plays, some are non-fiction and some are my own original stories.

**What Graded Readers have you written for Macmillan Education?**

I've written many Readers for Macmillan over the years – I can't remember them all (please check the catalogue!) Some recent ones are *Goldfinger*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Heidi* and *Touching the Void*.

**You have written many retold Graded Readers. What is the most important thing when you start to retell a story?**

Before you start to retell a story, the most important thing is to make sure you understand the original story very very well – you have to get right 'under the skin' of the original story. Above all, you must aim to make your Reader coherent and readable.

**Would you please explain in detail the procedures of retelling a story?**

When you retell a story, first you have to decide what characters or events in the original story are not essential and so can be left out – i.e. which ones don't contribute to the main plot or move the action forward. You also have to focus carefully on the language – especially at the lower levels, language should be simple but never stilted.

**Do you have your own tips on retelling a story and could you tell them to us?**

Apart from being very familiar with the original story, planning is essential. It's very important to make a written plan of your Reader chapter by chapter. The chapters in a Graded Reader will probably not be the

same as in the original because you have to compress events into one chapter which in the original might take two or three. Then, once you start writing, you can follow your plan like a map.

**Do you think there are any differences between a classic novel's retelling and a movie's retelling? If you feel there are differences between them, what are they?**

I think the main difference between the retelling of a classic novel and a movie is that the adaptation of a classic requires a dramatic shortening of the original story. There will probably be a considerable amount of background description of scenery which can be left out in a Graded Reader. Also in a movie there is likely to be far more dialogue which will appear in the Reader too.

**When do you consider the levels of vocabulary and grammar? After you finish the first draft or do you consider them from the beginning?**

I consider vocabulary levels from the beginning but grammar after the first draft. It's quite easy to go back and simplify grammatical structures if necessary.

**Which is more important, creating a faithful adaptation of the original or shaping an interesting story in its own right?**

An adaptation is a book in its own right which should be entertaining, interesting, enjoyable and perhaps thought-provoking too. If someone enjoys the Reader, it doesn't necessarily mean they will like the original.

**What do you think is the ideal retold Graded Reader?**

I think the ideal retold Graded Readers are the ones which best retain the spirit and atmosphere of the original stories.

**What do you think are the best retold Graded readers you have written?**

The best retold Graded Readers I have written are probably the ones with strong but simple story lines – for example, *The Mask of Zorro* and *The Perfect Storm*. But Readers like *The Princess Diaries* are great fun to work on because the original stories were so humorous and the main character, Mia, so appealing. I like the stories where I can really relate to the characters, like the Indian lady shop-keeper in *The Mistress of Spices*, or the young mountaineers in *Touching the Void*.

**What is the work that you made every effort for and why?**

The Graded Reader which was most difficult for me was not a Macmillan Reader, but a Penguin Reader called *British Life* because it needed such a lot of research. In a different way, *Touching the Void*, the Reader I've most recently adapted for Macmillan, was quite challenging. You have to know a little about the basics of mountaineering in order to fully understand the story, and as I didn't, it took me a bit of time to read up about it. But it's a great human interest story too, and this motivated me to keep going.

**What kind of genre do you find easy to retell and why? What kind of genre do you find difficult to retell and why?**

I find all genres of story easy to retell except science fiction because I'm not very interested in it.

**What kind of writers' work do you find easy to retell and why?**

If the original writer has the ability to tell a good story and keep their readers interested and entertained, their work will be easy to adapt – it really doesn't matter what kind of work it is – whether a classic story or something more modern.

**What Graded Reader work impressed you most and why?**

The Graded Readers which have most impressed me are the ones which tell an original story. Well, like *The Black Cat* which I thought was excellent.

**Do you have any writers or works that you want to retell and why?**

I would like to do an adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* – now that would be a real challenge! I'm also interested in adapting stories by foreign writers – e.g. Japanese or Arabic authors.

**What kinds of work are you planning to do in the future?**

Apart from writing more Graded Readers, I'd like to spend more time on creative writing and possibly do a Masters Degree course in it.

See the Macmillan Readers catalogue for a full list of titles by Anne Collins. For more information about Anne Collins, see her author data sheet. This interview has also appeared in Japan's *Cosmopier* Magazine.