

Module 12A

Listening p. 116

Ex. 2a

1 modern languages 2 teacher 3 exhausting 4 romantic 5 history of science
6 (new) planet 7 clothes 8 events 9 plot 10 500/five hundred words

Hi there. My name's Laura Reddington and I've come along to answer questions sent in by listeners about my life and work.

Firstly, Sue from London asks if I have always been interested in books. Well, yes, Sue, I have – although not necessarily English literature because my degree was actually in modern languages. But, I always thought it would be wonderful to be a writer, however, I also knew it'd be very time-consuming and I didn't see that as a good career move when I was younger. I considered journalism, even publishing, but in the end I got a good job as a teacher and that tended to come first. So, this ambition to be a writer was, sort of, on hold whilst I did other things.

Now, Bill from Edinburgh asks if I regret not starting earlier. In a way, but maybe novelists shouldn't write until they've had a bit of experience of the world. Being out at work, you meet all sorts of people, see how they behave in different situations. I loved it and found it very satisfying, but also very exhausting. After 20 years, I'd had enough. That's when I decided to try my hand as a writer, because I was looking for a new challenge.

My first thought was that I needed to make a living, so I tried romantic fiction – without success, I might add. I thought it would be easy money because those novels sell in their millions. But, although I made up some great characters, the stories didn't work well. I just hadn't found the right thing and so my work wasn't published. It took something a little deeper and darker, I suppose, to bring out my talent as a writer. It turned out that a historical thriller was just the thing for me.

Sandra from Dublin asks how I got the idea for my first one. Well, Sandra, I've always loved history and I could see from other novels that were doing well that the history of science interested people. I'm a fan of astronomy myself and I've always read widely on the subject. I was looking through my books one day when I came across the story of a man who thought he'd found a new planet. I realised this was going on at about the same time as a famous murder case in London. So I thought I could mix the two stories together to make a sort of detective novel.

People ask me if I did lots of research for that book. Yes, I needed to get the historical details correct – you know, have people wearing the right clothes for the period and things like that. But then there are no records of what actually happened to people from day to day and, of course, the murder mystery was never actually solved in real life. So, I made up most of the events I describe. In a novel, it all needs to seem real to the reader but people aren't actually checking the historical facts.

Another question: Bill from Canada asks about the actual writing. How do I go about it? Well, that book took two years to write. I know some people can sit down and just write – you know, the inspiration just comes and until they've finished, they don't know how it will end. But for me, it's all about planning. Once I'd got all the plot clear in my mind, I was able to work the characters out in detail. Only then did I sit down and concentrate on the actual writing. Some writers do a lot of rewriting but once the ideas are in place, I just write – I know that some writers manage a thousand words a day, and I have done 750 on occasion, but usually around 500 words is the right amount for me. I keep reading through it, changing little things as I go, but most of it just flows from my brain to the page.

