

A House in the Country

Teachers' Notes



The Project. The BritLit project was launched in 2003 with the intention of providing Portuguese teachers of English in the state sector additional resource material for the extensive reading requirements of years 10 and 11. It is a joint venture between the British Council in Portugal and APPI (Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês). While originally aimed at the Portuguese market, the usefulness of the project as an international model has ensured it a place across the globe and new 'kits' have been developed by teachers from many different countries.

The Resource Kits. Much of the material provided is intended to be used with mixed ability classes and while the input from the materials is the same, the output from the students will vary considerably. Other materials are generally classed according to their degree of difficulty using the [CEF levels](#) now adopted by many European countries through the Council of Europe as benchmark criteria for language assessment. The resource kits provide a never-ending source of material for the teacher inasmuch as teachers are asked to contribute their own experiences and ideas to the project; we would like to see the materials mutate and mature with use. One of the advantages of using an electronic form is that each section can easily be personalised; we would be interested to see examples of this approach.

This Kit. The materials presented for class work on Romesh Gunesequera's short story 'A House in the Country' are intended for the development of language development and cultural understanding rather than as a source of literary study and was originally published in 2004. This version was updated in October 2013. There are three parts: **Pre-reading**, **Context**, and **After Reading**, plus a **teachers key**. As with all other BritLit productions, this is called a 'kit' to emphasise the fact that you, the teacher, are expected to assemble the component parts yourself, using the parts you require in the order you prefer. This is not, therefore, a course, simply a resource which can be picked over with some items used and others discarded. For this reason, each worksheet or worksheets within a sub-heading stand alone, and do not require work to have been done on any other worksheet. It is intended that the order in which the work is done is largely up to the teacher responding to the needs of their class. However, we would make the following suggestions:

- The activities in the **Pre-reading** section have been designed with preparation for reading the text in mind. In other words, the intention is that these worksheets are to be used **before** the students read the text. The reason is simply that by quoting from the text and dealing with language and content piecemeal in these sections, we assume that this will help the student to a more fluent reading of the text, without the need to break off and consult for meaning. *We strongly advise the use of this section, even if none of the material is used.*

- The 'Context' section can be done either before or after the text has been read.
- As the title suggests, the section 'After Reading' is to be tackled once all the other work has been completed. It attempts to 'wrap up' the work on the story, and to look forward to alternative texts.
- Copyright permission has been obtained where applicable. All BritLit material is photocopiable.

We very much welcome your contribution to the project. Much of the material in the current kit has been contributed by state school teachers working in collaboration with the project team and we invite you to contribute your ideas and experience so that future versions of this material will present an even wider choice of opportunities for students to explore language and culture through literature.

A Brief Summary of the Story

Ray returns to his native Colombo, Sri Lanka, after some years working in London. He enlists the help of a local man, Siri, to help him build his house in the town. The relationship between the two men straddles different times and cultures, and Ray struggles to cope with it. A project which Ray dreams up involves building a house in the country, partly to resolve his dilemma about his relationship with Siri, but also to come to terms with his return to Sri Lanka. These are troubles times, and an incident brings the civil unrest close to home, provoking a disturbing revelation from Siri. This rather dark, introspective story is about our place in the world around us, and reminds us how fragile our grip on it is.

2. Acknowledgements

The original material in this kit was written by: Fitch O'Connell, with assistance from the Porto Focus group (Ana Barroso, Ana Neves, Rosa Costa, Sílvia Almeida, Carmo Rodrigues) and the Funchal Focus group (Graça Valéiro, Paula Nóia, Tânia Martins, Tânia Lima, Tânia Jesus, Lídia Agrela, Andreia Ramos, Kathrin Ebeling). The kit was extensively revised in 2013 by Fitch O'Connell

Art Work: Rob Lenihan <http://www.iflourish.co.uk/#!>

BritLit team 2003/4: Carmo Rodrigues (APPI), Mark Howard (British Council), Fitch O'Connell (British Council), Maria João Soares (APPI)

3. Key

PRE-READING

1. Ask students if anyone knows where the city of Colombo is. Students might be allowed to search for Sri Lanka and Colombo on a map. Then allow students to read these extracts. They may be directed to the questions (2) first so that there is a directed purpose for this reading. You may wish the students to work in small groups.

2

	Ray	Siri
enjoys solitude	✓	
traditional		✓
is used to comfort	✓	
quiet	✓	✓
gentle	✓	✓
hard working		✓
used to simplicity		✓
cosmopolitan	✓	
older	✓	
family orientated		✓

Ensure that students can justify their choice by pointing to their evidence in the texts.

CONTEXT

Background Reading

- 1 Technical report
- 2 Holiday brochure
- 3 General travel guide
- 4 Specialist guide book
- 5 Sporting guide
- 6 Business
- 7 Newspaper
- 8 Report on Human rights
- 9 University prospectus

English From The Sub-Continent

4

a

He performed a lot of charity work
She loves to pull your leg

b

Pay attention to your teacher
I want you to discuss the poem
Please convey to him my greetings/my greetings to him

c

aren't you?
isn't she?

d

What have you come for?
They're always late
All my friends are waiting

e

Yes, I did / No, I didn't

- f Yes, I have / No, I haven't
- I understand what you are saying
She knows the answers to all the questions
5. cousin-brother : male cousin / Eve-teasing : harassment of women /
godown : warehouse / Himalayan blunder : serious mistake / optical : eyeglasses
hotel : restaurant / bearer : waiter / freeship : scholarship /
cent percent : 100 percent / eartops : earrings

Poem

English Teachers

Everyday when papers looki'n, I am very sad,
They are telling in Sri Lanka, English very bad,
Is this all a humbug mister, sometimes very true,
So I want to tell and give you, exactly what to do.

Olden times when we were children, in the village school,
Pappa tole muss learn the English, otherwise you fool,
Those days teachers taking trouble, taught the English well,
If I do not do the homework, they are playing the hell.

Nowadays have Shermadana, in the sun muss dig,
Other times too much torking, classes very big,
Principal is absent always, teachers putting part,
Boys are taking O/L, but only pass in art.

You must tell our Minister, soon to put a rule,
Give the English Education, nicely in the school,
Then the children will improve, learning very well you see,
Getting jobs and easy money, happy just like me.

Now I am an English teacher, I can now enjoy,
So I am doing better job, than any other boy,
I am engaged to Burgher lady, torking English well,
How to twist and do the Cha Cha, she is going to tell.

Pappa putting sarong only, simply village clerk,
now I am putting trousers and walking in the park,
So I'm telling without English, useless you will be,
Like a buffalo in the village, married to a tree.

Civil War

- 1 1 B 2 C 3 A 4 A 5 C 6 B 7 B 8 C
- 2 1 Attempts to balance view; tried to be informative; heartfelt
2 lacks entertainment; poor dialogue; low production value; amateurish
3 Has a message he wants to deliver
4 Poor dialogue; amateur shooting (e.g. at Heathrow); production
5 ?

Biography

1 fluent 2 won 3 upheaval 4 relocated 5 escalate 6 childhood 7 grows up
8 background 9 intended 10 biggest 11 reality 12 location

- 1 4
- 2 Monkfish Moon
- 3 Peter
- 4 Cook/Restaurateur
- 5 a) discovery of the familiar b) discovery of the unfamiliar

AFTER READING

Summary

Order of paragraphs

1 5 9 7 11 2 4 6 13 3 8 10 12 14