



# Doing something with the Grange Hill Kids

Article Author:

[Robert Leeson](#) [1]

[1](#) [2]

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Other Articles

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**Robert Leeson** talks about his latest book.

It's not the book of the film; it's not the film of the book . **Robert Leeson** writes about creating a completely new relationship between books and TV.

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When I was asked to consider writing a **Grange Hill** book, I was interested because of having seen, by chance, one or two episodes. (One of the benefits of working at home is that you can watch children's television.) I was struck by the dialogue and the actors - these were real comprehensive school kids, not the usual pale imitation often seen in TV school stories.

So, it was popular, with umpteen million viewers. But who trusts statistics? Still there was a way of finding out, since I often visit schools. Sure enough, one had only to mention **Grange Hill** to get immediate welcoming grins in almost any class.

Not always a welcome, though, for a number of heads and senior teachers said that this TV series was not school as they knew it. In a way they were right. For the **Grange Hill** series is above all school as the kids see it. Scriptwriter Phil Redmond, one time comprehensive school pupil himself, has the inside view.

But most interesting were the characters - Tucker, Trisha, Benny, Cathy, Penny, Justin and not least - Michael the schemer. Teachers, like Baxter the heavyweight sportsman. and of course the caretaker Mr Garfield, were well drawn, but the pupils were something else.

One day I sat and watched one **Grange Hill** episode after another. Time and again I thought - one could do something with kids like these.

Making a film from a book is a well-known process. Making a book from a film doesn't win any awards. A lot of film books are just written-up versions of the scripts - often worse than the original.

That way didn't interest me. The best way to make a film from a book is to catch the spirit of the book, its characters, its scene. That must be the best way to make a book out of a film - to catch its spirit.

So I tried to imagine the world of those characters - not just the part shown on the screen, but the other parts - the streets behind the shopping centre, a building site (where Tucker might long to go poking around), the inside of the local police station. And I thought of more scenes in the staff room, as well. Now the series worked instantly - with pictures. I had to do it with words but not be long-winded about it.

But with the help of those characters, all of whom had a life of their own, a whole series of new adventures began to work themselves out. There was Michael Doyle, plotting to demolish Tucker, and Tucker wondering what had hit him.

Trisha at odds with Penny, Cathy in deep trouble on her own, but facing up to it, Justin with a strange secret and Benny in hot water (ably assisted by Tucker, of course!). And all of it working up to a grand finale with teachers, parents, police, all piling in.

I won't say it wrote itself. It was hard work. But once it got going, it was great fun.

Page Number:

26

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