



# THE BOOK CLUB

YOU SPEND A LOT OF TIME DEVELOPING BRILLIANT RESOURCES FOR YOUR STUDENTS, SAYS FRANCIS GILBERT, BUT HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT SHARING THEM WITH A WIDER AUDIENCE?

On one level, most teachers are publishing all the time. Every time you plonk a worksheet before your pupils, you are publishing your work in the broadest sense of the word: you are making it public. In the last ten years, the internet has led to an explosion of teaching resources becoming much more widely available, with sites like TES Resources (teachers.net) and teachsecondary.com offering the chance for teachers to publish their work and reach a global audience. But Teach Secondary and Teachit are rare in that they offer payment for some lesson resources – most websites expect teachers to offer their work for free. And being the publicly spirited people they are, they do.

However, the landscape is shifting for a number of reasons. First, a number of major companies such as Apple, Amazon and Kobo are now providing everyone with the tools to publish their own e-books. Second, as a result of the technological strides being made, the nature of publishing is changing. A new order and hierarchy is emerging – and it's one from which teachers could benefit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Francis Gilbert's *Starcrossed: Romeo and Juliet for Teenagers* and his Study Guides are available in the Amazon store. His author page is at [amazon.co.uk/-/e/B001K7P706](https://www.amazon.co.uk/-/e/B001K7P706) and his website ([francisgilbert.co.uk](http://francisgilbert.co.uk)) contains links to the subject specific blogs he's done. Twitter: @wonderfrancis See also: [localschoolsnetwork.org.uk](http://localschoolsnetwork.org.uk)

## New paths

Let me explain. Many authors – both professional and amateur – are abandoning traditional publishing routes, whereby an author contacts a publisher (generally through an agent), offers a book and sees whether the publisher agrees to publish and distribute it. If so, the author may well be paid an 'advance' after signing a contract. However, in educational publishing today, because the profits are so small, it's rare for an author to get much money; many teachers, even those who are established writers and commentators, will be paid nothing. Furthermore, they'll sign a contract that will mean it's highly unlikely they will see any royalties: the publisher invariably arranges things so that their costs are covered

before a writer enjoys a share of the profits. When the author does deliver a book to a publisher, he or she often has to wait many months before it is published because it will take time for the publisher to edit, format and print it.

I've been lucky enough to publish six titles through mainstream publishers, with one of those – *I'm A Teacher, Get Me Out Of Here* – becoming a bestseller. But recently I've become aware that I've created a lot of resources that no mainstream publisher would consider significant enough to take on, despite the fact that there is still a potential market for this work. I have written guides for my classes on classics such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. I'm pleased with the work I've done; it's the fruit of many hours of after-school labour. I've set up blogs on these texts and published resources on various websites, but up until recently, it's been a piecemeal effort.

Now, though, using platforms like Amazon's Kindle, Apple's iBookstore, or self-publishing sites like Lulu or Blurb, it's possible for individuals to write and publish handsome



KDP I saw that it had a great addition – a special ‘cover creator’, which, in a matter of a few minutes, can help you make a decent looking cover for your book. I gathered the work together I had on various classics in Word documents, converted them to HTML for the web using Word, uploaded them, and with a few days of intensive work I had eight books published.

Once that was done, however, I saw that my ‘product description’ could be better, and that it would be far more effective to ‘brand’ all my books by giving them the same cover schema. I also spotted some mistakes and realised that I needed to improve the layouts. So I went back to work – re-designed the covers, re-wrote my product descriptions, corrected my typos and re-formatted the books so that the paragraphing and titles were consistent. The fantastic thing about self-publishing is that the author has total control; you don’t have to go through a publisher to make changes. As a result, amendments that could have taken weeks, maybe even months (and which would never have been done at all in a printed and bound book), were completed in a matter of hours and updated editions offered on Amazon within twenty four hours.

The flip side for the self-publisher is the difficulty in getting noticed; you have to do all

the marketing yourself. If you are a ‘name’ already it helps; well known teacher-authors like Mike Gershon and Sue Cowley are publishing their own work and clearly reaping the benefits from this – the former’s resources on how to teach have been downloaded 1.6 million times while Cowley has books in the Amazon bestseller list. Teachers buy books – in droves – so it’s worth putting the effort in to encourage them to buy yours.

### For what it’s worth

This self-publishing experience has made me value the materials I make for my students much more. I’m currently teaching Wilfred Owen and William Blake’s poetry, and I’ve already made some Word documents that are the beginnings of more e-books. The added incentive of publishing the work has meant I’ve paid even closer attention to what material really works – and what doesn’t. I’ve set up blogs for these texts; many of the posts I write for the blogs will be content for the books, and in time, I’m hoping to use the blogs to promote the published titles.

The books are a goal to work towards. They will come to represent the summation of my efforts and thoughts on topics that mean a lot to me. I’ve also experimented with using Amazon’s GoCreate website, which is linked to the KDP store – in the last week I’ve published a hard copy of *Star-crossed: Romeo and Juliet for Teenagers*, my modern translation of Shakespeare’s play, which was a hit with my Year 10 classes. I enjoyed making the cover and learning about the difference between e-books and hard copies. The costs are remarkably low; it’s less expensive than photocopying a batch of scripts.

Overall, I feel the self-publishing has made me value the resources I make for pupils much more. Financial reward isn’t the issue for me; I’m selling the books cheaply and I’m not aiming to give up the day job. But re-drafting the words which I originally slapped onto a worksheet into a fluently written, nice-looking book has made me feel that all those hours of work haven’t disappeared into the void.



### ★ USEFUL LINKS

- ★ Leon Cych is a teacher, publisher & film-maker who offers invaluable tips here: [tinyurl.com/tsleon](http://tinyurl.com/tsleon)
- ★ Kindle publish their own free guide to publishing on their platform here: [tinyurl.com/tskindle](http://tinyurl.com/tskindle)
- ★ I found from Word to Kindle very useful and honest: [tinyurl.com/tswordtokindle](http://tinyurl.com/tswordtokindle)
- ★ iBooks Author: [apple.com/uk/ibooks-author](http://apple.com/uk/ibooks-author)
- ★ Blurb: [blurb.co.uk](http://blurb.co.uk)
- ★ Lulu: [lulu.com](http://lulu.com)

books without having to pay huge fees to designers, editors, and printers. Indeed, if you use Amazon’s GoCreate website, you can get attractive copies of your book available to be printed on demand. In other words, there’s no risk at all; you don’t have to pay a penny to put a hard-copy book in the Amazon book store. Added to which you can get 70% of the royalties, a much better deal than you’d get from a traditional publisher, who usually gives you 12% of the profits after your advance and costs have been paid off. So that’s what I’ve done.

### The whole package

I’ve never been a huge Apple fan, so I opted to publish my titles through Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) – although looking at the amazing Mac apps like iBook Author I can see how the Apple Operating System can more easily produce attractive books. This said, Amazon has roughly 70% of the e-book market; the formatting of Kindle books may not look that great, but they are very popular. I tried to publish some work on Amazon Kindle about a year ago, but I stopped because I just couldn’t get a decent cover for my books together. However, this summer when I looked again on

