



**Phil Hoose**

## **TeachingBooks Movie Transcript**

**Phil Hoose, interviewed in his studio in Portland, Maine on August 17, 2001.**

**This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.**

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I think a writer's job is to inspire a reader to turn the next page. And that's basically all there is, whether you're Stephen King or Phil Hoose. I want that seventh-grader sitting in that seat in that middle school, who is reading *We Were There, Too!* to keep turning pages.

### **The Unanswerable Question**

*Hey, Little Ant* was a song that my daughter Hannah and I performed. We had a family band. We saw Ruby (her younger sister) squishing ants out in the driveway one time. I went up to Ruby. She was all over these ants. I said, "How would you like to be one of those ants?"

The first time most people get to think about the ethics of killing and the option not to, had to do with squishing bugs. When you squish a bug, you kind of think about it. I thought, 'why don't I script a negotiating session between an ant about to get squished and Ruby, the kid about to squish it?'

The book ends with the question: "Should the ant get squished? Should the ant go free? It's up to the kid, not up to me. We'll leave the kid with the raised-up shoe. What do you think that kid should do?"

How can you answer a question like that?

### **On Interviewing**

I love to interview people. It's one of my favorite things to do in the world. When maybe two interviews would do, I'll interview seven people. I want a lot of context. It takes a lot of energy to interview people well. One has to listen so attentively.

### **The Power of Sport**

I'm very interested in the power of sport in the lives, especially, of youth. I wrote a book called *Hoosiers* about high-school basketball in Indiana. *Necessities* was a book about racial problems in U.S. sports. There was a chapter about Black catchers, African-American swimmers, general

managers, people in the media -- why it was that you didn't see more African Americans in these leadership positions. But rather than asking other baseball executives, I asked African Americans who had tried to be those things.

### **Making a Difference**

I wrote a book called *It's Our World, Too!* — fifteen stories of young people who were doing all sorts of things to cause change. One boy rebuilt hundreds of bikes and gave them away to homeless shelters and battered women's shelters. Another boy changed the way that Star-Kist had contractual relationships with tuna companies in order to save dolphins.

Then I wrote a handbook, sort of a "Rules for Radicals," for children, in which I took ten tools: how to write a good letter, how to organize an effective petition, how to get the reporter you want, etc., and created a ten-tool manual at the end of the book.

### **Young People in U. S. History**

For *We Were There, Too!* I interviewed many people. I wanted to write a book that went from Columbus to AIDS, involving young people — a series of short stories involving true, nonfiction characters, as many girls as boys, as many active stories as I could get, representing the major ethnic groups and cultures that make up this country.

One example would be Carolyn McKinstry, who was one of the children in Birmingham, Alabama who faced the fire hoses and dogs in the spring of 1963. I thought very carefully about choosing the characters that I wrote about. I wanted good storytellers. When I had more than one choice, it was the story that counted: Who could tell the best story?

I want *We Were There, Too!* to matter. And I know it's a tall order. Young people have always been bored, have always been restless, have always quested, have always been idealistic. I want them to know that they're not the first, and I want to give them good stories that they're going to want to read. I want them to turn that next page.

### **Books by Phil Hoose**

- WE WERE THERE, TOO! YOUNG PEOPLE IN U.S. HISTORY, Melanie Kroupa Books / Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001
- HEY, LITTLE ANT (written by Phillip and Hannah Hoose, illustrated by Debbie Tilley), Tricycle Press, 1998
- HOOSIERS: THE FABULOUS BASKETBALL LIFE OF INDIANA, Guild Press of Indiana, second edition, 1995
- IT'S OUR WORLD, TOO! STORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE, Little, Brown and Company, 1993
- NECESSITIES: RACIAL BARRIERS IN AMERICAN SPORTS, Random House, 1989
- BUILDING AN ARK: TOOLS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL DIVERSITY, Island Press, 1981

### **Selected Magazine Articles by Phil Hoose**

- "A New Pool of Talent." *New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 1999
- "Don Larsen Had the Perfect Remedy for a Cousin's Woes." *Sports Illustrated*, October 2, 1989

*Note: Bibliographies created in 2002.*

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