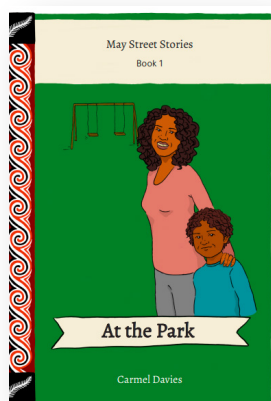
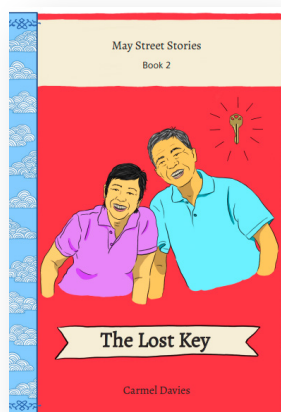


AT THE PARK



Davies, C. (2020). **AT THE PARK**. Australia: Urban Lyrebirds. ISBN 978-0-994574-64-0 (pbk.) 18 pp. Bk 1 Series: May Street Stories. AU\$19.40. Illustrations by Dixon, V.

THE LOST KEY



Davies, C. (2020). **THE LOST KEY**. Australia: Urban Lyrebirds. ISBN 978-0-994574-63-3 (pbk.) 18 pp. Bk 2 Series: May Street Stories. AU\$19.40. Illustrations by Dixon, V.

Reviewer

Gillian Claridge
ELTANZ

At the Park and the *The Lost Key* are books 1 and 2 in a series of six books called the May Street Stories. They are published by Urban Lyrebirds and written by Carmel Davies, an Australian ESL teacher who creates resources for English learners. All the books in this series can be purchased in hard copy or as e-books on the Urban Lyrebirds website, where you can also find free audio recordings.

The target readership for the *May Street* series is adult learners of English (recent immigrants to Australia) with a proficiency of about A1. In an interview with Claire Harris (2020), also a writer of graded readers, Davies said that her intention was to write stories with “a real narrative and reason to read”. Both books reviewed here relate the story of an immigrant or immigrant family for whom a problem is resolved with the help of a caring neighbour.

An analysis of words using Cobb’s (2002) Lextutor Classic Vocabulary Profiler indicates that the percentage of words likely to be unknown to learners at the A1 level is between five and eight per cent. This might be considered a little high: ideally graded readers should contain a maximum of two to four per cent unknown words for fluent reading. However, the unknown words in these books are mostly highly relevant to the target readership of immigrants with families. Some examples are *childcare*, *apartment*, *kitchen bench*, *swings*, *slides*, *pond*. To assist learners’ comprehension, tangible objects are illustrated using clear line drawings, and words such as *childcare* are used in an appropriate context. The grammar is simple: short sentences with no subordinate clauses and a narration largely in the present tense. The language is a good model for natural, everyday discourse.

A feature of these books is the use of dialogue. As well as being employed for individual silent reading, the dialogues can be acted out in class, giving the learners opportunities to practice colloquial, frequently used words and phrases with partners or in groups.

Exercises at the end could be completed in class or can be set for individual study. The practice exercises use the same format in both books: placing words in the correct sentences to highlight key words; true or false questions to check details; re-ordering sentences to check for gist; and a final activity where learners are able to personalise the stories using practical vocabulary such as *emergency* and *contact*.

The books look attractive, with colourful covers, and the use of black line drawings inside probably reduces the overall cost, to the advantage of the learner. The stories are engaging and appropriate for the audience, and the vocabulary and syntax are well graded. There is an obvious effort to portray the ethnic and age variety of immigrants in Australia. The additional possibility of using audio will be of benefit to the learner who does not have a teacher or who wants a model available out of class. Also, there is an option of buying PDF versions (which are slightly cheaper, at AU\$14.50 per book) instead of hard copies.

On the evidence of these two books, I would certainly recommend this series to any ESL teacher of post-beginner immigrant English learners.

References

Cobb, T. Web *VocabProfilers*. <https://www.lex Tutor.ca/vp/>

Harris, C. (2020). *New Australian EAL readers!* <https://clareharris.com/new-australian-eal-readers-may-street-stories/>

We are very keen to add to our pool of wonderful book reviewers.
If you are interested, please contact

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