Clarion Review

Education

Stories of Lily
Michelle Saccardo
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Stories of Lily is a collection of short anecdotes about a young woman who leaves China to study English in Melbourne, Australia. Lily, along with her friend Iman—a student from Iraq—shop, travel, and learn together while adapting to a new life, language, and culture. The book is aimed at people who are in the process of learning English as a second language.

To help readers learn through an immersive process, ESL teacher Michelle Saccardo focuses on everyday activities such as shopping for dinner, meeting neighbors, and participating in social activities unique to the culture of Melbourne. Simple, seemingly mundane activities—buying train tickets, going to the movies, purchasing a birthday gift for a friend—are brought to life in straightforward language that has the natural cadence of everyday speech. Sentences are clear and crisp, allowing new English-language readers to follow along with ease, while still offering some challenges through the introduction of colloquial phrases, such as "Now, let's have a cuppa," to sustain interest.

Though this focus on Melbourne will be of tremendous value to English-language learners living and working in the city, the location-driven approach does limit the scope of the book. Cultural references to "Melbourne Cup Day" or food items like "lamingtons" offer insight into Australian culture, but remain largely unfamiliar and perhaps not as useful to new English learners adapting to other English-language cultures around the world. However, Saccardo's inclusion of multicultural themes, shown through Lily's friendship with Iman and the various ways they navigate tthrough challenging situations, are universal in their appeal. Any new English-language learner will be able to relate to the feelings of dislocation and uncertainty that Lily and Iman face when meeting new people or participating in unfamiliar cultural events.

Saccardo shows tremendous insight into the concepts and situations that new learners find challenging, and she uses this knowledge to create stories that are both realistic and

optimistic. Though it can be argued that the stories do not show the complexities of newcomer experiences—the incredible isolation of living alone in a new country, the potential for racism, or the tremendous difficulty in adapting to a completely new way of life—the lack of depth does not detract from the value and ultimate purpose of the book. By maintaining a consistently lighthearted tone, the text keeps the focus on connecting with the reader while guiding them through new vocabulary and establishing a firm knowledge of rhythm in language.

Accompanied by charming illustrations that carry the cheerful tone throughout, *Stories of Lily* is an excellent introductory-level book for students learning English as a second language. Although the stories are set in Melbourne, educators elsewhere will still find its content useful in their classrooms.

Shoilee Khan