Coral Ocean

Amira’s tongue seemed to be stuck in her mouth. They had practised saying ‘good morning’ in English so many times but now that she needed to speak the words, they wouldn’t come out. She looked down at her scuffed shoes feeling awkward and said nothing. Nothing seemed easier. The teacher towered above her. He was taller than her one from home; home seemed like a lifetime ago.

The teacher walked her outside into the playground to be with the other children. A sharp wind blew across the tarmac and Amira shivered. She missed the warm scent of orange blossom; this new school environment just smelt of the city streets. She ached when she thought of her old friends; here, she knew no one.

Not quite knowing what to do, Amira wandered between the groups of children, dragging the school bag that she had been given. She could just see her little brother, Amir, in the other playground, surrounded by all the younger children.

He stood still with his thumb stuck in his mouth, looking lost and self-conscious; everyone else seemed to be moving round him, weaving in and out as they played. She longed to go to him; she knew Mama would have. For a moment, the memory of her mother held her fixed, paralysed. Once again, she relived the moment when they had been running…

Mr Walker looked out across the playground. Shrugging his shoulders against the bitter wind, he hugged his mug of coffee and glanced at his watch.

Ten minutes to go. He could see the new children, both uncertain how to break the ice. The Syrian girl, Amira, seemed transfixed. The girl from Cornwall had also not settled in and just looked angry. She had already been with them for a week and had yet to settle. He sipped his coffee and sighed. It was going to be a tough day.

Coral Ocean stood on the edge of the playground and waited. No one came near. All the other kids seemed to be absorbed in their own games. She gazed out through the railings and pretended to stare at something in the distance. Blinking back tears, she roughly rubbed her eyes and hoped that no one would notice

“What’s up?” A tall boy had come across and stood bouncing a tennis ball.

“Clear off!” snapped Coral aggressively, scuffing her shoe against the railings.

“Please yourself,” muttered the boy. He spun round and raced back across the playground, bouncing his ball as he went. Coral could see him chatting to some other children and pointing at her. Everything seemed wrong.

How she longed for her old school! Coral missed the sunlit playground in sight of the sea; her new school stood in the cold shadows of a tower block. She missed the thrill of playtime games; here, no one knew her. She missed the walk home along the cliff tops with her neighbour Amy; here, she had to catch the bus, alone.

At that moment, there was a shout that brought Coral back to the present. Some of the children were standing round an individual she had not noticed before. One of them had grabbed the girl’s school bag. Now, they were throwing it round the group. The girl had no chance of getting it back. They were laughing and shouting but the girl stood in the middle, her eyes full of tears. Coral dashed forwards determined, her fists clenched as she yelled, “Leave her be!” The group turned to stare.

A sharp whistle froze everyone in the playground to a juddering halt. Mr Walker stood with hands on his hips and waited. Some of the children hung their heads. “Line up,” he snapped, “Now.”

Back in the class, Mr Walker introduced the class to the newcomer. She was called Amira and had travelled all the way from Syria. The new girl stood at the front of the class embarrassed, finding it hard to look at anyone, scrunching the hem of an ill-fitting dress. “Coral, I think you had better look after Amira,” suggested Mr Walker, steering her towards where Coral sat. Shuffling her books to one side, Coral made a space. She glanced sideways at the new girl. Amira gave her a shy smile; Coral grinned back.

**Year 5 and 6 Appendix 1**

accommodate accompany according achieve aggressive amateur ancient apparent appreciate attached available average awkward bargain bruise category cemetery committee communicate community competition conscience\* conscious\* controversy convenience correspond criticise (critic + ise) curiosity definite desperate determined develop dictionary disastrous embarrass environment equip (–ped, –ment) especially exaggerate excellent existence explanation familiar foreign forty frequently government guarantee harass hindrance identity immediate(ly) individual interfere interrupt language leisure lightning marvellous mischievous muscle necessary neighbour nuisance occupy occur opportunity parliament persuade physical prejudice privilege profession programme pronunciation queue recognise recommend relevant restaurant rhyme rhythm sacrifice secretary shoulder signature sincere(ly) soldier stomach sufficient suggest symbol system temperature thorough twelfth variety vegetable vehicle yacht