



Putting the charm back into maths

For anyone who has struggled with the subject at school, a series of children's maths books making basic concepts clear, charming and fun sounds like a contradiction in terms.

However island resident Kimberly Moore – with the help of partner James Samuel – has done just that, and the result is Arithmetic Village.



Author and illustrator Kimberly Moore with partner and website designer James Samuel.

The whimsical world of this village is overseen by a fair and kind ruler, King David Divide, and populated by characters like Linus Minus, who is always losing things, Polly Plus, who collects and adds jewels to give to the king, Tina Times and cutest of all, King David's dog Rover, who always gets 'what's leftover'.

The idea for the books had its seed many years ago, says Kim, a qualified primary and early-childhood educator.

"It was when my oldest daughter was five, about 12 years ago, and I went to a Steiner school where I met a math 'gnome'. This playful character struck me as a really fun way to learn the subject and I basically went on a quest to find that sort of math curriculum in mainstream schooling.

"It wasn't there. I sort of felt like the rest of the world was being 'ripped off' by not having the opportunity to learn math in that fun way and I wanted to create a bridge between Steiner and the mainstream."

The idea was to take what is often referred to as 'right brain', creative thinking and apply it to what has traditionally been viewed as a left-brain subject.

"It's all about personification, colour



and rhyme and having the basic concepts demonstrated simply but in the context of an imaginary place with recognisable characters."

Living through her own experience of being taught maths also shaped her ambition to do things differently.

"When I was at high school, my math teacher pulled my father aside and told him that I was not going to pass algebra. As it turned out my exam result was in the 97th percentile."

Kim believes it's all about teaching styles and some are just more effective than others.

"There are 100 ways to learn something. Why limit yourself to just one?"



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She also had the experience as a teachers' training college student in America, of having her maths tutor tell her to 'stop being so inventive, just follow the rules'.

"I was amazed that some of my peers, who would all presumably have to teach maths to elementary school children, didn't know basic concepts like fractions; they had only learnt math by memorisation."

Having produced the Arithmetic Village books two years ago with a different illustrator, Kim says she had an epiphany moment about a year and a half ago.

"I wasn't happy with the illustrations and I decided I needed 24 hours without my children to just play with ideas and designs and see if perhaps I could do them myself. So I got on a ferry to town and booked myself in to the first cheap hotel I saw near to the ferry, which turned out to be quite trashy and noisy at night, and just drew and drew. And after that, I decided that yes, perhaps I could do them."



And the results plainly bear this out; the books are charming and colourful, using soft primary colours for each character; so anything connected to King David Divide, for example, is purple.

"The colour coding is just another tool or prompt to aid learning," says Kim.

So the books were born and James created an Arithmetic Village website with downloadable worksheets.

"Because this is James' field, he helped me a lot with his technical capacity with Photoshop and all those tools," she said. "But Kim directed me and told me exactly what she wanted," adds James.

He says they have often tried to work together but never as successfully as over this project.

"I think we have created the most 'unmathiest' website ever," laughs Kim.

Their key market at the moment are homeschoolers in the US.

"That just happens to be the market that has picked up on the books, and I've



The books have soft colours, likeable characters and clear concepts and are suitable for children from three to around nine. Kim and James' daughter Zuva (above) loves reading them.

had hugely positive online reviews from so many of these people. I even had someone tell me they had held a birthday party in the Arithmetic Village theme, which I thought was funny."

And the proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Six-year-old daughter Zuva has

been one of the first 'test markets' and she adores the books so much, she carries them around with her.

To find out more about Arithmetic Village, go to www.arithmeticvillage.com or www.facebook.com/TheArithmeticVillage.

• *Julianne Evans*

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