

CAMBRIDGE

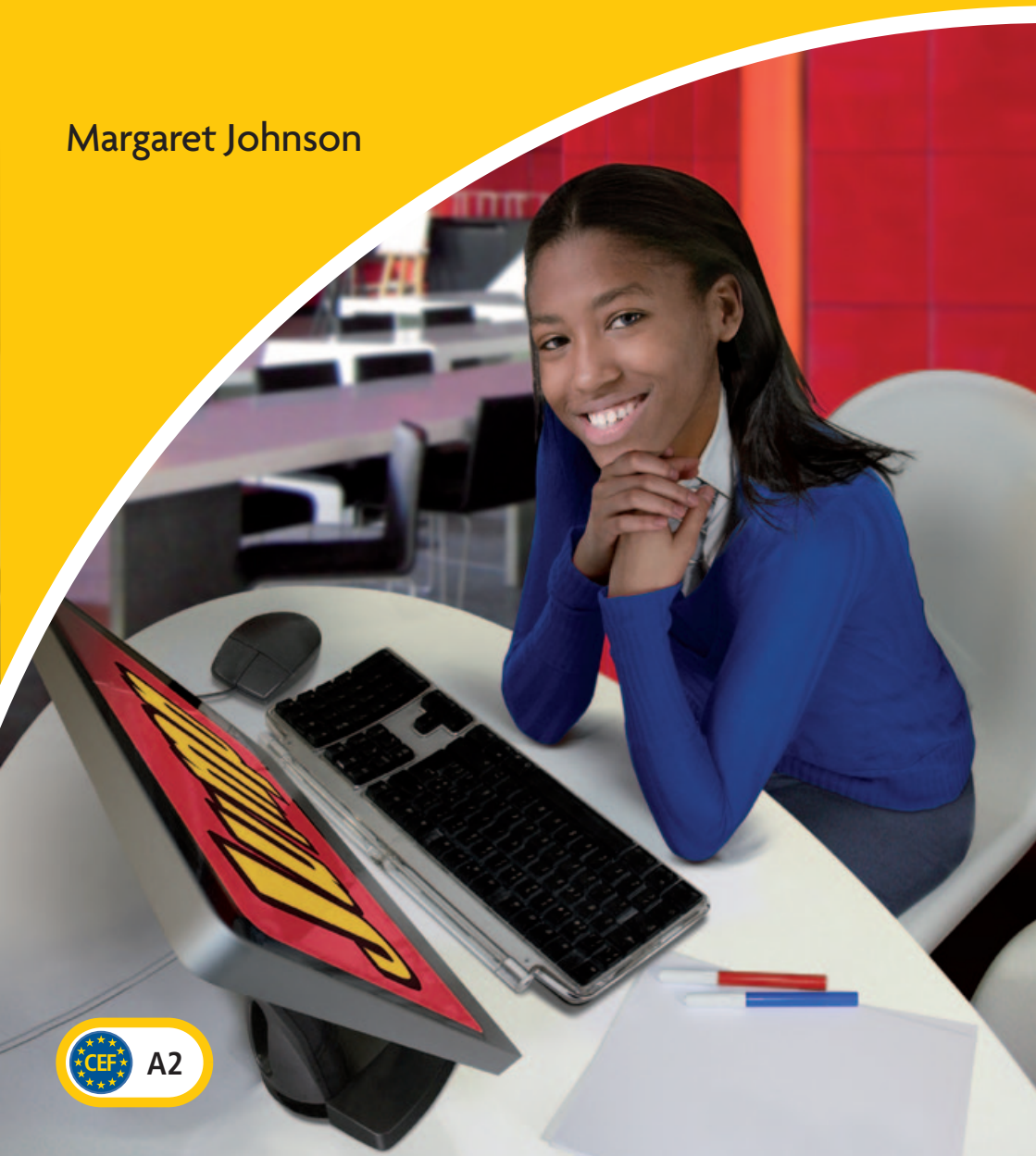
Cambridge University Press  
978-84-8323-616-1 – Ask Alice  
Margaret Johnson  
Excerpt  
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CAMBRIDGE



# Ask Alice

Margaret Johnson



## People in the story

**Alice:** a fourteen-year-old girl; she writes for the student website at her school

**Lauren:** the main writer on the website

**Ed:** the sports writer on the website

**Johnnie:** does all the computer work for the website

**Yvonne:** Alice's mother

**James:** Alice's father

**Emma:** a friend of Alice

**Stu:** one of Ed's friends

**Cherie Reeves:** a famous pop singer

## BEFORE YOU READ



- 1 Look at the advertisement on page 5. What do you think?

Answer the questions.

- 1 What do people write to Alice about?

.....

- 2 What does Alice do?

.....

## Chapter 1

# Alice knows everything

**Have you got a problem?  
Do you need someone to help?**

**ASK ALICE!**

She's seen it!

She's done it!

She's felt it!

Alice knows everything!

**Send Alice an email. She can help.  
[askalice@jumpgoldhill.sch.uk](mailto:askalice@jumpgoldhill.sch.uk)**

‘So, what do you think?’ Lauren asked me. ‘Do you like it?’

I looked up from the screen.

Lauren’s face was excited. ‘You want more emails, don’t you?’ she asked me. ‘We’ll put this advertisement on the website and lots more people will write to you. What does everyone else think?’ She looked at the two boys in the room.

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Ed, Johnnie, Lauren and I all worked on *Jump*, the website that gave news and stories to the kids<sup>1</sup> at Gold Hill School. It was twelve thirty. We were having our usual Friday lunchtime meeting.

Ed was looking bored. Ed's the sports writer for the website. Sport is the only thing he's interested in. 'It's fine,' he told Lauren quickly.

I looked over at Johnnie. Johnnie looks after the website. He knows a lot about computers. ‘Er ... what do you think, Alice?’ he asked me in his quiet voice.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘it looks good, but it’s not true, is it? I don’t know everything. And I haven’t done *everything*.’

But Lauren didn’t think that was important. ‘When they make an advertisement for a phone they don’t say, “This phone is OK”’, she argued. ‘They say, “This is the best phone in the world!”’

I knew that was true, but phones are different to people. I wanted to say to Lauren, ‘I’m not a phone!’ But she was already talking about something else.

Lauren’s like that. She always thinks she’s right. She writes most of the stories for the website. And she’s the editor – the person who decides most things. The website was all her idea.

I love writing and that’s why I wanted to help with the website. But when I talked to Lauren, she said they only needed an agony aunt<sup>2</sup>. An agony aunt – *me!* I’m only fourteen. Agony aunts in magazines and on websites have to answer some difficult questions. They’re usually quite old.

My friend Emma thought it was funny when I first told her about it. ‘It’s a stupid idea, Alice!’ she told me. ‘It’s more work. Haven’t you got enough homework already? *And* it will be boring! You’ll get lots of emails from sad people with problems.’

But I didn’t mind that. I wanted to be a journalist when I left school, and I thought the website was a good way to get some practice. So I went back to Lauren and said yes, and now I’m an agony aunt. I give advice<sup>3</sup> to people with

problems. And I like the work most of the time. It's nice to help people.

Here's an email I've just replied to:

- **From:** Stay-at-Home Girl  
**To:** askalice@jumppgoldhill.sch.uk  
**Subject:** Please help
- 

Hi Alice

Can you help me with my problem? My nose is too big and I hate it. All the other kids laugh at me and call me names<sup>4</sup>. I hate school now. I just want to stay in my room all the time. Please help.

Stay-at-Home Girl



This is the reply I put on the website:

▶ Hi Stay-at-Home Girl

I'm sorry you're so unhappy. I know what it's like when people call you names. I'm mixed-race – my mother is black and my father is white – and I get called names sometimes too.

But what about the kids who laugh at you? Perhaps they have something they're not happy about. We all have something that makes us different – too tall, too short, not having the right shoes ... Perhaps laughing at you makes those kids feel happier. I know that's not nice and it's not fair, but sadly people are often like that.

Please, Stay-at-Home Girl, come out of your room and don't worry. My advice is tell yourself you've got the best nose in the world!

And if you're still unhappy, please talk to somebody – your mum or dad, or one of the teachers. They can help.

I hope this helps.

Love from  
Alice

As I said, the work of an agony aunt is important. I hate people to be unhappy, and I like to help them. But I don't know everything, and sometimes I worry. I don't want to say the wrong thing to someone.

'Right, we've nearly finished today's meeting,' Lauren was saying. 'The last thing we need to talk about is the school disco tomorrow night. Johnnie, are you still OK to take photos?'

'Yes, that's fine,' Johnnie said.

‘Great!’ said Lauren. ‘Alice, Ed, look out for any interesting stories.’

Ed smiled for the first time in the meeting. ‘Gossip<sup>5</sup>, do you mean?’ he asked.

‘I prefer to say “interesting stories”,’ Lauren told him. ‘Who’s talking to who, people who look good, people who *don’t* look good ... That kind of thing.’

‘Gossip,’ said Ed again.

‘Lauren, it isn’t very nice to write unkind things about people,’ I said. ‘We try to help people with their problems on *Jump*. We don’t want them to feel bad.’

Both Ed and Johnnie smiled at me. After a moment, Lauren smiled too. ‘Don’t worry, Alice,’ she said. ‘I won’t be unkind about anyone.’

But I still wasn’t happy. I sometimes read gossip magazines at the hairdresser’s. Sometimes gossip was really unkind.

‘Will you show us what you write about people – before it goes on the website?’ I asked.

Lauren looked at me a bit coldly. ‘Of course, Alice,’ she said. ‘That’s why we have these Friday meetings, isn’t it? Right, has anyone got anything else to say? No? Then let’s finish now.’ And she picked up her bag and left the room.

‘Good for you, Alice,’ Ed said quietly as he left. ‘It isn’t easy to tell Lauren anything.’

Johnnie looked at me. ‘You didn’t like the advertisement, did you?’ he said.

‘No, not really,’ I agreed. ‘But I really want people to email me if they need help. So maybe it’s OK. Anyway, I’ll see you soon, Johnnie.’

‘See you at the disco,’ he said.



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‘But don’t take any photos of *me*, OK?’ I said. ‘I’m not a good dancer! And my friend Emma is helping me to choose my clothes. I don’t know *what* I’m going to look like!’

‘Why don’t you just wear what *you* want to wear?’ asked Johnnie.

‘You don’t know what Emma’s like,’ I said. ‘It’s hard to say no to her!’

Johnnie smiled at me. ‘OK,’ he said. ‘No photos.’



As I walked to my next class, I thought about the disco. I didn't really want to go, but Emma wanted us to go together. She loved discos. I didn't have anything good to wear, but Emma wanted to lend me some of her clothes. I couldn't say no. She was so excited.

Why was it so hard for me to say no to people?

'Sometimes, Alice,' I told myself as I went into my maths class, 'I think *you* need to send an email to *Ask Alice!*'

## LOOKING BACK

- 1 Check your answers to *Before you read* on page 4.

## ACTIVITIES

- 2 Complete the sentences with the names in the box.

Alice (x2)	<del>Ed</del>	Johnnie	Alice's mum
Alice's dad	Lauren	Emma	

- 1 ..... *Ed* ..... is only interested in sport.
  - 2 ..... writes most of the stories for *Jump*.
  - 3 ..... wants to be a journalist.
  - 4 ..... gives advice to people who have problems.
  - 5 ..... is going to take photos at the disco.
  - 6 ..... loves discos.
  - 7 ..... is a teacher.
  - 8 ..... is in a band.
- 3 Match the two parts of the sentences.
- 1 Alice wants Stay-at-Home Girl to  b
  - 2 Emma wants Alice to
  - 3 PJ's dad wants him to
  - 4 Alice's dad wants her to
- a try on some clothes for the disco.
  - ~~b~~ feel good about her nose.
  - c go to Greece in school time.
  - d play football all the time.

**4** Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Lauren gave Alice the job of agony aunt on *Jump*.  T
- 2 Ed wants to write a lot of gossip for *Jump*.
- 3 Alice really wants to go to the school disco.
- 4 Alice wants Johnnie to take photos of her.
- 5 Alice doesn't speak to her dad very often.
- 6 Alice's dad wants to take her away in the school holidays.
- 7 Alice is sure her mum will agree to her dad's idea.
- 8 Alice's mum is worried about Alice spending too much time on *Jump*.

**5** Answer the questions.

- 1 When is the *Jump* meeting each week?

.....

- 2 What is the name of Alice's school?

.....

- 3 What does PJ say he is good at?

.....

- 4 Where is Alice's dad going in the summer?

.....

## LOOKING FORWARD

**6** Tick (✓) what you think happens in the next two chapters.

- 1 Alice goes to the disco.
- 2 Alice's mum says Alice can go to Greece with her dad.
- 3 More people write to *Ask Alice* with problems.