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Cambridge Discovery Readers

Ask Alice

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American English



CEF A2

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People in the story

Alice: a 14-year-old girl; she writes for the student Web site at her school
Lauren: the main writer on the Web site
Ed: the sports writer on the Web site
Johnnie: does all the computer work for the Web site
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?

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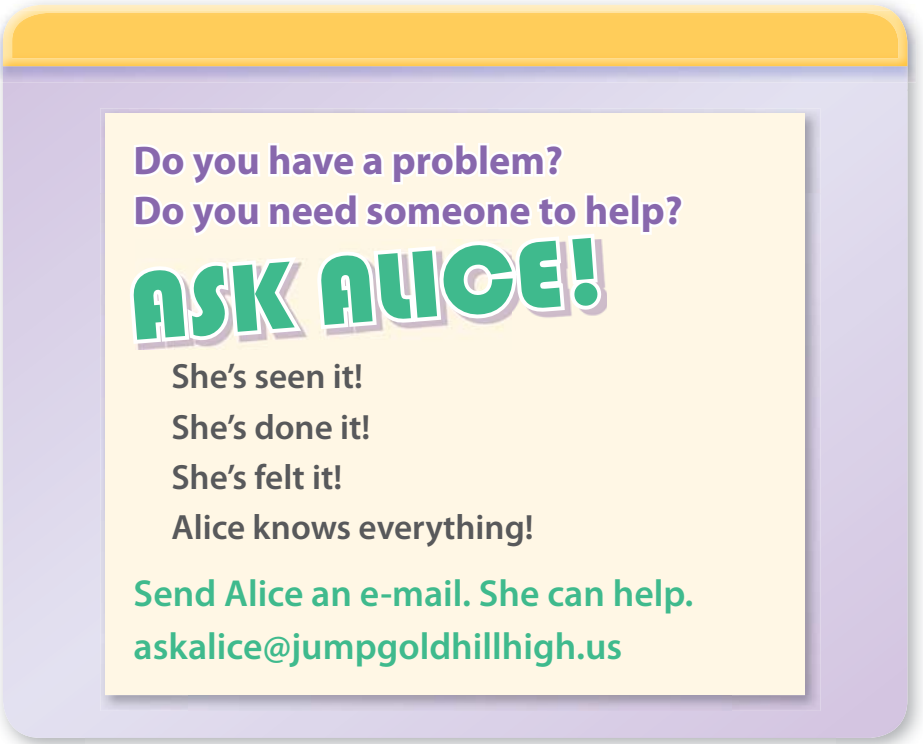
2 What does Alice do?

.....

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Chapter 1

Alice knows everything



"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 e-mails, don't you?" she asked me. "We'll put this advertisement on the Web site 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 Web site that gave news and stories to the kids[1] at Gold Hill High School. It was 12:30. We were having our usual Friday lunchtime meeting.

Ed looked bored. Ed's the sports writer for the Web site. Sports is the only thing he's interested in. "It's fine," he told Lauren quickly.

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I looked over at Johnnie. Johnnie takes care of the Web site. He knows a lot about computers. "Uh . . . what do you think, Alice?" he asked me in his quiet voice.

"Well," I said, "it looks good, but it's not true. 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 from 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 Web site. And she's the editor – the person who decides most things. The Web site was all her idea.

I love writing and that's why I wanted to help with the Web site. But when I talked to Lauren, she said they only needed an advice columnist[2]. An advice columnist – *me*! I'm only 14. Advice columnists in magazines and on Web sites have to answer some difficult questions. They're usually very 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. Don't you have enough homework already? *And* it will be boring! You'll get lots of e-mails from sad people with problems."

But I didn't mind that. I wanted to be a journalist when I finished school, and I thought the Web site was a good way to get some practice. So I went back to Lauren and said yes, and now I'm an advice columnist. I give advice[3] to people with

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

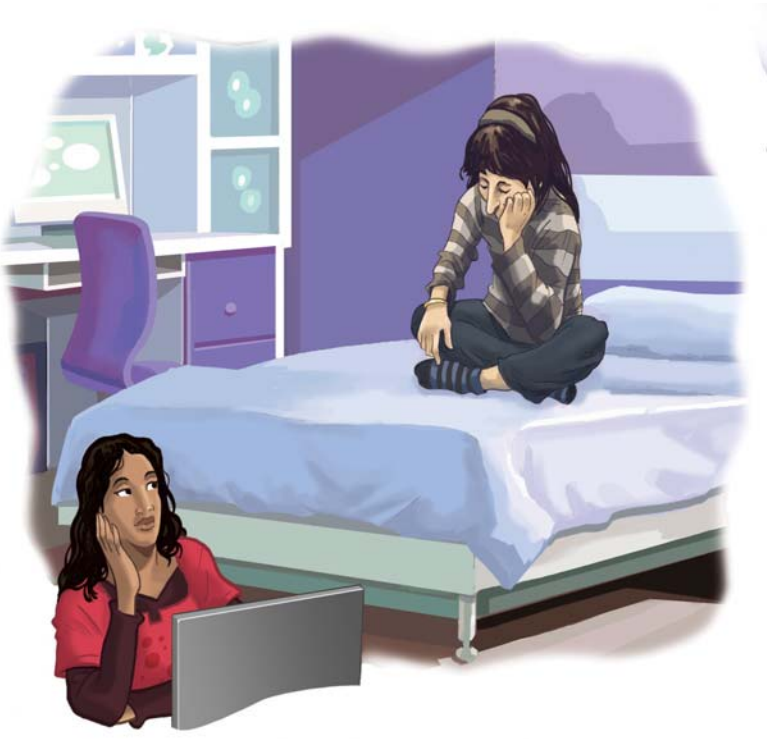
Here's an e-mail I've just replied to:

From: Stay-at-Home Girl
To: askalice@jumpgoldhillhigh.us
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[4]. I hate school now. I just want to stay in my room all the time. Please help.

Stay-at-Home Girl



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This is the reply I put on the Web site:

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 biracial 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? Maybe 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 . . . Maybe 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 mom or dad, or one of the teachers. They can help.

I hope this helps.

Love from,
Alice

As I said, the work of an advice columnist is important. I hate for 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.

"OK, we're almost finished with today's meeting," Lauren was saying. "The last thing we need to talk about is the school dance tomorrow night. Johnnie, are you still OK to take pictures?"

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

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

Ed smiled for the first time in the meeting. "Gossip[5], 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 hair salon. Sometimes gossip was really unkind.

"Will you show us what you write about people – before it goes on the Web site?" 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? OK, does anyone have 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 e-mail me if they need help. So maybe it's OK. Anyway, I'll see you soon, Johnnie."

"See you at the dance," he said.

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"But don't take any pictures of *me*, OK?" I said. "I'm not a good dancer! And my friend Emma is helping me 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 pictures."



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As I walked to my next class, I thought about the dance. I didn't really want to go, but Emma wanted us to go together. She loved dances. 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 math class, "I think *you* need to send an e-mail to *Ask Alice*!"

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