

Ask Alice Margaret Johnson

Aims

- To make students interested in the book.
- To give students an insight into some of the characters and issues in the book.
- To stimulate students' imaginations.

NOTE: You may find that many of the activities described below can be exploited better in your students' own language or native language if you speak it. The native language, if used carefully as a resource, can facilitate your students' progress in English and help them to understand the context of the story, thus preparing them to understand it better when they read it.

Pre-reading Activities

- 1 Tell students that the title of the book is *Ask Alice*. Write a list of types of genres on the board (e.g., murder mystery, comedy, science fiction, romance, adventure, human interest). Discuss these with students to ensure that they know what they all are. Then tell students that you will be returning to this list shortly to guess what genre *Ask Alice* is.
- 2 Ask students to look at Illustration 1, which is from the cover of the book, and to read Extract 1. Tell students that the girl on the cover is Alice, and that she is the main character in the story. Ask them what kind of girl they think she is and write their suggestions on the board.
Possible answers: kind, smart, nice, knows what she wants, thinks carefully about things, quiet
- 3 Discuss with students the role of an advice columnist. Ask if students have seen advice columns, and if so, where. Ask, *What kinds of problems do you think students at Alice's school would e-mail about?* Make a list.
- 4 Return to your genre list in Activity 1 and ask students, *What genre do you think Ask Alice is?*
Answer: Human interest – a story about relationships
- 5 Remind students that Alice is the advice columnist on *Jump*, a Web site put together by students at

Alice's school. Working in pairs, ask students to discuss what else they think would be good to include on the *Jump* Web site. Give feedback to the whole class.

Possible answers: news, sports news, information about events, stories about student achievement

- 6 Ask students to read Extracts 2 and 3, which are both problems that are e-mailed to Alice in the story. Now ask students to choose one of these problems and write the reply they think Alice would give. Have students share their letters with a partner.
- 7 Tell students that people sometimes use a different name when they write to an advice columnist, like Stay-at-Home Girl in Extract 2. Tell them that we call this "using an alias." Ask students, *Why do you think people sometimes prefer not to use their own name when they write to an advice columnist?*

Possible answer: Their letter/e-mail and the reply will be on the Web site or in the magazine/newspaper for everyone to see. They might not want other people to know about their problem.

Return to the list of problems made in Activity 3. Ask students to think of aliases to match the problems people are writing in about. Share these with the whole class and ask students to vote for the alias they like the best. (NOTE: Students are not allowed to vote for their own alias.)

- 8 Ask students to look at Illustration 2, which shows someone with a problem who has e-mailed Alice. Have students work in pairs to discuss what they think the boy's problem is. Ask one person in the pair to write the letter to Alice, and the other to write Alice's reply. Share these in small groups or with the whole class.
- 9 Ask students to look at Illustration 3 and to read Extract 4. Discuss these with the whole class. Working in pairs, students now imagine a week has gone by, and write what happens when the four friends return to the shop. They should write the scene like a play or screenplay using dialog and descriptions of action. They are allowed to introduce new characters (e.g., a salesperson, the police, parents, Alice, etc.) if they wish.

- 10 Act out some of these scenes as a class or in small groups, trying to show how characters are feeling and thinking.
- 11 Tell students that a famous pop star appears in *Ask Alice*. Ask them to make some notes about what part they think this pop star will play in the story. Have students share their ideas with the whole class.

Post-reading Activities _____

- 1 Pass two pieces of paper around the class, one headed *Something I liked about Ask Alice* and the other headed *Something I didn't like about Ask Alice*, and ask students to write a sentence on each sheet. Use some of their responses to stimulate class discussion.
- 2 Ask students to choose one of these three scenes: (a) page 60, when Johnnie confesses to writing the e-mails; (b) pages 43 and 44, when Lauren is looking for Cherie Reeves; or (c) page 55, in the library café when Alice's father is talking to her mother. Students should then write an interior monologue for (a) Johnnie, (b) Lauren, or (c) Alice's father, showing what their character is thinking or feeling in the scene.
- 3 Ask students to imagine that a movie is to be made of *Ask Alice* and to choose a scene from the story for a billboard to advertise the movie. Ask students to explain their choice, either to the whole class or to a partner.
- 4 Have students, working in pairs, discuss how *Ask Alice* would be changed if it was called *Ask Alan* – that is, the main character was male instead of female.

Extract 1

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

Extract 2

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. I hate school now. I just want to stay in my room all the time. Please help.

Stay-at-Home Girl

Extract 3

Dear Alice,

My father loves soccer, and he really wants me to be good at it. We play soccer every weekend. But I like art, not soccer. I'm good at drawing and painting pictures.

Dad doesn't understand art. He thinks it's boring, and he doesn't like me staying in my room all the time.

I don't want Dad to be angry with me, but I feel very unhappy about this. What can I do?

PJ

Extract 4

On the way home from school, my friends and I always go to the shop to get some candy. But last week, they took some candy without paying. The man in the shop didn't see, and my friends all thought it was very funny.

They say they're going to do it again this week, and they want me to do it, too. I don't want to do it. My friends are stealing and it's wrong. But they say I have to steal some candy or they won't be friends with me.

My notes

CAMBRIDGE



Ask Alice

Margaret Johnson

 American English

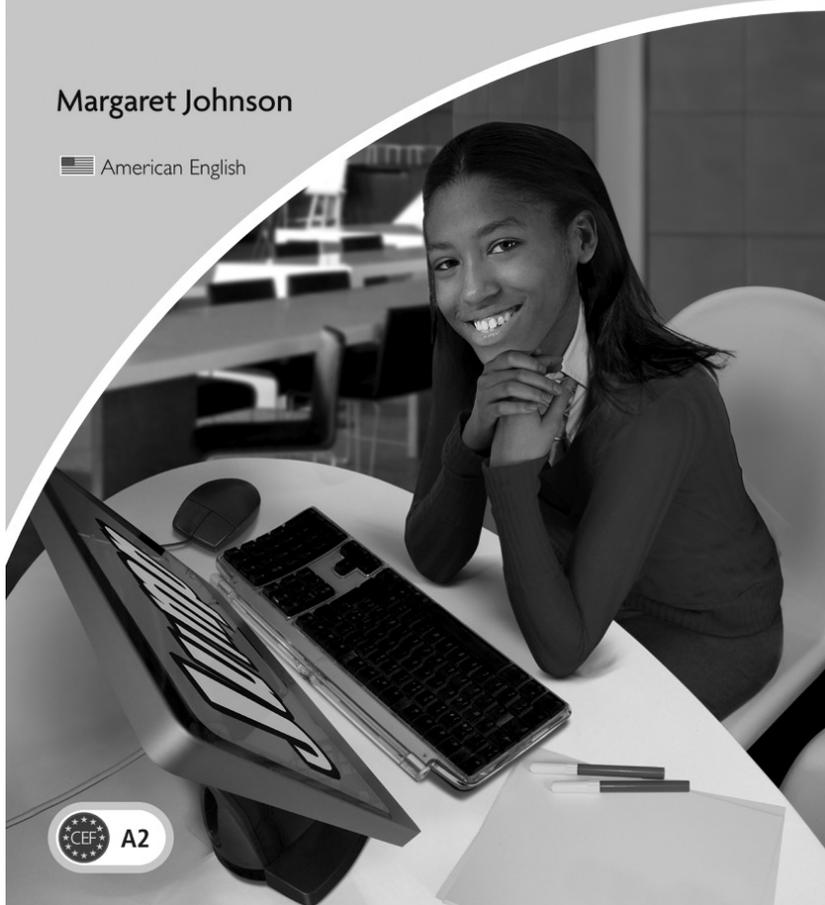


Illustration 2



My notes

Illustration 3

