



## The 'Alice & Megan' Series

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### Summaries and Discussion Points

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#### RATIONALE & THEMES

The 'Alice & Megan' series deals with the girls' friendship and looks – in an amusing and light-hearted way – at how they weather the ups and downs of family life, problems with friends, school and making new friends, among other issues.

Alice and her best friend Megan's personalities are complementary; Megan's caution and Alice's impulsiveness provide the perfect tension between their aspirations and the reality that inevitably engulfs them as each opportunity for adventure presents itself.

Throughout the series, Alice deals with her feelings about her parent's separation and her efforts to come to term with this, while Megan is dogged by the conflict of loving her family dearly and feeling guilty for wishing that they were 'cooler.'

Despite their friendship experiencing the gamut of jealousies, insecurities and rejection as well as simple, light-hearted joy, in the end the girls discover that the bond between them is stronger than anything and has never really been in danger of breaking.

The themes include:

- Close friendship
- Jealousy
- Joy
- Rejection
- Independence
- Bullying
- Family break-up
- Acceptance
- Embarrassment

This teaching guide covers the first five books in the series. The remaining two, *Alice & Megan Forever* and *Alice to the Rescue*, deal with the friends' first year in secondary school. *Alice & Megan's Cookbook* is also available.

#### SUMMARY

Although each of the books offers a broad scope of interesting issues and opportunities, the series provides a seamless narrative of Megan and Alice's friendship as it copes with the challenges of family break-up, rejection and madcap adventures.

#### Alice Next Door

The chronicle opens as family separation forces Alice and Megan apart. When Alice moves to Dublin to live with her mum, life for Megan becomes a storm of insecurity and she finds little comfort anywhere as she tries to cope at school without a best friend.

As a treat, Megan's mum arranges a day trip for them to Dublin and Megan is able to spend the day with Alice, which only fuels her insecurity when she meets some of Alice's new Dublin friends.

Alice however is very unhappy. Missing Limerick, her dad and her friends she devises a plan that she hopes will reunite her family.

She is allowed to make a return visit to Megan in Limerick and has little difficulty in persuading her to become an accomplice in her plan.

She decides to disappear, hoping that the shock will reunite her parents.

The novelty of surviving under Megan's bed on a diet of pot noodles with each of her parents believing that she is with the other, tests their confidence and ingenuity as the arrangements required to stay hidden become ever more complicated.

Discovery is inevitable. However, the consequences turn out to be less than they feared and their scheme ever achieves a degree of success in the end.

#### Alice Again

*Alice Again* is the second book in the series and Megan's mum has agreed to her visiting Dublin to stay with Alice for six whole days.

The girls have spent weeks planning the fun they plan to have together. The reality, however, is somewhat different.

Megan finds Alice distraught, convinced that her mum has a secret boyfriend.

Alice's hopes that her family might reunite are in jeopardy and she persuades Megan – against her better judgement – to help her to identify the boyfriend and then drive him away.

Their suspicions seemed to be confirmed when they secretly follow Alice's mum, Veronica, to her rendezvous with 'Norman'.

Alice creates a series of increasingly desperate diversions to frustrate their liaison, climaxing when she and Megan gatecrash a coffee date; with her hyperactive young brother, Jamie, in tow.

Alice's mission to convince Norman that Veronica's children are uncontrollable succeeds and after Jamie has been spectacularly sick, Alice and Megan return to the flat to clean him up and await Veronica's return.

When Veronica returns the exchange becomes surreal as she collapses in peals of laughter at Alice's denunciation of Norman as her boyfriend.

She reveals that he is her life coach and has been helping her adjust to her new circumstances.

Megan quietly retreats to allow Alice and her mum to talk about how they feel and order is eventually restored.

Exhausted and drained, Megan returns to Limerick. The following weekend she

wakens to discover Alice on her doorstep. Fearing another madcap scheme, she is relieved when Alice declares that her mum has decided to return to Limerick and they have come down to flat hunt.

Suddenly everything seems possible again.

### Don't Ask Alice

Megan is feeling positive about going back to school. Alice is back and school promises to be fun again; the last term a whirl of excitement with Confirmation first on the agenda.

An embarrassing fashion disaster is deflected when Megan's dad wins a clothes voucher and persuades her mum to buy a new dress for the occasion rather than attempt to knit one.

Alice becomes nostalgic again for a united family and hatches another scheme to reconcile her parents.

Her plan is simple. If she can persuade her mum that her dad has a girlfriend, she hopes that her mum will become jealous and attempt reconciliation.

Alice pressgangs Megan's support to arrange a suitable date for her dad.

The first opportunity presents itself when their teacher Miss Herlihy announces a class trip to Fota Island and asks for parent volunteers to help out.

Alice volunteers her dad immediately. Unfortunately Miss Herlihy is distinctly unimpressed when her dad interprets the invitation as an opportunity to behave like a child for the day

His catalogue including confusing the bus driver and getting them lost, soaking the teacher and being sick on the return home not to mention his complete lack of any fashion sense.

Fortune offers Alice a second chance when Megan's mum plans a reunion weekend and arranges for Megan's Aunt Linda to babysit both her and little sister Rosie for the weekend. When Alice learns that Linda is unattached, the planning begins.

Alice and Megan connive to introduce Peter and Linda, issue a dinner invitation to Peter; give Linda a beauty makeover; then shop for and cook a 'romantic' dinner for two.

At each turn the logistics become more torturous and the explanations more Machiavellian.

The evening passes without major disaster and despite initial embarrassment Peter and Linda relax and enjoy the meal. However

they are not without their suspicions.

When they are alone, Linda confronts Megan and explains how the implications of their scheme could have had a different outcome.

Alice eavesdrops on her parents discussing the 'date' and finally realises and accepts that they will never be reconciled.

The term finishes for the girls with an end of school celebration where they share memories and resolve to move on together, always friends.

### Alice in the Middle

Despite the porridge-coloured sky and the rain beating on the window, Megan wakes and greets the day with a huge smile. She is off to summer camp. The camp brochure she and Alice have devoured from cover to cover promised fun and excitement, plus she'll have Alice's company for three whole weeks.

The two girls are the first to arrive. The building is huge and echoes to their nervous giggles as they begin to explore. They meet the principal, the formidable Mrs Duggan, who curtly directs them to their room.

Gloria, their counsellor, introduces herself and they discover that they are to share a bedroom with a girl called Hazel.

As the building begins to ring with the sounds of arriving children, Megan wonders what Hazel will be like.

From the first moment Alice is dazzled by Hazel, who weaves a distracting web of 'cool' clothes, cosmetics and gadgetry to snare Alice and separate her from Megan.

To Megan's disbelief Alice abandons their netball pact in order to be Hazel's partner for tennis. This is only the beginning as Alice becomes closer to Hazel and pulls further away from Megan.

Gloria is aware of the developing dynamics and takes steps to ensure that Alice partners an unsuspecting Megan for the camp Talent Competition.

Hazel, not content with having Alice as a friend, now pursues Megan with vicious gossip and mean tricks, and humiliating her by arranging a bogus 'date' with Sam, a boy from the basketball group.

Megan is befriended by Sarah and discovers that she is not the only one to have spotted Hazel's tricks.

With Sarah's support and the respite of a family day by the sea building sandcastles with Rosie; Megan determines to cope until the end of the camp, hoping that Alice will eventually come to her senses and recognise

Hazel for what she really is.

Hazel now has Alice firmly under her control, having invited her to spend her family day with her family. Hazel and Alice plan an illicit day at the cinema together with Hazel's brother and his friend.

Megan is excluded again and desperate with worry when they fail to return, reluctantly reports their absence to Gloria.

Later, when the girls return, having missed the last bus, they meet the wrath of Mrs Duggan and face detention and proscription from the farewell disco.

After the tears, Megan has to endure the full torrent of silence, exclusion and mean comment from Hazel. This culminates in a vicious barrage and as Megan tries to escape she stumbles on the stairs, falls and finishes up in hospital.

Alice witnesses the exchange and it is enough to break Hazel's spell.

When Megan is discharged the next day; Sam and Sarah confesses their concern for her. Her parents arrive to take her home and marvellously, the old Alice has returned. Hazel has left and her memory is now a receding unpleasantness.

### Bonjour Alice

It is Megan's first teenage birthday and her mum Sheila takes her into town to buy an outfit. To Megan's surprise, she doesn't balk too much at Megan's fashionable choice.

Sheila has another surprise in store and when she announces that she has arranged a ten-day family holiday at a friend's vacant *gite* (holiday rental) in France, and invited Alice, Megan is ecstatic.

Megan rushes to break the news to Alice, only to discover that Alice has already accepted an invitation to go with their mutual friend, Grace, to Lanzarote.

Megan is distraught; her dream holiday is in tatters before it has even begun. However a little telephone diplomacy from Sheila and Alice's mum Veronica, including rearranging itineraries sees Alice bound for France with Megan and the rest of the Sheehan family.

There is no time to delay and packing up the car is quickly accomplished; although Donal, Megan's dad, is forced to limit the amount of organic produce that Sheila wants to bring with them.

Once aboard, the excitement and novelty of their own cabin is muted for Megan when her mum eschews the ship's restaurants and produces an organic picnic that she has brought for the journey. The edge of

Megan's embarrassment is dulled when Alice compliments and seems to enjoy the chickpeas; even though the homemade bread has disintegrated to crumbs.

The *gite* is beautiful and the girls share a quaint little attic bedroom.

On their first expedition into the village to buy bread, they see Pascal sitting reading in the baker's garden and Alice swoons. Pascal however is unimpressed and dismisses their attempts to speak to him.

When Sheila informs them that she has volunteered them to help provide a little English conversation practice for the baker's son, they are thrown into a frenzy of preparation at the prospect of spending time with Pascal.

Their dream dissolves when they discover that the baker's son is Bruno – and he is wearing the most repulsive pair of yellow shorts that they have ever seen.

He explains that Pascal is his cousin and Alice is deaf to his explanation that Pascal is not really a very nice person.

His advice is confirmed when the girls eventually meet Pascal. Megan discovers that Pascal has persuaded Bruno to wear the hideous shorts, convincing him that they were the height of sophisticated fashion and sure to impress the Irish girls. It is a mean trick that Alice determines to repay.

On their last full day while the rest of the family visit a museum, Alice and Megan decide to have a little adventure and set off on their bikes to explore a nearby forest. Without any preparation, they become lost and fear descends with the dark.

However, thanks to Bruno spotting the direction they took and giving clear directions to the Gendarmes, they are rescued without harm and returned safely to the *gite*.

Next day, as the family prepares to depart, Alice and Megan decide to cycle one last time to the village to thank Bruno. Alice takes a bowl of Sheila's lentil stew, now congealed, as a present for Pascal and without ceremony, tips it over his head, much to Bruno's delight.

They say *'au revoir'* to Bruno, who kisses each of them on the cheek, and make their way back, delighted and with an abundance of memories to share.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

### Alice Next Door

(Read pp 45 & 130-131)

Megan is embarrassed both by her mother's behaviour and her appearance. She resents

her mum's attitudes and opinions and wishes that they conformed to a more 'fashionably' cool image.

Would you sympathise with Megan or do you think she is being unfair to her mum?

What advice would you give either Megan or her mum to help them make their positions and opinions more acceptable to the other?

### Alice Again

(Read pp 110-115)

Against her better judgement Megan is persuaded by Alice to become involved in several activities that could be quite dangerous.

She does nothing while Alice gives her little brother Jamie sweets that she knows will change his behaviour for the worse.

What choices do you think that Megan had and do you think that she exercised them sensibly?

What advice would you have given to both Alice and Megan about their behaviour?

### Don't Ask Alice

(Read pp 195-200)

Alice and Megan engineer a dinner date between Megan's aunt, Linda, and Alice's dad, Peter, without either of them realising what is happening.

Later when Linda explains to Megan that she felt she was used, Megan feels very guilty.

Do you think it is right to fool people like this?

Can you think of any other times when you might not really consider other people's feelings when you ask them to do something for you?

### Alice in the Middle

(Read pp 45-50 & 137-139)

At summer camp, Alice and Megan share a room with Hazel, who turns out to be very manipulative and possessive. As Alice begins to fall under Hazel's influence; Megan notices a progressive change in her friend's behaviour and their relationship starts to come under pressure.

Megan is hurt and unsure how to react.

Do you think that she is exaggerating Hazel's influence on Alice? What advice would you give to Megan to help her deal with Alice's behaviour and the effect that it is having on her?

### Bonjour Alice

(Read pp 100-102 & 117-121)

Megan and Alice are on a family holiday in France. During the holiday they meet two cousins, Pascal and Bruno. The girl's first impressions of the two boys' are influenced by their appearances.

Do you think that this is an efficient way of deciding what someone is really like?

Can you think of a better way of judging what someone is like as a person?



Alice Next Door

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Alice Again

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Don't Ask Alice

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