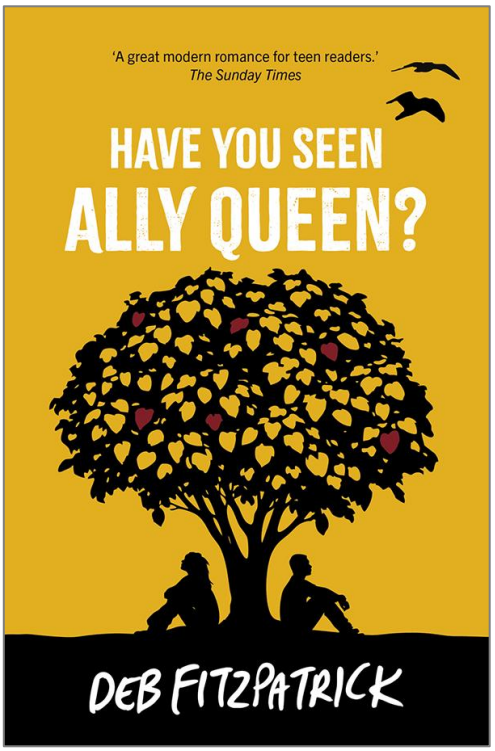
HAVE YOU SEEN ALLY QUEEN?

DEB FITZPATRICK
ISBN (PB): 9781760996741
YEAR LEVEL: Y9–12



ABOUT THE BOOK

Ally Queen is feeling more alone than ever. Forced to move miles away from her closest friend, their deep and meaningfuls have been reduced to sporadic and unsatisfying texts.

And Ally desperately needs a friend to confide in. Her mum is unwell, and the move to the country – which was meant to help things – seems to have made everything worse.

On top of this, Ally is faced with the hardest challenge of all: starting over at a new school.

As she struggles to come to terms with her new reality, Ally meets Rel, the annoying boy next door. But what starts as an infuriating addition to her troubles might just turn out to be the change in perspective she needs most.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Deb Fitzpatrick is the author of more than a dozen books. Her novels have received awards in Australia, been published in the US, and optioned for film. Deb has a Master of Arts from UWA, loves using stories from real life in her writing, and regularly teaches creative writing to people of all ages. In her early writing days, Deb did all manner of jobs to fund her writing, including making bad coffee, cleaning houses, supervising university exams, and helping kids cross the road safely as a crosswalk attendant, or 'lollipop lady'.

THEMES

- Identity
- Isolation
- Family
- Friendship
- Mental health

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y9–12 English

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: debfitzpatrick.com.au
- Post-traumatic stress disorder: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Pre-Reading

1. Write a journal response considering the following questions:
    a. What do you think it would be like if your family moved to a country town tomorrow?
    b. What challenges would you face?
    c. How would you deal with them?

During Reading

1. Plot summary: Keep a note of what happens to Ally in each chapter, and how Ally feels about it. You could draw a table like this (write one sentence in each box):

Title of chapter	What happens	How Ally feels

2. Ask students in small groups to look up definitions of important vocabulary that may be unfamiliar, such as:
    a. frazzled (p. 3)
    b. poxy (p. 5)
    c. cicadas (p. 35)
    d. dinghy (p. 36)
    e. fug (p. 76)
    f. demure (p. 104)
3. Discuss uses of metaphor and simile throughout the book and how the author uses this to create rich imagery. For example:
    a. **'… as floppy and tired as the leaves on the peppermint tree outside'** (p. 21).
    b. **'The floor croaks like a toad under my feet'** (p. 29).
    c. **'My head's a spin dryer on full blast'** (p. 114).
    d. **'… the leaves of the peppies brush the ground over and over like a broom clearing the way for something'** (p. 243).
    e. **'The sky's a huge black ceiling with chinks of light coming through'** (p. 271).
4. Ally texts her friend Shel, **'24 dead whales right out the front of our place. How's that for metaphorical significance?'** (p. 32). What do you think Ally means by this? What does the event reflect about Ally's feelings towards living in Melros?
5. When Ally's mum asks her, **'You don't like it much down here, do you, Ally?'** (p. 41), Ally describes the feeling of her blood rushing to her feet. Why do you think she reacts this way?
6. Read pages 42–43 in the chapter 'Angelgirl' where she discusses her **'New School resolution'**. What do we learn about Ally's character here and how she views herself?
7. As a class, analyse Ally's thought, **'Mostly, I don't want to be with me'** (p.55) following a conversation with her mum. Why does she feel this way?
8. On page 55, Ally's mum retorts **'Why can't you just keep yourself occupied? People didn't have telephones and DVD players in the old days, you know? They just had candles and books and wrote letters and *talked*.'** Adapt this comment to fit current society and how teenagers currently keep themselves busy.
9. What does the following passage reveal about how Ally is feeling? **'The waves break half-heartedly, and herring dive the wrong way, up into this world for a few stupid moments. *Good move*, I say under my breath when they disappear again. I look down the beach. There's just terns and sky and rocks and great lumps of weeds and heaps and heaps of grainy sand. And me'** (p. 75).
10. Read the chapter 'Words' (p. 88-90) and discuss the impact of Ally's mum's mental health on the family.
11. When Ally visits Rel's house for the first time, we begin to notice a shift in her demeanour. **'I smile, thinking, yum, while around me, their house begins to work its way in'** (p. 123). What does this mean?

12. Ally has a particularly strong reaction during her second meeting with the school counsellor, **'That's it, that's it! I think. I can feel the blood flooding into my face and I just wanna let rip at this guy'** (p. 172). Why do you think she is so angered by the encounter?
13. **'I don't want to hear anymore. I don't want to think about anything anymore. I want to be in that wind, that's all. On the beach, on the top of my dune, with the water ahead'** (p. 185). What does the beach mean to Ally? Discuss the common link between the beach and Ally's coping strategy of pushing away thoughts of her troubles – how effective do you think this is?
    a. **'I look across the ocean as far as I can, and try to blank it all out'** (p. 3).
    b. **'I feel like I need the beach – just sand and water, those two simple things, nothing else…'** (p. 148).
    c. While swimming out with the craypot: **'Every now and then, I remember yesterday, and everything else. But I just push it away. I can't see any point in thinking about it anymore. Not thinking about things works…'** (p. 195).
14. **'He looks up at me and smiles with his whole face. I want to burst out into something, just seeing him grinning like that'** (p. 205). Why do you think Ally's comment makes her dad so happy? Discuss the impact his reaction has on her.

Post-Reading

1. Create a timeline of key events in the novel:
    a. Draw a long horizontal line in the middle of an A3 sheet of paper to represent the year of time that passes during the book.
    b. Try to work out when each of the following events occur:
        i. Moving to Melros.
        ii. Discovering the seal.
        iii. Rel putting the orange peel in his mouth.
        iv. Mum staying in bed all day.
        v. Mum moving to her sister-in-law's.
        vi. Meeting the school counsellor.
        vii. Discovering the mulberry tree.
        viii. Meeting Rel at the beach.
        ix. Rel giving Ally the bracelet.
        x. Going on camp.
    c. Once finished, add a graph of how you think Ally is feeling during each event. Use the timeline as your x-axis, against how Ally is feeling as your y-axis. You could go beneath the timeline if her emotion is negative, and above the line if it's positive. Connect your dots to form a graph.
    d. Compare your graph with those of other students and discuss any differences. Why did you understand that part of the book differently?
2. Create a map of Melros and the surrounding areas on A3 paper, using information from the book on important locations. You will need to make educated guesses where precise information is not provided. Add short descriptions of events that happen at each location.
3. After having read the book, why do you think the author chose the title, *'Have You Seen Ally Queen?'*.
4. Discuss Ally's understanding of her mother's mental health, comparing comments she makes about her mother throughout the novel. Each quote could be allocated to a different small group to then share as a whole class.
    a. **'Sometimes I feel like we've changed mums, too'** (p. 2).
    b. **'I tell you, she hasn't been the same since that accident. I don't really know why it affected her so badly, but something shifted in her brain, never quite slotted back in where it should have'** (p. 23).
    c. **'She's walking down towards the front patch and she's fully weeping as she goes. I can't believe it'** (p. 40)
    d. **'Every time I think about Mum crying on the driveway last week I get a surge of, well, *pain*. Poor Mum'** (p. 42).
    e. **'I feel vaguely sick… I don't want to be here with Mum being strange'** (p. 55).
    f. **'"Well …' I feel a bit desperate now. 'Can we *do* anything to make her better?"'** (p. 71).

   g. **'… she's still Mum, but she's sick, but not sick enough to be in hospital, but too sick to be at home with us. God …'** (p. 100).
5. Throughout the novel, there are recurring references to the sky. In small groups, analyse how the descriptions reflect the emotional states of the characters and events occurring within the chapter:
   a. **'There's a nuclear cloud at the end of the sky, at the end of our street. It looks grey as hell'** (p. 79).
   b. **'The sky's dipping down on to us, way blue'** (p. 107).
   c. **'The clouds are thinning back, flat as the sea. They reflect on her face, or she reflects the tint of the water – I don't know which'** (p. 170).

Creative Writing

1. The novel finishes with Mum back home, and Ally and Rel enjoying their new relationship. Imagine what might happen after the end of the novel. Does Ally stay in Melros? Does she visit Shel in Perth? Or does she have adventures with Rel? Write one or more new chapters that extend the story after the end of the novel. Make sure you write in the same style as the novel. You will need to consider these questions:
   a. What tense is the novel in?
   b. Who is the narrator of novel?
   c. What is the tone of the narration? What kind of feeling does it have?
   d. What is the style of the language? What kinds of words are used? Are the sentences long or short? Simple or complicated? Formal or informal?
2. Write part of the novel from the perspective of another character. You could choose Mum, Dad, Jerry, Rel, Ms Carey or even Rel's mum. Write in first person, with your character as the narrator. You will need to consider these questions:
   a. What does your character know? What don't they know?
   b. How do they feel about the events you are describing?
   c. How would they speak or write? What kinds of words would they use? Would they speak in a simple or complicated way? A formal or informal way?

Health

1. **'Kids need their parents more than sharks do. That's true, I reckon. But we could sure do without their baggage'** (p. 178). Discuss the impact that parents' mental health can have on their children, in both positive and negative ways.
2. The novel explores mental illness and its effect on families, through Ally's mum's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In small groups, research post-traumatic stress disorder. Create a presentation that answers the following questions:
   a. What is PTSD?
   b. How is it caused?
   c. What does it feel like to have PTSD?
   d. How is it treated?
   e. What are the best things you can do for someone who is suffering from PTSD?

   Then design a poster to help people understand this condition.