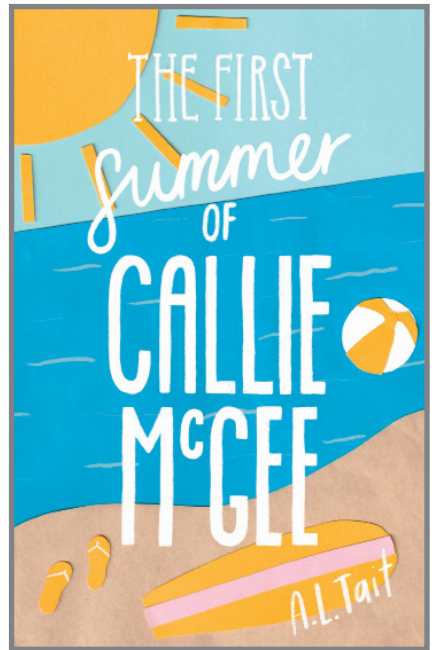


The First Summer of Callie McGee



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SCIS: 5455660

ISBN: 9781760260163

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

The water in a rip current is always calmer than the waves on either side. Once in it, you're best just to go with the flow.

It's the last summer before Callie starts high school and she's been dragged along to yet another 'family friends' holiday. Determined to change her nerdy reputation, Callie sets out to make waves but nothing is quite as she expects. Her usual ally, Sasha, has outgrown Callie; her nemesis, Mitch, has brought his cousin Owen along; and the boring south coast town of Sawyer's Point has been rocked by a series of burglaries. Callie, Owen and Mitch decide to investigate the robberies, bringing them face to face with a local gang . . . and a possible ghost.

But when Sasha goes missing, Callie must draw on all her smarts to find her friend, and discovers that being Callie McGee has its benefits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allison Tait (A. L. Tait) is the internationally published bestselling author of middle-grade adventure series The Mapmaker Chronicles and The Ateban Cipher. A multi-genre writer, teacher and speaker with many years' experience in magazines, newspapers and online publishing, Allison is the co-host of the top-rating So You Want To Be A Writer podcast. *The Fire Star: A Maven & Reeve Mystery* taps into her passion for historical fiction and adventure. Allison lives on the south coast of New South Wales with her family.

Find out more about Allison at allisontait.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think the title might refer to?
 - How can someone have a 'first summer'?
 - Based on the cover art, what genre would you predict this book to be? Why do you think this?
 - What can you see happening on the cover?
 - Who do you think might be the protagonist of this novel?
 - What do you hypothesise is likely to happen in this story?
 - When and where do you think this book might be set?

- After reading the first chapter, as a class, discuss how the author has set the scene. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
 - What have we learnt in the first chapter about the protagonist?
 - What do we know about when and where the novel is set?
 - What do you predict is likely to happen in this novel, based on what has happened in the first chapter?
 - What information has the author managed to convey to us about the details of the setting and characters? What literary techniques have been used?
 - How has the author introduced the other characters, and the relationships between them?
- Is there a place where you and your family or friends have a lot of happy memories—like Sawyer’s Point and ‘In the Rip’ for Callie and her family? It might be somewhere you travel to regularly, or could be a local park, campground or even your home. Write and illustrate a description of a place where you have (or would like to have) a lot of happy memories with family or friends.
- Callie hates her long and hyphenated name, and is insisting on being called Callie instead. She would like to be called CJ, but thinks that she could not manage to live up to people’s beliefs about who someone called CJ is. How accurate do you think her opinions are when it comes to names and what they tell people about the bearer? Create an aspirational acrostic poem where the first letter of each line spells your name or nickname when read vertically. Each line of your poem should describe a characteristic, behaviour or notable feature that you would like to possess in the future.
- When they hear about the spate of thefts that have been taking place in Sawyer’s Point; Callie, Mitch and Owen decide to investigate. How sensible an idea would this be in real life? What are some of the reasons why a group of pre-teens shouldn’t investigate criminal activities themselves? As a class, discuss some of the problems and dangers that the three young people were lucky to avoid.
- Callie has always liked puzzles. What types of pen and paper puzzles do you know of? Create a pen and paper puzzle of your own for your classmates to solve. It could be a crossword, a sudoku, a logic puzzle, a wordsearch, a maze, a riddle or another type of puzzle that you know of. Make enough copies of your puzzle for everyone in the class, then collate all the different puzzles into a class puzzle book, with one copy of the book for everyone to work on solving puzzles in their spare time.
- Why do you think that thinking ‘What would CJ do?’ is so effective at helping Callie change years of ingrained patterns of behaviour? Think of a behaviour of your own that you would like to change, and try to think of a catchphrase like Callie’s to help you.
- What is the difference between anxiety like that which Callie’s mother struggles with, and ordinary concern and worry? What are some of the things that you can do or say to help someone who is struggling with anxiety?
- When Sasha was left in charge of the younger children, it nearly ended in disaster. What are some of the most basic safety considerations around open water that everyone should follow, and which one did Sasha and the adults fail to ensure was adequately followed?
- Callie’s knowledge of what a rip is, and how to get out of one comes in very useful. What are some other important things to know to help you stay safe at the beach, and how is this different from staying safe in a pool?
- Sasha told Callie that she got angry because she was scared. As a class, discuss this statement. Some things you might include in your discussion could be:
 - Do you think that it was fair for Sasha to be angry at Callie? Why/why not?
 - How did having Sasha angry at her make Callie feel?
 - Why would being scared make someone angry?
 - What are some things we can do if we find ourselves getting angry, when we are really scared?
 - What could Sasha have done differently when talking to Callie that would have been better for the both of them?
 - Can you think of a time when you (or someone else near you) has gotten angry because they have been scared? What else could you have said or done when you found yourself getting angry?
- On their last day, the three families all went on a ten kilometre walk. How long do you think it would take you to walk ten kilometres?
 - As a class, work out a walking route around your local area that is approximately ten kilometres long. Remember

to include the walk back to your school in your calculations! Pack snacks and water, wear comfortable shoes and a broad brimmed hat, and set off in the morning while it is still cool. Time how long it takes to walk the distance, and when you return to class write a recount of the experience, how you felt, and what the best and worst parts of it were.

- Were you surprised when Callie and the boys discovered the identity of the thief? Why/why not?
- What is your opinion of the ending of this story? Do you think that it ties everything up neatly, or do you still have some unanswered questions? As a class, discuss the resolution and ending of the novel, and talk about the different techniques the author has used to conclude the novel. Consider in your discussion both the various aspects of plot construction, and the use of first person narration in finalising the action.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE