



# Selfie

## ALLAYNE L. WEBSTER

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 12+

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### SYNOPSIS

Tully's life changes the moment Dene Walker leans over and chooses her as a friend. She can't believe it at first. Dene is super famous, with 1.5 million followers on Instagram. Tully has never seen herself as anything special, but as Dene's friend she starts to think she might be.

But as Tully's friendship with Dene develops, other parts of her life begin to suffer. Her best friend, Kira, is starting to lose patience with her cancelling plans and ignoring texts. Her marks are suffering. Even her stepmother, Michelle, starts to comment on Tully's growing obsession with her new friend.

Tully isn't worried. What would they know? They don't know how good Dene's attention makes her feel, or how it's more than just popularity. It's sharing secrets and getting to know the Dene behind the hashtag. Or is it?

Tully becomes consumed by her friendship with Dene. She's jealous of Dene's other friends and finds herself growing desperate for ways to be closer to Dene. She tells her everything—how she feels about her dad living mostly in another state, about her mum abandoning them years ago.

Then Dene abruptly withdraws her friendship, leaving Tully feeling rejected and alone. Tully thinks it's her fault for not being a good enough friend, and tries harder to show Dene how much she cares. Michelle tries to step in and gently tell Tully to pull back. Kira tries to reach out. But the only friendship Tully wants is Dene's.

Eventually, the rejection makes Tully spiral into despair. She can't go to school, and nothing makes her happy. Until Michelle encourages her to start painting again, and Tully starts to remember the things that really make her who she is.

*Selfie* is a timely story about figuring out who you are and what you want against the noise and seduction of online fame.

### CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allayne L. Webster grew up in rural South Australia and now lives in Adelaide. Her books include the CBCA notable novels *Paper Planes* and *A Cardboard Palace*, *Our Little Secret*, *The Centre of My Everything*, *That Thing I Did* and *Sensitive*.

### BEFORE READING

1. In the acknowledgments for *Selfie*, Allayne Webster writes: *'To new readers discovering my work for the first time: if Selfie speaks to you and you see yourself within it, please know you are not defined by how many likes you get on a post. You are not the sum of content on a social media page. You are not a product designed for consumption. You are beautiful and special and uniquely you. As a famous writer, Oscar Wilde said: Be yourself; everyone else is already taken. It's perfectly okay for you to take a while to figure out who you want to be. I'm still working it out – and I wrote this book!'* Discuss this comment in relation to your own experiences of social media. Does it make you feel pressure to conform or to perform for other people? How do you balance online friendships and likes against your own feelings of self-worth? Where do you turn for support when things go wrong?



- How is a selfie different from other photographs? Who is in control of the image, of *your* image? What kind of image are you trying to capture when you take a selfie?
- Selfie* is a book about friendship (real and fake). What do you look for in a true friend? Make a list of warning signs or red flags that make you think someone might be untrustworthy. Make a list of things that make a true friend.

### WHILE READING

- Kira is angry when she confronts Tully for ditching her to hang out with 'Insta Barbie'. (p. 31) Is her anger justified? Why do you think Tully is so shocked by Kira's reaction?
- What does Kira mean when she says 'a snake that sheds its skin is still a snake'? (p. 32) Is she right in her evaluation of Dene?
- When does Tully start to mistrust Dene?
- Why does Tully tell Dene that her mum is ill?
- Discuss the way that Tully's relationship with her mum changes throughout the story. Why doesn't Tully's mum tell her family the truth about the seriousness of her condition from the start?
- Why does Tully struggle to respect Dene's boundaries? Why does one person get to say when a relationship is over?
- Tully accuses Michelle of not having boundaries with her dad. Is she right? Why do you think Michelle puts up with his behaviour?
- Chapter 8 is called #SecretFears. What do you think Tully's secret fear is? Does she overcome it?
- Why does Kaz call Michelle when Tully shows up at their house?
- What is the difference between Tully's intention and Dene's reaction when Tully recreates the scene from *Love, Actually*? Does it matter that her intention was good?
- How do you think Maddy would describe Tully? Where does the conflict between them come from?
- Think back to the way that Tully sees herself at the beginning of the book. How has this changed by the end? Do you think she'll live happily ever after?

### AFTER READING

#### CHARACTER

- Discuss the opening paragraph of the book. What does it tell you about Dene and the influence she has/is going to have over Tully? Underline the words that reveal Dene's influence.
- What, in Tully's mind, makes someone worthy of attention? Does she believe that attention makes someone a good person? What do you think?
- Consider the difference in the ways that Luke and Tully see their Dad. Is Tully naive? Do you think she allows herself to be manipulated by others? How do you think you'd respond in this situation?

### STRUCTURE

- Many writers use 'signposting' to point towards future conflict. On page 6, Tully thinks that Dene's friendship 'seemed too good to be true'. What other signposts can you find in the story? What conflict or tension do these moments point towards? How are they resolved?

### THEMES

#### Social media

- Tully describes Dene as 'Insta-famous'. What does this term mean to you? What does it take to make someone Insta-famous? Make a list of the pros and cons of this kind of attention.
- Who is in control of Dene's online image? What are the ethics of a parent using their child to become famous online? Does Dene enjoy being famous?
- Tully wonders how Dene could 'possibly feel bad with all these people saying nice stuff to her'. What are some of the cracks in Tully's logic here? On the flip side, do you believe that Dene is genuinely unhappy? Discuss the differences between the persona people share on social media versus the person they are face to face.

#### Friendship

- Discuss the ways in which Tully's friendship with Dene is different to her friendship with Kira. Make a list of the ways that each of them show genuine friendship.
- Tully says, 'I felt like I had a connection with [Dene]: a clear window into her life and who she was. It was like she wasn't hiding anything.' (p. 126) Is the connection she feels genuine? Why/why not?
- When Michelle finally gets through to Tully, she says, 'Boundaries, people set theirs. It's time you set yours.' (p. 178) Why are boundaries important in a relationship? What kind of boundaries might you have in a friendship? Discuss some of the ways that a lack of boundaries can be harmful to a friendship.

#### Identity

- Why do you think Tully agrees with Dene when she complains about algebra even though she enjoys it? What are some of the other ways she changes herself to fit in with Dene?
- How does Tully describe the way that art makes her feel? How do others respond when she starts to make art that truly reflects who she is?
- Does Tully see her birth mother as a positive role model? Why/why not? How does her relationship with her parents shape the way she sees herself?

### RESPONDING

- Michelle tells Tully and Luke that their insults are 'worthy of a Shakespearean insult'. (p. 9) What does she mean by this? Find an example of an actual Shakespearean insult and use it as a template to come up with your own.
- The whole book is written from Tully's perspective, even though it is clear that other characters – Dene, Michelle, Kira – see what's happening very differently. Choose one of these three characters, and rewrite a significant scene from the book from their perspective.
- 'There's a moment. A pause. A gap where things can go either way. A choice.' (p. 156) Identify three significant



choices that shape the way the events in the story play out. Rewrite one to show what might have happened if a different choice was made.

4. Choose a celebrity that you follow online, and write a paragraph that summaries their online persona. Reflect on this in light of the messages in the book—how might they be different in person? Imagine that you are in their shoes, and write a diary entry reflecting on an aspect of your (their) life.
5. Throughout the book, Tully imagines the hashtags that might appear to describe her friendship with Dene. Come up with three hashtags that you would use to describe the book. Are hashtags an accurate reflection of the way someone feels?