

# **Almost Famous, a Talent Novel Study Guide**

## **Almost Famous, a Talent Novel by Zoey Dean**

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# Plot Summary

*Almost Famous*, by Zoey Dean, is a novel aimed at young teenage girls. It features four privileged and wealthy girls who are entering 8th grade with a goal of remaining their Bel-Air, California middle school's most popular group. However, they soon learn that the things that they do can come back to haunt them and that their clever attempts at revenge can backfire, leaving them humiliated and ostracized by their fellow students.

On the night before starting their 8th grade year at Bel-Air Middle School, Mac, Coco, Becks, and Emily gather for their annual slumber party. Mac, Coco, and Becks are the daughters of wealthy, well-known Hollywood personalities while Emily is an aspiring actress who has come from Iowa to live with Mac's family while she pursues her dream of stardom. The girls spend time planning Mac's upcoming campaign for social chair of their class, and they have fun pulling pranks on her rival for the position, Ruby Goldman, during a video chat.

School begins as they had expected, with Coco chosen as captain of the dance team; Mac's campaign going well; Becks getting a date with her crush; and Emily catching the eye of an important film producer. However, things suddenly and unexpectedly begin to unravel. Coco learns that she has been replaced as dance captain, Austin cancels his date with Becks, the producer begins giving Emily the cold shoulder, and Ruby is elected social chair over Mac. They are perplexed until they see a video Ruby has put on the Bel-Air intranet. After their prank video chat, Mac forgot to shut down her computer and Ruby recorded the four girls making fun of their fellow classmates and revealing embarrassing details about themselves, and now all their classmates have seen the video and begun to shun them.

The girls, who call themselves the Inner Circle, are dismayed, but soon Mac hatches a plan to regain their reputation and power. She signs on as Ruby's assistant and the other girls attach themselves to Ruby's friends with a goal of using information they gain to embarrass the other girls at ExtravaBAMSA, their school's most important annual fundraising event. However, plans go awry when Ruby's crowd learns of the Inner Circle's scheming and turns the tables on each girl, leaving them more humiliated than ever.

In the end, Mac assumes her usual leadership role and takes her friends in a different direction. Rather than continuing to try to regain their reputations at school, they begin to focus on their dream careers and their plans of becoming famous and dominating Hollywood.

# Chapters 1 through 3

## Chapters 1 through 3 Summary

*Almost Famous*, by Zoey Dean, follows the lives of four wealthy, privileged Los Angeles girls as they begin 8th grade and, over the course of two weeks, learn about the vagaries of popularity and the harm that can be caused by unfeeling kids, including themselves.

The book opens with four girls gathered for a sleepover before their first day of 8th grade at Bel-Air Middle Schools or BAMS for short in Los Angeles. They are Mackenzie Little-Armstrong (called Mac), daughter of a major Hollywood talent agent, Evangelina Becks (called Becks), daughter of a former TV star, Coco Kingsley, daughter of a hotel mogul and a superstar singer, and Emily Mungler, an Iowa native who is living with Mac's family while pursuing an acting career. The girls are gathered in Coco's private dance studio practicing Le Strut, the special walk they plan to use the next day to show how cool they are. Once they have perfected their walk, they turn their attention to Mac's campaign to become social chair of their class. When a freaky-looking girl arrives with the Pinkberry frozen yogurt they ordered, they treat her with disdain, especially after she recognizes Coco as the daughter of superstar Cardammon, which makes Coco uncomfortable. When Mac looks at a Bel-Air community web page, she spots an ad for a personal assistant and realizes it was placed by Ruby Goldman, who is running against her for social chair. The girls talk Emily into using her acting skills to get on a video chat with Ruby and pretend to be Tom, a guy applying for the job as her assistant. The plan works and Ruby says she wants to meet with Tom to see if he would be a good match for the position. After the chat ends, the girls laugh about their clever joke and Emily does spot-on impersonations of her friends as well as several other girls they know, including Kimmie Tachman, daughter of a powerful Hollywood producer. Coco laughs so hard that she urinates a little and Becks reveals her crush on a boy named Austin, then uses her frozen yogurt to pretend to make out with him. As the girls are falling asleep, Mac farts and the others tease her, then she reveals that she is lactose intolerant. As she falls asleep, Mac feels grateful to have such good friends and thinks that this is going to be the best year ever.

Chapter 2 opens the following morning as Mac's mother's assistant, Erin, picks up the girls and drives them to school. Emily is nervous because she feels as if she is auditioning at her new school. When they arrive, Mac gives Emily a silver chain with a ring engraved with the words Inner Circle, the name the girls have given their group. When the other three girls go off to take care of various business, Emily is left alone and she watches as Ruby sings a song she says is from her upcoming album to a group of admiring kids. Kimmie Tachman arrives, driven by her father, famous producer Elliott Tachman, for whom Emily had auditioned and been rejected for a film role. However, Elliott approaches her and says he wants to find a role for her in the movie, and Emily enters school thinking that she might belong there after all.



In Chapter 3, Coco is auditioning for captain of the Bam-Bams, the school dance team, and she is nervous because she thinks people will compare her to her famous mother. She is also unhappy to be competing against Ruby, who earlier had beaten her out for a record deal. When the auditions begin, Coco's routine goes perfectly but Ruby falls and Coco is chosen captain.

## Chapters 1 through 3 Analysis

The book's first chapter introduces the four main characters and provides a preview of plot lines that will follow. From the beginning, it is clear that Mac is the leader of the group and the most pretentious and social conscious. She teaches her friends to adopt an attitude of boredom and make it clear that the girls in the Inner Circle are above everyone else at school. The author carefully names the designer of every item of clothing each girl wears and paints a picture of all except Emily as being spoiled and privileged. Emily stands out because she is the innocent of the group, having arrived just days ago from Iowa in the hope of pursuing an acting career and being taken in by Mac's family because Mac's mother is a powerful agent and Mac aspires to follow in her footsteps. Incredulously, Emily has already gotten and failed an audition for a major movie role and their classmate Ruby has landed a recording contract for which Coco also competed.

The video chat between Ruby and Emily, posing as Tom, appears to be a minor incident at this point but foreshadows events that will become extremely important to the book's overall plot. It also introduces Ruby and Kimmie, who will be important secondary characters, as well as the Pinkberry delivery girl, who will unexpectedly reappear. The secrets that the girls reveal about themselves - Coco's tendency to urinate when she laughs too hard, Mac's lactose intolerance, and Becks's crush on Austin - also foreshadow future events.

Chapter 2 is important because it introduces Elliott Tachman and his interest in casting Emily in his upcoming film, and Chapter 3 sets up the Bam-Bams rivalry between Coco and Ruby.

Throughout the book's early chapters, readers should pay particular attention to the Inner Circle's attitude toward their fellow students and their tendency to place themselves above them and poke fun at what they see as their inferiority.

# Chapters 4 through 6

## Chapters 4 through 6 Summary

Chapter 4 finds Becks on the beach behind her Malibu house, preparing to indulge in her favorite pastime - surfing. Austin Holloway, her neighbor and friend since childhood, approaches and Becks is suddenly shy because she has recently developed a crush on him. They talk for a moment and agree to get together on Wednesday, and as Austin leaves, Becks is thrilled that they have a date.

In Chapter 5, Mac is pleased that her campaign for social chair seems to be on track. While at her locker, she is approached by Kimmie, who says that although she is Ruby's friend, she is quietly supporting Mac in the election. She also tells Mac that Ruby broke her ankle when she fell during the dance audition and that her record deal has fallen through. Ruby arrives and the girls exchange a few barbs, then she leaves with her group of followers, including Kimmie, Haylie Fowler and Ellie Parker.

In Chapter 6, Emily is having breakfast with Mac and her mother, Adrienne, at the Polo Lounge. Mac takes notes on ideas her mother has for getting Emily's acting career started and Emily tries to fit in with their fast lifestyle. When they arrive at school, Mac and Emily greet Kimmie when she gets out of her father's car, but she rushes off to class and Mac begins talking with Lukas Gregory. Emily thinks Kimmie's father appears to be glaring at her from inside his car, so she yells hello to him but he rolls up his window and drives off. Although Mac reassures her, Emily is afraid that she has somehow gotten on his bad side.

## Chapters 4 through 6 Analysis

The chapters in this section are important because they continue to set up events that are soon to develop. The reader meets Austin, the boy with whom Becks pretended to make out using her yogurt as a prop, and he asks her out on what she assumes will be their first date. We also learn about Becks's love of surfing, which will be important later. Chapter 5 introduces Haylie and Ellie, who will become important characters in the upcoming downfall of the Inner Circle.

Chapter 6 has a few notable elements. We meet Mac's powerful mother and get a sense of her strong personality and Mac's determination to follow in her footsteps, in particular by launching Emily's acting career. We also see Emily's discomfort with the lavish lifestyle of Mac's family even though she wants the career they can help her achieve. She is very aware of the difference between her own upbringing in Iowa and that of Mac in the privileged circles of Hollywood. Finally, when Emily sees Elliott Tachman dropping Kimmie off for school, she expects to receive the same warm greeting she got the previous day, but instead she senses that he is angry with her,

although she can't imagine why. This incident foreshadows other upcoming events that will bring about a complete reversal in fortune for the Inner Circle.

# Chapters 7 through 9

## Chapters 7 through 9 Summary

As Chapter 7 opens, a week has passed and Coco is heading toward a small cafe to prepare for a meeting of the Bam-Bams. She is pleased that things have been going much more smoothly since Ruby is no longer involved, and she is flattered that the team has decided to use her audition choreography for their performance at the upcoming ExtravaBAMSa, an annual school event that raises money for charity. However, when she arrives, she finds that the girls have moved up the time of the meeting without telling her and they have inexplicably voted to make Haylie captain and Coco an alternate, which means she will never get to perform. Leaving the meeting, she is grateful that her mother has come to bring something from home that Coco forgot because it gives her an opportunity to hide out in her mother's car for a few minutes, but she can't bring herself to tell her superstar mother that she is a failure.

In Chapter 8, Becks is looking forward to her date with Austin later that afternoon, and she has uncharacteristically worn makeup in anticipation. Ruby's friend Ellie, who has previously flirted with Austin, asks Becks if she wants to hang out later, but Becks tells her she has a date with Austin. However, moments later, she receives a text from Austin cancelling their plans and saying he can't see her the following day either. Becks is heartbroken and wonders what has happened in the past two days to change his attitude toward her.

In Chapter 9, Mac is sitting at the Inner Circle's regular picnic table in the school quad, eagerly anticipating her victory in the social chair election, when the other three girls arrive and begin telling about their recent misfortunes. Before Mac can respond, she receives an e-mail from Ruby with a video attached and the four girls watch in horror. The night of their slumber party, Mac forgot to log off her computer after they pranked Ruby during her video chat with Emily/Tom, and Ruby recorded the rest of their evening. The professionally-edited video shows Mac farting, Becks pretending to make out with the Pinkberry frozen yogurt, Emily doing an unflattering impersonation of Kimmie, and Coco wetting herself. It also shows Mac declaring that after she is elected social chair, she will only hang out with the Inner Circle and the girls agree that they have no interest in the other kids at BAMS, making all four girls appear to be snobby and conceited. Ruby and her friends come to the table to gloat, and after they leave, everyone receives an e-mail saying that Ruby has been elected social chair.

## Chapters 7 through 9 Analysis

In the chapters that comprise this section, the girls in the Inner Circle continue to experience surprising misfortunes but in Chapter 9, the reason finally becomes clear. Mac, for all her planning skills and social acumen, has made a terrible mistake simply by failing to log off her computer after the prank video chat with Ruby, thereby giving



Ruby access to all the secrets that were revealed during the remainder of the evening. While Ruby is made out to be the villain in this scenario, it is easy to see why she would be offended by the prank the girls played on her and take advantage of the embarrassing information they carelessly provided to her. She has also posted the video on a Bel-Air intranet to which all residents have access, so all the kids at BAMS have seen it, including those who were directly impacted such as Kimmie and Austin. Clearly Kimmie has told her father that Emily poked fun at her, which explains why the producer appeared to be cold toward Emily earlier that morning. It is also apparent that Ruby has turned on Coco, who beat her out for captain of the Bam-Bams dance team, and has used her friendship with Haylie to get Coco removed from the team's active members. In the matter of just a few hours, the fortunes of the Inner Circle have changed completely and they have gone from being the queens of their school to being its laughing stocks and outcasts.

# Chapters 10 through 12

## Chapters 10 through 12 Summary

Chapter 10 finds the Inner Circle sitting glumly around Mac's pool, reading online comments people have left about Ruby's video and lamenting the fact that their reputations have been ruined. They also watch a new video Ruby has posted, thanking the BAMS students for electing her social chair and slyly slipping in references to the embarrassing parts of the slumber party video. As the chapter ends, Emily is considering moving back to Iowa, where her life was much less complicated.

Chapter 11 opens with Mac home alone after her friends have left when Ruby unexpectedly appears at the front door, offering Mac a way out of the mess she has created. Ruby explains that she has gotten in over her head with the social chair position and asks Mac to be her assistant, adding that if the ExtravaBAMSa goes well, Ruby will announce that the video was a fake and the Inner Circle girls were in on it all along. Mac refuses the offer. A few minutes later, Adrienne arrives home and asks Mac what happened that day since Elliott Tachman is not returning her calls. Mac explains and Adrienne suggests that she accept Ruby's offer, reminding her daughter that she had to work her way up the ladder at her agency and that Mac has always had everything handed to her. Realizing she has little choice, Mac sends a text to Ruby accepting her offer, although she realizes the situation will be unbearable.

In Chapter 12, Mac calls a meeting of the Inner Circle at the school's organic garden, where they are unlikely to be seen by others. She explains her plan and she will be Ruby's assistant, Coco will serve as waterboy for the Bam-Bams dance team, Becks will teach Ellie to surf, and Emily will befriend Kimmie. This will go on for two weeks and then Ruby will let them off the hook with her announcement at the ExtravaBAMSa that the video was fake. At first, Coco and Becks refuse, but as they are leaving, two Goth kids make fun of them and they reconsider, finally agreeing to Mac's plan. The chapter ends with Coco humbling herself by stacking water bottles at the BAMS practice as they rehearse the routine that she created.

## Chapters 10 through 12 Analysis

The reality of their situation dawns on the Inner Circle girls in Chapter 10. When they read the comments people have left on the Bel-Air intranet, it is clear that although the video has been removed, it was seen by everyone they know and has damaged their reputations beyond repair. Other girls might have been able to laugh off an incident like this and move on, but Mac and her friends have always been at the top of the social chain, looking down on others, so this degree of public humiliation is unbearable for them. Even Emily, who is new to Los Angeles and to the group, considers giving up her dream of becoming a movie star and returning to Iowa. She is keenly aware of the

difference between her friends back home and the cruelty she is encountering among the privileged kids she is meeting in Bel-Air.

Rather than simply relishing her victory, Ruby decides to escalate the situation in two ways. She posts another video in which she gives the outward appearance of being gracious in her social chair victory but works in subtle, clever references to the Inner Circle's embarrassing secrets. Later, she offers Mac a way out of her downfall, but the price is high. Being Ruby's assistant would be even more humiliating for Mac, particularly since it would involve helping plan the important school event that Mac expected to be handling on her own if she had been elected. In talking with her daughter, Adrienne makes it clear that Mac has led a life of ease and privilege, but that she herself had to work hard and endure many humiliating experiences in her climb up the business ladder. After deciding to accept Ruby's offer, Mac once again exerts her influence as the leader of the Inner Circle by convincing her friends to humble themselves as well, with the promise that after the ExtravaBAMSa, their reputations will be magically restored by Ruby.

It is interesting to note that, at least at this point in the novel, the Inner Circle girls have no remorse regarding their attitudes toward their fellow students or any self-awareness regarding their assumption that they are somehow entitled. Rather than being embarrassed by their behavior, they are only upset because they have fallen from grace and their only goal is to restore their reputations and power within the school.

# Chapters 13 through 15

## Chapters 13 through 15 Summary

In Chapter 13, Becks is ready to teach Ellie to surf. She is surprised when Ellie wants to meet at a store rather than at the beach, but she quickly learns that Ellie wants Becks to help her pick out appropriate clothing for surfing. At first, Becks is uncomfortable, but she soon finds that she is good at it, although she asks Mac to help her with her own clothing choices. When Ellie is trying on a swimsuit, the girls are approached by Chad, who works for the store and says he is always looking for young surfers to sponsor and use in advertising campaigns. Ellie immediately announces that she is a surfer, and since she looks the part, Becks realizes that it appears that Ellie is the surfing expert. After Chad leaves, Ellie asks Becks why she didn't speak up and Becks realizes that it was her own fault that she didn't assert herself. As they prepare to leave the store, Ellie announces that she hopes Austin will be attracted to her after she learns to surf and Becks realizes that she is in danger of letting Ellie steal all her dreams.

In Chapter 14, Emily meets with Kimmie, who shows her the script for a one-act play, *Judgers and Haters*, that she has written. The play is about a girl who is a loser and lives in a cabin in the woods, then she kidnaps a cute Bel-Air girl who shows her the error of her judging and hating ways. Emily is dismayed to learn that she will be playing the role of the loser, Spazmo, while Kimmie will play Kipleigh, the cute girl. Kimmie gives Emily her costume, which is hideous and includes ugly glasses and orthodontic headgear, then announces that she expects Emily to get into the role by becoming Spazmo 24 hours a day. Emily realizes that since no one at school knows her yet, they will assume that Spazmo is really who she is.

In Chapter 15, Mac arrives at Ruby's house to begin her chores as assistant. Ruby is in her bedroom and instructs Mac to organize her huge closet, which has clothes and shoes piled everywhere. They agree that Mac should arrange the items by color, but when she finishes, Ruby says she wants it done by designer, then when that is completed, she tells Mac to arrange everything by season. In the meantime, Ruby leaves the room several times to meet with vendors about the ExtravaBAMSA, checking with Mac each time to be sure her choices are the best ones. She also leaves her phone and computer lying around, but Mac resists the urge to use them to prank Ruby and embarrass her. As the chapter closes, Ruby instructs Mac to serve as butler at a party she is hosting on Saturday night, wearing a maid's uniform, and Mac realizes that her humiliation is about to become public.

## Chapters 13 through 15 Analysis

Each of the Inner Circle girls is beginning to see the reality of their situations. Becks is the champion surfer, but Ellie is consumed with buying the right outfit before beginning her lessons and since she is more assertive than Becks, she takes advantage of the

situation when they meet a promoter who should rightly be more interested in Becks. However, Becks has a few moments of self-realization. For example, when she notes that although she defers to Mac for her everyday fashion choices, she is good at helping Ellie choose appropriate surfing attire and she actually begins to enjoy herself although shopping is something she usually loathes. She also realizes that the fact that Chad never learned that she was an excellent surfer was her fault, not Ellie's. Ellie simply seized an opportunity while Becks was content to stay in the background. At the end of the chapter, though, Becks realizes that she was right about Ellie's motivations in wanting to learn to surf. Her only goal is to impress Austin and take him away from Becks.

Emily displays a mixture of emotions when she learns about Kimmie's play. Her love of acting prompts her to get excited about the prospect of performing in a play but she is dismayed by the role she is being asked to take and even more distressed when Kimmie makes it clear that she must use the method acting approach and pose as Spazmo all the time. Still, Emily fails to embrace the opportunity to portray a role that is completely different from her actual self, which typically would be the dream of any ambitious actor.

Mac's frustration is exacerbated when Ruby reveals that being her assistant includes a number of demeaning tasks. Arranging and rearranging the closet is nothing compared to serving at Ruby's upcoming party, but Mac shows great restraint by giving up the opportunity to snoop or prank when Ruby leaves her phone and computer behind. This foreshadows other events to come as the plot takes a turn later in the book.

# Chapters 16 through 18

## Chapters 16 through 18 Summary

Chapter 16 finds Emily entering her first Spanish class dressed as Spazmo. All the students stare at her and since Kimmie is sitting next to her, she is forced to introduce herself as Spazmo rather than her real name. She quickly escapes to the bathroom and calls her mother back in Iowa, but before she can explain her situation, Kimmie enters the bathroom and she is forced to hang up. Leaving the bathroom, Emily runs into Mac in the hallway and Mac doesn't recognize her at first, but she encourages Emily to keep going with the plan. Then Mac suddenly rushes away and Emily sees Lukas Gregory, a boy Mac likes, in the distance and realizes that her best friend in Bel-Air is embarrassed to be seen with her.

In Chapter 17, Coco is at the dance team practice when Haylie hands her a package. Coco assumes it is a set of the team's signature practice outfits, but instead she finds a huge track suit with the word "Waterboy" on the back. Haylie then gives her a seemingly-impossible list of drinks and snacks to get within the hour, but Coco calls her mother's butler and somehow they get everything done in time. As she watches the team practice, she sees that things are going very badly and although Haylie is enthusiastic, it is clear that the other girls know how bad they really look. As practice ends, Coco approaches Haylie and says she has some suggestions for when she rejoins the team in a few days, but Haylie does not seem to know what she is talking about and Coco realizes that Mac's plan might not be as simple as Mac indicated.

Chapter 18 opens with Erin, Adrienne's assistant, driving Mac to the Getty Museum for her evening of serving Ruby and her guests. Mac finds Erin somewhat annoying but is polite to her anyway. When she arrives, Mac is astonished to see that Ruby has invited their entire class to the party, and she informs Mac that she must serve multiple courses of food to each guest individually, while wearing her maid uniform. Mac realizes she will be very late for the Inner Circle's sleepover, but she puts on a brave face and makes the best of the situation. Five hours later, the party has wound down and Mac, looking for a restroom where she can change clothes, instead wanders into a pantry where she overhears Ruby talking to another girl. She hears Ruby make fun of Kimmie and Haylie, who are supposedly her friends, and Mac realizes that she never intended to follow through on her promise to say the video was a fake. In the car on the way home, Mac asks Erin how she can stand being someone's assistant, but Erin says she chooses to think of all the perks her job has, such as meeting famous people. She also mentions that since all of Adrienne's important friends treat her as if she is invisible, she overhears lots of information and could use it to her advantage if she chose to do so. This makes Mac realize she is in the same position with Ruby and decides to begin playing hardball.

## Chapters 16 through 18 Analysis

Emily is very much aware of Mac's admonishment that first impressions are everything, so she is especially dismayed that her fellow classmates' first impression of her is as her character, Spazmo. She is quickly learning how cruel the girls at BAMS can be when she cannot even have a private phone call with her mother without Kimmie insisting that she talk with the lisp she has written into the script for Spazmo. To make matters worse, Mac ditches her when a cute boy approaches. It should be clear to the reader at this point that Mac's shallowness is ingrained. Even though she is being humiliated by Ruby, she does not have the nerve to stand up for her friend and turns away rather than be embarrassed by being seen with someone who would be considered geeky by the other kids. Emily's mistrust of the kids she is meeting in Bel-Air is now beginning to extend to her own circle of friends.

Coco is the first to get a clue that Ruby has no intention of following through on her promise to say the video was a fake. She has assumed that she will be rejoining the dance team as a regular member after that revelation takes place, but her conversation with Haylie reveals that Haylie is not aware of any such plans. It is becoming obvious to Coco that Mac has badly misunderstood the situation, or at the very least, been misled by Ruby. Mac comes to the same realization after the party when she overhears Ruby making fun of Kimmie and Haylie, demonstrating that if she is willing to turn on her own friends, she will show no loyalty to the Inner Circle girls who have looked down on her for some time.

During her conversation with Erin on the way home, the reader first begins to get the impression that Mac is beginning to develop some level of sensitivity. For the first time, she seems genuinely interested in her mother's assistant and seeks her counsel, but by the time the conversation ends, she has seized only on Erin's mention that it would be possible for a seemingly-invisible assistant to wreak havoc with information she is privy to. The Inner Circle's situation is poised to take a turn when Mac realizes that they can use their proximity to their enemies to cause trouble and regain their former position within the school's social hierarchy.

# Chapters 19 through 21

## Chapters 19 through 21 Summary

In Chapter 19, Coco, Emily and Becks are gathered at Becks's house, waiting for Mac to arrive for their slumber party. Clutch, Becks's father, tries to cheer them up, then tells them that he has agreed to let the Surffest portion of ExtravaBAMSA be held on their beach, which clearly upsets Becks since she knows Ellie will be flirting with Austin. When Mac arrives, she tells them that Ruby has no intention of letting them have their lives back, but she also reveals her idea that they should use the inside information they have on Ruby and her friends to their advantage. At first, they are puzzled, but then Becks realizes that she can cause Ellie to embarrass herself at the Surffest.

In Chapter 20, Emily is puzzled when Mac drags her out early on Sunday morning, saying they are going to the Pinkberry frozen yogurt store. As Erin drives the girls to their destination, Mac explains that her role of Spazmo in Kimmie's play is actually a huge break because she has the chance to really shine in the role. Furthermore, Hank Myler, a well-known producer and director and the father of a BAMS student, will be there and Emily has a chance to impress him. Mac suggests that Emily study the girl they call Freakberry, the odd girl who delivered yogurt to their earlier slumber party, to prepare for her role as Spazmo. Arriving at Pinkberry, they find that the freakish girl is working and Emily begins to befriend her so she can learn from and copy her behavior.

In Chapter 21, Coco watches dance practice in dismay, realizing that the girls are going to embarrass themselves when they perform at ExtravaBAMSA, but Haylie refuses to make changes in the routine because Ruby has already approved it. Coming up with an idea, Coco writes a note on each girl's water bottle asking them to come to a secret meeting and to her relief, all of them show up. She explains how they can change the dance routine to make it great and gives them new costumes, and all of the girls express their dismay that Haylie is their captain rather than Coco. The plan calls for the girls to begin their routine as usual, but then rip off their ugly costumes to reveal the new, cute ones, which will cause Haylie to leave the stage in embarrassment. Meanwhile, Coco will enter and lead the team in a superb performance.

## Chapters 19 through 21 Analysis

Mac's strong influence over her friends is again in evidence when she convinces them to take part in her plan for revenge against Ruby and her group. All of the Inner Circle members look to her for leadership, so they ask few questions and agree to do as she suggests. Becks is the first to come on board when she sees that her position as Ellie's surfing teacher gives her a perfect opportunity to sabotage and humiliate her during the surfing exhibition, thereby ensuring that Ellie has no chance with Austin.



Despite her Iowa roots, Emily has been influenced by the Bel-Air girls enough at this point that she does not hesitate to falsely befriend a freakish girl in order to take advantage of the opportunity to emulate her for her performance as Spazmo. Again, the shallowness of the girls overshadows any sense of responsibility and they think only of their social position and how to regain their former popularity. Coco is the only one who has anyone else's interests at heart when she tries to keep the Bam-Bams from embarrassing themselves by following a routine that simply isn't working, but her motives, too, are selfish. Her concern does not stem from a sense of wanting to help the other girls so much as her own desire to become the surprising star of the show and upstage everyone else.

# Chapters 22 through 24

## Chapters 22 through 24 Summary

In Chapter 22, Becks and Ellie have been on the beach for hours and Ellie has yet to be able to stand up on the surf board. As much as she does not want to like Ellie, Becks finds herself thinking she could be kind of cool, and eventually Ellie manages to stay on her feet and catch a wave all the way to shore. Just then, Austin arrives and congratulates Becks on being a good teacher, but Ellie immediately proceeds to flirt with him. When Ellie suggests that they go for a Pinkberry, Becks remembers that she can never be friends with her and returns to her plan for revenge. After Austin leaves, Becks shows Ellie a move called "toes on the nose" and tells her it is easy, although it actually took her years to perfect it herself. Ellie asks whether Becks and Austin are just friends and when Becks assures her that they are, Ellie says she thinks it will not be long before he belongs to her. Becks consoles herself with the knowledge that Ellie will embarrass herself when she tries to do "toes on the nose" at Surffest.

Chapter 23 finds Mac following Ruby around an upscale grocery, pulling items from the shelves at Ruby's command. Ruby reveals that she plans to lip-sync a song at the ExtravaBAMSa finale and Mac realizes this will give her an opportunity for sabotage. Ruby also walks away for a moment, leaving her cell phone in Mac's easy reach, but Mac realizes it is a fake phone and knows Ruby has been trying to trick her into snooping into her belongings. When Ruby realizes that Mac did not take the bait, she tells Mac she is glad they are now friends and Mac plays along.

Chapter 24 opens at Surffest, where many celebrities have joined the BAMS students and parents for the event. Becks is first to surf and her performance gets wild cheers from the crowd, but she realizes that the surf is really rough that day. Before the novices go into the water, she warns Ellie not to try "toes on the nose" but Ellie brushes her off. After missing a few waves, Ellie finally gets to her feet on her board, then wipes out when she tries "toes on the nose" and although her board washes to shore, Ellie disappears under the water. Austin rushes into the ocean and pulls her to shore, and when she tells him that Becks taught her the too-advanced move, Austin takes Ellie's hand and looks at Becks with disgust.

## Chapters 22 through 24 Analysis

Mac's shallow nature is again in evidence when she accompanies Ruby to the grocery. Realizing that she has another opportunity to use Ruby's cell phone to somehow embarrass her, she stops only because she sees that it is a fake phone and that Ruby is trying to trick her, unlike earlier scenes in which her motives for respecting Ruby's privacy are more pure. Even when Ruby offers an olive branch and says that she and Mac are now friends, Mac is too consumed with her own plan for revenge to see the wisdom in accepting Ruby's offer.

The first signs that the Inner Circle's plans will go awry come at Surffest. Becks has found that she is beginning to genuinely like Ellie, but Ellie's mention of Pinkberry is a stark reminder of the embarrassing video in which Becks pretended to make out with Austin. It is unclear whether Ellie's remark was innocent or intended as a dig at Becks, but her later remark about her plans to gain Austin's affections prompts Becks to put any friendly feelings aside and proceed with her plan for revenge. Still, it is a genuine concern for Ellie's safety that prompts Becks to advise her to abandon the "toes on the nose" technique because of the rough water. In the final moments of that scene, it is apparent that she has driven Austin farther away by her deception, and therefore right into Ellie's waiting arms. This foreshadows upcoming scenes in which each girl's plans go horribly wrong.

# Chapters 25 through 27

## Chapters 25 through 27 Summary

Chapter 25 finds Coco backstage at the ExtravaBAMSa, preparing for her victorious takeover of the dance group. Haylie had included a smoke machine in the routine, so Coco plans to make her secret entrance onto the stage as the smoke appears, but when the smoke clears, she suddenly comes crashing onto the stage, having run into Haylie, who did not leave the stage in embarrassment as Coco had planned. She also sees that Haylie and the other girls are performing the original routine in their original costumes rather than the ones Coco provided for them, and she slinks off the stage, humiliated in front of her friends and parents, but not before Haylie whispers that she should not have double-crossed her.

In Chapter 26, it is Emily's turn to shine at ExtravaBAMSa in Kimmie's Judgers and Haters play. She has perfected the role of Spazmo and is nervous but excited about performing it. The play goes beautifully, with Emily giving a wonderful performance while Kimmie struggles with her own performance as the perfect Bel-Air girl. At the end of the play, Emily catches up with her friends outside and is anxious to meet producer Hank Mylar, but when the moment comes, his daughter tells him that Emily is not her friend and was not acting — she really is Spazmo, and Emily is unable to get the orthodontic headgear off in time to speak with him and show him that it isn't true. Instead, he begins talking with Kimmie about his upcoming movie and Emily's opportunity is gone.

Chapter 27 brings the ExtravaBAMSa finale. Mac consoles her friends but ensures them that her plan to bring down Ruby will work. She has replaced the recording of the song Ruby plans to lip-sync with another song with lyrics that are derogatory of their school and its students. However, when Ruby takes the stage, she has switched the recording back to her own and the performance goes flawlessly. During her speech, she refers to Mac as her assistant and calls her Mackenzie Little-Fartstrong, bringing further humiliation in front of all the students and parents. Mac realizes that this is what it feels like to not get what you want and wonders if this is how other people feel all the time.

## Chapters 25 through 27 Analysis

These three chapters share a "deception doesn't pay" theme as Coco, Emily and Mac find that their best-laid plans have been thwarted by Ruby and her group. Instead of becoming the stars of ExtravaBAMSa and redeeming themselves and their previous reputations and stature, they end the evening more humiliated than ever, and this time it occurs in front of their parents as well as their fellow students. Coco and Mac, in particular, are upset about this because their mothers are extremely successful and they feel they have let them down. Emily does not have the added embarrassment of having her family present, but her situation is arguably even worse because she has blown an opportunity for professional advancement. The reader might note that her situation is

very different from the other three girls. She did not set about to humiliate Kimmie, but rather to shine in the challenging role of Spazmo, and she succeeded in that endeavor. Unlike her friends, she was not brought down by having an enemy find out about her efforts to exact revenge, but simply by the difficulty of getting out of the Spazmo costume in time to speak with the film producer. In this respect, Emily's Midwestern values are subtly differentiated from the shallowness of the Bel-Air crowd.

At the end of Chapter 27, Mac has another moment of potential self-realization when she wonders if this is how other people that those who aren't as privileged as she has always been feel on a regular basis. Not getting what she wants is an entirely new feeling for her, and an opportunity for growth, but the reader has yet to learn whether she will seize it or not.

# Chapters 28 through 30

## Chapters 28 through 30 Summary

Chapter 28 finds Becks waking up early the morning after ExtravaBAMSa. Her friends have slept over, but they spent the night crying themselves to sleep. Becks slips out of the house, planning to surf, but when she spots Austin down the beach, she is too embarrassed to see him so she goes back inside, realizing that no matter how hard you try, you can't make someone like you. Seeing her father in the kitchen, she asks if he can take her to a different beach to surf today.

In Chapter 29, Coco returns home to find that her mother has set up an elaborate breakfast buffet for her. Cardammon says that perhaps she has pushed Coco too hard to be a pop star and dancer, but Coco says it was what she wanted. However, she wonders if her mother is suggesting that she should quit and she realizes that she is tired of fighting for success.

In Chapter 30, Emily is sitting sadly in her bedroom at Mac's house. She calls her mother, and hearing her voice and the familiar background noises makes her miss her home in Iowa even more. She tells her mother that things are not working out for her as an actress and that she hates Bel-Air. Just then, she sees Mac in the doorway and realizes she has overheard the conversation. Mac leaves, obviously hurt.

## Chapters 28 through 30 Analysis

These three brief chapters find Becks, Coco and Emily indulging in some rare self-reflection and self-awareness. Because Becks still has a crush on Austin, she is more embarrassed than ever to face him after he has learned about her effort to humiliate Ellie at Surffest, and she realizes that no matter what she does, it is possible that he will never belong to her. Right or wrong, Coco interprets her mother's comments as an indication that she isn't good enough to be a dancer and pop star, and Emily decides that she will never belong in Los Angeles, inadvertently hurting Mac in the process. Independently of each other, all three girls make a decision to quit that Coco by going to a different beach to avoid Austin, Coco by giving up her dream of a music career, and Emily by abandoning her hopes of becoming an actress and returning to Iowa. The reader might interpret this as the other members of the Inner Circle needing Mac's leadership in order to carry on and pursue their dreams.

# Chapters 31 and 32

## Chapters 31 and 32 Summary

In Chapter 31, Mac is feeling dejected so she goes to talk to her mother, who surprises her by saying she is proud of her. Adrienne says that Emily did a great job in the play and she suspects that she would have quit if Mac had not encouraged her to see it through, and Mac realizes that it is true. Adrienne tells Mac that she needs to look outside the BAMS environment for success, and Mac realizes that her mother is right, so she decides to go after her original goal of Hollywood domination.

In the book's final chapter, Emily, Coco and Becks are back at school, but Mac has not been seen all day. They are eating lunch, with Emily dreading telling her friends that she has decided to return to Iowa, when Mac appears and whisks them off to a waiting car with Erin behind the wheel. As they drive to a restaurant for lunch, Mac tells them they must aim beyond BAMS. She has arranged for Chad to see Becks surf so he will use her in his advertising campaigns, and she has decided that Coco needs to find a sound that suits her in order to get a recording contract. She also has gotten Emily the lead role in a major upcoming film. Although she has put together a video of Ruby making a fool of herself, she decides not to post it publicly because they are finished with that nonsense. Instead, she tells her friends that their success is also her success, and that they are almost famous.

## Chapters 31 and 32 Analysis

As the book draws to a close, the author misses an opportunity to provide more mature guidance for young female readers. Mac's decision not to publicize her embarrassing video of Ruby is made not out of any sense of honor, but by the fact that she is now directing her attention to bigger goals. The book provides a happy ending for each of the main characters, but certainly an unrealistic one in which everything is wrapped up with a bow in just a few paragraphs. The characters appear to have learned no meaningful lessons from their experiences and continue to be the materialistic and self-absorbed girls they have always been.

# Characters

## MckKenzie Little-Armstrong

MacKenzie Little-Armstrong is the book's lead character. Nicknamed Mac, she is the daughter of Adrienne, the biggest talent agent in Hollywood, and has grown up in a world of wealth and privilege. Although the author intends to portray her as a character to be liked and admired by readers, she is superficial and shallow, caring mostly for designer clothing and other material trappings as well as holding a position of envy by her friends and fellow students at exclusive Bel-Air Middle School.

Mac is the leader of the Inner Circle, a group of girls who relish being the center of attention among their acquaintances. She dictates what they wear, how they behave, what they eat and even how they walk on campus, affecting a pose she has christened Le Strut, with which they try to appear bored and above everyone else.

Hoping to follow in her mother's footsteps as a powerful agent, she has taken Emily, a girl from Iowa who hopes to become an actress, into her home and under her wing. It is at a slumber party that Mac hatches a plan to have Emily use her acting skills to play a prank on her rival, Ruby Goldman, which goes awry and leads to the Inner Circle becoming the subject of ridicule rather than respect. Her attempts to help her friends regain their social status backfire as Mac uses trickery and deceit to no avail.

During the course of the novel, Mac flirts with self-awareness and empathy a few times, but the author never develops the character fully. In the end, she remains an ambitious but somewhat vapid, materialistic, and self-absorbed young woman.

## Emily Mungler

Emily Mungler is a young girl from Iowa who has come to Los Angeles in the hope of launching an acting career. She meets MacKenzie Little-Armstrong, the daughter of a powerful agent and would-be agent herself, who takes an interest in her and invites her to live with her family while Mac tries to get her a movie role.

Emily is more fresh and innocent than her fellow Inner Circle members. She fits in with them in some ways, but often struggles to understand the cutthroat attitudes her fellow students exhibit toward each other, as well as the fast-paced world of Hollywood. She wants to fit in and continue to pursue her dream, but also misses her best friend back home, her mother, and the simplicity of her former life.

Emily is very talented with a knack for impersonating other people, a skill that gets the Inner Circle into trouble when she allows Mac to talk her into playing a prank on Ruby. After first expressing dismay at being forced to play the role of a freakish girl in a school play, she later embraces the opportunity to show her acting chops and shines in the part, eventually landing a movie role with Mac's help.



## **Cordelia**

Cordelia Kingsley, called Coco, is the daughter of Charles Kingsley, a wealthy hotel magnate, and Cardammon, a rock and roll superstar. She lives in the top-floor suite of one of her father's hotels, which is complete with a private dance studio designed for her. Coco is a member of Mac's Inner Circle and hopes to follow in her mother's footsteps as a dancer and pop star.

When the book opens, Coco has recently competed for a record contract, but lost to Mac's archrival, Ruby Goldman. However, she succeeds in beating Ruby for the position of captain of their school's prestigious dance team, but is ousted from the role in the wake of the scandal that envelopes the Inner Circle. Her subsequent attempt to deceive Ruby and her friends and emerge as the team's superstar falls apart and she is humiliated at a large school event instead.

Coco is close to her mother, but also feels a certain degree of competition with her. She is proud of her mother's accomplishments, but feels that she might never measure up to the degree of success she has achieved and is somewhat embarrassed by the attention she draws by being Cardammon's daughter, so she has trouble confiding in her mom when things go wrong for her at school.

## **Evangelina Becks**

Evangelina Becks goes by the name of Becks and is a member of the Inner Circle. She is an 8th grader at Bel-Air Middle School. She lives in Malibu with her father, the wealthy former star of a prank TV show, and she shares his passion for surfing. Becks also has a secret crush on Austin Holloway, her neighbor and lifelong friend and a fellow surfer.

Becks is a tomboy who doesn't care much about clothing and fashion, but she dresses well thanks to Mac's constant guidance. She is not as fiercely ambitious as her friends, preferring a more laid-back lifestyle at the beach. She is also quicker to see the good in the students who are not members of the Inner Circle, primarily Ellie, a girl she falsely befriends as part of the group's plan for revenge for their social downfall. However, even though she begins to like Ellie, she quickly turns on her again when it becomes clear that Ellie also likes Austin and intends to attract his attention by becoming a surfer. In the end, she tries to save Ellie from harm but her earlier scheme causes the girl to nearly drown during a surfing demonstration, leading Austin to rescue her and lose respect for Becks.

## **Ruby Goldman**

Ruby Goldman is a fellow 8th grader at Bel-Air Middle School and Mac's archrival. She has recently lost a lot of weight and now copies all of Mac's wardrobe choices, much to Mac's annoyance. Her father is a major movie star and now a director of action



blockbusters, and the family lives in a house that the Inner Circle girls consider gaudy and ostentateous.

Ruby has recently received a record contract and hopes to become a pop star, but she is beaten by Coco in the competition to become captain of the school dance team. She wreaks havoc for the Inner Circle when she accidentally is able to record the events at an Inner Circle slumber party, including several things that embarrass Mac and her friends, and shares the video with the other students at their school. This enables Ruby to beat Mac as social chair for their class and become the school's reigning superstar.

Ruby is a typical "mean girl." She embarrasses others at every opportunity and talks badly about her friends behind their backs, but uses them to help her gain popularity and status among their fellow students.

## **Haylie Fowler**

Haylie Fowler is a somewhat heavy girl who is Ruby Goldman's primary sidekick. She has status at the middle school because her father owns a stylish shopping and entertainment complex that is popular with the hip young kids. She becomes captain of the dance team when Coco is disgraced and ousted, but her main claim to fame is her role as Ruby's minion.

## **Kimmie Tachman**

Kimmie Tachman is an 8th grade girl and a member of Ruby's group. Her father is a powerful film producer who is casting for a new movie that Emily hopes to star in, but Kimmie ruins her chances when she reveals to her dad that Emily made fun of her at an Inner Circle slumber party. Kimmie later brings greater humiliation to Emily by forcing her to use method acting to prepare for a role in a school play, coming to school each day dressed as a freakish girl.

## **Ellie Fowler**

Ellie Fowler is a friend of Ruby's, therefore an enemy of the Inner Circle. She wants to learn to surf in order to impress and win the heart of Austin, the boy on whom Becks has a crush.

## **Austin Holloway**

Austin Holloway is a freshman at a local prep school and a neighbor of Becks and her father in Malibu. He and Becks are lifelong friends and fellow surfers, but Becks has now developed a secret crush on him that soon becomes known by everyone.

## **Adrienne Little-Armstrong**

Adrienne Little-Armstrong is Mac's mother and the most powerful talent agent in Hollywood.

## **Cardammon**

Cardammon is Coco's mother and an internationally known pop superstar.

## **Freakberry**

Freakberry is the nickname given by the Inner Circle to an odd girl who works at the Pinkberry frozen yogurt store and on whom Emily bases her portrayal of a freakish girl in Kimmie's play.

# **Objects/Places**

## **Bel-Air Middle School**

Bel-Air Middle School or BAMS for short is an exclusive school in Los Angeles attended by the book's characters.

## **Los Angeles**

Los Angeles is the city in which the novel is set. The setting is important because much of the plot centers on the film and music industries.

## **Pinkberry Frozen Yogurt**

Pinkberry is a popular brand of frozen yogurt preferred by the book's characters and becomes an important part of the plot.

## **Mac's Wooden Bangles**

Mac wears wooden bangle-style bracelets as her signature piece until Ruby begins to copy them.

## **Malibu**

Malibu is a beach community where Becks lives and the scene of the school's Surffest exhibition.

## **Getty Center**

The Getty Center is a museum and arts center in Los Angeles and the scene of the party at which Ruby forces Mac to serve as her waitress.

## **Ruby's Wardrobe**

Ruby has a large wardrobe of designer clothes, all of which she has copied from Mac and which she forces Mac to organize several times as a way of humiliating her.

## **ExtravaBAMSa**

The ExtraBAMSa is Bel-Air Middle School's annual charitable fundraising event. It is the centerpiece of the Inner Circle's ill-fated plot to regain their social status at school.

## **Quicksilver**

Quicksilver is a fashionable store at which Becks helps Ellie shop for surfing attire and where they meet a man who is looking for young surfers to promote and use in ad campaigns.

## **Coco's Dance Studio**

Coco's home contains a large dance studio designed for her to practice in. It is the scene of the slumber party that opens the book and at which Ruby is able to gain embarrassing information about the Inner Circle.

## **Ruby's Recording**

Ruby has a recording of the song she plans to lip-sync at ExtravaBAMSa. Mac steals the recording and switches it with something else, but Ruby switches it back in time for her performance.

## **Le Table**

Le Table is a picnic table in the middle of the BAMS quad where the Inner Circle girls eat lunch every day.

# Themes

## Appearances are Everything

Right or wrong, the idea that outward appearance matters more than anything else is the most pervasive theme of *Almost Famous*. The plot centers on four young teenage girls who are entering their last year of middle school and three of them have been shaped by the wealthy, privileged life they have led. Emily, who has recently moved to Los Angeles from Iowa, has a somewhat different mindset, but she is quickly being assimilated into the materialistic world of her new friends who comprise the Inner Circle.

The author makes a point to include the name of the designer in every mention of a piece of clothing, accessory or even furniture throughout the book. This is done to ensure young readers that the characters wear only the newest, most hip, most exclusive and most expensive attire at all times, and that only the best of everything is acceptable. The girls of the Inner Circle look down their noses at anyone who fails to live up to their high standards in terms of appearance and often classify other students in terms of their clothing and hairstyles.

In addition to clothing, the characters even affect a particular walk called *Le Strut* to set themselves apart from their peers. The walk is designed to make it appear that "you were too bored to care and therefore cooler than everyone who'd missed the memo on not caring." In addition, the author notes that Mac, the group's leader, has instructed her friends to look bored at parties in order to appear cooler than the other kids in attendance.

In most books of this nature, by the end of the story, the characters would have learned important lessons about superficiality, but *Almost Famous* continues the theme that appearances are the most important thing throughout the novel.

## The Difficulties of Navigating Teenage Relationships

The relationships and rivalries among the students of Bel-Air Middle School is a central theme of *Almost Famous*. The four members of the Inner Circle are close, loyal friends, but they look down their noses at most of the other kids at their school, and it is this tendency that leads to their fall from grace when Ruby posts a video that enables others to see their conceited attitudes. The plot takes its first major turn when all of the kids at school immediately turn on Mac, Coco, Emily and Becks after the video is posted and their former position as the top students vanishes immediately as the status of Ruby and her friends rises accordingly.

Rather than accept their fall gracefully, the girls of the Inner Circle soon embark on a plan to get revenge on Ruby and her group by publicly humiliating each of them in turn. Ruby, Haylie and Kimmie are no better, as they use their new positions of power to embarrass Mac and her friends. Even as the book ends, none of the girls has come to

an understanding, reached a truce or learned to peacefully co-exist. The Inner Circle girls simply move on to bigger and better things and the reader is left with the impression that they will gleefully rub their success in the faces of their classmates.

Interestingly, the girls' parents offer no help to their daughters in terms of learning to form positive interpersonal relationships with their peers, and no admonishments when the girls clearly behave in an unacceptable manner.

## Revenge

Nearly every character in *Almost Famous* attempts to exact revenge on another character at some point in the novel. The book begins with Ruby's revenge on the Inner Circle girls after she learns that their video chat was actually a prank and she uses her access to their secrets to post an embarrassing video that causes them to lose the respect and admiration of their fellow students. A domino effect follows as Kimmie causes her father to turn on Emily as revenge for Emily's making fun of her and Ruby installs Haylie as Bam-Bams captain in place of Coco.

The girls of the Inner Circle respond by seeking revenge of their own. Mac tries to humiliate Ruby by switching the recording to which she plans to lip sync at the ExtravaBAMSa, Coco plots to cause Haylie to embarrass herself during a dance performance, and Becks tries to humiliate Ellie in front of Austin and the others at the surfing exhibition. Only Emily's portion of Mac's plan is based not entirely on revenge, although her manipulation of Kimmie is part of the overall plot against Ruby and her friends.

While some of the themes that shape *Almost Famous* are not particularly positive ones for young readers, the book does convey the idea that exacting revenge when one is wronged is not a positive problem-solving tool. Each of the Inner Circle girls' plans goes awry and they fail to redeem their reputations. In fact, they embarrass themselves even further, but the author glosses over that element and does not make it clear that the girls learned any life lessons from the experience.

# Style

## Point of View

Almost Famous is recounted from a third-person point of view. The narrator is omniscient and reliable, with the ability to discern not only the actions of each character, but their thoughts and feelings as well.

The book contains a well-balanced mix of exposition and dialogue, enabling the reader to receive objective information as well as peek in on discussions among the various characters.

In addition to actual dialogue and description, the reader gets a further glimpse into each character through the calendar item posted at the beginning of each chapter. Each one shows the day's agenda for a particular character in which they not only list specific to-do items, but also provide their thoughts on various tasks, such as Emily's notations that she hates iChat. The reader can assume that her attitude is partly because she feels isolated from her best friend back in Iowa, but also is a result of the horrible results of the iChat prank she and her friends played on Ruby.

## Setting

Almost Famous is set in Los Angeles, California, and its Bel-Air section in particular. Bel-Air is an exclusive part of the city, largely populated by wealthy people in general and high-ranking members of the film and music industries in particular.

The setting immediately establishes the book's characters as wealthy and privileged, and the author passes up no opportunity to drive that point home. She places the characters at various locations such as the Polo Lounge and expensive stores, and mentions each well-known neighborhood and street through which they pass. The homes of each character are described in detail, including such amenities as Olympic-sized pools and private dance studios.

Although she attends school in Bel-Air, Becks lives in Malibu, an expensive beach community also populated by movie stars and other wealthy members of the community.

Much of the book's action takes place at exclusive Bel-Air Middle School, which has an elaborate campus that includes an organic farm. Other locations include the Getty Museum, the Pinkberry frozen yogurt shop, and a few expensive stores and shopping/entertainment areas.



## Language and Meaning

The language of *Almost Famous* can best be described as "teenage girl." It is casual and informal, but includes a good mixture of somewhat challenging words that will help young readers stretch their vocabularies.

The book's characters are the "cool kids" at their school and their speech mannerisms reflect that status. The author sometimes uses structures such as "ah-mazing" rather than simply "amazing" to convey the manner in which a character might pronounce a particular word to achieve emphasis.

The members of the Inner Circle also sprinkle French words and phrases throughout their speech as a device for establishing their coolness. For example, they refer to their special walk as "Le Strut" and the picnic table at which they each lunch as "Le Table."

The author also makes frequent use of italics to convey the extreme emphasis on which the girls place certain words, and uses common teenage abbreviations in the characters' text messages, such as "gr8" in place of "great."

## Structure

*Almost Famous* is divided into 32 chapters of varying lengths, although the later chapters tend to be shorter than the earlier ones that establish the book's characters and setting. Each chapter is numbered but not titled, and each begins with a page from one of the Inner Circle's daily agendas, noting her schedule for the day and some thoughts on various activities. These agenda pages are dated, helping the reader keep track of the amount of time that has passed between chapters and events.

Although it is not formally divided into parts, the author has essentially separated the book into three sections. The first 100 pages or so — roughly one-third of the book - is devoted to setting up the Inner Circle girls as the most influential students at Bel-Air Middle School and establishes their plans for making their 8th grade year the best ever. The next one-third of the novel follows their downfall at the hands of Ruby and her friends, and their further humiliation when they are forced to do their bidding. In the final one-third, Mac and her friends set about the business of exacting revenge and turning the tables on Ruby and her crowd and brings the plot to its conclusion.

## Quotes

"Le Strut meant walking like you were too bored to care and therefore cooler than everyone who'd missed the memo on not caring" (p. 2).

"Mac sighed. But in the darkness, she smiled to herself. It was great to have good friends. Friends who had your back no matter what. This was going to be a great year. The Best Year Ever" (p. 17).

"Emily rolled her eyes. Mac always made a distinction between Los Angeles and the rest of the world, as though the bar of humanity had been slightly raised for the City of Angels" (p. 23).

"Maybe this was just how Bel-Air worked. In Iowa, friends' parents didn't roll up a window and drive away when you greeted them politely. But here, people were always rushing off places" (p. 67).

"She quickly wiped away her teardrops before her mother could notice them slipping onto her cheeks. She did not want to have to explain any of this drama to her mother, who wouldn't understand. Megastardom came so easily to Cardammon, and Coco couldn't even stay on her middle school dance team. Had she gotten all the bad genes?" (p. 77).

"Becks turned her phone off and dropped it into her backpack. She needed to de-text for a while. But even though her phone was out of sight, she could still see Austin's mysterious message running on loop in her mind. What had happened in the past forty-two hours and thirty-seven minutes to make him change his mind" (p. 85-86).

"Mac's heart stopped for a moment and her breath came in short, staccato bursts as she put together the bizarre clues like a CSI detective: Pinkberry...Cat Girl...Depends. Suddenly, it clicked. They were talking about the Inner Circle slumber party" (p. 91).

"The denouement was Mac's declaration, "Even after I win social chair, I'm still going to hang out with you girls all the time. I have no interest in hanging out with anyone else at BAMS." Ruby had actually subtitled this bit of dialogue so there could be no mistaking Mac's conceitedness. As the girls screamed, "Tell us something we don't know!!!" and laughed hysterically, everyone looked snobby by association" (p. 93).

"Hearing Coco say that, Mac felt a huge weight on her shoulders, knowing that she had caused this problem for everyone. After all, it had been her idea to prank Ruby. It was her fault for not logging off her own stupid computer. It was her big mouth that had made them all look like conceited snobs. Mac had to fix this" (p. 94).

"Emily closed her eyes and imagined being back in Iowa, where she could walk through acres of sunflower fields on her way to school, where kids didn't have their acceptance speeches professionally edited and digitized, and where there was officially zero chance

of insulting a legendary producer's daughter and thereby ruining one's own life.. She opened her eyes again and stared out at the Armstrong's shimmering swimming pool. She sort of felt about it the way she did about her Hollywood life. It seemed too good to be true, and just out of reach" (p. 102-103).

"'I'm not saying you kiss her butt - and don't talk like that, it's trashy.' Adrienne flicked a crumb off her sweater. 'I'm saying you show respect instead of expecting the world to kiss your butt, as you so eloquently put it'" (p. 114).

"She felt bad for Ems, who was so far from home. Bel-Air was hard enough when you were from here" (p. 119).

"Becks clenched her teeth, sulking too much to say anything. She had agreed to teach Ellie to surf. She had not agreed to watch Ellie steal her dreams" (p. 135).

"Emily opened her mouth to speak. She was about to say, 'But nobody at BAMS knows me yet and they're going to think I really am Spazmo!' But then she looked into Kimmie's twinkling eyes and realized: That was exactly the point" (p. 144).

"Mac turned to face Erin, noticing her bright red lipstick and bright white teeth, and for the first time ever Mac realized why she was so non-stop talky: She drove around all day running errands. She was lonely. Because being a personal assistant was the worst job in the world" (p.148).

"Emily turned to see what had caught Mac's attention: Lukas Gregory was walking toward them. And she was making Mac look like a loser by association. Emily looked like such a freak that her best friend in Bel-Air was embarrassed to be seen with her" (p. 170).

"Erin started the car. 'Plus, when you're an assistant, people forget you exist. They say things in front of you they would never say around anyone else. I mean, if I were a different kind of person' - Erin looked at Mac intently, narrowing her eyes mock sinisterly - 'I could do some real damage'" (p. 195).

"There was no sense in playing by the rules if she and Ruby weren't even playing the same game" (p. 196).

"Becks smiled too, imagining Ellie embarrassing herself at ExtravaBAMSA, in front of everyone. Thanks to Mac, she knew exactly how to make that happen. For the first time in a while, Becks had hope. Poor little Ellie. She had no idea what she was in for" (p. 206).

"Emily's lips twitched. It had never occurred to her that there was anything good about being in Judges & Haters. She'd been too busy judging and hating it" (p. 211).

"Emily could feel the people in line behind her boring holes into her back with their eyes, waiting to get their fro-yos. But to her surprise, as embarrassing as it was to unleash her inner Spazmo, it was actually a little fun" (p. 215).



"Coco looked into the sea of faces staring at her respectfully and understood why her mother had emphasized the respect of her peers so much. Earning it was the best feeling in the world. Next week couldn't come fast enough" (p. 223).

"Whatever you say, boss," Mac said, amazed that she'd gone from enemy to frenemy in one-point-five grocery store aisles. Ruby was finally going to give her some real responsibilities, which she'd promptly abuse. It was all working out better than she had planned" (p. 236).

"And then, just when Coco thought it was not humanly possible to feel worse, she spotted Cardammon and her father. The horror on their super-tanned faces said it all. Coco had gone from fairy tale to cautionary tale in exactly two eight-counts" (p. 253).

"Mac swallowed and realized she was experiencing a very uncomfortable sensation. It was the feeling of not getting what she wanted. Was this how other people felt all the time" (p. 272- 273).

"And then Becks realized: No matter how hard you tried, you couldn't make someone like you. All the scheming, hoping, wishing, conniving — no boy was worth that much energy. And it didn't work anyway. Becks was too sad to care" (p. 276-277).

"Mac nodded slowly. She'd done it right initially, holding up her end of the deal. But then she remembered the moral detour she had taken when she decided to sabotage the Rubybots. She thought about how that plan had completely backfired, and sunk them even deeper into the self-centered off-ramp of misery. If only she'd stayed on track and followed her mother's advice! Then maybe none of this would have happened" (p. 292-293).

## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the difference between Emily's upbringing and background and that of Mac, Becks, and Coco. Give at least one specific example of how her behavior and attitude differs from theirs because of her background. In what ways is she like the other girls despite the differences in how they were raised?

Was Mac right to agree to Ruby's demands that she become her assistant in order to regain her reputation? Should she have seen through Ruby's plan or not? How might she have handled the situation differently?

Do you think Ruby's recent weight loss has contributed to her current personality and attitude? How? How is her weight loss related to her friendship with Haylie?

Why does the author make such a point of naming the designers of each piece of clothing the girls of the Inner Circle wear? Are these items typical of the clothes the girls at your school wear? Why is clothing so important to the girls, particularly Mac?

Were you satisfied with the way the book ended? Was it realistic? Why or why not?

Which characters in the book can you relate to most easily? Why? If you can't relate to any of them, why not?

Compare and contrast the relationships between the Inner Circle girls and their mothers, or in the case of Becks, her father. Which girl do you think is closest to her parent? In what ways are their relationships typical of other teenagers' relationships with their parents and in what ways are they different?

Do you think the Inner Circle girls deserved what Ruby did to them by making and posting the video? Did Ruby go too far in the way she, Haylie and Kimmie treated Mac and her friends afterward by causing them further humiliation? Were Ruby and her friends deserving of the embarrassments the Inner Circle girls tried to levy on them? Explain the reasoning behind your responses.

How was Kimmie forcing Emily to play Spazmo in her play different from the humiliations Mac, Coco, and Becks were forced to suffer? In what ways was it better and in what ways was it worse?

When Coco goes behind Haylie's back and secretly takes over the dance team, she feels she has earned the respect of her peers, just as her mother talked about. Do you think she went about it the right way? Did she really earn their respect? Why do you feel that way?