

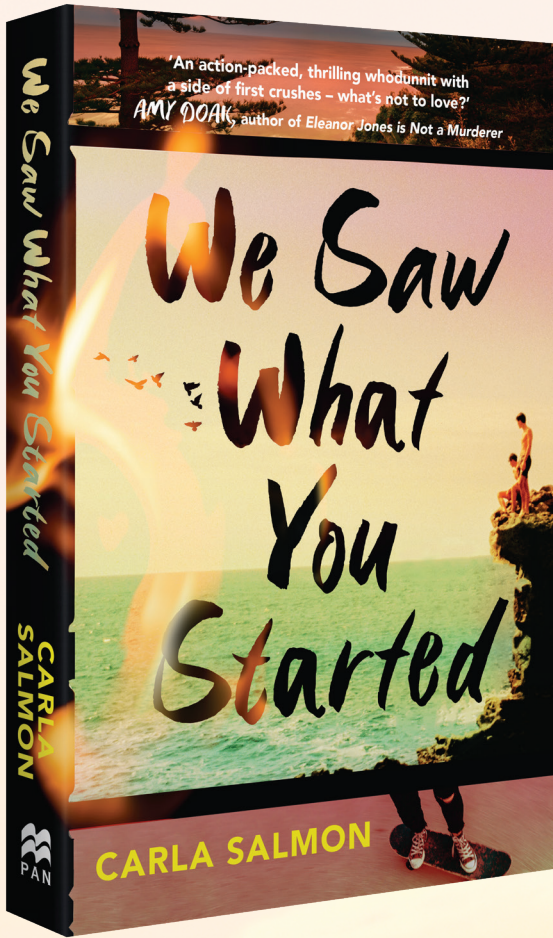
'An action-packed, thrilling whodunnit with
a side of first crushes – what's not to love?'
AMY DOAK, author of *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*

We Saw What You Started



CARLA SALMON





About the Author

Carla Salmon is a Highly Accomplished Lead Teacher at Brisbane Grammar School who loves telling stories. Her debut novel, *We Saw What You Started*, is inspired by her country coastal childhood, where sports ruled and

beach campsites were paradise. Much like the students in her classrooms today, her characters lead action-packed lives with plenty of heart and humour. Carla lives in sun-soaked Brisbane, with her husband and two teens.

About the Book

Otto was a star surfer back in California, but now he just wants a fresh start. When fires break out in Red Sands, the locals are suspicious. It's no coincidence that Otto's at the scene every time. Is it?

Milly isn't so sure. Public opinion isn't always right – that's why she has to work so hard if she wants to beat her 'perfect' brother and become captain of the surf lifesaving club. What if Otto is innocent?

Can Otto and Milly trust each other to find the truth behind the fires? And what happens when you do the wrong things for the right reasons?

A fiery whodunit, a thriller of surf and sea; *We Saw What You Started* is a suspenseful exploration of loyalty, family and friendship for 11-15-year-old readers.

Recommended for 11+; Years 7 to 9

Themes

Truth, belonging, identity, power, loyalty, family, friends, community

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Hello readers,

Welcome to Red Sands! Thank you for visiting this small coastal paradise that's inspired by my favourite childhood memories.

For me, growing up in a small town meant time to play and freedom to explore. Life was all about sleepovers with friends, family camping trips, weekends at the beach, school clubs and sport. So much sport.

Saturday mornings were spent chasing hockey balls across grassy fields, painting patterns in heavy dew. That's where I learned about camaraderie. On summer evenings at touch football, we celebrated collaboration with a winning pass or breakthrough run. I didn't realise at the time, but every activity I tried offered challenges, rewards and values that I still draw from today: dance demanded confidence; golf gifted grit; tennis locked in loyalties. But the most important thing I learned was that great teams – even beyond sporting arenas – offer the strongest sense of belonging. The teams that excel champion individual strengths and cater for weaknesses; they charge a tide that lifts all boats.

I wanted to showcase this powerful feeling by welcoming you into the Red Sands Surf Life Saving club. In surf life saving, great teamwork doesn't just result in a winning score – it can be the difference between life and death. The ocean is an unpredictable playing field. But this sport is also a community that's woven into the fabric of our Australian beach culture and lifestyle, built on a foundation of volunteering, mateship and trust.

I've always been in awe of the ironmen and women who compete in the most gruelling competitions of courage, strength and endurance. They respect their environment. They respect their teammates and competitors. And they respect themselves. That's no easy feat.

As a teen, learning to accept and be proud of your individual identity is a universally accepted challenge for a reason. It's hard. It takes time. It's often lonely, especially when trying to find your tribe in a world hyperbolised by social media. Surface level smiles in group photos tend to compound our comparisons and expectations – when really, we're all hiding fears and insecurities. It's not easy figuring out our values, beliefs and who is really on our team.

So while this story is a high action thriller with a mystery to solve, it is also an exploration of friendship, family, belonging and trust. I want to encourage you to stretch for your own goals and dreams that might be beyond other people's comfort zones. You don't have to go with the most popular choice. Question the way things have always been done. Refuse to accept stereotypical expectations. Blaze your own path.

Most importantly, I hope you feel welcome in Red Sands. Thank you for joining the club!

Carla

Theme: Truth

How is truth managed, restricted and revealed?

Telling the truth is not always easy. Otto's understanding of truth changes as he gains social power but loses the respect of the wider community. Milly also questions her moral compass as she chooses to conceal elements of the truth as an act of goodwill.

Essential Questions

- Why is truth important?
- Who gets to decide what people know?
- What defines a lie?
- Is it ever okay to hide the truth for 'the right reasons'?
- What are the consequences of controlling knowledge?
- Does telling the truth always lead to freedom – or can it lead to danger?

Discussion Points

1. Otto believes the distinction between telling the truth and lying isn't clear. In Chapter 1, he leaves out important details when explaining where Jasper is:

Not a lie. Just not the whole truth. A half-truth that I'd told Jasper, sending him over the dunes into the dense wilderness. Half-truths buy time. (p. 2)

Explain how Otto feels about telling 'half-truths' in comparison to lying. In this conversation with Mick, what information does Otto choose to hide and why? Is Otto's behaviour justified?

2. Otto is very wary of trusting new people.

'What if Jasper says the overland track's washed out?'

'Then we'll wait out the tide,' Mick says, like I'll just trust him. Except I don't do that. I don't just trust anyone. (p. 3)

Suggest why Otto feels this way. Do his beliefs impact his sense of belonging in the surf lifesaving club? How do his beliefs affect his actions in challenging situations?

3. Being anonymous and holding secret information gives Otto a sense of power

There's a feeling of power with anonymity. I like it. In this moment, I'm no-one's son or nephew with a past. I'm not even a friend or an enemy. I'm a faceless, emotionless provider of information that other people want. The perfect half-truth. (p. 51)

Consider why controlling knowledge gives people power. Is this fair?

4. Alex and Jasper have a friendship that involves total trust. Otto is in awe of their friendship; he accepts it but is a little jealous.

'You must have done something to get under [the sergeant's] skin. He said you'd been hanging out with Jasper, like he was baiting me, hoping I'd be jealous and give him dirt on you or something.' Alex laughs and Jasper joins in, as though me having any impact on their lifelong friendship is the funniest thing ever. I wonder what that feels like, to trust someone else so completely. (p. 78)

Identify factors that have contributed to Alex and Jasper's strong trusting friendship. What could damage a friendship like that? How does this moment make you feel about Otto's situation?

5. Milly has always valued telling the truth. She's never had a reason to lie – until now:

My attention is stolen by the boys jostling each other out of the store. The red-headed Starling Cove brothers and Cooper have been joined by Leo. Targeting the girls on the bench, the boys form a loose circle, rowdy and domineering. I can't risk walking past with Dad. The video of Cooper's stack; the 7-Eleven confrontation – Dad won't be impressed with either if the boys say anything. (p. 118)

Why doesn't Milly trust her dad with her concerns? Is it reasonable for her to stay quiet? What complications are foreshadowed in this scene as a result of Milly's decision to withhold information?

6. Otto is frustrated during his police interview when Jasper fails to tell the truth.

This is his chance to tell Brad about our night swim and give me a chance to explain my wet boardshorts. But Jasper chews his lip. And I'm not a snitch. (p. 168)

What does Otto value more than proving his own innocence? Is this the best choice for Otto? What else could he have done in this moment?

7. Milly is frustrated with her brother and feels like he is given advantages. Yet she still refuses to tell her father that she suspects Jasper is responsible for the crimes.

I literally took a chunk out of my tongue to stop myself blurting out the truth. I'm the one doing the thinking, to protect Jasper! I made Otto promise not to tell anyone about the hoodie, while Jasper probably pranked my board.' (p. 188)

Explain Milly's values and what she is prioritising in this moment. Would you do the same in her situation? Why?

8. When they know who the true criminal is, Milly appeals to Otto to go to the police.

'Otto, there's still time. We need to go to Brad.' I sigh. *Milly's enthusiasm is a nice gesture, but the situation is hopeless.* (pp. 262–263)

Why do they decide not to tell the police? Should they have asked for help? Explain how evidence (or the lack of it) can impact outcomes even when the truth is revealed.

Creative tasks

- 1. Monologue:** Adopt the role of Jasper and intervene on page 168 following the line: *And I'm not a snitch.* Write a 1–2-minute monologue (first person present tense) from Jasper's perspective, reflecting on his thoughts and feelings at this point in the novel.
- 2. Newspaper article:** Imagine that Mrs Murphy has leaked everything she knows about the fires to the local newspaper. You are the journalist – write a front-page news story with an appropriate headline to update the community. Include an attention-grabbing headline.

Theme: Belonging

The Red Sands community is built around the surf lifesaving club, but does everyone belong?

When you first join a club, you may not feel like you immediately belong. Otto joins the surf club and hopes to 'fit in' quickly, but he feels like an outsider. He finds it difficult to trust his teammates and club leaders like Mick. Milly is a long-term club member and is very passionate about the club, yet she thinks she must prove herself to club leaders and members.

Essential Questions

- What does it mean to belong to a club?
- Is there a difference between friends and teammates?
- What values are promoted by successful clubs?
- Who decides who 'fits in'?
- What defines great leadership in a club?

Discussion Points

1. Surf lifesaving is not a common sport for teens in other countries. Otto is surprised and quite apprehensive when he first learns about the activities on offer.

Apparently, I'm going to be an ironman. Sign me up for the next Marvel movie. I'd never heard of surf lifesaving before Mick turned up at my aunt's house last week, but he convinced me to join before I'd unpacked my bags. (p. 21)

Explain why Otto agrees to join the surf lifesaving club so quickly. What does he hope to gain? What are his fears? Consider a time when you joined a new club or activity – how long did it take before you felt comfortable and confident as a member of the group? If you never felt that you truly belonged, what factors do you think caused that outcome?

2. Otto's actions are often driven by his desire to fit into the club and follow the leaders of the group in social situations. This includes deciding to break into the pool at midnight with Jasper.

...my head screamed no, but niggling doubt crept in. What if I'm the only loser who has ever refused the dare? (p. 33)

Explain Otto's fear of saying no to Jasper – what does he think will happen? What is he willing to risk to guarantee acceptance?

3. Milly knows that her brother Jasper is a natural leader and is often respected by his peers in the surf lifesaving club – even though he doesn't always deserve it. She is surprised by Otto's unexpected behaviour:

I wait for Otto to laugh, because Jasper's friends always laugh, even when his jokes aren't funny. But Otto's face is still, olive cheeks slack, dark freckles sprinkled across his nose. (pp. 41-42).

Analyse how Otto's attitude towards Jasper has changed. Does Otto still want to fit into the club?

4. Otto looks for other opportunities to gain social power and establish a sense of belonging in Red Sands.

My phone buzzes, connecting my unnamed number to six I don't recognise. I'm basically anonymous – the only thing I have in common with these guys is Jasper. They won't be friends with Cooper. I decide to make a grand entrance. Copy. Paste. Cooper's stack uploaded. (p. 67)

Explain how Otto is trying to position himself in the group chat. What will be the recipients' first impression of Otto? What has Otto risked to potentially gain social power? What do you think will happen next? Consider how the author's use of en dash and short sentences establishes Otto's mood and voice.

5. Despite Otto's best efforts to fit in and belong, he is continuously reminded that his connections are not as strong as the bond between Jasper and Alex.

I replay the image of Jasper paddling into the channel to rescue Alex, and struggle to comprehend it. It's the greatest show of loyalty I can possibly imagine. Will I ever have a friend like that? Someone willing to risk their life to save mine? (p. 229)

Consider what advice you would offer Otto at this point. What tips would help Otto strengthen his sense of belonging? Is it reasonable to expect strong connections immediately with new friends?

6. During Milly's ironwoman race, she chooses to give up the win to save her competitor from drowning. She describes the moment after they find the girl's pulse as:

...the greatest win of my life. (p. 309)

Explain how Milly's personal definition of success has changed. How will this help her better understand her place and purpose in the surf lifesaving club? What other benefits could this renewed perspective offer her?

7. Otto finally feels a strong sense of belonging in Red Sands after the surf lifesaving championships:

Mick laughs, patting my shoulder as he walks past. I feel his approval and it's almost too much. I squeeze my toes tight, crunching grains of sand. I'm part of his team. I wait for the doubt and fear to compress my chest, a reminder not to trust, not to breathe easily. But my lungs are clear. (p. 313)

What factors deliver this significant identity shift for Otto? Explain Mick's perspective and how he feels about Otto now, compared to the start of the story. Describe what it means to truly 'belong'.

Creative tasks

- 1. Advertising poster:** Design an A4 poster for your nearest surf lifesaving club to recruit new teen members at the start of the season. Include persuasive devices and language that promotes the sport and the benefits of belonging to a community club. Utilise the information, statistics and teen experiences included at the end of the book.
- 2. MindMap:** Visually represent the connections between characters in a MindMap. Link and explain the relationships (both negative and positive) and how their connections affect the characters' decisions and actions in the story. Now, create a real-life version of the important people in your world at home, school and in other areas of your life.

Theme: Identity

How does previous experience contribute to current identities?

Otto misses his old life in California. He struggles to adjust to the small-town Australian community after growing up in a large American city. He also carries trauma from his previous experience with bullying and crime, which contributes to his understanding of himself and others. In contrast, Milly questions her identity and the social constraints and stereotypes she experiences as a strong female athlete, and a daughter.

Essential Questions

- Are positive and negative experiences equal in terms of building identity?
- Can your perspective of past events and experiences change?
- How do other people's values contribute to your own identity?
- How do places and various cultures impact your identity?

Discussion Points

1. Otto's previous experiences impact his decisions in the first chapter.

'You have ten minutes to escape a wildfire. Ten minutes before you're facing a furnace that started a mile away. That's not a beat-up. I've done the math, replaying the blaze that stampeded through fields. It spewed smoke that blinded eyes and pushed into lungs, smeared terror along rails of ribs. My eyes. My lungs. My ribs. I swallow hard. No point choking on memories I should have left in California. The hairs on my arms have grown back; even the scars on my feet have faded into my Aussie tan. But nightmares don't need passports.' (p. 1)

In these opening lines, what assumptions do you make about Otto's past? Explain the meaning behind the phrase *nightmares don't need passports*. Describe the effect of short sentences and repetition.

2. Otto's homesickness isn't explicitly stated, yet readers are able to deduce that he is feeling defensive and apprehensive towards his new 'home'. This thinking process is called inferencing and involves collecting clues.

'You know each other?' I ask, a stupid question since the total population of Red Sands is smaller than my old high school in California.

(p. 5)

Identify the words and phrases that could imply that Otto is homesick. What other clues can you find to support this in Chapter 1?

3. The narrative point-of-view alternates between Otto and Milly. In Milly's chapters, she reveals insecurities about her identity as a female athlete and aspiring leader.

Everyone knows Dad treats me differently. It's like I'm his forever ten-year-old when I need him to see me as the next captain of our surf lifesaving club. 'Getting this position will show Dad I'm more than capable of making my own decisions.' (p. 27)

Explain what Milly is trying to prove. Why would she think that her father treats her differently to her twin brother? How will a part-time job change her father's perspective of her capabilities as a leader?

4. Otto's troubled relationship with his father significantly drives his actions.

'You're a chicken,' Jasper says, and I flinch like I've been hit, my father's voice barrelling into my consciousness. C'mon chicken! he'd tease, laughing as I'd tried to swim out through the breakers to reach him in the tranquil zone where surfers bobbed on boards, waiting for sets. I was four years old. Then five. (pp. 35–36)

Family dynamics and relationships are explored in this story. Otto's troubled relationship with his father is one example, but why would that matter to readers who have different family situations? How does exploring various relationships widen your own understanding of the world?

5. Milly also has complicated family relationships – particularly her connection with her twin brother, Jasper.

I flinch as Jasper's board shoots out from under him and he hits the edge of the bowl, sliding down the side like a cracked egg yolk ... dark thoughts push their way into my head. What if he isn't okay? What if he's injured and can't compete at the carnival? The world pauses as I imagine Dad celebrating my total points powering ahead of Jasper's on the leaderboard. But how can I even think this? It doesn't feel good. A ball of guilt sucker-punches me. (p. 59)

Explain what we learn about Milly in this chapter. Do you feel differently about her character now? What is the significance of sharing this negative thought about her brother? How do you think it will affect her future actions?

6. Mick is a likeable character, even when Milly shares her frustrations.

Dad needs to learn that his dreams for me are nowhere near big enough. (p. 75)

At this point, do you empathise with Mick or do you think Milly's perspective is validated ... or both? What do the two main characters have in common at this point? How do their positions in the family inform their feelings?

7. Otto considers authority figures to be likely enemies.

Cops don't help. They don't care when you're kicked out of your home, onto the street. They don't do anything to get back what your father stole. If they had, maybe we wouldn't have moved to that strawberry farm where everything went so wrong. (p. 92)

While Otto doesn't explicitly state what he has done at this point, readers can infer that he possibly broke the law. How does this experience affect Otto's sense of self? Who does he trust?

8. Milly struggles with her drive to rebel – it conflicts with her need to please her father.

As a child, I'd lived for our father-daughter ice-cream dates, feeling like the centre of his universe. Two scoops of strawberry in a waffle cone for me, caramel choc chip in a cup for him. I'd never finished mine. It's been ages since we've done something like that together, just the two of us. (p. 117)

Should Milly feel guilty at this point? Can you be someone who follows the rules and challenges established processes at the same time? Do conflicting values impact your identity? Have you noticed that your own values and sense of self is changing as you grow older?

9. Milly compares herself to a famous girl detective as a joke to hyperbolise her conflicting priorities.

I sigh. I bet Nancy Drew never had a part-time job. (p. 246)

Milly's mention of a character from another text is called an intertextual allusion. It is a literary device that strengthens the character's fictional fit in our real world. What do you learn about Milly by this reference? What other literary examples have been mentioned by other characters?

10. Milly's understanding of who she is becomes clear at the surf lifesaving championships.

And I want to win. Desperately. Not to prove I'm better than Jasper, or anyone else. I love competing and I love winning. And that's okay too. (p. 308)

What events and experiences have led to Milly's changed perspective? Milly's bravery and selfless decision is used to show her new attitude. How would Mick feel about this?

Creative tasks:

1. **Visual art:** Create a collage of images to represent the changing identities of one of the main characters. Be ready to justify your ideas.
2. **Diary entry:** In the role of Milly, write a diary entry describing events that followed the ironwoman race. Did this 'win' help Jasper and Milly better understand one another?

LANGUAGE

Language for interacting with others

- understand how language expresses and creates personal and social identities (AC9E7LA01)
- recognise language used to evaluate texts including visual and multimodal texts, and how evaluations of a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources (AC9E7LA02)

Text structure and organisation

- identify and describe how texts are structured differently depending on their purpose and how language features vary in texts (AC9E7LA03)
- understand that the cohesion of texts relies on devices that signal structure and guide readers, such as overviews and initial and concluding paragraphs (AC9E7LA04)

Language for expressing and developing ideas

- understand how complex and compound-complex sentences can be used to elaborate, extend and explain ideas (AC9E7LA05)
- investigate the role of vocabulary in building specialist and technical knowledge, including terms that have both everyday and technical meanings (AC9E7LA08)

LITERATURE

Engaging with and responding to literature

- form an opinion about characters, settings and events in texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others' opinions and justifying a response (AC9E7LE02)
- explain the ways that literary devices and language features such as dialogue, and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (AC9E7LE03)
- discuss the aesthetic and social value of literary texts using relevant and appropriate metalanguage (AC9E7LE04)

Examining literature

- identify and explain the ways that characters, settings and events combine to create meaning in narratives (AC9E7LE05)

LITERACY

Analysing, interpreting and evaluating

- analyse the ways in which language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose (AC9E7LY03)
- use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring, questioning and inferring to analyse and summarise information and ideas (AC9E7LY05)

Creating texts

- plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, selecting subject matter, and using text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features as appropriate to convey information, ideas and opinions in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive and/or analytical (AC9E7LY06)

LANGUAGE

- AC9E8LA03 explain how texts are structured depending on their purpose and how language features vary, recognising that some texts are hybrids that combine different genres or elements of different genres
- AC9E8LA05 examine a variety of clause structures including embedded clauses that add information and expand ideas in sentences
- AC9E8LA07 investigate how visual texts use intertextual references to enhance and layer meaning
- AC9E8LA09 understand and use punctuation conventions including semicolons and dashes to extend ideas and support meaning

LITERATURE

- AC9E8LE02 share opinions about the language features, literary devices and text structures that contribute to the styles of literary texts
- AC9E8LE03 explain how language and/or images in texts position readers to respond and form viewpoints
- AC9E8LE04 identify intertextual references in literary texts and explain how the references enable new understanding of the aesthetic quality of the text
- AC9E8LE05 analyse how language features such as sentence patterns create tone, and literary devices such as imagery create meaning and effect
- AC9E8LE06 create and edit literary texts that experiment with language features and literary devices for particular purposes and effects

LITERACY

- AC9E8LY01 identify how texts reflect contexts
- AC9E8LY04 analyse how authors organise ideas to develop and shape meaning
- AC9E8LY06 plan, create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts, organising and expanding ideas, and selecting text structures, language features, literary devices and visual features for purposes and audiences in ways that may be imaginative, reflective, informative, persuasive and/or analytical
- AC9E8LY08 apply learnt knowledge to spell accurately and to learn new words