

84 Ribbons Readers Guide

Conforms to the Common Core State Standards ELA- 6-12

Dance is a delicate balance between perfection and beauty

—Anonymous

Pre-Reading

The opening page of the book, *84 Ribbons*, reveals a great deal about Marta Selbryth. What 5-10 characteristics, goals and shortcomings can you uncover? List them.

Key Discussion Questions

1. The protagonist's level of confidence is revealed across several areas of her life: as a daughter, as a dancer, as a friend and as a girlfriend. They color her ability to function. Analyze pertinent sections of the book. Record your opinions about her levels of confidence in each role. Share evidence from throughout the text to support your opinions. After discussing or debating her level(s) of confidence, what changes will you make to your initial opinion(s)?
2. Relationships play a key role in the story. Look back through Marta's relationships with her mother, Madame Cosper, Mrs. B., her ballet friends (Lynne and Bartley), Damien and Steve. What characteristics do all the relationships share? How are they distinct? Select 4 relationships to dissect. Support each with specific evidence from the text that shows how well or how poorly the relationship works.
Consider these relationships as you start your analysis:
Marta and Mom Marta and Madame Cosper
Marta and Mrs. B. Marta and Lynne
Marta and Bartley Marta and Damien
Marta and Steve
Which character is closest to your typical way of handling a relationship? What traits do you share with the person you selected?
3. How does life in the late 1950's differ from life today? What qualities from the 1950's would improve today's life style if they could be brought back into use? Cite evidence from the text in making your comparison.
4. Several problems present themselves in Marta's life beginning with her lost luggage and mimicry of Madame and continuing through her fall, her tempestuous relationship with Steve, Bartley's death, and her May audition.
Organize these problems as a list, from most significant (#1) to least significant impact on Marta's life. Justify your ranking of the events.
5. If you were able to speak with Marta, what five questions would you ask her? Predict and write her responses. Share them.
6. What new understandings, appreciations or questions about ballet do you have from reading the book? Record and share them.

Post-Reading

Having a passion for art requires significant time and dedication. Whom do you know that has such a passion? Is that person a personal friend or a celebrity? Do they share any traits that help them master their art form? Discuss the things you know about them that appear to influence their success.

Creative Writing Prompt

Music plays a key role in most of our lives. Marta's love of ballet and classical music propel her through her life as well as her career. What music inspires you? What elements of the music cause that interest and inspiration? Write a one page description about the music that influences you. Relate the specifics of the musical genre that attract you.

Internet Resources/Connections

www.dancemedia.com (dance212)

www.theballetbag.com

www.ballet-dance.com

Related Reading

101 Ballet Stories by George Balanchine

Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet by Jennifer Homan

Balanchine's Complete Stories of the Great Ballets by George Balanchine and Francis Mason

In the Wings: Behind the Scenes at the New York City Ballet by Kyle Froman

Where Snowflakes Fall and Swear: Inside the Land of Ballet by Stephen Manes

Select Interdisciplinary Activities

Bridge: History of the Arts (3 ideas)

Identify two or more famous dancers (living or deceased). Describe their skills and how they were received by audiences. How long did it take for them to become famous? Did they have self-destructive habits? What were their 'claims to fame'?

Read about the history of ballet from its earliest times. List twelve key points that influenced or changed dance.

Notation for ballets is unique. Learn how ballet choreography are passed down from one generation to the next. Explain the process to your classmates.

Bridge: Psychology

Loss is a powerful emotion. Read about recommended ways to handle loss.

www.kidshealth.org (look under- feelings and emotions)

Bridge: Language Arts (2 ideas)

When Marta danced, she felt free as well as totally immersed in dancing. Write about your favorite personal movements. What actions give you a sense of freedom? Explain that freedom using appropriate similes and metaphors.

Is the success/art worth the personal sacrifice to body, psyche, and personal life? Write your argument. Support your claim(s) with evidence from the novel, other readings and media, or interviews.

Bridge: Music and Ballet (Theatre Arts) (3 ideas)

Listen to three selections of ballet music. How does the orchestration create mood and setting?

Watch one of the ballets mentioned in the book. How does the music affect the choreographed movement on the stage? What other factors influence 'the story' being told? Check out online videos of ballet at a variety of sites.

Create a glossary of twenty or more ballet terms. Write your definitions in easy-to-understand language so a reader can recreate each movement.

Bridge: Physiology

Dance is an art form that totally depends on the skill of the human body.

Learn about the physiology of dance and body mechanics.

How are dancers able to become so flexible?

How can ballerinas balance their body weight on pointe?

How do male dancers leap so high?

Compare ballet physiology requirements to that of other arts or sports.

Dancer Anatomy (Sports Anatomy) by Jacqui Haas

Anatomy of Movement by Blandin Calais-Germain

Bridge: Addiction

Across many generations, dancers have struggled with various additions: alcohol, pain medications, illegal drugs, sex, obsessive disorders.

Are their addictions any worse than those of actors, athletes or prominent citizens?

How do those addictions affect their level of success?

Write an argument supported by the evidence you uncovered.

Read, *Dying to Be Thin; Understanding and Defeating Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia* by Ira M. Sacker/Marc A. Zimmer

Watch, *NOVA: Dying to Be Thin (DVD)* with Susan Sarandon

This reading guide was created by the author to further the use of the book in classrooms. Any errors are unintentional and belong to the author, Paddy Eger.

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