

Isabelle™

Learning Guide

Learn about recognizing and celebrating your talents, finding your creativity, and being an inspiration to others through the stories of Isabelle Palmer, Girl of the Year 2014.



Isabelle™: Girl of the Year® 2014

Dear Educator,

American Girl is pleased to introduce you and your students to Isabelle, the 2014 Girl of the Year. Isabelle Palmer is a talented girl living in Washington, D.C. She attends the Anna Hart School of the Arts, where she excels in ballet. Isabelle's older sister, Jade, is also a ballerina at the school, and sometimes Isabelle feels lost in Jade's shadow—she worries she can't compete with her older sister's grace and poise. But Isabelle has a skill her sister doesn't share: she's a talented fashion designer who helps to create dance costumes for many of the girls' recitals.

Isabelle's journey in the three-book series is about discovering and celebrating the talents that make her special. She learns to quit comparing herself to others and to focus instead on the inspiration that makes her feel creative and alive.

This learning guide has been designed to support the themes introduced in Isabelle's stories:

- ☆ Resisting the urge to compare yourself to others
- ☆ Focusing on personal talents
- ☆ Sharing your talents with others
- ☆ Discovering your own creative inspiration
- ☆ Inspiring and mentoring others

Through the following activities, students have an opportunity to explore these themes in class discussions and small groups. In addition, students can personally reflect on the themes through independent work and journaling.

Even though the learning guide has been developed with the hope that each student in your class will read Isabelle's stories, it also includes relevant excerpts from the books in case reading the three-book series is not possible.



Resisting the Urge to Compare Yourself to Others

Isabelle, pages 79–80

“It’s just that . . .” I began, “well, I don’t think I’ll ever be as good a dancer as Jade.”

Dad put his peeler down and then, picking up another carrot, twirled it between his fingers. “You’re going to tell this poor little carrot that it’s not as good a vegetable”—he said, reaching for a potato with his other hand—“as this tater?”

Despite everything, I started to laugh. “You’re not supposed to play with your food, Dad,” I scolded him.

“You’re getting to sound like your mother more and more every day,” said Dad. He made an elaborate show of setting both carrot and potato down side by side. “But if you’re going to be fussy, you and Jade can be rubies and diamonds.” Then Dad turned to face me and said, “Either way, Isabelle, stop comparing yourself to your sister.” He picked up the spare onion. “That’s the fastest road to onion-dom, otherwise known as the kingdom of misery and tears. Instead, just try to dance a little better than you did the day before.”

Theme Introduction

The quickest path to doubting your own abilities is to compare them to someone else’s talents. Isabelle has a hard time seeing the value of her own dance skills when she compares herself to Jade. But when she accepts that skill and accomplishment don’t have one strict definition, her own talent flourishes.

Talk About It

- ☆ Have you ever felt as if your talent was less important than someone else’s? What made you feel that way?
- ☆ Do you think it’s important for people to have different talents? Why or why not?
- ☆ Do you think some skills are more important than others?

Think About It

Describe someone in your life who has a talent you admire that’s different from yours. What is it?

What do you admire about that person?

In what ways are you different from him or her?

Journaling

Imagine a story about a zoo animal that tries to pass itself off as another kind of animal in the zoo. What happens when the animal tries to behave like something it’s not?



Focusing on Personal Talents

Isabelle, page 31

I studied my outfit from all angles in the mirror. It was a great outfit, and it made me feel as if I could handle anything. I slipped off my shoes and spun in a graceful pirouette, watching my room and Mom whirl past my eyes. I took a couple more steps and then launched into a leap, my arms spread like a sail catching the wind. For a moment, I felt like I was floating.

Theme Introduction

Isabelle has the self-awareness to recognize her talents—fashion design and dance—and the way they affect and play off each other. Being aware of her own strengths has a powerful effect on her self-esteem and overall outlook.

Talk About It

- ☆ What are your talents?
- ☆ Does talking about the things you're good at make you feel strong, or nervous and embarrassed?
- ☆ Can you combine any of your talents to create something new and unique?
- ☆ How do you feel when other people notice and acknowledge your talents?

Think About It

Write down three talents you possess.

Write about a time your talent made you feel strong and special.

Journaling

Write a story about an imaginary superhero who has your strengths, but at an extreme level. How does she use her talent? How does it make her feel?



Sharing Your Talents with Others

Designs by Isabelle, pages 86–87

Then [Mr. Kosloff] crooked his finger at my sister. When Jade came over, I heard him ask, “Where did you get that skirt, Jade?”

“Isabelle designed it, and my family made it,” Jade said proudly, turning to smile at me.

Mr. Kosloff had my sister turn around a couple of times slowly so that he could study the skirt from different angles. Folding his arms, he paused thoughtfully, and then waved me over, too. “Nice job with the skirt, Isabelle,” he praised, and I felt a warm rush of pride in my chest. Then he pointed at the ceiling. “Jade, will you go upstairs to wardrobe and ask for Margie? Tell her I want her to adjust your costume so that it has chevrons, like your practice skirt.”

As Mr. Kosloff headed toward the door, Jade skipped over to my side and pulled me into a hug. “The skirt worked,” she said, her voice muffled by my shoulder. “Thank you, Isabelle.”

Theme Introduction

Isabelle becomes more appreciative of her talents when she realizes how they affect those around her. When she learns how to use her talents to help others, she allows her skills to truly blossom and grow.

Talk About It

- ☆ Have you ever used your talents to benefit someone else? How?
- ☆ How have you been helped by someone else’s talents?
- ☆ Do you think people have a responsibility to use their talents in a helpful way? Why or why not?

Think About It

What is a talent of yours that you think might be particularly helpful for other people?

Which do you think could be more helpful—a creative skill (like fashion design) or a knowledge-based skill (like technology smarts)?

Journaling

Think of a time someone used his or her talents to help you. Write that person a thank-you letter.



Discovering Your Own Creative Inspiration

Isabelle, pages 21–23

Mom had created [the mobile] two summers ago after our family had visited the Aquatic Gardens at Kenilworth Park. It had just rained, and round lily pads covered the pond like shining green scales, with water lilies and lotuses scattered among them like jewels. The water was so still that it mirrored the sky, and the reflections of clouds seemed to glide dreamily among the plants. It reminded me of the Claude Monet painting we had just seen in a special show at the National Gallery.

I had gazed at one particular flower floating among the broad green leaves. The pointed outer petals were pink and the inner ones yellow, deepening to gold near the center. Covered in raindrops, the petals looked like slices cut from beautiful stones.

That pond had been really good luck for us. It had inspired Mom to make this beautiful work of art. Now that pond was helping to inspire my designs—and my dancing.

Theme Introduction

As Isabelle learns, inspiration can lie in the most ordinary and unexpected places. What she sees as playful interaction between Jade and their pet cat transforms into Jade's graceful, flowing dance moves. And something as simple as a lily pad skipping across the water opens both Isabelle's and her mother's minds to very creative, but very different, artistic possibilities.

Talk About It

- ☆ Has an everyday object ever inspired you to use your talents to create something?
- ☆ Inspiration doesn't always come from an object. Isabelle's dad writes music inspired by his love for her mom. Have you ever created something based on an emotion you've felt?
- ☆ You don't have to be artistic to be creative. Can you think of ways to show your creativity that don't involve art, music, or dance?

Think About It

Think of someone you know whom you consider to be creative. Can you tell what inspires his or her art?

List three objects or feelings that inspire your imagination.

Journaling

Choose an object and write a short poem or song lyrics inspired by it. Now choose an emotion and write a new poem or lyrics. How are the two poems or songs alike? How are they different?



Inspiring and Mentoring Others

To the Stars, Isabelle, pages 115–116

Jackie had said that she wouldn't be where she was today without her grandmother. And I knew that I wouldn't be dancing today either without Mom and Dad—and especially not without my big sister, Jade—cheering me along every step of the way. No matter where we were, Jade would always be with me, just as Jackie's grandmother would always be with her.

Now, here was Trisha. Was she watching me today the way I had watched Jade at her first ballet recital? Could I inspire Trisha the way Jade had inspired me? I was sure going to try.

Theme Introduction

Isabelle is shocked when she realizes her heroes are regular people, just like her. They look up to other people the same way she looks up to them. It opens her eyes to the fact that she has the power to inspire others as well, and that she should never doubt that her talent is worth admiring.

Talk About It

- ☆ What do you think it takes to be an inspiring person?
- ☆ If you could mentor someone, what skill would you choose to teach him or her?
- ☆ Do you think someone can really be inspired by someone else, or is it something that comes from inside?
- ☆ What is something that you learn best from another person, rather than from reading a book or listening to a teacher?

Think About It

What qualities do you have that might inspire someone else?

Have you ever had a coach, teacher, or group leader who inspired you to do something new? Who was it, what was the new activity, and what was it about that person that inspired you?

Journaling

You can inspire others—and yourself—through the words you use. A good way to strengthen your belief in yourself is to choose a motto that makes you feel powerful. Write a motto that focuses on your best qualities. Repeat it every day, until you're *sure* that you believe it!

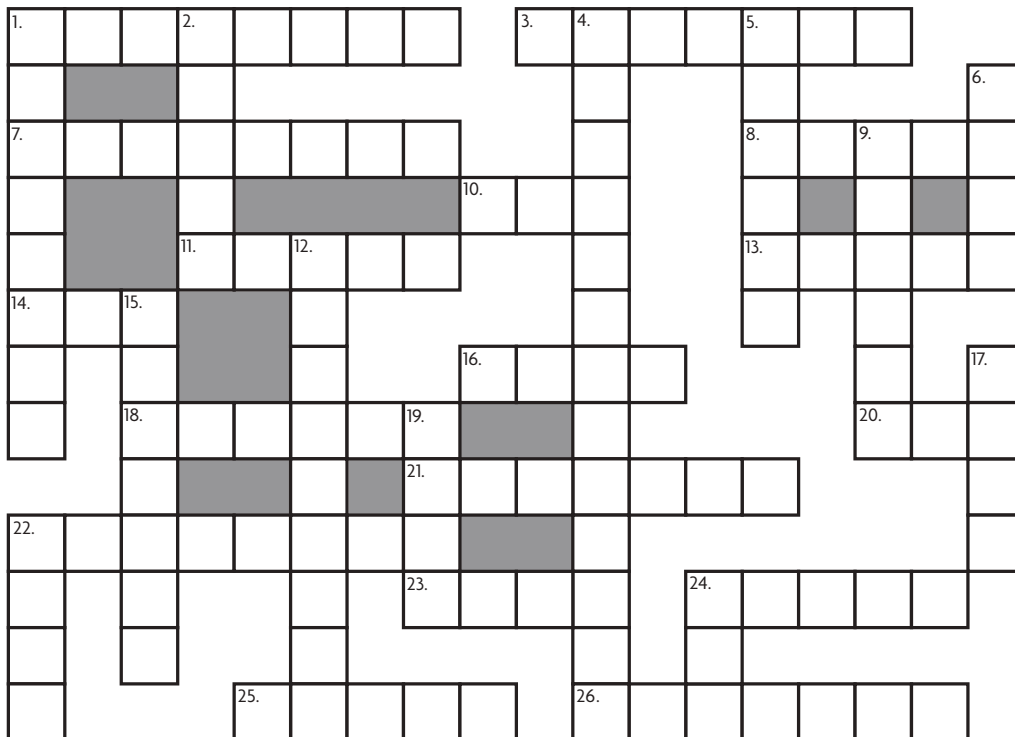


Ballet Play

If you love puzzles or like to dance, solve this rhyming crossword when you have the chance.

ACROSS

1. These shoes of satin or leather make you feel light as a feather.
3. To warm your muscles, go to a barre. Just don't ____ too far.
7. Wear makeup for the ____ to see—especially from the balcony!
8. A dancer's body and her face show a lot of style and ____.
10. A ____ will hold hair in place and keep it off shoulders and face.
11. To help your arm stay supple and flow, support your wrist and ____.
13. This isn't surprising news: ballet dancers wear ____.
14. By using body and face to react, dancers don't need to speak to ____.
16. In ballet it's important to extend your ____, so find a mirror to give yours a check.
18. You need strong ____ to go up on toe. Until you build strength, you'd better stay low!
20. If you're ready for ____ shoes, your teacher will give you the news.
21. Nothing is better, nothing sweeter, than to dance in a crowded ____.
22. It may seem like a curse, but before a show, you must ____.
23. It's a popular color, many think. When choosing a tutu, many like ____.
24. To prevent the slipping of their shoes, dancers rub them with this goo.
25. You look like a ballet star when you're stretching at the ____.
26. Slippers do not come with these, so ask someone to add them, please.

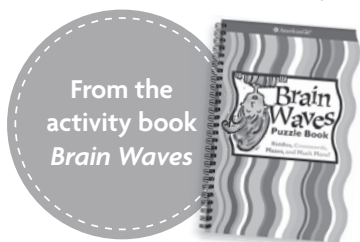


DOWN

1. It may sound silly or simply absurd, but in this ballet, the princess is a bird!
2. Ballerinas show grace and ____.
4. This ballet has an army of mice—and sugar-plum fairies who are really nice.
5. When you need to reach those heights, you'll feel more comfy wearing ____.
6. Most ballets have simple ____, so dancers have room for pirouettes.
9. You don't have to be the prettiest or smartest to be a dancer who's a great ____.
12. To be a prima ____ is a dream come true. Someday it may happen to you!
15. When you aren't sure what to do, this person will give you a clue.
17. Try saying this move the French way: grand plié or demi-plié.
19. Study every ____, learn each position, and soon you'll be ready to audition!
22. If *The Nutcracker* is your goal, then Clara is a wonderful ____.
24. Be sure your ribbons are tied right. They might ____ if they're too tight.

Answers

Across: 1. slippers, 3. stretch, 7. audience, 8. grace, 10. bun, 11. elbow, 13. tutus, 14. act
 16. neck, 18. ankles, 20. toe, 21. theater, 22. rehearse, 23. pink, 24. rosin, 25. barre, 26. ribbons
 Down: 1. Swan Lake, 2. poise, 4. *The Nutcracker*, 5. fights, 6. sets, 9. artist, 12. ballerina,
 15. teacher, 17. bend, 19. step, 22. role, 24. rub



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Word Puzzle



When Isabelle learned that Jade was struggling in dance because she felt too tall, what did she do about it? To solve the puzzle, place the letters above the dark grey line into the boxes below the dark grey line to form words. The letters in each column can be used only in that column. A light grey square indicates the end of a word.

A	H	C	E	M	O	T	E	L	G	A	E	D
J	A	E	K	S	E	U	I	G	N	G	T	
S		D	A	D	R	H	F	T	H	H	T	
		S		I		S		I	A	E	D	
				D				G				
			K								T	
		C			O	U			A			
J							E			H		

Answer: She designed a skirt that camouflaged Jade's height.