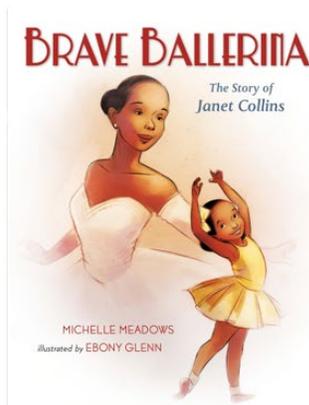
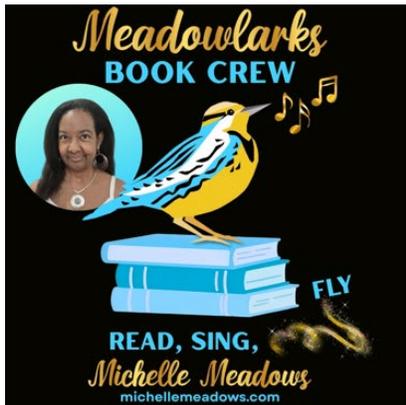


READING GUIDE - BRAVE BALLERINA: The Story of Janet Collins



AUTHOR: Michelle Meadows
ILLUSTRATOR: Ebony Glenn
PUBLISHER: Henry Holt/Macmillan
AGE LEVEL: 4 – 8

ABOUT THE BOOK: BRAVE BALLERINA is a picture book biography of Janet Collins, the first Black prima ballerina with the Metropolitan Opera House in 1951. Despite discrimination, Janet pursued dance with passion and fierce determination. This is the story of a remarkable pioneer and trailblazer.

STORY INSPIRATION: While taking a ballet class, author Michelle Meadows researched the history of Black ballet dancers and became fascinated by the story of Janet Collins. The experience of taking ballet as an adult brought back fond childhood memories for Michelle. Her mother took her to ballet classes on Saturday mornings when Michelle was a little girl.

KEY THEMES: picture book biography, nonfiction, dance, ballet, music, performing arts, women's history, Black history, discrimination, bravery, courage, resilience, perseverance, diversity, multiculturalism

OBSERVATION MONTHS & DAYS:

February: Black History Month

March: Women's History Month

April: National Poetry Month

April 29: International Dance Day

Last Saturday in July: National Dance Day

First Week of October: World Ballet Day

DEFINITIONS

- **Discrimination:** Unfair or unequal treatment – treating some groups less fairly than others
- **Racial discrimination:** Discrimination against groups of people based on race
- **Equality:** The rights of different groups of people to have the same treatment
- **Inclusion:** The act of respecting and including all people
- **Diversity:** The vast, vibrant differences that make each person unique, including but not limited to race, religion, gender

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BACKGROUND:

- Janet Collins wanted to be a ballerina in the 1930s and 1940s, a time when racial segregation was widespread in the United States.
- When she was accepted into the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo as a teenager on the condition that she paint her skin white, Janet refused. She was heartbroken, but she continued to go after her dreams and stay true to her values.
- From the Author's Note in the back of the book: Carmelita Maracci is the teacher in the scene – "This is the class, a welcoming place..." Zachary Solov is the man in the scene – "This is the man who saw her perform..."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/READING COMPREHENSION:

1. How do you know that Janet Collins loved to dance? Which parts of the story show her love of dance?
2. What did Janet Collins do to achieve her dreams of becoming a ballerina?
3. What did Janet's mother do to pay for her dance lessons? Why do you think her mother did this?
4. What challenges did Janet Collins face in her life?
5. Why do you think Janet Collins kept dancing despite the challenges?
6. How would you feel if you were not allowed to pursue your dreams?
7. How does the rhythm and rhyme of the text express themes of the book?
8. What did you find most surprising about this story?
9. Which scene in this book is your favorite? Why?
10. Why do you think Janet Collins decided not to lighten her skin?

FUN ACTIVITIES:

Writing Exercise – BRAVERY IS...: Write out a definition of bravery. Then find as many synonyms of bravery as you can and write out a list of them.

Poster Project – BRAVE PEOPLE: Identify three brave people, whether current or in history. Make a poster showing the name of each person – with photos or drawings of the person. Finish off your poster by adding colorful boxes with 1 – 3 sentences about why you think each person is brave.

Craft Project – BIOGRAPHY (BIO) BOX: Pick someone who you admire, whether current or in history. Take an empty cereal box and decorate the box with facts about the person's life. Get creative and use colorful paper, magic markers, glue, and anything else that helps you showcase this person's life.