

Ezra Jack Keats Award: Book Discussion Guide

Theme: Strong Girls

Firebird: Page 1



In *Firebird*, American Ballet Theatre soloist Misty Copeland tells the story of a young girl, with brown skin like her own, who is afraid she won't be able to reach the heights Misty has reached. Misty shows her exactly how, through hard work and dedication, she too can become Firebird.

Discussion Questions

Who Tells the Story? Misty Copeland chose to write the story as a conversation between a beginning dancer and an experienced dancer.

- ▶ Why do you think she made the choice to tell the story this way?
- ▶ How do you know when each character is speaking?

Illustration Style. Look at the double-page spreads in the book to see the dance between the illustrations and the text.

- ▶ Describe how Christopher Myers's choice of collage illustrations work with Copeland's words.
- ▶ Describe how illustrations and text express movement in various spreads throughout the book.
- ▶ When does the text convey more movement than illustrations and vice versa? What medium did the illustrator use?
- ▶ What are some other mediums that artists use in illustrating books?
- ▶ Review what Myers used to create the images for *Firebird* and compare them with options employed by other artists. Examples include collage, mixed-media, water color, oil or acrylic paint, and digital and stylistic options include realism, abstract, surrealism, and cubism.

Feelings in Words and Illustrations.

- ▶ At the beginning of the story, why does the young dancer feel so hopeless?
- ▶ On pages 8-9, how do the words and illustrations show you how she feels?
- ▶ On the pages that follow, how do the words and illustrations show you that she is gaining hope and confidence?

Finding Connections.

- ▶ What is a role model?
- ▶ How does the experienced ballerina serve as a role model to the new dancer?
- ▶ Who are your role models?
- ▶ What qualities do you want in a role model?
- ▶ How are you being a role model?

Focus on Word Choice. On page 32, the young dancer says, "I will show them that forever is not so far away."

- ▶ Why do you think she says this and what does she mean?
- ▶ How can forever not be so far away?

The Element of Time in Words and Pictures.

- ▶ On pages 32-33, who are the dancing silhouettes?
- ▶ Do they represent the past, the present, or the future? Why are they there?

Title: *Firebird: Ballerina Misty Copeland Shows a Young Girl How to Dance Like the Firebird*

Author: Misty Copeland

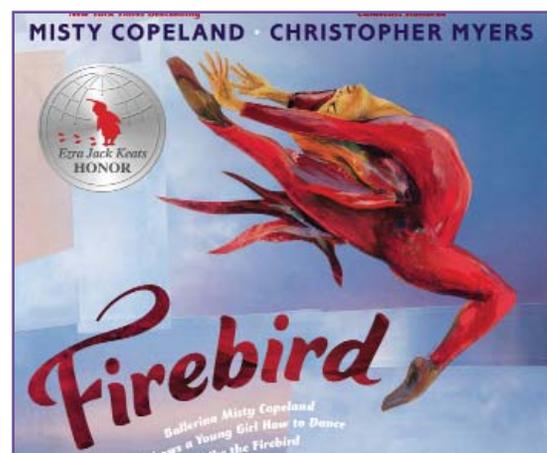
Illustrator: Christopher Myers

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons

Award: 2015 Writer Honor

Intended Grade Level: 3rd - 5th

Age Range: ~8-12 Years Old



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Activities for *Firebird*

Writing As Encouragement:

- ▶ Name something you're good at doing?
- ▶ Write a piece of encouragement to a beginner, someone who is learning this skill at which you already excel.
- ▶ In talking about her experience with ballet, Misty Copeland used strong verbs and descriptive words to create images of dancing:
 - ▶ "stretching across the skyline" (Page 6)
 - ▶ "stretching at the barre" (Page 18)
 - ▶ "switching worn-out slippers" (Page 18)
 - ▶ "pirouetting tightly" (Page 26)
- ▶ How can you use strong verbs and descriptive words to share your experience and encourage a beginner?

Collage Art Project: Think about an activity in which you show skill and find enjoyment.

- ▶ How can you share your skill and love of this activity in a picture that might inspire other people to want to learn this skill or participate in the activity?
- ▶ Create a collage storyboard that shows the wonders of this activity, just as Christopher Myers showed the wondrous motion of dancing in his illustrations. You can use a variety of mediums (magazines, tissue paper, paints, markers, etc.) to create your collage.