

NICOLE CUFFY

DANGLES

Book Club Kit



Discussion Questions

1. “I stood out because of my blackness,” Cece says. “And I was determined then to obliterate it, to render my blackness irrelevant with perfection.” Why does Cece feel she has to “obliterate” her blackness in order to succeed in the world of ballet? How does this shift throughout the book?
2. Throughout the narrative, Cece’s perception of herself seems at odds with the way the media, the public, and younger dancers see her. Why is it so hard for her to see herself as influential and successful, even after Kaz promotes her and she becomes the first black female principal in the New York City Ballet? What—if anything—helps her to finally believe it?
3. Cece says, “I am not conditioned to see myself as a damsel in distress. I am not conditioned to see myself as fragile, precious. I am not conditioned to see myself as worth saving.” How does she work against this conditioning? What would you identify as the turning point in her journey?
4. Discuss Cece’s relationship with her mother. What is at the root of their tension? How does this compare to Cece’s relationship with Paul, and her mother’s relationship with Paul?
5. “It is ballet that chose me. But I chose it back, and sometimes I wonder if it wasn’t, in part, a small act of rebellion,” Cece says. Explain what she means by this. What and who is she rebelling against?
6. Discuss the different ways the ballerinas push, test, strain, and ravage their bodies. What do you think *Dances* is trying to say about the physical pressures of dance?
7. What other themes did you notice in this book?
8. What does Cece gain from Luca and Galina that she doesn’t get elsewhere? How important do you think it is to have the support of parental figures who aren’t one’s parents?
9. Explore Cece’s relationship with Jasper. Why does she stay with him for so long, despite signs that he isn’t the most devoted partner? What does Jasper provide for her? What does Cece provide for him?
10. What did you make of Cece’s pregnancy and abortion? Is she satisfied with her choice? Do you think she should have told Jasper? How did this book’s treatment of abortion compare to other portrayals of the procedure in literature?
11. Why does Cece resist Irine’s offer to join her company? What choice would you have made?
12. How much did you know about the world of ballet before reading this novel? What, if anything, were you compelled to research further?
13. What did you think about the end of the book? Do you believe Cece and Paul will reunite someday?

Playlist

LISTEN TO THE MUSIC OF DANCES ON SPOTIFY—AND FEEL FREE
TO PRACTICE A PIROUETTE OF YOUR OWN WHILE YOU DO SO.

Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35: I.
Allegro moderato

*Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Itzhak Perlman, Eugene Ormandy,
Philadelphia Orchestra*

Sonata for Violin and Guitar in A Minor, Op. 2, No. 6,
MS 26: Tempo di Walzer

Niccolò Paganini, Scott St. John, Simon Wynberg

Tchaikovsky: The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 66, Prologue
“The Christening”: No. 2, Entrance of the Fairies - Scène
dansante

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra

The Four Seasons - Summer in G Minor, RV. 315: I.
Allegro non molto — Allegro

Antonio Vivaldi, Adrian Chandler, La Serenissima

Tchaikovsky: The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 66, Act II
“The Vision,” Scene I: No. 17, Panorama

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra

Chaconne

Johann Sebastian Bach, Jascha Heifetz

Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker, Op. 71, Act II: No. 14c,
Pas de deux. Variation II “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy”

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Berliner Philharmoniker, Sir Simon Rattle

Tchaikovsky: The Sleeping Beauty, Op. 66, Act III
“The Wedding”: No. 25d, Pas de quatre. Coda

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra

Overture to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Op. 21:
Tempo primo

Felix Mendelssohn, John Eliot Gardiner, London Symphony Orchestra

Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake, Op. 20, Act II: No. 10,
Scene. Moderato

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra

Coppelia: Act I - Valse

Léo Delibes, Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Andrew Mogrelia

Waltz in A-Flat Major, Op. 69 No. 1 “L’adieu” (Ed. J.
Fontana)

Frédéric Chopin, Vittorio Forte

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Nocturne en Mi Bémol Majeur, Op. 9 No. 2

Frédéric Chopin, Luis Fernando Pérez

Agon: Double Pas de quatre

Igor Stravinsky, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Robert Craft

Sonata in D Minor, K. 9

Domenico Scarlatti, Ivo Pogorelich

Sonata in E Major, K. 380

Domenico Scarlatti, Khatia Buniatishvili

Act I: XIII. Dance of the Knights

Sergei Prokofiev, Vasily Petrenko, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

Act I: II. Romeo

Sergei Prokofiev, Vasily Petrenko, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

Orchestral Suite No. 3 in G Major, Op. 55: I. Élégie

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, USSR State Symphony Orchestra, Boris Shulgín, Yevgeny Svetlanov

Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake, Op. 20, Act III, Appendix II:
No. 20a, Russian Dance

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, André Previn, London Symphony Orchestra

Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43: No. 19, Var.
XVIII. Andante cantabile

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Luke Faulkner

12 Songs, Op. 21: V. Lilacs (Transcr. Rachmaninoff for
Solo Piano)

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Sergei Babayan

Liebestraume, S541/R211 : No. 3: Nocturne in A-Flat
Major

Franz Liszt, Jenő Jandó

Ballet Dictionary

LEARN THE DEFINITIONS OF THE DANCE TERMS THAT COMPRISE CECE'S WORLD

Adagio (Italian) or adage (French):

“Slow tempo.” In ballet, a tempo in which the dancer moves slowly and gracefully.

Allegro:

Brisk, lively. A term applied to all bright, fast, or brisk movements.

Apothéose:

The French for “apotheosis.” In ballet (particularly the older classics), the apotheosis is a dramatic conclusion that highlights the theme in a grand way, usually connecting it to historical figures/the divine. The famous example of an apotheosis in classical ballet can be found in *The Sleeping Beauty*, where, at the end (in the original production and interpretations that remain faithful to it), the fairies arrange themselves on stage in a kind of tableau with clouds in the background and Helios above them (representing the sun king, Louis XIV).

Ballabile:

A dance performed by the corps de ballet.

Ballerina:

A principal female dancer in a ballet company. The true definition of the word “ballerina” is elusive, as discussed in this piece from *Pointe* magazine: pointemagazine.com/who-is-a-ballerina/

Barre:

A horizontal bar, approximately waist height, typically made of wood or metal, that is used for ballet warm-up exercises. Also refers to the part of a ballet class that is done with the support of the barre.

Centre:

Refers to the part of a ballet class where dancers leave the barre (women will often start putting on their pointe shoes) and move to the center of the room, where the instructor will give combinations progressing from adagio (slower movements) and tendus to turns, and then little jumps to big jumps, all done without the support of the barre, and often traveling across the room on the diagonal.

Coda:

Literally “tail.” In music, a Coda is a passage which brings a movement or a separate piece to a conclusion. In ballet, the coda is usually the “Finale.”

La danseuse:

The official, yet often unused term for female ballet dancers. The term for just any general female ballet dancers is mostly ballerinas, even though it is technically inaccurate.

Ballet Dictionary

LEARN THE DEFINITIONS OF THE DANCE TERMS THAT COMPRISE CECE'S WORLD

Le danseur:

The official term for a male ballet dancer. A male dancer can also be known as a ballerino in Italian.

Entrée:

In ballet, the term Entrée has two meanings: Entrée can refer to the opening number in a suite of dances known as the Grand Pas. Entrée can also mean a number in which the lead character or characters of a ballet make their initial appearance on stage.

Intermezzo:

A brief dance inserted between the sections of a longer performance.

Pas de caractère:

A character dance (e.g., Puss in Boots in *Sleeping Beauty*) that is often humorous and does not really further the plot of the ballet.

Préparation:

The small movements that come before a combination, usually comprised of just the arms (e.g., *allongé*), but sometimes also involving the legs.

Révèrece:

Respect; a sign of respect in which the dancer curtsies to show appreciation; usually done at the end of class or performance.

Variations:

A solo dance, sometimes referred to as a *pas seul*, meaning to dance alone. In a classical grand pas de deux, the ballerina and danseur each perform a variation.