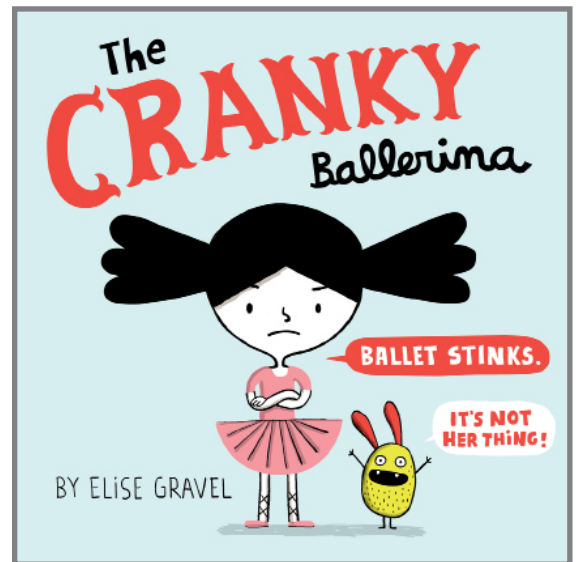


# The Cranky Ballerina

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SCIS: 5453796

ISBN: 9781761298653



## SYNOPSIS

Saturdays make Ada cranky. That's because Saturday is the day Ada has ballet class. Stretch! She kicks. Twirl! She swats. Jump! She flops. 'I hate ballet!' Ada says. And it doesn't seem like that's going to change anytime soon.

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

Elise Gravel is both a graphic designer and accomplished illustrator. She has written and illustrated several books for children in both French and English, including *Super-Dude*, *Super-Gizmo*, *Super-Thingamagig*, *Le Catalogue des Gaspilleurs*, and *J'élève mon Monstre*. Elise lives with her family in Montreal, Canada.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - Look at the face and body language of the little girl on the cover of the book. What do you think she is feeling? Why do you think this?
  - What can we learn about this book from the cover?
  - What is happening in the cover illustration? How is the little girl dressed?
  - Read the back of the book. What else have you learnt about the story?
  - What do you think might happen in this story? Why do you think this?
  - After reading the book, revisit your predictions. Were they correct? Why/why not and in what way?
- Ada's ballet class practises 'their pliés, their jetés, and their arabesques'. What are pliés, jetés, and arabesques? Research online, and see if you can discover what these ballet terms mean (look for a video demonstrating basic dance moves and terms). As a class try to do one or more of these—how easy or difficult is it to do each of these?
- Draw a self-portrait of yourself trying to do one of the dance steps/moves mentioned in the story. Caption your portrait with a description of the dance move and your attempt at it.
- What language are pliés, jetés, and arabesques from? Why do ballet teachers and dancers use words in this language to describe the different steps?
- Ada says that 'arabesques are grotesque'. What does grotesque mean? Can you think of any other words that she might have used to describe arabesques? Why do you think she chose to use grotesque instead of a shorter and more common word? Try and think of some words she might have used to describe pliés and jetés.
- What is a pirouette, and what happened when Ada tried to do one? What do you think would happen if you tried to do one?

- Practise your pirouettes (somewhere with plenty of space!), and write a brief description of what happened and how it feels to try to do one.
- How did Ada's classmates react to her attempt at a pirouette? Do you think this was fair to Ada? Why/why not?
- What are all the different words used in the book to describe Ada's attempt to pirouette? How many of these words are onomatopoeic?
  - As a class, discuss what onomatopoeia is, and why the author might have chosen to use onomatopoeic words to complement the illustrations. Can you think of any other onomatopoeic words? In small groups or as a class, brainstorm and create a list of as many onomatopoeic words as you can think of in a short time. Choose one of these words and create an A4 illustration to go with it. Your illustration might be a cartoon picture of a person performing an act, or it could simply be the word presented as the centre of a brightly coloured pattern inspired by the way the words are presented in the book. Create a classroom display of your onomatopoeic artworks for everyone to admire and enjoy.
- Watch a professional ballet performance for children. If there are no live performances happening in your local area, watch a recording of one (or part of one) online, on the largest screen you have available. After watching, as a class discuss what you saw the dancers doing, and whether you recognised any of the steps mentioned in the book. How did watching professional dancers perform make you feel? Would you enjoy seeing another performance? Why/why not?
- Look carefully at the illustration of Ada attempting a pirouette. How many arms can you see? How many legs does she appear to have? As a class discuss why the author chose to use this type of illustration to show Ada's pirouette? What are some other methods that artists use to show movement in a still picture?
  - Paint an action picture of yourself or a friend doing a physical activity that involves fast movement.
- As a class, create a dance performance to accompany a reading of this story. Practise your dance and perform it for another class, for parents, or at assembly.
- Ada is awful at ballet—but extremely good at karate! What are some things that you are extremely bad at, and some things that you are good at?
- Thinking about what happens in the book, and what Ada discovered about herself, what is something that you can say to someone who is struggling to succeed at an activity or skill?
- If this story had a clearly stated moral at the end of it, what do you think it should be? In pairs or small groups, write a moral for this story, and illustrate it with individual pictures.
- What do you think the little boy on the last page of the book should try doing instead of karate? Why do you think this? Why do you think he hates karate, while Ada finds it to be so much better than ballet with easy skills to learn?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**RAE CARLYLE**