

The Best Dancer

by ReadWorks



Annabelle was the school's best dancer, something she reminded Taylor, Laura, and even five-year-old Christina of every day. "Mrs. Coolidge says I'm very *gifted*," she said, elongating the word "gifted" until it seemed to have three syllables instead of two. "She says I'll probably be a principal dancer at one of the world's most elite theaters."

Mrs. Coolidge *had* said these things, yes, but she had said them to a number of students in need of inspiration as encouragement. "Getting inspired" was something Mrs. Coolidge thought was very important. Annabelle, she believed, was inspired, but inspired to *win*, to *outdo*, to beat everyone else. Mrs. Coolidge would prefer it if Annabelle simply liked to dance.

"Students! Students!" Mrs. Coolidge called to the small gaggle of girls surrounding Annabelle.

"I'd like to introduce you to our newest student, Sally. Sally is a most talented and gifted student. I hope you'll all take the time to greet her warmly."

Annabelle looked at Sally with lowered brows. Sally didn't have a dancer's body: she was short, with legs that looked bowed, like they belonged to a frog instead of an eleven-year-old girl. Annabelle smirked. This girl would be no competition for Annabelle and her graceful, *gifted* performances.

In the following weeks, however, it became clear that Annabelle had grossly underestimated Sally's dancing abilities. In fact, Sally was not just a gifted dancer, but Sally was an *incredibly gifted* dancer. She leapt and twirled and bowed and moved in ways Annabelle hadn't imagined possible for such a short girl. And to top it off, Sally was a *nice* girl. She didn't brag, she didn't rub her talent in her classmates' faces, and she never said no to helping one of the younger girls learn a new dance move. She was funny, she was smart, and everyone liked her.

Annabelle was furious. Auditions for the lead of the school ballet were only three weeks away, and she was nearly positive that Sally would snatch the part right from underneath her. And so Annabelle devised a plan.

It was a well-known fact that Sally liked cake. In fact, Annabelle wondered how someone so little could eat so much. And yet, Sally managed to eat one-third of a triple chocolate fudge cake every single day. "Cake," Annabelle told herself, "is Sally's weakness."

On the morning of the audition, Annabelle filled a small paper bag with earthworms. There were four of them: big, juicy brown worms that she found sunning themselves on the sidewalk after the previous evening's rain. She felt them wriggle and twist in her hand as she placed them in the bag. She arrived at school just after Sally, and placed the paper bag in her locker.

"Mrs. Coolidge," she said during their first class, "I forgot something in my locker. Can I go get it?"

Mrs. Coolidge nodded yes, and continued to talk about the importance of stretching. Annabelle hurried to her locker. She reached up to the top shelf, but the small bag was missing. She began to look frantically through the locker. She shook out her jacket, pulled out her bag, and emptied her pencil case. The worms were gone.

Annabelle walked back to her class stiffly. She wasn't sure what to make of this development. The worms couldn't have walked away. She frowned. Had someone seen her collecting the

worms?

By the time Annabelle returned to class, it was time for auditions. Annabelle would perform first. She had prepared a beautiful piece in which she slid across the stage on her toes, emulating a flowering tulip.

Annabelle was midway through her performance when she felt something warm and sticky land on her right shoulder. A few moments later, she felt another drop on her head, and then again on her left shoulder. She looked down. The earthworms she had collected in the morning were draped across her shoulders. She could feel the third earthworm dangling from her ear like some misshapen earring. Annabelle looked up, and from the rafter she saw Sally holding the small brown paper bag.

Sally winked at her. "Nice try," she mouthed. Sally got the lead that year.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Mrs. Coolidge says that Annabelle is very what?

- A. kind
- B. beautiful
- C. snooty
- D. gifted

2. Annabelle devises a plan that somehow involves a bag of earthworms and Sally. What motivates Annabelle's actions?

- A. She wants to stop Sally from getting the lead part in the school ballet.
- B. She wants to prove that she is a more gifted ballet dancer than Sally.
- C. She wants to get the other ballet students to stop liking Sally so much.
- D. She wants Mrs. Coolidge to think that Sally is dirty and gross.

3. Annabelle wants to be the best at ballet. What evidence from the story best supports this conclusion?

- A. "Mrs. Coolidge would prefer it if Annabelle simply liked to dance."
- B. "In the following weeks, however, it became clear that Annabelle had grossly underestimated Sally's dancing abilities."
- C. "Annabelle, she believed, was inspired, but inspired to *win*, to *outdo*, to beat everyone else."
- D. "She had prepared a beautiful piece in which she slid across the stage on her toes, emulating a flowering tulip."

4. How can Annabelle best be described?

- A. honest
- B. competitive
- C. helpful
- D. generous

5. What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. Sally gets the lead part in the school ballet because she tricks Annabelle.
- B. Annabelle gathers earthworms in a bag, but she loses the bag.
- C. Two young ballet dancers start off as rivals, but soon become friends.
- D. Annabelle is jealous of a new student who is a better dancer than her.

6. Read the following sentences: "Annabelle smirked. This girl would be no competition for Annabelle and her graceful, *gifted* performances. In the following weeks, however, it became clear that Annabelle had grossly **underestimated** Sally's dancing abilities. In fact, Sally was not just a gifted dancer, but Sally was an *incredibly gifted* dancer. She leapt and twirled and bowed and moved in ways Annabelle hadn't imagined possible for such a short girl."

As used in this sentence, what does the word "**underestimate**" most nearly mean?

- A. think someone is lower in ability than they really are
- B. accurately guess how good someone's ability is
- C. think someone is higher in ability than they really are
- D. make a guess with very little information about something

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____, Annabelle is the best dancer in the class. Then a better dancer joins the class.

- A. For example
- B. However
- C. Initially
- D. Finally

8. Who gets the lead in the school ballet?

9. During Annabelle's audition, Sally drops the earthworms that Annabelle had collected on her and mouths, "Nice try." Based on this information, what can you conclude about Sally?

10. "Annabelle and Sally are more similar than they seem at the beginning of the story." Explain whether this statement is accurate or not. Support your answer using information from the story.

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Answers may include: Sally knew that Annabelle was going to try to ruin Sally's audition. Sally wants to get the lead role in the ballet. Sally is also a competitive person, just like Annabelle. Sally is not as nice of a person as she seems at the beginning of the story.

10. "Annabelle and Sally are more similar than they seem at the beginning of the story." Explain whether this statement is accurate or not. Support your answer using information from the story.

Answers may vary and should be supported by the story. Example:

"The statement that Annabelle and Sally are more similar than they seem at the beginning of the story is accurate. At the beginning of the story, it seems like Annabelle is boastful and competitive, while Sally is modest and helps other students with their dancing. At the end of the story, Sally drops worms on Annabelle during her audition. This shows that Sally is like Annabelle, in that they are both competitive, they both want the lead role, and they are both willing to mess up the other's audition."