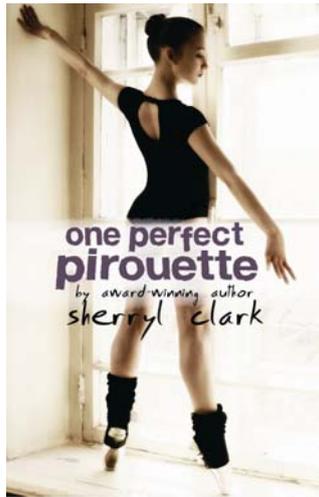


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

# ONE PERFECT PIROUETTE

## Sherryl Clark



### Teachers' Notes

### Written by a Practising Teacher

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### SYNOPSIS

Brynna is passionate about ballet and is determined to be accepted into the coveted National Ballet School. As a result, her family decides to relocate from Bendigo to Melbourne so that Brynna can attend an exclusive ballet school, however this is not an entirely smooth transition.

Brynna is also faced with the challenges of a new school and the fiercely competitive world of elite sport. Bullied and excluded, she starts to doubt her ability and whether her family's sacrifice will be warranted, but Brynna's perseverance and steely resolve help her to keep focussed on her dream of becoming a ballerina. Will every step towards success come at a price?

This is a story about resilience, family, self-belief and sacrifice. Everybody faces obstacles in their life's journey – it's how these obstacles are handled that helps determine the future.

### THEMES

#### FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Brynna's family makes an important decision to relocate from Bendigo to Melbourne to help her achieve her goal of being accepted into the National Ballet School.
- Brynna has an open and positive relationship with her parents and older brother, Orrin.
- Brynna's other brother, Tam, is facing his own issues but Brynna blames herself for his loss of direction.
- Brynna does not trust the new girls she has met at school, or in her ballet class.
- Brynna finds a genuine friend in local street kid, Ricky.
- Brynna is prepared to put her dreams on hold when her father is nearly killed in a work accident.

#### CHANGE

- Starting a new school/work place has many challenges.
- Moving from the country to the city causes significant upheaval.
- All family members have to resettle; not everyone can adapt easily.
- Change can bring on new opportunities and experiences.
- Not all change is bad.

#### BULLYING

- Jade and Stephanie both bully Brynna.
- Brynna learns how to handle being bullied.

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**SELF BELIEF, RESILIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE**

- To reach your potential and realise your dreams, you need discipline, focus and self-belief.
- Everyone faces obstacles; it's how these obstacles are handled that matters.

**WRITING STYLE**

*One Perfect Pirouette* is a narrative told in first person and is written in the past tense. Brynna is the central character. The narration is realistic and contemporary and the language is accessible and appropriate for its intended audience.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION (written by Sherryl Clark)**

Although this is a book about ballet and following your dreams, many of my novels centre on the family and what can happen when changes and problems arise. How does a family cope with change? With conflict? With trauma? How are the children affected? For me, this was a great story idea within which I could look at a family and how a major decision for one child can change and affect everybody.

I had a lot of help from both the national ballet school and the owner and teacher of a local ballet school. They taught me how a typical class is run. I spent a lot of time researching ballet – the correct terms, steps, positions, etc. – as well as the type of music and dances.

**STUDY NOTES**

- Brynna is determined and focussed on auditioning for the National Ballet School. Create a mind map that illustrates:
  - The steps she takes beforehand to make it through to the audition successfully
    - e.g. finding a place to practise, not risking injury through playing netball.
  - The obstacles that impede her plan
    - e.g. not enough money for extra classes, ballet shoes being vandalised, her father having an accident.
  - How these obstacles are overcome
    - e.g. Orrin offers to take a cleaning job, asking to use the youth centre's room for practice.
- Do you have a dream or goal?
  - What is your dream or goal?
  - How important to you is it that you achieve this dream?
  - What obstacles might stand in the way of achieving your goal?

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- How might you overcome such obstacles?
  - What steps can you make to help achieve this goal?
  - Make a realistic plan to outline the steps that you can take to make your goal more attainable.
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- Brynna faces fierce rivalry from Stephanie and the Silhouettes. How is this relationship different from the relationship that Brynna has with Jade? How is it similar?
  - Brynna is often sceptical of Lucy's intentions. Is Brynna justified in her feelings towards Lucy or is she misjudging her? Give reasons to support your answer.
  - Brynna is bullied by Jade at her school and by Stephanie in her ballet class. Why do characters like Jade and Stephanie bully Brynna?
  - How does Brynna handle being bullied? Are these methods effective? What other strategies could she use to stop being bullied?
  - Have you ever started at a new school? Describe what it was like to be the *new kid*.
  - Why does Brynna refuse to join the netball team? Is it more than to protect herself from injury? If you were in Brynna's position would you have joined? Explain.
  - It doesn't take long for Brynna to realise that Ricky is a genuine friend. What makes a good friend?
  - Brynna's mum was also an elite athlete. How do her experiences help guide Brynna?
  - Is Brynna's mum reliving her own dreams of sporting success through Brynna's ballet or is she simply supporting her talented daughter? Discuss.
  - Create a graphic organiser that compares the family's life in Bendigo with their new life in Melbourne. Brainstorm useful headings for the comparison such as school, friends, lifestyle, etc.
  - In what way is Ricky like Tam?

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- The issue of the behaviour of parent spectators at sport arises in *One Perfect Pirouette*. Examine some newspaper reports on this topic and if possible, conduct some surveys observing this behaviour.
  - Write your own newspaper article that addresses one of the following issues:
    - Parent behaviour at sport and the contribution this makes, whether positive or negative, to the sport and the child.
    - Off-field behaviour of famous sports people.
    - Sledging in sport.
  - Search some local sporting club's websites and examine the Player's Code of Behaviour and the Parents' Code of Behaviour.
  - Create your own Code of Behaviour for a lunch-time sport at your school such as handball or tiggly.
  
- Self-belief is a major theme in this text. So too is that of resilience and perseverance. Read excerpts from a variety of auto/biographies that examine these themes, whether sporting or not. These may include people such as:
  - Jessica Watson
  - Matthew Hayden
  - Jesse Martin (*Lionheart: A Journey of the Human Spirit*)
  - Bethany Hamilton (*Soul Surfer*)
  - Joni Eareckson (*Joni*)
  - Helen Keller (*To Love This Life*)
  - Alan Marshall (*I Can Jump Puddles*)
  - Lance Armstrong (*It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life*)
  - Li Cunxin (*Mao's Last Dancer/The Peasant Prince*)
  - Janine Shepherd (*Never Tell Me Never*)
  - Adeline Yen Mah (*Chinese Cinderella/Falling Leaves*)
  - Michael J Fox (*Lucky Man: A Memoir*)
  - Wayne Bennett (*Don't Die With the Music in You*)
  
- Watch an episode of *Australian Story* that illustrates perseverance and the overcoming of obstacles, such as *Woman on a Mission* about Olympic swimmer Meagan Nay.
  
- Read *The Peasant Prince* by Li Cunxin, the picture book version of *Mao's Last Dancer*.
- Create a picture book of *One Perfect Pirouette*, using a storyboard to plot the storyline and a 'dummy book' to determine the placement of text and illustrations. Visit a class of younger students and read the picture book to small groups.

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- Create a book trailer for *One Perfect Pirouette* using a program such as Windows Movie Maker or Photo Story 3. To look at some examples of book trailers, visit: [www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=41987](http://www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=41987)
- *One Perfect Pirouette* is similar in many ways to the film, *Billy Elliott*. Watch selected scenes of this film (note this film is rated M15+) and compare it with Sherryl Clark's book. Students could be divided into small groups with one group doing a freeze frame from *One Perfect Pirouette* and the other doing a freeze frame from *Billy Elliott* and then discussing their ideas with the rest of the class.
- *Swan Lake* features as a common thread throughout the novel. Read a children's version of *Swan Lake*.
- View some examples of dance, including:
  - Scenes from a ballet such as *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgsTbKRNb5Y> (*Swan Lake*)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHYwVfN3wY4> (*The Nutcracker*)
  - More contemporary forms of dance such as a piece by *The Tap Dogs*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pa8qOHIRI3A>
  - A scene from *West Side Story* such as the Jets song  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exGJsv6ZNlo>
  - The Ice Dance from the *Edward Scissorhands* stage production  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY4cmxYrYJ0>
  - Bangarra Dance Theatre and contemporary Indigenous dancing  
<http://www.bangarra.com.au/Home.aspx?element=1&category=1>
- In small groups, choose one of the following activities to complete and present to the class:
  - Compose a piece of music, either modern or classical, that may suit one of the dances you have seen.
  - In groups, choreograph your own dance sequence to a piece of music.
  - Create a poster to advertise a ballet or musical.
  - Design and draw the set for a ballet or musical.
  - Design and draw costumes for a ballet or musical.
- Plan an excursion to see a live ballet performance.
- Choose one of Brynna's brothers and write a series of diary entries as that character.

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- Both Jade and Brynna have goals and dreams but use different strategies to reach those dreams. Compare the different ways in which they set about achieving their goals.
  - The Antarctic explorers Robert Scott and Roald Amundsen raced each other to the South Pole. Read about their respective expeditions and compare the differences between their strategies, management and leadership skills. How did these differences contribute to the success or otherwise of their expeditions?
- Discuss Brynna's decision to quit the audition for the National Ballet School.
- Tam is a confused and rather lost character. Why is Tam feeling this way?
  - Middle child?
  - Having two talented siblings?
  - Resenting moving to Melbourne?
- Brynna is encouraged to let her body *feel* the music. Listen to a variety of music genres, letting students feel and move to this music. Alternatively, have students respond to the music in a journal entry or through a drawing.
- Examine the poetic language that the author uses to help create imagery in the text. How does this contribute to the richness of the story?
  - 'His socks would drive a hibernating grizzly bear out of its cave' (p18).
  - 'It stank of about a hundred years of boiled cabbage and old lady's talcum powder' (p18).
  - 'I stared down at my feet, feeling like a bug pinned to a board' (p38).
  - 'Steel fingers gripped my stomach' (p80).
  - 'The thought of failing filled my legs and arms with lead' (p81).
  - 'To get your arms moving correctly, pretend you're swimming in peanut butter' (p129).
- Write some of your own descriptions using poetic devices. As a class, brainstorm possible situations to describe, such as:
  - first time on a roller coaster
  - trying to get to sleep on Christmas Eve
  - playing a grand final
  - watching a dangerous stunt
  - swimming with clothes on.
- Brynna often feels nervous or anxious. What physical signs do you get when you feel nervous?
  - Lump in your throat?
  - Sweaty Palms?

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- Shaking legs?
  - Research some breathing and relaxation techniques to help in these situations.
  - What strategies do sports people use in high-pressure situations?
  - Sports psychology helps to prepare sportspeople for many of the situations that Brynna faces. Find out more about the role of psychology in sport. If possible, invite a sports psychologist as a guest speaker.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sherryl Clark's first children's book, *The Too-Tight Tutu*, was published in 1997 and she now has more than 40 books in print. Most recently, she has published *Tracey Binns is Trouble* and *Tracey Binns is Lost* and her young adult novel *Bone Song* was published in the UK in 2009. *Farm Kid* won the 2005 NSW Premier's Literary Award and *Sixth Grade Style Queen (Not!)* was an Honour Book in the 2008 CBCA Awards.