



The Reel Wish & El deseo de mi corazón written by Yamile Saied Méndez

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

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Spanish ISBN: 9781643796444

Reading Level: Grade 5–8

Interest Level: Grades 3–7

Guided Reading Level: T

Spanish Guided Reading Level: U

Accelerated Reader® Level: 4.9

Spanish Accelerated Reader® Level: 4.4

Lexile™ Measure: 700L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Bullying, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Persistence and Grit, Resilience and Overcoming Obstacles, Courage, Sports (Dance), Dance (Ballet, Irish dance), Dreams and Aspirations, Empathy and Compassion, Friendship, Optimism and Enthusiasm, Self Esteem and Confidence, Body Positivity and Body Image, Social and Emotional Learning, Wellness and Whole Child Development, Latine / Latino / Hispanic Interest

Resources on the web:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-reel-wish/>

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/el-deseo-de-mi-corazon/>

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

SYNOPSIS

After a panic attack prevents Florencia from performing as Clara in *The Nutcracker* and her best friends takes the lead, a new dance style helps her face her anxiety as well as a troubled friendship.

Cuando un ataque de pánico impide que Florencia desarrolle su rol de Clara en *El Cascanueces* y su mejor amiga la reemplaza, un nuevo estilo de baile la ayuda a enfrentar su ansiedad y una amistad problemática.

Ballet is Florencia del Lago's entire world. After years of hard work, she is chosen as Clara in the winter production of *The Nutcracker*. Not only is she the youngest dancer to receive such an honor but also the first Latina. She's on track to be recruited by the best ballet companies.

Unfortunately, she suffers a panic attack on opening night-on stage, in front of everyone. And then Selena, Florencia's best friend, steps right into the role to replace her. Just like that, Florencia's whole world falls apart-the ballet studio expels her, and her best friend turns on her, tormenting her on social media and in real life.

But even though the one thing she was driven toward has come to an end, therapy and family support help Florencia open up to new experiences. She notices people at school she's never paid attention to before, and she even stumbles upon an Irish dance school and decides to give it a try. Can

a new passion for Irish dance help Florencia find the joy of performing on the stage that she lost that fateful winter night?

El ballet lo es todo para Florencia del Lago. Después de años de arduo trabajo, es seleccionada como Clara en la producción invernal de *El Cascanueces*. No sólo es la bailarina más joven en recibir tal honor sino también la primera latina. Está en camino de ser contratada por las mejores compañías de ballet.

Desafortunadamente, la noche del estreno, sufre un ataque de pánico– en el escenario, delante de todos. Y luego Selena, su mejor amiga, la reemplaza como Clara. Así, se desmorona su mundo entero– el estudio de ballet la expulsa, y su mejor amiga se vuelve contra ella, atormentándola en las redes sociales y en la vida real.

Pero a pesar de que algo que ella amaba llegó a su fin, la terapia y el apoyo familiar la ayudan a abrirse a nuevas experiencias. Forma una amistad con dos chicos de la escuela a los que nunca les había prestado atención, e incluso se encuentra con una escuela de danza irlandesa y decide intentar aprender esta nueva forma de arte. ¿Podrá una nueva pasión por la danza irlandesa ayudarla a encontrar la alegría de bailar en el escenario que perdió aquella noche de invierno?

BACKGROUND

Adapted from the Author's Note from Yamile Saied Méndez

"In this book, Florencia goes to therapy, takes medicine, and talks about different techniques or exercises to manage her symptoms of anxiety: sensory exercises, bubble and fidget toys, zen gardening, the protective bubble technique, and calming breathing exercises.

Although these tools are mentioned, they're not meant to diagnose or treat anyone. If you, reader, experience symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, please talk to someone: a parent, teacher, coach, mentor, or friend.

Also, note that dance helped Florencia deal with anxiety, but on occasions, it made her situation worse. Unfortunately, the environment in children's sports or artistic activities can be the number-one cause for anxiety. School is also another space in which children struggle because they spend a large portion of their day there, and also because of the challenges that plague our educational system (gun violence, bullying, lack of resources, learning disabilities, etc.).

Sometimes, even when we do everything in our power to overcome anxiety and/or depression, nothing works. Please know that you're not alone. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that 9.4 percent of children aged 3–17 years (approximately 5.8 million) were diagnosed with anxiety in 2016–2019. And 4.4 percent of children aged 3–17 years (approximately 2.7 million) had been diagnosed with depression in 2016–2019. The numbers keep increasing. You're not alone, and you're needed and loved. Please seek help or be a helping hand to someone else. More than anything, be kind—to yourself and others. We never know what battles we're all fighting." – **Yamile Saied Méndez, author**

Mental Health Awareness and Resources

The main character, Florencia, prioritizes her mental wellbeing in *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*). Depression and anxiety might be topics that students could have difficulty processing and it is important to help students process this during their time reading this novel. Here are a few resources to help guide and support discussion:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics has resources available for educators on how to support children and young adults (<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/school-health/mental-health-in-schools/supporting-students-with-depression-in-school>).
- Crisis Text Line offers resources on how to deal with self-harm, anxiety, suicide, and depression, as well as where to find help (www.crisistextline.org/topics).
- May is Mental Health Awareness Month. National Alliance on Mental Illness (<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/>) participates in this initiative which aims to fight stigma, provide support, educate the public and advocate for policies that support people with mental illness and their families.

Bullying and Cyberbullying

According to the National Children's Alliance and researchers at the Cyberbullying Research Center, a study of US middle and high school students in 2021, showed that one in four kids had experienced cyberbullying in the last 30 days. National Children's Alliance has resources available on preventing and responding to cyberbullying (https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/cyberbullying/#_edn1).

Stopbullying.gov has resources available on how to identify bullying and stand up to it safely. Visit their website at stopbullying.gov.

Irish Dance

The main character, Florencia, finds her love for dance once again in Irish dance. Learn more about the history of Irish dance, the music, costumes, dance steps, and more at danceus.org/irish-dance.

Body Image and the Pressures of the Dance World

Flor and her friends face an immense amount of critique and pressure from Madame Sophie on their weight and body image. This can be extremely detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing for young people. It is important to highlight the resources available to help combat the pressure young athletes face in the dance world. Consult the following resources to learn more on how to support dancers with their body image in dance (<https://dancenutrition.com/body-image/>) and (<https://pointemagazine.com/body-image-resilience/#gsc.tab=0>).

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What do you know about ballet? What do you know about Irish dance?
- What strategies do you use when you're scared, angry, or sad? How do you cope with your feelings?
- Ask students what they know about mental health. What characteristics do students associate with depression or anxiety? Why do they think it is important to take care of your mental health alongside your physical health?
- What activities are meaningful to you? Why? With whom do you enjoy doing these activities?
- How does food, dance, or a favorite pastime help people heal? What helps you feel better after a difficult moment or situation?
- How do you show persistence or resilience? What does it mean to be persistent? Why is it important to have persistence? How can someone practice and develop persistence?
- Why is important to practice something? Whether you play an instrument, sport, or are learning how to do something, how does practice help you improve?
- Why are differences important? What would it be like if everyone was the same? Why is it important to be unique?
- What does it mean to be a friend? What are the qualities of friendship? How do you support your friends? Why is it important to be loyal to your friends and defend them?
- Ask students to think about what their family and what they mean to them. How is family important to you? How do you interact with your family members?
- Why is it important to stand up for something or someone? Was there ever a time when you stood up for something that you believed in? How did it feel? What did you do?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Book Title Exploration: Talk about the title of the novel, *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*). Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that? Why do students think there is a difference in the English and Spanish titles?

Read author Yamile Saied Méndez biography: Read about Yamile Saied Méndez prior to reading the book. Encourage students to think about how she came up with the idea to write *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*) and what her inspiration was for writing this story. Visit Yamile online at yamilesmendez.com.

Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author's dedication, and Author's Note at the end. Display the book and analyze the cover.

Encourage students to stop periodically and jot down thoughts and questions in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction, have an idea, have a question, or hear a new word.

Have students write feelings or reactions in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how Flor's role as Clara in *The Nutcracker* changed Selena and Flor's friendship
- how stress and trauma affect people differently
- what the qualities are of a healthy friendship
- the importance of self-discovery and advocacy in this story
- how harmful bullying and cyberbullying are
- how young people show resilience through difficult times
- the complexities of familial relationships
- how friendship and community play a role in healing
- how Flor and Mamá's characters change over the course of the book

Encourage students to consider why the author, Yamile Saied Méndez, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Reference the glossary in the back of the story for a full list of vocabulary words in *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*.

Content Specific

noncompete, stern, bodice, catastrophe, feis, ghillies, mate, melodrama, sabotage, slip jig, the reel, lilting

Academic

staggered, endearment, frazzled, misshapen, indigestion, detoxify, beelined, enchantment, embroidered

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Part 1: The Star

1. How does the story begin? What are Florencia and Selena trying out for?
2. How rigorous is ballet? What all does Florencia have to commit to?
3. How is Selena acting after Flor is casted as Clara in *The Nutcracker*?
4. What does Mama tell Flor about envy?
5. How well is Flor balancing school and dance? Why does she compare herself to her brother, Ariel?
6. What does Papa ask Flor about dance? Does Flor want to be the next superstar?
7. What all does Flor have to be mindful of when it comes to dance and Madame Sophie?
8. What is Flor's interaction with Selena when Selena spends the night during fall break?
9. What compliment does Madame Sophie give Flor during the rehearsal before opening night? What type of teacher would you describe Madame Sophie as?
10. What do Zoe and Tenlee tell Flor during rehearsals? How does this make Flor feel?
11. What happens on opening day?

Part 2: The Black Hole

12. What type of friend does Selena become after Flor's traumatic event?
13. What breathing technique does Flor's therapist teach her? How does it work?
14. What happens on Flor's birthday? Does it end up being the reset that Flor wanted?

15. What is Flor mesmerized by at the festival that Ariel is working at? What does Flor feel when Ariel tells her she should try something different than dance?
16. What does Flor wish for when she sees the aurora borealis?
17. Why does Flor not want to go to school the day after her birthday? What does Mamá tell her?
18. What tool does Dr. Phillips give Flor when she is popping her knuckles? How does this help?
19. What happens when Flor rescues Bandit? How does Flor feel after saving Bandit?
20. How does Irish dance make Flor feel? Where does she want to go?
21. What all does Flor prepare to adventure out to the Irish dance studio? How does her journey go?

Part 3: The Constellation

22. What does Flor notice about the dance instructor as she goes into the Irish dance studio? What is her interaction with Miss Gianna like?
23. What does Flor learn about Larkin at the free beginners class? Why is Flor trying to understand Larkin?
24. How does Flor's first beginner class go?
25. What happens when Flor and her family do Rose Game night? Why does Ariel not want to participate? What does Mamá say?
26. Why is Mamá upset with Flor?
27. Who does Flor sit with at lunch? How does it go?
28. What happens to Candy during the lockdown at school? How do Flor and Larkin help Candy?
29. What does Mamá say about her call with Miss Gianna? How does Mamá feel about Irish dance?
30. How does Flor feel about calling Larkin? What good news does Flor share with Larkin?
31. What is school like the next day after the lockdown? What are the dance girls saying about Candy?
32. What does Dr. Phillips tell Flor about friendship?
33. What do Candy, Flor, and Larkin all share about their grandparents and where their family is from?
34. How does Flor work to accept the negative words that come through her mind? How does she feel after accepting the negative words?
35. How does Flor's first class at Irish dance go? How does Flor push past the negative thoughts in her head? How is Miss Gianna different from Madame Sophie?
36. What is a feis? What does Miss Gianna say about signing up Flor for classes? What does Miss Gianna tell Flor about signing up for the feis?

37. What is Flor's real wish?
38. What do Flor and Larkin do when they go over to hang out at Candy's house?
39. How did everyone find out at school that Candy was a YouTube celebrity? What does Candy do with the money she makes from YouTube?
40. What condition does Candy have? What does Flor learn about it?
41. How does Laura treat Flor when she passes by their house after hanging out with Candy? What does she say about her?
42. What does Flor see on the ground when she takes Pinky out? How is Selena making Floren-
cia's life miserable?
43. How does Flor feel about Irish dance so far? What does she want? What does Miss Gianna tell
her?
44. What does Nancy McAllister share with Flor's mamá? What does Flor notice about how Candy
and Larkin are acting while they are at his house?
45. What do Candy and Larkin share with Flor? What is happening on social media? How does this
make Flor feel?

Part 4: The Sun

46. What does Ariel share with Flor about friends and juggling it all when he played soccer?
47. What happens when Flor steps out for a breath of fresh air? Who is outside?
48. How does Flor handle the confrontation with Selena? What do the adults say about this situa-
tion? How do Flor's friends handle the aftermath?

Part 5: Stardust

49. How does Flor convince herself to go to the feis? How does her family support her? How do
her friends support her?
50. In what ways is Larkin completely transformed from how he is at school to now at the feis?
51. What is The Blind Man special?
52. How does Larkin's performance go? What does Larkin respond when Flor asked him "How did
you do it?"
53. How does Flor's performance go? What does Flor remind herself of leading up to her perfor-
mance? What has she learned?
54. How has Flor's journey been more like the broken Nutcracker?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does the title *The Reel Wish* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think the

author chose this specific title?

2. What figurative language do you notice in *The Reel Wish*? Why do you think this helped further your understanding of the character's emotions?
3. How does Florencia's character evolve from the beginning of the story to the end of the story?
4. Why does Flor feel the pressure to fulfill Mamá's dreams of dancing that she had to give up in coming to the United States?
5. In what ways does Flor cope with anxiety throughout *The Reel Wish*? How do you deal with anxiety or difficult moments? Why do you think it is important to prioritize your mental health?
6. How does Flor demonstrate resilience throughout *The Reel Wish*?
7. Mama tells Flor, "Envy is an ugly thing, Flor. It can destroy friendships." Why does envy destroy Flor and Selena's friendship? Have you ever had to deal with situation where envy ended a friendship? How did that situation make you feel?
8. Flor stands up for her friends and family throughout *The Reel Wish*. Why is it important to stand up for your friends and family? How do you stand up for what you believe in? How does that make you feel?
9. Why is therapy an important part of Florencia's life? What techniques and coping mechanisms does Dr. Phillips teach her? Are you familiar with any of the strategies? Have you ever used any of the strategies or something similar? If you would like to share, how did it go? Did it help?
10. Dancing takes up most of Florencia's time. How does she manage to balance school, dance and friendship throughout the story? How do you manage your responsibilities? What works for you? What doesn't work for you? What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to balance their responsibilities?
11. What did you learn about Irish dance? What are the differences between ballet and Irish dance? How are Miss Gianna and Madame Sophie different instructors? How does Irish dance change Flor and what she thinks about dancing?
12. The sign over the door at Academy Fire says, "To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak." What do you think that means? How does Flor interpret this message? Why is it important to do something with your heart?
13. What does Flor reflect on at the end of the book? What do you think she realizes? What lesson(s) does she learn at the end of the story?
14. Despite the "differences in personality" with her friends Candy and Larkin, Flor finds happiness in their friendship after her fallout with Selena. How do her friends help with her healing? Is it necessary to be similar to your friends? What qualities do you admire about your friendships?
15. Why is Larkin so hesitant to befriend Flor when she first steps into Academy Fire? What is Larkin worried about? How does Larkin's character challenge gender stereotypes in dance?
16. How do Flor and Larkin demonstrate bravery in *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*)? How

do they show what it means to be a good friend? How do you feel around your friends? How do you show up in moments that may be scary?

17. Why does language matter? Candy pushes Flor to stop saying “my anxiety” to release the control it has over her and to refer to it as “the anxiety.” How does this help push Flor? How does this mindset help Flor overcome other difficult situations?
18. What does family mean to you after reading this story? Have any of your perceptions or feelings toward family members changed after reading this book? How do Flor’s relationships with her family members inspire you to act toward your own family and friends?
19. What do you think of the ending of *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*? How does this make you feel? Do you feel proud of Flor? Is she pursuing her dream to dance?
20. As a reader, how did you feel throughout the book? What thoughts and emotions did you experience as you read *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*? What did you learn about what it means to be resilient? How did this story connect to your life? What moments did you identify with? Why?
21. Read Yamile Saied Méndez’s Author’s Note. What inspired her to write the story? How can our own lives and experiences be mined for inspiration? How can real life be used in fiction writing?

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? What is your takeaway from this book? What would you tell a friend about this book?
2. What do you think Yamile Saied Méndez’s message is to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind her intentions to write this book.
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make between the story and your own life? What do Florencia’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while reading *The Reel Wish*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make between the text and art in the book and what you have seen happening in the world, such as on television, in a newspaper, or online? What in this book made you think of that?
6. How do Flor’s actions in *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)* demonstrate her determination and persistence? How does she handle difficult situations? Why is it important for her to problem solve?

7. What different types of conflicts are presented in *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*? Discuss Flor's conflicts within herself, her family, her friends and conflicts with dance. Compare and contrast the difference conflicts within the text.

Multilingual Learners Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are multilingual learners (ML).

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - 1) Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - 2) Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about one of the characters in the book. Have them discuss what characteristics they admire about Florencia from *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*.
5. Have students give a short talk about what they identified with most from *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*. Did they learn something new that they hadn't known before?
6. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
7. *The Reel Wish* is also available as a Spanish edition, *El deseo de mi corazón* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/el-deseo-de-mi-corazon/>) if this is applicable to your classroom. This authentic Spanish text presents ample opportunity to encourage students to engage with both languages. Ask students to compare their experiences if students read both English and Spanish editions. What was it like reading the story in Spanish? What was it like reading the story in English? Why do they think the titles differ in their translations? Have students discuss the texts in both languages and how they are similar and/or different.
8. *The Reel Wish* and *El deseo de mi corazón* are also available as English audiobook (<https://rbmediaglobal.com/audiobook/9798896793311/>) and Spanish audiobook (<https://rbmediaglobal.com/audiobook/9798896794936/>). Encourage students to listen to the narrator as they follow along in the print edition. Additionally, parents and caregivers can listen to the

audiobook to discuss with their child

9. Consider consulting multilinguallearningtoolkit.org for more ideas on how to support Multilingual Learners.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Choose an emotion such as happiness, fear, hope, sadness, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *The Reel Wish*.
2. What types of emotions does Florencia struggle with throughout *The Reel Wish*? How do these emotions present themselves throughout her journey in the story? How do they impact her in her friendships, school, and dance?
3. How does Flor demonstrate resilience throughout *The Reel Wish*? Identify a scene from the story that exemplifies how Flor is resilient. What made you choose this passage? How did it affect you, and what did you learn from Flor after reading *The Reel Wish*?
4. How does *The Reel Wish* show positive family relationships? How does Flor's family support her in the story? How do your family and friends support you in your daily life?
5. What are the coping strategies that Flor uses throughout *The Reel Wish*? Do you use any of the strategies Dr. Phillips teaches her?
6. Flor faces bullying and cyberbullying throughout *The Reel Wish*. How do you respond to bullying? How can you stand up to bullies, or stand up for people who are being bullied?
7. How does the trauma of seeing the car accident on the way to the opening night of *The Nutcracker* affect Flor that night? How do you cope with traumatic events? Does it interfere with how you continue with your day? What happens if you don't process the traumatic event?
8. The dance girls bully Flor by saying she was cast as Clara to fill a "diversity quota" for the production. How do you respond to discrimination when you experience it yourself and/or when you see it happening to others?
9. Flor goes to therapy to help with her panic attacks, and the other girls in ballet make fun of her, calling her "crazy." How can you combat the stigma of mental illness and advocate for the benefits of seeking out help? Consult the National Alliance on Mental Illness for additional resources (<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/October-2017/9-Ways-to-Fight-Mental-Health-Stigma>).

10. How has a family member or friend impacted your life? How do you think Flor's family and friends have inspired her? Provide evidence from the story to support your ideas.
11. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with four columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?
12. Flor falls in love with dancing again when she begins Irish dance. What benefits can dancing have on mental health? Consult the following resources for more information (<https://www.mentalhealthde.com/blogs/the-benefits-of-dance-on-mental-wellbeing>)
13. What are the benefits of finding an activity you love to help with mental health and well being? How does finding a new activity, hobby, pastime help Florencia when she feels like her life is falling apart? Why is it important to focus on moving forward even when it feels impossible? Why is it important to let go of things, situations, friendships that no longer bring you joy?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; and Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a figurative language study with students.** Have students go on a figurative language scavenger hunt in *The Reel Wish*. Refer to Read Write Think's "Figurative Language Resource Page" as a tool for students to use during their search (http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson79/figresource.pdf). Create a chart with different rows for figurative language terms (i.e. simile, metaphor) and students can fill it in with specific examples from *The Reel Wish*. Afterwards, students can experiment using figurative language in their own writing piece or poem inspired by the book.
- **Conduct a mentor text study that centers characters who are athletes, featuring *Maximilian & the Mystery of the Guardian Angel* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/maximilian-the-mystery-of-the-guardian-angel-2/>) and *Step up to the Plate, Maria Singh* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/step-up-to-the-plate-maria-singh/>) and pair them with *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*).** Have students compare the main characters in each of the novels. How do these characters handle the pressures of being

an athlete? What did they have to do to overcome the obstacles in their life? How are they similar? How are they different? Provide students with a graphic organizer to differentiate the titles, and then have students write an essay answering the previous questions.

- **Conduct an author study on Yamile Saied Méndez featuring her Lee & Low Books novel *On These Magic Shores*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/on-these-magic-shores/>). Compare the different themes that *On These Magic Shores* presents. How are the main characters similar? How are they different? How are the topics of each book similar? How are they different? Why do you think it's important that both of her novels also have Spanish editions? For students who read the Spanish editions, what was that experience like comparative to the English edition? Provide students with a graphic organizer to differentiate titles and then ask students to write an essay answering the previous questions.
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to interview author Yamile Saied Méndez.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a novel? How did she come up with the idea to write *The Reel Wish*? How did she like writing *The Reel Wish*? What was challenging? Consider contacting Yamile online at yamilesmendez.com and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting for an author visit.
- **Ask students: what can *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)* teach us?** Have students share their findings. What lessons did the book teach readers over the course of the story? What did they learn from the story's message? Students can talk with partners, in small groups, or with the whole class. Consider creating a word cloud to find out what words came up the most often (<https://www.wordclouds.com>). Then students can come up with a big idea or statement about what they learned from *The Reel Wish*.
- **Students can write a piece about a hobby that's meaningful to them.** Do students have a hobby, such as dancing or another activity. Flor loves dancing. Students can write a small moment piece or another reflection on their hobby, how it makes them feel, how they practice, and why it's meaningful to them. If possible, students can show off the hobby to the class or bring in an artifact that demonstrates their hobby to the class.
- **How has a family member or a close friend impacted your life?** Do you have a family member, mentor, or close friend who has changed your life in a positive way? What were some things that person did that were significant to you? Students can write a poem, essay, or display their work in any other visual format that works best for their learning needs.
- **Have students identify a place in the story where Florencia's character changes in *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*.** Why do students think that was a point where Flor changed? How does Flor feel before the change, what causes the change, and then how does she feel and act after? Create a graphic organizer with a column on the left that says "Before," a column in the middle that says "During," and a column on the right that says "After," and have students fill in the details above.
- **Assign students different characters from the book and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into small-

er, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have also done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9; and Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students conduct research on the history of *The Nutcracker*.** (https://nutcracker.com/history-of-nutcracker/?srsltid=AfmBOoqW2PSdagTp9ZUTiXo_fZpEjwavlBMkiTzXlZ-7j2ecAOFcgEW_W). What did you learn about the history of *The Nutcracker*? When was *The Nutcracker* first performed outside of Russia? What do you think about the role of Clara? What do you think about the role of the Nutcracker? Why does Florencia relate more to the role of *The Nutcracker* rather than Clara? Students can research additional resources and share their findings with the class.
- **Have students conduct a research study on the athleticism required for dancing. What does training look like for dancers?** How is it similar to the training required for other sports like soccer or gymnastics? How is it different? Why is it important consider dance as a sport? Why might some people not consider dance as a sport? Students can consult the following resources to guide their research (<https://www.danceus.org/news-trends/is-dance-a-sport-exploring-the-athleticism-and-artistry-of-dance/#:~:text=1.,who%20practice%20their%20athletic%20ability.>) and (<https://www.performingdancearts.ca/crucial-tips-exercises-to-improve-a-dancers-strength/>). Have students present their findings in a visual presentation and share with the class.
- **Learn about Irish dance.** Have students conduct a research study on Irish dance (<https://idtana.org/what-is-irish-dancing/>). What is Irish dance? What is the history of Irish dance? How is Irish dance different than other dance forms? What is the music like? What are the clothing and shoes like? What are some of the most basic dance steps? Assign groups of students different categories to research on Irish dance. For example, have one group present on the history of Irish dance, another group can present on the costumes and shoes, another group can present on the music, the steps, famous Irish dancers, and Irish dance today. Students can present their findings to the class.
- **Learn about ballet.** Have students conduct a research study on ballet (<https://pbt.org/community/resources-audience-members/ballet-101/brief-history-ballet/#:~:text=Ballet%20originated%20in%20the%20Italian,court%20participated%20in%20the%20performances.>). What is ballet? What is the history of ballet? What is the origin of ballet? What is ballet today? What types and styles of ballets are there? What are the clothing and shoes like? Students can present their findings to the class.
- **Conduct a Joan of Arc research study.** Flor doesn't want to go to school one day and when

Mamá tells her she isn't the last or only girl to face obstacles, Mamá names Joan of Arc. If students are not familiar with Joan of Arc, allow students to research who Joan of Arc was and what obstacles she faced. Students can read more about Joan of Arc at faith.nd.edu/saint/st-joan-of-arc. Have students write a reflection on what they learned about Joan of Arc.

- Have students conduct a research study on influential women of color in dance.** Florencia references Misty Copeland and Marianela Núñez in the story. Students can focus on the following questions: What is their story? What issues do they care about? How did they get into dance? What obstacles did they have to overcome to get into dance? How have they made a difference in dance? Resources online include "Learn About These 5 Ballet Stars in Celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month" (<https://sab.org/scenes/learn-about-these-5-ballet-stars-in-celebration-of-hispanic-heritage-month/>), "Celebrating Black History Month: 10 Influential Black Ballet Dancers" (<https://balletaz.org/celebrating-black-history-month-10-influential-black-ballet-dancers/>), and "The most influential female dancers" (<https://www.royalacademyofdance.org/news-and-facts/the-most-influential-female-dancers/>). Students can select one dancer and share about them in a visual presentation of their choosing, using reputable resources from books and websites.
- Have students research obstacles to women, such as discrimination and bullying, in dance today.** What obstacles prevent women in the United States from becoming professional dancers? What about in other countries? Students can research online from different articles, such as The LA Dance Chronicle's "Bullying and the Struggle for Gender Parity in Dance" (<https://www.ladancechronicle.com/bullying-and-the-struggle-for-gender-parity-in-dance/>) and Yale University Press's "Breaking Down Racial Barriers in Dance: Then and Now" (<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2014/08/07/breaking-down-racial-barriers-in-dance-then-and-now/>). Students can share their findings in an essay and then conduct a small group or whole class discussion about how discrimination and bullying are evident in dance nationally and globally.
- Flor and her school experience a lockdown during *The Reel Wish*.** Have students read this article from *The Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-lockdowns-in-america/>) and have them reflect on how often school lockdowns occur. What information did students find after reading this article? What did they already know? How does this information make them feel? What do they wish they could know more about? Have students reflect on the article and write a short response. Students can share their reflection in groups or with partners. The Academy 4 Social Civics SC has a great resource for educators on how to teach with lockdown drills (<https://new.academy4sc.org/2025/03/19/teaching-with-lockdown-drills/>). **NOTE:** Please keep in mind that this topic may be difficult for students to process. The National Association of School Psychologists offer resources on mitigating psychological effects of lockdowns (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/mitigating-psychological-effects-of-lockdowns>).
- Have students research the food dishes that are mentioned in *The Reel Wish*.** Various Argentinian foods and dishes are mentioned in the story such as facturas and empanadas. Have students identify the different foods that were discussed in the book, find photographs,

and compile recipes to create a *The Reel Wish* cookbook for the class. What were the typical ingredients (spices and herbs) used in these dishes?

- **Flor's family are loyal Argentina fútbol fans and Candy's family are Brazil fútbol fans.** Have students research more about the history of Argentinian fútbol or Brazilian futebol (have students reference the glossary to read about the difference between these terms). Students can focus on the following questions, what is their history? What is their legacy? What accolades do they have? Who are some of their most famous players? Do Argentina and Brazil have a rivalry? If students pick Argentina, they can use the following resource for their research (<https://www.footballhistory.org/national/argentina.html>). If students pick Brazil, they can use the following resource for their research (<https://www.footballhistory.org/national/brazil.html>). If students are looking for information regarding this rivalry, they can consult the following resource (https://en.as.com/en/2021/07/10/soccer/1625895959_600981.html). If students show interest in researching a different national fútbol team, consider allowing students to conduct their research. Students can share their findings in groups.

Science/STEM

(4-PS3-2 Energy Make observations to provide evidence that energy can be transferred from place to place by sound, light, heat, and electric currents.) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study on black holes.** Flor is learning about energy and black holes in science class and she learns, "No energy is wasted or gone. It always transforms. When a star dies, it either becomes a white dwarf star or a neutron star. The largest stars explode in a supernova and then become a black hole. The gravity inside a black hole is so strong, not even light can escape it." Have students learn more about black holes and the transformation of energy. What did they learn about black holes? What are they surprised about? What would they like to know more about? Students can consult the following resource from NASA on what a "dead" star is (<https://science.nasa.gov/universe/whats-inside-a-dead-star/>) and this resource to learn more about what a black hole is (<https://www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/for-kids-and-students/what-is-a-black-hole-grades-5-8/>). After their research, students can connect their findings to Florencia's feelings in Part 2 of *The Reel Wish*. Why did she feel like a black hole had opened in her heart? Students can reflect on their findings and discuss as a class.
- **Have students learn more about what the Aurora Borealis is.** Florencia spots the Aurora Borealis one night and she wishes on it. Students can use the following questions to guide their research: What is an aurora? What makes it happen? Where can you see an aurora? When can you see an aurora? Why is this specific phenomenon called the Aurora Borealis? Consider using the following resources for research (<https://www.space.com/15139-northern-lights-auroras-earth-facts-sdcmp.html>) and (<https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/aurora/en/>). If time allows, have students write down a wish they would ask for if they were to see the Aurora Borealis. Students can share what they found most interesting about the Aurora Borealis and if they would like, they can also share what they would wish for if they saw one.

Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; and Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Citing textual evidence, select a theme portrayed in the novel, *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*.** Create a visual presentation with illustrations, drawings, and any other creative materials to reflect how this theme is developed over the course of the text.
- **Have students create a drawing, painting, or other visual representation of a hobby that they care about.** Why did students choose this hobby? Students can create posters, paintings, or other visual representations of the hobby that they're passionate about and then display their work in small groups or for the whole class to see.
- **Have students illustrate a feeling one of the characters experienced in the story.** What do they want to convey? Students can think about a particular scene that stood out to them from *The Reel Wish* featuring the character of their choosing. What kinds of materials do they want to use? Have students share their pieces with a partner, small group, or whole class.
- **Ask students to create a portrait of someone they admire or their role model using illustration, collage, or photographs.** After creating their portrait, have students describe in their artist statement what actions and qualities they admire about this person. How do they relate to this person? What do they admire about them? Why is it important for students to connect with people they admire in their sport or art?
- **Have students watch a video of Argentine ballet dancer Marianela Núñez.** Students can watch the following Marianela Núñez performance from The Royal Ballet (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbjXh9auUmc>). What do they think of her performance? What do they think about the music? What would they like to learn more about? Have students write Marianela a letter asking her questions about her career. They can learn about Marianela online at <https://www.rbo.org.uk/people/marianela-nunez>.
- **Show students American ballet dancer Misty Copeland's Firebird performance** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muo0DUGmIRo&list=PL38KxaZGoPGVo7h-Y3FPF4n-QseZq06lw&index=2>). Have students read about why this role was monumental for Misty and her career (<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/09/09/345297939/misty-copeland-on-broadening-beauty-and-being-black-in-ballet>). What did students think about her performance? What would they like to learn more about? Have students write Misty a letter asking her questions about her performance or career. They can visit Misty online at <https://mistycopeland.com/>.
- **Watch various videos on Irish dance.** Have students search for several Irish dance performances. What do they notice about their performance? What about their costumes? What did they learn about Irish dance from *The Reel Wish (El deseo de mi corazón)*? Do they see what they learned about Irish dance from *The Reel Wish* in the performances they watched? As a starting point, students can watch the following videos from The Academy Irish Dance Com-

The Reel Wish & El deseo de mi corazón

Teacher's Guide leeandlow.com/books/the-reel-wish/
leeandlow.com/books/el-deseo-de-mi-corazon/

pany (<https://youtu.be/1XjwAPqnsHw?si=8mo7E5zgm5KDGVtb>) and from the World Irish Dance Association (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhc5vXDvst0>). Have students discuss in groups what they learned about Irish dance.

- **Have students reimagine the cover to *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*).** What would they change? What would they keep? If time allows, have students illustrate a new book cover.

School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have family members and/or caregivers share hobbies that they enjoy doing in their free time.** What hobbies do they like? Why do they like this hobby? How does it make them feel? Students can share their responses with the class.
- **Connect with family history.** Students can be encouraged to speak with family members about tough times when the family had to come together to overcome obstacles and/or emotionally difficult times.
- **Introduce families to ballet or Irish dance.** Have families consult the background information of the guide to learn more about ballet or Irish dance. What do they know about these dances? How are they similar to or different from other dances they know?
- **Find a feis near you.** If students and their families are interested in attending a feis near them, have them visit The Irish Dance Teachers' Association of North America (<https://idtana.org/feiseanna/>). Where is the closest feis to you? When is it? Would you be interested in going to one? Have students talk to their families about what Irish dance is.
- **Encourage students and their families to listen to the audiobook for *The Reel Wish* (*El deseo de mi corazón*).** *The Reel Wish* and *El deseo de mi corazón* are also available as English audiobook (<https://rbmediaglobal.com/audiobook/9798896793311/>) and Spanish audiobook (<https://rbmediaglobal.com/audiobook/9798896794936/>). Encourage students to listen to the narrator as they follow along in the print edition. Additionally, parents and caregivers can listen to the audiobook to discuss with their child.



Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-reel-wish/>

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/el-deseo-de-mi-corazon/>

By Phone: 212-779-4400

By Mail:

381 Park Ave S, Room 1401
 New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yamilé Saied Méndez is the award-winning author of many books for young readers and adults, including *Furia*, *Where Are You From?*, the Horse Country series, and *On These Magic Shores*, among others. She was born and raised in Rosario, Argentina, but has lived most of her life in a lovely valley surrounded by mountains in Utah. She's a graduate of the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA Writing program, and a founding member of Las Musas, a marketing collective of Latine writers. Connect with her at yamilesmendez.com.

REVIEWS

* "This age is difficult to capture, and Méndez portrays it beautifully; Florencia has very grown-up feelings and actions interspersed with childlike observances. . . . Seeing a fellow tween navigate a difficult time will inspire not just dancers but any young person finding their way back to themselves." **-Booklist, starred review**

* "A beautifully realized book that reminds readers that there's more than one rhythm to dance to." **-Kirkus Reviews, starred review**

* "Méndez examines the toll that participating in elite dance has on one child's friendships and mental health in this emotionally raw and honest offering." **-Publishers Weekly, starred review**

* "An impactful and nuanced look at childhood mental health and the pressures children sometimes face when pursuing their passions at an early age." **-Shelf Awareness, starred review**

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