

WISH READER'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION



“I sit here feeling empty while a thousand clamoring voices fight for space in my head. I can no longer talk myself out of facing this problem and what it means for all of us. It’s times like this when I feel like I need comforting from my mother. But this time she’s the problem.”

For Indigo Stevens, ballet classes at Miss Roberta’s ballet studio offer the stability and structure that are missing from her crazy home life. At almost 16, she hopes this is the year she will be accepted into the New York School of Ballet. First she must prove she’s ready, and that means ignoring Jesse Sanders – the cute boy with dimples who is definitely at the top of Miss Roberta’s List of Forbidden Things for Dancers.

But Jesse is the least of Indigo’s concerns. When she discovers her mom is an alcoholic, it simultaneously explains everything and heaps more worry on Indigo’s shoulders. As her mom’s behavior becomes increasingly erratic, Indigo fights to maintain balance, protect her younger brothers from abuse, and keep her mother from going over the edge. When the violence at home escalates, Indigo realizes she can no longer dance around the issue. At the risk of losing everything, she must take matters into her own hands before it’s too late.

EXCERPT

Stress and worry wash over me in a giant wave. Part of me wants to spew about stuff at home but I don’t think my friends can understand or help.

I can’t do it alone. No one can. It’s a crystal clear realization.

I take a deep, shuddery breath. I can do this. They are my friends. I have to say something. “Guys, I—”

Sarah snorts loudly. “Holy...guys...you have to see this!” She holds her phone up triumphantly. The others bend their heads to look.

And then I know. They can’t possibly help me. What would they do, anyway? Text my mother to death? I slouch in defeat.

“Earth to Indigo.” Monique is staring at me, her eyebrows crimped together in a scowl.

“What? Sorry. Did I miss something?” I mumble.

“Jesus. What is with you lately?” Her mouth is a grim line. “And you,” she says, glaring at Sarah. “Put that thing away. Don’t you know it’s rude to text at the table?”

Sarah stares at her open-mouthed for a second before tossing the phone in her purse.

Monique continues. “Anyway. Who’s coming on Saturday?”

“Saturday?” I ask.

“Do not tell me you forgot. The show, Indigo. My show, the one I’ve been rehearsing for three months?” she sputters. “Please tell me you know what I’m talking about.”

“I—” I fumble. Brain not working.

“Dammit, Indy. This is the most important thing I’ve done like, ever. It’s a big deal. For me. But apparently not for you.”

“Look, M, I’m sorry. I’m just tired. I can’t even think straight right now. I just spaced.”

“Well guess what? I’m tired too. Tired of being treated like I’m not important.”

The air rings with the harsh tone of her words. She’s got it all wrong, of course. She matters more than she knows. But she doesn’t know that I feel like I’m drowning. And now is not the time to tell her. I don’t have the energy for a fight or a witty comeback, so I take the coward’s way out. “You’re right. I’m sorry. You know what, I’m gonna go. I need some sleep.”

I grab my stuff, giving them a wan smile before I take off. Just before I walk out the door, the coffee grinder goes off again and I jolt. Every nerve in my body is fried. Is this what it feels like to hit rock bottom?

A cloud of steam billows out through the doorway as I make my escape. Even the wisps of smoke are more substantial than I am right now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which of the characters from *WISH* do you most identify with and why?
- Why doesn’t Indigo tell her friends about her issues at home? Would you do the same in her position?
- Do you agree with the way Indigo handles Marlene? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Do any of Miss Roberta’s Rules of Ballet apply to your life? Why or why not?
- What does the ballet studio symbolize for Indigo? How or where do you find similar support in your life?
- Why is there a *List of Forbidden Things For Dancers*? Do you have a list of forbidden things? Why or why not?
- Do you think the sacrifices Indigo makes for ballet are worthwhile? Why or why not? Have you ever had to make similar types of sacrifices?
- Why does Indigo choose to confide in Becky? Do you agree with this choice? Which friend would you have chosen? Why?
- Indigo injures herself after she breaks *The Rules*. Have you ever broken “the rules”? Why? What was the outcome?
- If you wrote your own set of rules what would they be?
- Indigo has to find her own way to deal with the growing problems she faces. What advice would you have given to her when things were at their worst? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Do you think Indigo made the right choice breaking off her relationship with Jesse? Why or why not?

- What are some of the methods Indigo uses to destress? Which methods do you use?
- Where do you see the characters going at the end?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Grier Cooper is a California based writer, photographer, and dancer who has performed worldwide with the San Francisco Ballet, Miami City Ballet, and Pacific Northwest Ballet. She draws on over thirty years of experience as a dancer, teacher and performer to create both fiction and nonfiction for readers. About WISH she says, “I wrote the story to remind readers that they have the power to change their lives.”

AUTHOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• Why did you write WISH?

Dance has been one of the few constants in my life and my dance life has shaped who I am in the world today. Many people don't get to experience this world firsthand and I wanted to give readers an insider's perspective of ballet.

I also feel strongly about the difficulties of growing up in a dysfunctional family. I know the longterm implications from personal experience: my mother was an alcoholic. You learn to distrust your instincts and feelings, to play small, and to stay quiet when you know you should speak up.

Young adulthood is a time of huge transition and change even when there are healthy family dynamics. It's a time to find your voice, to clarify who you are and who you want to be in the future. It's not an easy road to navigate. I wrote WISH to give readers hope, to show them a path to self-empowerment, and to help them understand they can create change in their lives.

• Which of your characters is the most like you?

I'm a bit like many of my characters. I have aspects of Indigo's emotional sensitivity, Miss Roberta's work ethic and perfectionist tendencies, and Becky's supportive nature. I wish I had more of Monique's sass and Jesse's laid back attitude.

The cool thing about creating characters is that even though I come up with the initial vision they eventually take on a life of their own. I'm often surprised by some of the things they say or do and I'll think to myself wow, I would never have thought of saying that to someone...which is strange since the idea came out of my head. But it's what the character would do, not what I would do.

• What role does dance play in your life today?

I've been a dancer since I was five and I don't see that changing, although my relationship with dance has evolved over time. When I was young, dance was something I did for fun. Later it became my profession and now I look at it as a sanctuary, a home, a place to move beyond my small self and connect to something bigger.

The things I've learned as a dancer – discipline, dedication and persistence– still serve me now.

Without this foundation I couldn't do what I do. Writing is self-paced and self-driven. No one is telling me what to do or looking over my shoulder to make sure it gets done. It's all on me.

Sometimes I'll take a break and put on some music and dance to counteract all the sitting and staring at a computer. Dance keeps me happy.

• **How long did it take you to write this book?**

The first draft took a little over a year to write. I was working on a number of other projects simultaneously so I wrote it a bit at a time. The editing process lasted more than a year and a half; I worked with my group of critique partners and fine-tuned a number of different parts of the book several times.

• **Who is the dancer on the cover of WISH?**

I was lucky enough to find Colette, the cover model, through a friend of mine who teaches ballet in the Bay Area. I took the photographs in a ballet studio, using a solid-colored backdrop and my cover designer took my original photo, modified it and layered in the other elements. You'll see more of Colette on future covers in the series.

ACCLAIM

“An extremely touching, heartfelt, and often humorous account of a young woman’s journey to live her passion. WISH reminds us, that despite our obstacles, we can live the life we dream. You won’t be able to put it down.”

**– Zippora Karz, Former Soloist, New York City Ballet
Author of The Sugarless Plum/ Ballerina Dreams**

“Grier Cooper expertly weaves her insider knowledge into this compelling read. Even if you’ve never danced en pointe, you may find yourself reaching for ballet slippers after reading Wish.”

– Charity Tahmaseb, co-author of The Geek Girl’s Guide to Cheerleading

“Grier Cooper’s WISH contrasts the elegant and disciplined beauty of ballet versus a gritty and often violent home life. She handles the topic of alcoholism with poignancy and honesty and choreographs in light-hearted moments of friendship, sibling rivalry and a budding romance to round out this touching story of art and love.”

– Paula Yoo (Good Enough, HarperCollins)

“Grier Cooper writes with emotional hooks that penetrate deeply. Her wonderfully-flawed characters are unforgettable. This book and its lovely dancing protagonist sparkle as if onstage!”

–Corina Vacco, author of My Chemical Mountain

“I absolutely loved WISH; it brought back such memories of high school, boys and ballet. What a gift this is to young dance students.”

–Lauren Jonas, Artistic Director, Diablo Ballet

“Grier Cooper is completely able to express these years of sweat and tears with the accuracy of someone who has lived through it herself. It’s a great read; I highly recommended WISH!”

**–Jenna Lavin-Crabtree, Former dancer with Atlanta Ballet, Miami City Ballet
Full time Faculty/Choreographer, Ballet Academy East, NYC**