

SIMONIE AND THE DANCE CONTEST



EDUCATOR'S
RESOURCE



BY GAIL MATTHEWS

ILLUSTRATED BY ALI HINCH

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Simonie loves to dance! When he sees a sign for Taloyoak's annual Christmas Jigging Dance Contest, he can't wait to enter. But practising is hard work, and Simonie starts to worry that he won't do a good job in front of all his friends and neighbours. Luckily, with a little advice from his *anaana* and *ataata*, and some help from his friends Dana and David, Simonie learns how to listen to the music and dance the way it makes him feel. When the time comes for the contest, he's ready to dance his very best. Based on the annual Christmas dance contest in the community of Taloyoak, Nunavut, this heartwarming picture book shows how a lot of hard work—and a little inspiration—go a long way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gail Matthews lives in Taloyoak, Nunavut, where she teaches English language arts at Netsilik School. She has travelled across Canada's Arctic region and has also worked in Ivujivik, Nunavik. Gail is a teacher educator, researcher, writer, and dancer. She has published research papers on literacy, teacher education, and curriculum. Gail earned her PhD at the University of Toronto and was an assistant professor of literacy at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John. She is a graduate of the Teacher Training Program at Canada's National Ballet School, and continues to teach children ballet and Israeli folk dance.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Ali Hinch has been working as a full-time illustrator and designer in educational kids' literature since getting her degree in illustration from Sheridan College. She's also dabbled in puppet concepts, set design, storyboarding, and writing for animation. Currently living in Toronto, she spends a lot of time drinking iced tea and making new dog friends.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

This educator's resource is written for Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms. The suggested discussion questions and activities can be adapted for each class according to the experiences of students.

Teachers can use this book to teach about topics such as:

- Confidence
- Cultural traditions
- Traditional and seasonal events
- Dancing, music, and other arts
- Family and friendship



PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Before reading the book out loud, hold it up and show the cover to the class. Ask students what they think the book is going to be about. Do they think it will be happy or sad?
- Ask if anyone has ever been in a dance contest. If so, did they like it? If not, have they been in another kind of contest?
- Tell the class that if they hear an unfamiliar word, they should raise their hand so that you can explain the meaning.

DURING AND POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions and discussion points can be used during and after reading *Simonie and the Dance Contest*. Provide students with the chance to voice their own opinions, share their experiences, ask questions, or point out anything else they may notice about the book.

- Page 5: Simonie loves reading and dancing. Are either (or both) of these things activities that you enjoy? What are your two favourite pastimes? If you don't think reading is fun, do you at least think it's useful? If you don't like to dance, why not? Can you imagine some reasons why Simonie does?
- Page 10: Who would be your partner if you were to enter a dancing contest?
- Page 13: This page uses great imagery to describe David's dancing by saying he was "like cottongrass blown by a gust of wind." What other descriptive words can you think of to describe how somebody looks when they are dancing?
- Page 14: How does music make you feel? When do you like to listen to music?
- Page 16: How do you think Simonie is feeling at this point in the story?
- Page 23: What do you think will happen next? How will the story end?
- This story has some elements that can be found in all stories: plot, character, setting, and theme. Discuss these elements: What is the plot (what happens in the story)? Who are the main characters? What is the setting (where the story takes place)? Can you identify a theme or themes (what the story is about)?



- The author based this story on the annual Christmas dance contest in the community of Taloyoak, Nunavut. Have you ever heard of this contest? Do you know where Taloyoak is?
- What is your favourite music? Is it good to dance to? Do your friends like your music? Do they like to dance? How about your parents? Is anyone in your family a good dancer?
- Simonie's family and friends are happy to help him practise for the contest. Have your family and friends ever helped you get ready for something? What was it? How was their support helpful to you? Did you feel like they wanted you to succeed?
- When Simonie asks David how he dances so well, David says, "I just dance the way the music feels." Do you understand what he means by this? Do you understand how music can make you feel things, even if you don't dance to it?
- Simonie's mom tells him, "Remember to enjoy the dance. Whatever's in your heart, express it!" Talk about some ways you can express what's in your heart. How does it make you feel when you do?
- Do you think that practising something can make you better at it? Share an example of something you've spent time practising. How long did it take before you noticed an improvement?
- There are many types of contests in the world. Can you name some? What results are expected and what are some of the words used about them? (Examples: fastest, biggest, longest, best, farthest.) Do you enjoy competing in contests or do they make you feel uncomfortable? Can you name some contests held in your community? Can you name some other community gatherings that are not contests?
- In the end, Simonie is brave enough to dance in the contest. What hard thing have you done that you were proud of accomplishing?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The following activities could be used to help strengthen students' understanding of the story. Adapt these suggestions to the ability level of your own students as necessary.

LANGUAGE ARTS

WRITING PROMPT

Even after all his practising, when Simonie first arrived at the community centre for the contest, he felt very nervous. Do you think Simonie feels nervous because he's afraid he won't do well? Or is it because lots of people will be watching him? How does his friend David help him not be nervous? Write about a time that you felt nervous. What made you feel that way? What did you do to feel better? What would you say to help someone who is feeling nervous?

PRACTISE YOUR LETTER-WRITING SKILLS

- Pretend you are Simonie or Dana and write a letter to your grandparents telling them all about what happened at the dance contest.
- Pretend that you are a friend of Simonie's in another town and write to him asking for advice about how to get ready for a contest you want to enter.
- Pretend you are Simonie and write a letter thanking the community for voting you a winner!
- Pretend you are writing an article for Simonie's school newspaper and do an interview with Simonie and Dana about their first place win at the dance contest.

ART

Create a poster advertising a dance contest at your school or in your community.

MUSIC

Simonie was told he needed to feel the music while he danced. Put on some music. While you listen, paint, draw, or doodle anything that comes to mind. Create whatever you feel while you listen to the music.

- How does your art change when the music is fast/slow?
- How does your art change when the music is loud/soft?
- How does your art change when the music has lyrics/no lyrics?

HEALTH / EMOTIONS

- Simonie felt many feelings and emotions throughout the story, such as happiness, excitement, nervousness, and pride.
 - o As a class, come up with a list of both positive and negative emotions. List as many as you can think of.
 - o Practise acting out these emotions.
 - o Take pictures of all classmates acting out different emotions. Print these pictures to have as a reference in your classroom to start discussions about emotions.

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Choose a person who is famous for having won a contest. Research and write a report about their preparation and accomplishment.
- Choose a famous dance or dance move. Research and write a report about it. Bonus points for demonstrating it to the class!

SPEAKING

Write a speech about something that makes you feel proud.

(Alter the requirements based on grade level: Three sentences for Kindergarten; four to five sentences for Grade 1; one organized paragraph for Grade 2; two organized paragraphs for Grade 3.)

- Practise reading your speech out loud to yourself. Use intonation and expression in your voice.
- Read or recite your speech to your peers.
- Ask questions about others' speeches.

