

Ricardo's Dilemma

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book

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Chapter 1

“Now listen up, class. Don’t forget to bring a sack lunch tomorrow for our field trip! We’ll have such a wonderful time!” Mrs. Periwinkle called out.

Luckily, the end of the school day had finally arrived. The bell rang, and Ricardo was almost safely out the door when Mrs. Periwinkle stopped him in his tracks. “Aren’t you looking forward to our field trip for tomorrow? I am very excited for you to see the ballet and tour the Opera House. I know you’ll just love it.”

“Oh yeah, of course I’m excited. Thanks, Mrs. Periwinkle. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Ricardo forced a smile for his teacher as he walked quickly past her and into the hallway. The truth was, he was much more excited about the playoff soccer match against the Tigers, and the match was going to start in less than two hours. Ricardo was the leading scorer on his team, and the playoff game was all that his mind had been occupied with for several days. He reached the front door and headed outside. His fast-paced walk turned into an enthusiastic sprint as he pulled his cap tightly down over his head. “Look out, Tigers, here we come!” he shouted.





Chapter 2

The following morning, Ricardo sat smiling as he remembered the winning goal he had scored at the playoff match. "I knew we would win!" he told his mother as she joined him at the breakfast table. "We're going to be the champions this year. I can feel it in my bones!"



"That's great, dear. Now, are you ready? We have to get going. I agreed to go on the field trip with you and your class since I have the day off work. I think it's wonderful that your teacher is taking you to see the ballet. *Cinderella* is such a fun story, and besides, not everyone has the opportunity to see all that's happening backstage before the show begins. This is going to be a fabulous day. I can feel it in my bones," she said with a wink of her eye.

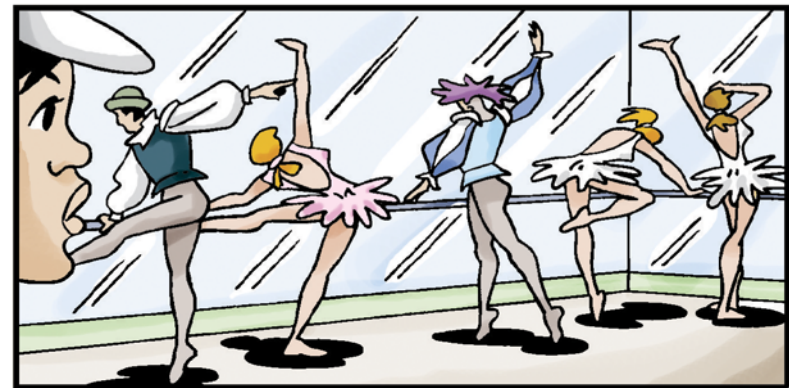
Ricardo rolled his eyes, then grabbed his backpack and said, "Okay, let's get this over with." Little did he know that this excursion would change his life forever!

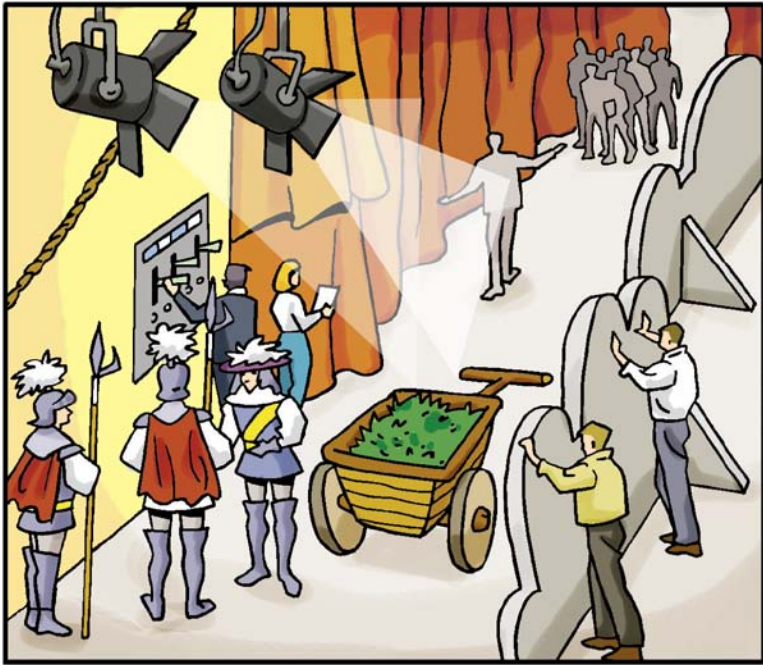


Chapter 3

As the class entered the Opera House, Mrs. Periwinkle gave their tickets to the man at the counter. He made a call on his tiny black walkie-talkie, and soon a tall, skinny man appeared. Max was his name, and he had rosy cheeks and an enormous smile that made it almost impossible for anyone not to like him. With an exuberant wave, he led the class to an expansive space where a variety of strangely dressed people were milling around.

The tour guide told the students that these were the stars of the ballet, which, Ricardo supposed, would explain why everyone was meandering around in tights and slippers. Some were stretching their long legs toward the ceiling while standing on one foot, and some were turning in circles again and again, arms stretched above their heads. Still others were sitting on the floor, their upper bodies bent incredibly far to one side while they rolled their ankles in circles. They seemed to be focused so intently on what they were doing that they didn't notice anyone around them. Ricardo watched, amazed by their concentration. He couldn't have imagined that ballet dancers were so serious about their work. "Just like a player warming up before a big game," he thought to himself.



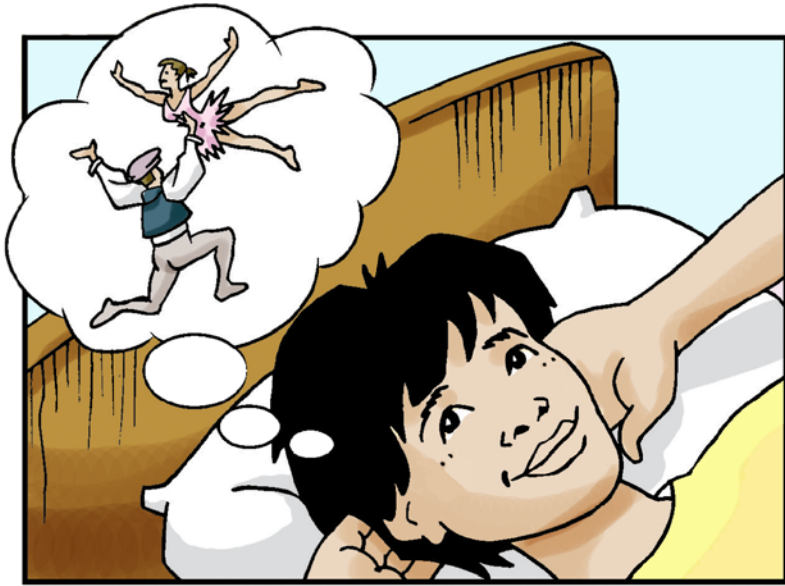


Max led the class to the backstage area where all the scenery pieces had been arranged and were now ready for the show. There were brightly colored costumes, and he could hear the orchestra warming up in the background. Everything looked so huge that it made Ricardo feel very small. The stage floor would soon be filled with the twirling, stretching bodies they had just seen in the studio. Ricardo felt the excitement grow even more as the luminous and colorful lights flashed on from the sides of the stage.

“Wow! This is really cool,” he exclaimed to his mother. She smiled and said that she thought so, too. Quickly, he looked down and stopped smiling. He reminded himself that he was a boy who liked sports, not the ballet, and he looked around, wondering if any of the guys had noticed his enjoyment of the field trip.

“Still safe,” he thought, assured that most everyone had been listening to Max. He heard Mrs. Periwinkle say that the show was about to begin. Max led them from the backstage area and down the stairs to where they would watch the show. As everyone sat in their places, the lights dimmed and the orchestra began to play. Ricardo couldn't wait for the curtain to open.



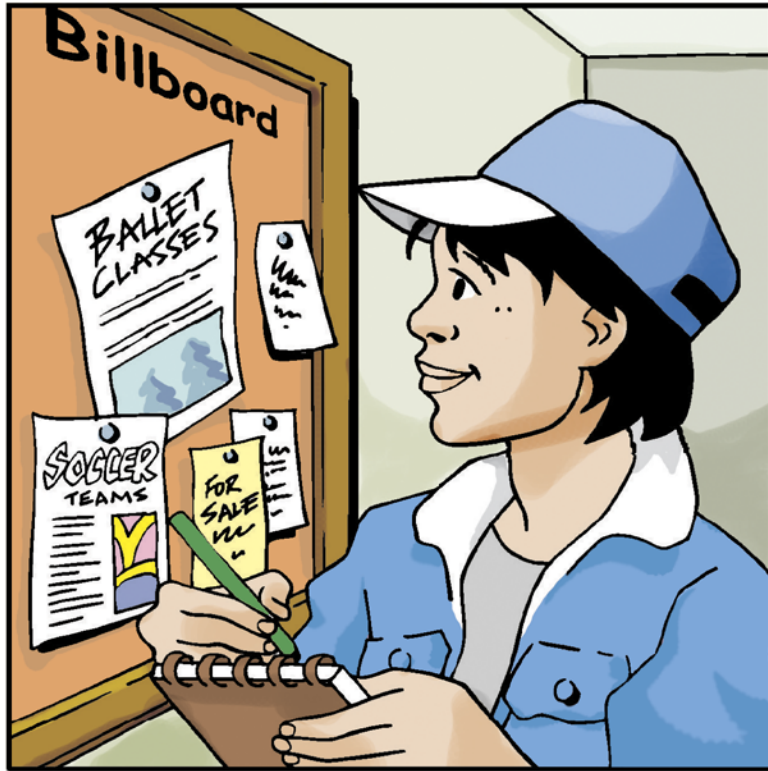


Chapter 4

That night, Ricardo found it challenging to fall asleep as he lay in bed remembering the day. Mrs. Periwinkle was right—it *was* a cool field trip! He couldn't keep his eyes off the dancers. They were so strong, so athletic, so powerful and graceful. Was it possible to be all of those things at once? He remembered being so proud of his heritage when he saw the names of two Latino dancers. One was even named Ricardo. They seemed to enjoy themselves so much when they were on stage. At that moment, Ricardo decided that he wanted to learn more about ballet.

The next morning he shared his thoughts with his mother. "I think we should visit a dance studio and find out how much it would cost to take a few classes. That way, you could find out if you really like it or not," she said.





Ricardo really wanted to learn how to do all of the amazing things he saw the dancers perform. But what would his friends think? There weren't many boys who took ballet, and he was afraid his friends would poke fun at him. But Ricardo was self-confident. He was comfortable with himself, so he decided he would try a few classes. But he definitely did not want to share his plans with his pals. At least not yet.

Over the next few months, Ricardo took several lessons. His interest in dance began to grow, and his instructor told him that he was a natural. Playing sports had made him strong. His strength helped him perform new and difficult steps. He found that ballet was intense and challenging, but when he got something right, it made him feel like he was on top of the world. Little did he know that someday his dance skills would help him in ways he could not have imagined!





Chapter 5

One summer afternoon, Ricardo was wandering through the city zoo with his best friend, Zach. They had just finished a great soccer match—winning five to zip!

“Boy, it just seems like it’s impossible for us to lose lately! Our team this year is the best team I’ve ever been on. I don’t want the season to ever end,” Zach said. “Do you think our championship trophy will be silver or gold this year?”



“Definitely gold. And I hope it is six feet tall!” replied Ricardo. The boys laughed. They only had two more games to win to finish up the season as champions, and both were confident that they could pull it off.

Ricardo had been busy during the playoffs, but he managed to make it to ballet class three nights a week. It had become very important to him, and the better he got at it, the more he knew that he wanted to dance forever.

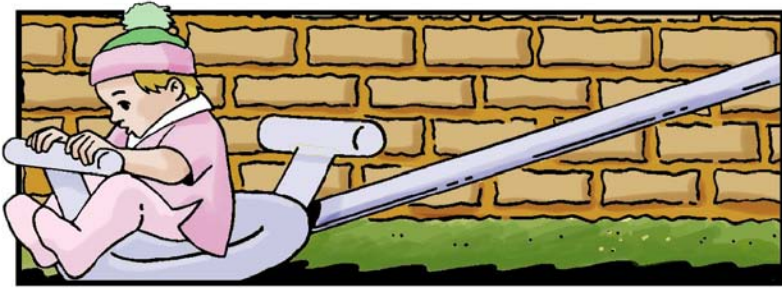
But Ricardo realized he couldn't keep his dancing a secret from his friends for much longer. He just hoped that they would somehow understand.

Today, at the zoo, he had planned to break the news to Zach. He practiced what he was going to say a million times in his mind. He thought and thought. Finally, he came up with a list of reasons why someone would want to learn ballet. He practiced saying the reasons over in his mind. (1) There are men all around the world who dance ballet. (2) Some dancers are very famous and make a lot of money performing. (3) Ballet is great exercise. (4) There are lots of cute girls in dance class who want to be his friend.



Ricardo smiled as he remembered all the girls telling him that he was so cool for learning ballet. Surely the guys would understand at least that part of it. At least he hoped they would. He took a deep breath and got ready to spill his guts to his best friend. Just then the strangest thing happened, and it happened so quickly that Ricardo didn't have time to think—he just went into action.





Chapter 6

Ricardo and Zach had just arrived at their favorite part of the zoo—the crocodile pond. They loved watching the enormous reptiles.

Ricardo had visited the zoo a lot, but he had never seen anything as crazy as what happened next. The boys were walking toward the croc pond when Ricardo noticed a baby girl crawling up onto the teeter-totter. Then from out of nowhere came this whirling, twirling, crazy kid. The kid suddenly jumped onto the raised end of the teeter-totter, not even noticing the baby! He was yelling over his shoulder to his friend, “Hey, dude! Get on!” As he jumped on one end, it slammed down and sent the other end flying upward. The infant was sent flying through the air, straight toward the crocodiles.

“Yikes!” yelled Ricardo as he sprang into action. Without even thinking, he put all of his ballet training to the test. He ran toward the pond as fast as his legs could carry him and leaped into the air in a marvelous grand split. Flying high through the air, he snatched up the baby. His fantastic leap and split was so fast and so high that it carried him over the pond. He looked down to see the hungry crocs with their large jaws wide open. He landed gracefully on the other side, holding the baby safely in his arms.





People all around clapped and cheered, “Hooray for the hero!” Ricardo couldn’t believe it. A bulky man with bushy hair ran toward him as he held the baby tightly. “Thank you, thank you, my lad, for saving my baby’s life,” he cried. “How can I ever repay you? I insist on throwing a party in your honor. Tell all your family and friends to be sure to come. The whole city will be invited! No expense will be spared. I want to properly thank you, my hero!” Just as Ricardo thought things couldn’t possibly get any more exciting, he heard someone calling the man with bushy hair “Mr. Mayor.”



Had he actually saved the mayor’s daughter from the hungry crocodiles? Well, that’s what the newspapers said the next day. And that’s what the newspeople from the television station said when they interviewed Ricardo. “How did you ever learn to leap so high and so gracefully?” they asked.

Ricardo looked straight into the camera and, speaking into the microphone, replied proudly, “Ballet! I love to dance.” From that moment on, the secret was out. But he wasn’t embarrassed. Instead, he was quite happy that he no longer had to keep his love of ballet a secret. And no one ever made fun of his love of dance.