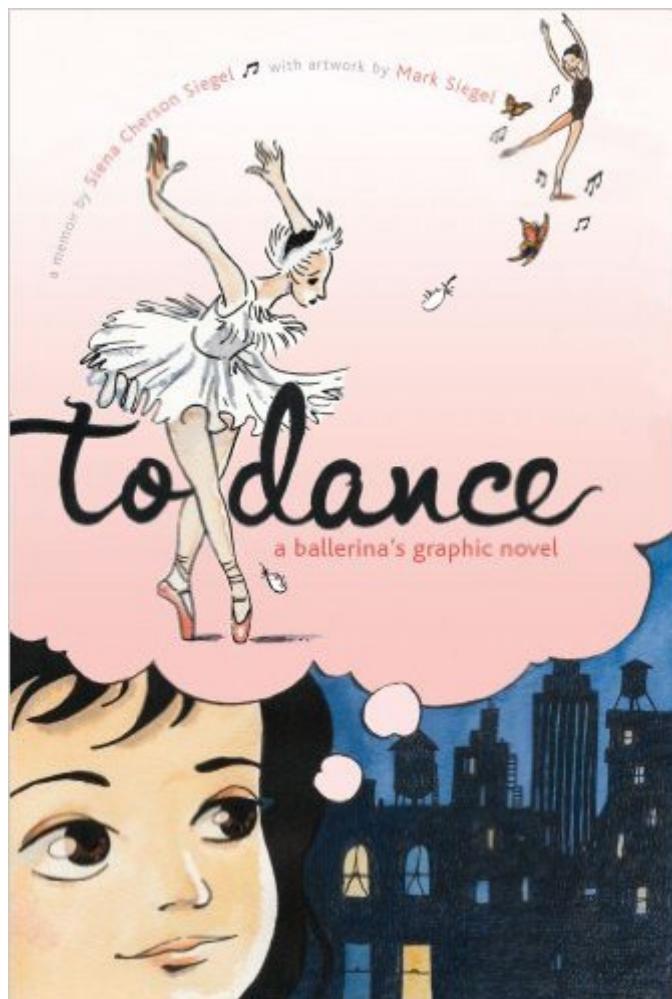


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# To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel



## **Synopsis**

Dancers are young when they first dream of dance. Siena was six -- and her dreams kept skipping and leaping, circling and spinning, from airy runs along a beach near her home in Puerto Rico, to dance class in Boston, to her debut performance on stage with the New York City Ballet. Twirl along with Siena as she shares her story in words with pictures by acclaimed illustrator Mark Siegel.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 610L (What's this?)

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers (October 1, 2006)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (24 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #95,946 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Performing Arts > Dance #770 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Girls & Women #828 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Comics & Graphic Novels

Age Range: 8 - 14 years

Grade Level: 3 - 9

## **Customer Reviews**

How should your average adult shopper determine the difference between a graphic novel that is good and a graphic novel that is bad? It's simple. If a graphic novel is bad then it will be poorly illustrated, shamefully written, and just dull all over. If a graphic novel is good it can convert the unconvertible. I work with a woman who is a self-proclaimed woman "too old" for graphic novels. She never dug them. Never much cared for them. And then "To Dance" fell into her lap and BANG! Instant fan. This should come as no very great surprise. We're dealing with the Siegel duo. Mark Siegel the illustrator may at this point in time be best known for "Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operattea" which he penned with aplomb. He's the editorial director of First Second (the company that gave the world that go-buy-it-right-now book "American Born Chinese" by Gene Luen Yang) and a talented artist in his own right. And Ms. Siena Cherson Siegel attended the School of America

Ballet where she studied "preprofessionally" (as the book's author blurb says) for twelve years. So what couple is better suited to depict the rigor and wonder of how a child becomes a ballerina, I ask you? This is a biography like you've never seen it before. Siena begins her story this way: "Big, empty spaces always made me dance". She yearned to move. First growing up in San Juan, Puerto Rico and then later when her family moved to Boston. For Siena, dance was in her heart and mind. She flew to New York in 1977 to get a taste of dance rigor at the American Ballet Theater and discovered that she wanted to be a ballerina more than anything. A year later she auditioned for the School of American Ballet (founded by George Balanchine) and got in. As her home life grew unpleasant, Siena's time with the ballet became even more precious to her. The book tracks what it's really like to be both a kid and a professional ballerina. And though she quit at the age of 18 and followed other pursuits, she still dances today. "Dancing fills a space in me". I must say that if the Siegels had put their heads together and said, "Let's find a way to stymie library catalogers everywhere" they couldn't have done better than to create a graphic novel biography. Where the heck do you put it in the collection? It'll never attract its key audience in the biography section, but won't it also get lost in the fantasy/manga shuffle if you stick it in with the other graphic novels? What's a librarian to do? If I ruled the world I'd create a whole new section of gn bios and then insist that everyone from Toni Morrison to Ray Bradbury create one (art by others, of course). Ms. Siegel's memoir, however, is particularly well-written. I loved the little details of Siena's life that she was able to work into the story. It's a mere slip of a book, but there's an abundance of great details here. I was particularly fond of young Siena's fears that if her relatives had huge boobs then maybe she herself would get huge boobs. The next panel is of little Sienna lying in bed as an image of a big boobed self dances through her head. Less blatant was the book that started it all. In the story Siena receives the book "A Very Young Dancer" and is enchanted by it. As a kid, I too had a copy of that book, and I can attest to how entrancing it was. For a kid growing up in the Midwest, the idea of a kid like myself getting to live in New York to dance professionally was a wild magnificent dream. Now kids today can relive that dream, only now with Siegel's book as their guide. And then there's Mark's art. I thought it was pretty nice and all for the first few pages, but then I came to an image he drew of two hands crossed against a pure black background that blew me away. I am a great admirer of hands and Mark knows how to draw them. Heck, he knows how to draw ballerinas period! Their poses, positions, and gestures are captured here so well that Mr. Siegel must have studied ballerinas and their moves for hours on end. Then there's the layout of the book itself. Instead of strict panels of corresponding shape and size, Siegel expands and contracts his spaces according to the story's plot. When Siena and her friends put on silk kimonos and explore the New

York State Theater on their own, they stand in the vast auditorium like three small colorful specks, dwarfed by magnificence. I also liked how Siegel chose to give his book chapters of a sort. The book is broken up under headings with names like "Refuge" and "Dying Swan". As for the color scheme, Siegel uses watercolors here in variegated colors and shades. Quick eyes will also note that the first image of this book (that of Siena leaping across yellow sand as a child) is mirrored by the last image of this book (that of Siena leaping across yellow sand grown and WITH a child). Mark even makes his own headless cameo in the upper left hand corner of this last picture. 2006 seems to be the year for male artists to pen children's book odes to their wives. Matteo Pericoli did it with "The True Story of Stellina" (also in watercolors). Now Siegel does the same with "To Dance". Of course Siena Siegel wrote the book herself, so it's not as if she didn't have any input or anything. There are so few graphic novels to compare this title to that I have a hard time conveying how nice it is to you. I'll just say this: Kids (girl kids, some might say) like ballerinas. The book shows ballerinas in spades, has a great eclectic format, some great writing, and beautiful art. If you think you can do better for your kids, go ahead. Be my guest. Just remember "To Dance" when you find yourself seriously stumped gift-wise. It's a gem.

Bluebonnet award winner, Mark Siegel has teamed with his wife Siena Cherson Siegel and created an exquisite and tender graphic novel that honors dancers everywhere. Siena began her dance journey in San Juan, Puerto Rico when she was diagnosed with flat feet. She started dance classes and fell in love with the art form. The story follows her family as they move to Boston where she sees the Bolshoi Ballet perform for the first time. She dreams of ballets. At the age of 11 she auditions and wins a spot in the School of American Ballet and begins to work in earnest. She sees George Balanchine and Baryshnikov, Suzanne Farrell, and Gelsey Kirkland in the halls. Being fitted for her first toe shoes, winning a spot in her first performance and partnering class are all milestones in her life at SAB. Family life is difficult as her parents' marriage fails. As a teenager there are boyfriends and schoolwork and worry about the shape of her body. Plots of ballets are seamlessly woven into the story as we see the excitement and glamor of performance balanced with the hard work of practice and the heartbreak of not being chosen to perform. Her memoir also allows the reader an inside look at the grief and sorrow that overwhelmed the company when Balanchine died. Mark Siegel draws the story with detail and love. To depict a story like this in graphic novel form allows the reader to move through the years with Siena. The reader notes the change of color of her leotard as the years pass, each color representing a higher level at SAB. Her painful injuries and aching toes from hours of dancing are communicated without words. One scene where young

Siena is reading the book *A Very Young Dancer* by flashlight is typical of the care and detail the Siegels have included. I think every school library has that book as it is a favorite with young dancers. Like the girl on the cover, Siena will wear the green leotard. Siegel opens the story with little Siena dancing on a beach. He ends it on a beach too and it brought tears to my eyes. This is sophisticated storytelling at its very best. Words to describe this book: Brilliant, fascinating, informative, original, beautiful, a must have for all ballet students, dancers, and fans of ballet

**TO DANCE: A BALLERINA'S GRAPHIC NOVEL** provides a blend of history, drama, and autobiography in telling of young Siena's dream to dance, which began when she was six. Ages 8-14 are the intended readers - but younger ages will find this equally accessible in its full color graphic novel format as it tells of a young dancer's evolution.

Found this gem for my girlfriend, who is a former dancer. She loved it. The nostalgia evoked in this book is perfect, both whimsical and realistic. A young girl pushing herself so hard to perform. HIGHLY recommended for dancers and those who love them.

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