



## Lesson

# Any-Body Can Be a Ballerina: How Misty Copeland Helped to Change the Face of Ballet

Alison Hassenplug

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**Subject Area**

Elementary History &amp; Social Studies

**Grade Level**

Pre-K-1

**Time**Two, 45-Minute Sessions  
*Opportunities for Extension*

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## Description

This 2-day lesson will teach younger students about a trailblazer in ballet, Misty Copeland, who overcame lots of obstacles to succeed as a Principal Ballerina for the American Ballet Theater. Using primary sources and read alouds, students will engage in a growth mindset activity and relate Misty's story to their own lives, learn about equality, fairness, and representation in ballet, and learn about time lines. Plenty of extension opportunities allow this lesson to be as long or as short as you'd like!

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## Lesson Objective

- Students will be able to verbalize Misty's name, occupation, and main contributions.
- Students will be able to engage in 'growth mindset' discussions, including something they are not yet able to do and how they may reach that goal.
- Students will be able to put the main events of Misty's life in chronological order using Timeline Cards.
- Students will identify a skill they have not yet mastered and complete a writing prompt.
- Students will use quotes from Misty Copeland to create an inspirational poster.

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## Big Idea

- Who is Misty Copeland and how was she a trailblazer in ballet?
- What can we learn from Misty's story?
- How can we apply Misty's growth mindset to our own lives?
- What are some of the main events in Misty's life?

# Any-Body Can Be a Ballerina

Teaching with Primary Sources Lesson Plan

Elementary History & Social Studies

Grades Pre-K-1 Two 45-Minute Sessions

## C3 Framework Standards Addressed

- D1.1.K—2.** Explain why the compelling question is important to the student.
- D2.Civ.2.K—2.** Explain how all people, not just official leaders, play important roles in a community.
- D2.Div.10.K—2.** Compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.
- D2.Civ.14.K—2.** Describe how people have tried to improve their communities over time.
- D2.His.1.K—2.** Create a chronological sequence of multiple events.
- D2.His.2.K—2.** Compare life in the past to life today.
- D2.His.3.K—2.** Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped a significant historical change.
- D2.His.4.K—2.** Compare perspectives of people in the past to those of people in the present.
- D3.2.K—2.** Evaluate a source by distinguishing fact and opinion.
- D4.7.K—2.** Identify ways to take action to help address local, regional, and global problems.

## Materials & Resources

### PRIMARY SOURCES

1. **Misty Copeland — Heritage and Harmony: Her Art, Her Voice.** NWHM Learning Media Video (~5mins).
2. **American Ballet Theater: History of Ballet.** Digital Exhibition Page.
3. **Misty Copeland On Changing the Face of Ballet.** Time Magazine Feature Video (~2.5mins).
4. **Misty Copeland's Website.** Official Website.
5. **Bunheads** by Misty Copeland. Picture Book.
6. **Misty Copeland Memoir Explores Importance of Mentorship.** Excerpt from a PBS Interview with Misty Copeland (~2mins).
7. **Misty Copeland.** Britannica Kids Info Page.
8. **Smithsonian Collection**'s pictures of ballet items used by Misty Copeland.
9. **Magical Misty Copeland.** PBS Video Interview about Black Dancers (~5mins).

### OTHER SOURCES

1. **Misty Copeland: A Little Golden Book Biography.** by Sherri Smith.
2. **Misty Copeland.** YouTube Kids Video (~5.5mins)

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## MATERIALS & RESOURCES CONT.

### MATERIALS

1. **Timeline Cards:** Information from [Britannica Kids Info Page](#) and NWHM's [Misty Copeland-Heritage and Harmony: Her Art, Her Voice](#).
2. **Inspire Yourself Everyday:** Inspirational Poster Template.
3. **Coloring Supplies** (crayons, colored pencils).

## Essential Vocabulary

### Timeline

A visual representation of the major events in a person's life.

### Ballet

A form of dance which usually tells a story.

### Ballerina

Someone who dances ballet.

### Principal

*As in 'Principal Ballerina'*

Someone who dances ballet.

### Inspire / Inspirational

To motivate or something motivational.

### Goal

Something you'd like to accomplish.

### Think, Pair, Share

To take a few seconds to 'think' of an answer, then 'pair' with a partner, and a short time to 'share' with them.

### Primary Source

A first-hand account or direct evidence; usually from the subject themselves (as in a book written by Misty Copeland).

### Secondary Source

An account that is not a first-hand account (such as a book written about Misty Copeland)

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## PROCEDURES

*This lesson should take place over two days (or two time periods). Day 1 is an introduction to who Misty is and engages students in her story. Day 2 is using that information for comprehension and recall, as well as applying Misty's story to our own.*

### DAY 1

## Who is Misty Copeland?

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### Warm Up

**Show pictures** of ballet items used by Misty Copeland from the [Smithsonian Collection](#). Ask students to put their thumbs up if they think they know what career these items could be from.

**Introduce ballet** as a career, noting that ballet is something that anyone can do—now.

Let's learn about a famous ballerina, Misty Copeland, who wrote the book *Bunheads* about being a dancer.

**Show the cover of the book and ask:**

1. What do you notice?
2. What do you think a 'bunhead' might be?
3. Can you make any connections to what this book might be about?

**Begin reading the story**, stopping to ask comprehension/inference questions such as:

1. What is special about Misty?
2. How do you think she feels when she dances?
3. How would you feel?
4. Do you think dancing is easy or hard? How can you tell?
5. What does Misty do when something is hard?

After reading, **use the following questions to guide a conversation:**

1. Do all ballerinas look the same?
2. What can we learn from Misty in this story?
3. Have you ever tried anything that was tricky at first?

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## Direct Instruction

1. Watch YouTube Kids Video: **Misty Copeland**
2. Using picture examples from the Library of Congress: **American Ballet Theater — History of Ballet** Primary Source and the PBS Video about **Black dancers** (an interview with Misty Copeland), briefly discuss the lack of Black dancers in the field of ballet or in the audience at performances. The ABT Primary Source shows mostly white dancers (mostly male at first) and discusses ballet's Russian origin, while the PBS Interview with Misty Copeland acknowledges the need for Black female representation in the field.
3. Point out some of the barriers Misty came across (being Black, not having the same body type, not coming from high socio-economic status, starting ballet 'late' at age 13). NWHM's video **Misty Copeland- Heritage and Harmony: Her Art, Her Voice** (~5mins) and **Time Magazine's Feature on Misty** (~2m30s) are great examples of Misty explaining these barriers herself.

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DAY 2

## How does Misty's story apply to my own?

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### Independent Practice

*Student Created Work*

1. Show a picture of Misty from Day 1's lesson to refresh students' minds. Ask "Who is this?" and "What is so important about her?"
2. Remind students that you spent Day 1 learning about Misty Copeland and learning some key facts about her life (major events, main ideas, central ideas, or whichever term your institution uses to describe this concept).

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### Summarizer

1. Introduce the concept of a 'timeline' by defining the term and showing an example by drawing a long line on chart paper, a white board, or digital display (such as a Promethean Board or SMARTBoard). Add 4-5 significant events in your own life along the line. For example, the day you were born, when you graduated High School, graduated college, got married, became a teacher, etc.
2. Emphasize the fact that a timeline only shows major events, not everything.
3. Complete a short timeline of major events in Misty's life as a class using the **Timeline Cards**.

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## ASSESSMENT / HOMEWORK

### Formative Assessment

1. Completion of the [Inspire Yourself Everyday](#) poster / worksheet.
2. Participation in 'Think, Pair, Share' activity.

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### Summative Assessment

1. Ability to recall information about Misty on Day 2.
2. Participation in the [Timeline Activity](#).

## FURTHER RESEARCH / RESOURCES

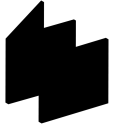
### Modification & Accommodation

1. Oral prompts could be turned into writing prompts.
2. Videos could be shortened or clips could be shown if short on time.

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### Extension & Enrichment Activities

1. Read other books by or about Misty Copeland such as:
  - [Misty Copeland: A Little Golden Book Biography](#) by Sherri Smith
  - [You Should Meet Misty Copeland](#) by Laurie Calkhoven
2. Explore [Misty Copeland's Website](#).
3. Look into other famous ballerinas and compare/contrast their stories (white vs. Black dancers or other POC).
4. Safely try out some ballet positions or dance moves.



# **Any-Body Can Be a Ballerina**

**How Misty Copeland Helped  
to Change the Face of Ballet**

**Supplemental Materials**



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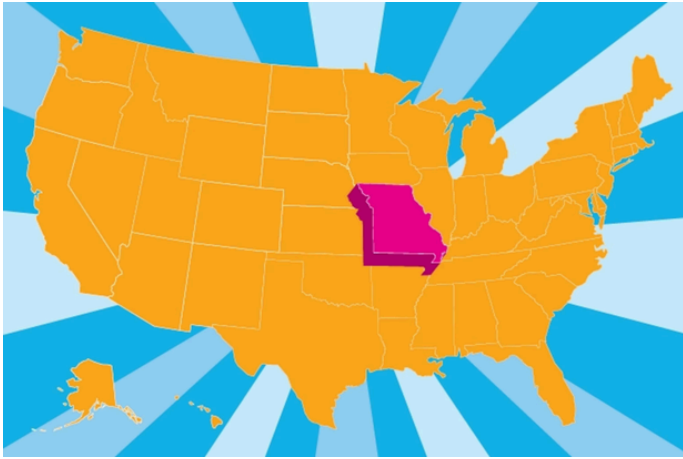
## Misty Copeland Timeline Cards

The next 6 pages contain the Misty Copeland Timeline cards to be used on Day 2 of NWHM's Lesson Plan: *Any-Body Can Be a Ballerina: How Misty Copeland helped to change the face of Ballet*.

Please print the cards (starting with the next page) two-sided—back-to-back—flipping on the short edge to ensure images are cited correctly.

**Thank you and enjoy!**

1



Misty was born on September 10, 1982 in Kansas City, MO.

2



When she was young, Misty's family moved to California, where her coach noticed how talented she was.

3



Misty started taking ballet lessons when she was 13 years old, which was considered 'a late start!'

4



In 1998, Misty won her first award in ballet and joined a summer dance program.

## Image 2

sourced from



## Image 1

sourced from



## Image 4

sourced from



## Image 3

sourced from



5

ABT AMERICAN  
BALLET  
THEATRE

When Misty officially joined the American Ballet Theater in 2001, she was the only Black dancer in a company of 80 dancers.

6



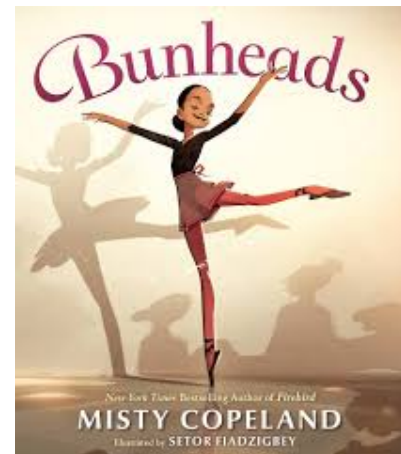
The ABT hadn't had a Black female soloist in over 20 years when Misty was given that opportunity.

7



In 2015, Misty became the first Black Principal Ballerina in history of the ABT.

8



Misty has written many books over her career to encourage all people, no matter what they look like, to go for their dreams.

## Image 6

sourced from



## Image 5

sourced from



## Image 8

sourced from



## Image 7

sourced from





In October **2025**, Misty danced her last performance in New York City then retired from ballet.

# Image 9

sourced from





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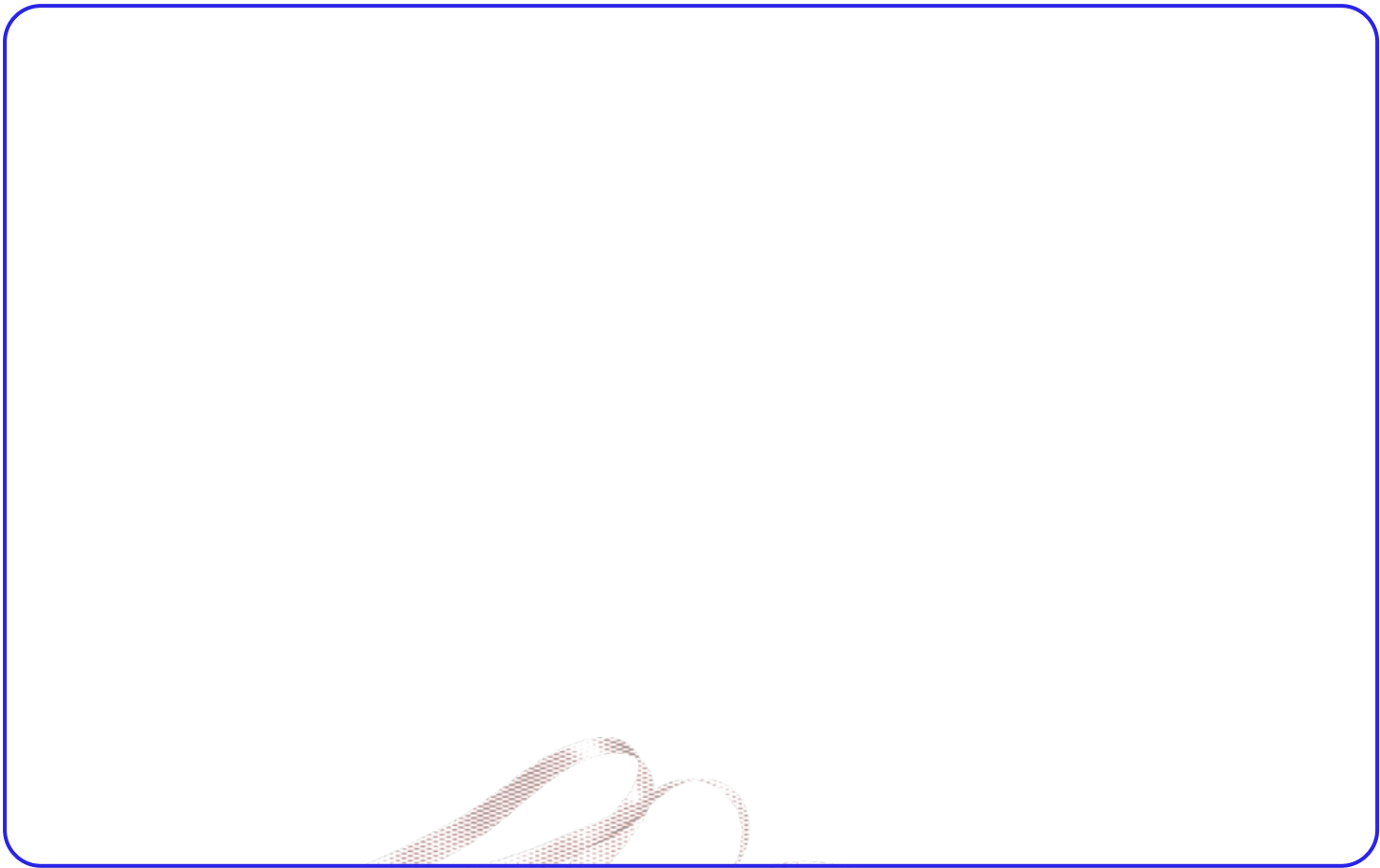
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**Inspire Yourself Everyday**



“ **Belonging** shouldn't mean you are like **everyone else.** ”

Misty Copeland



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**Know that you can start late, look different, be uncertain and still succeed.**

Misty Copeland



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**I may not be there yet, but I'm closer than I was yesterday.**

Misty Copeland



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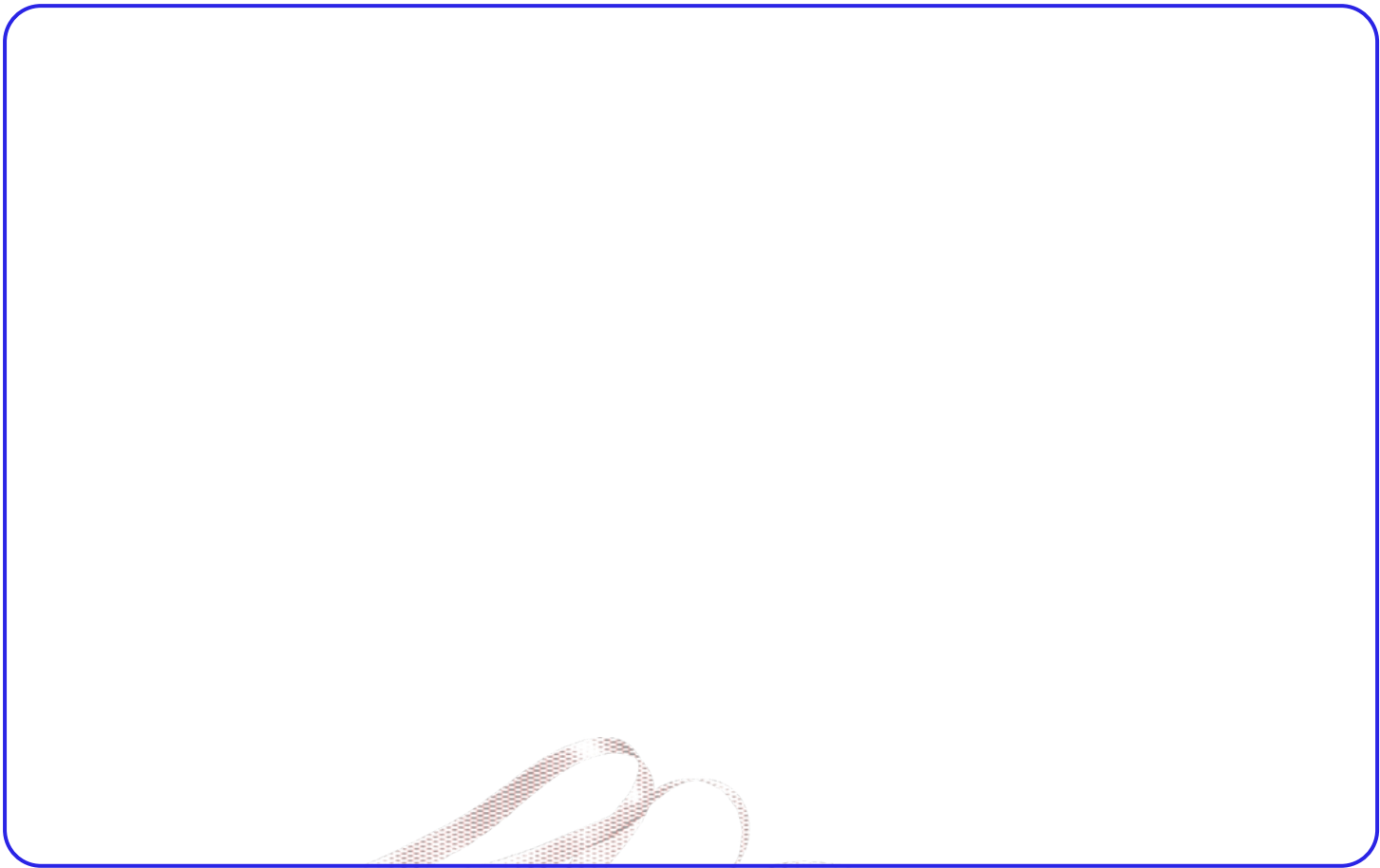
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**Inspire Yourself Everyday**



“

I can do **anything** when  
I am **in a tutu.**

Misty Copeland



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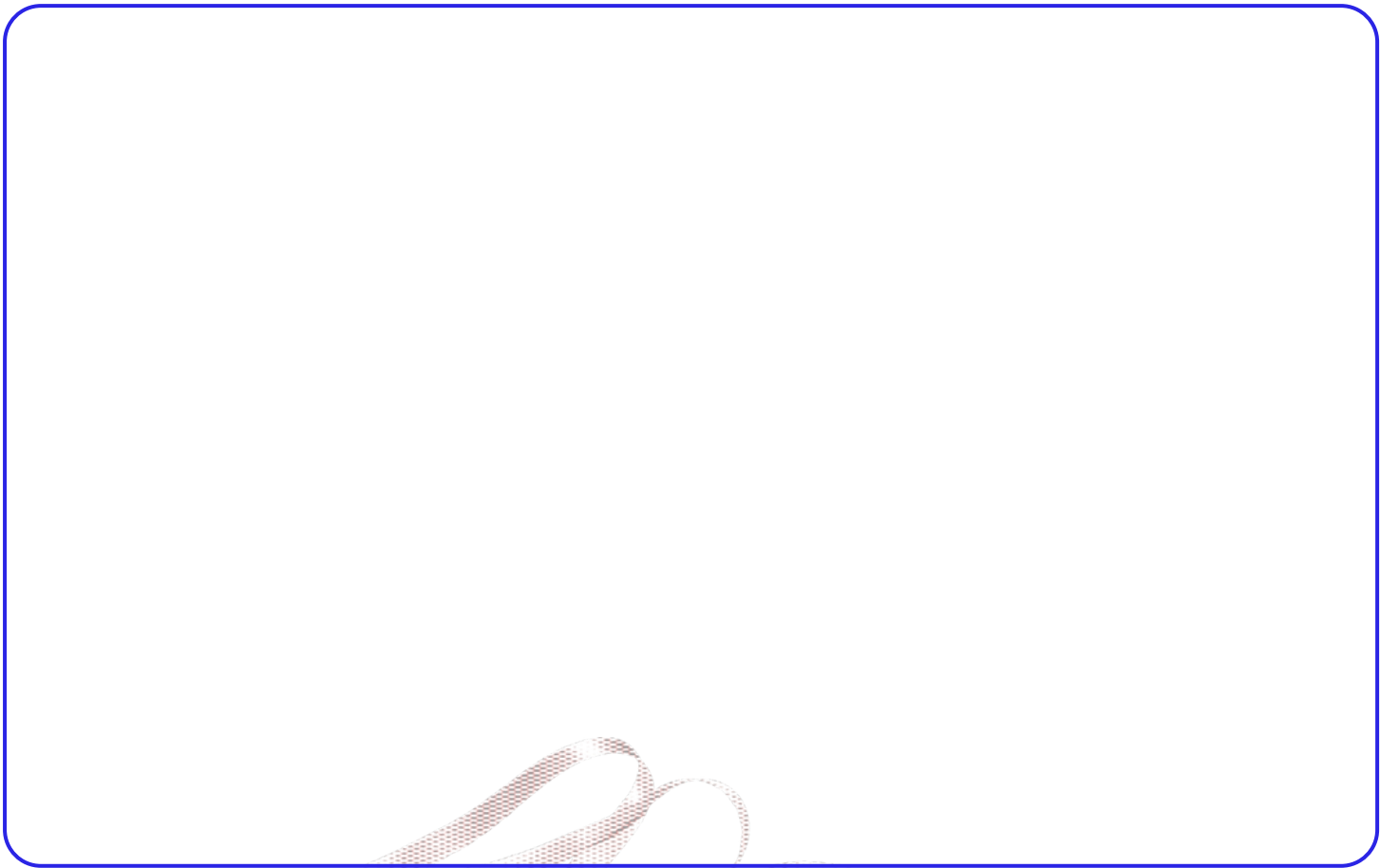
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“

Knowing that it has **never been done before** makes me want to **fight even harder.**

Misty Copeland



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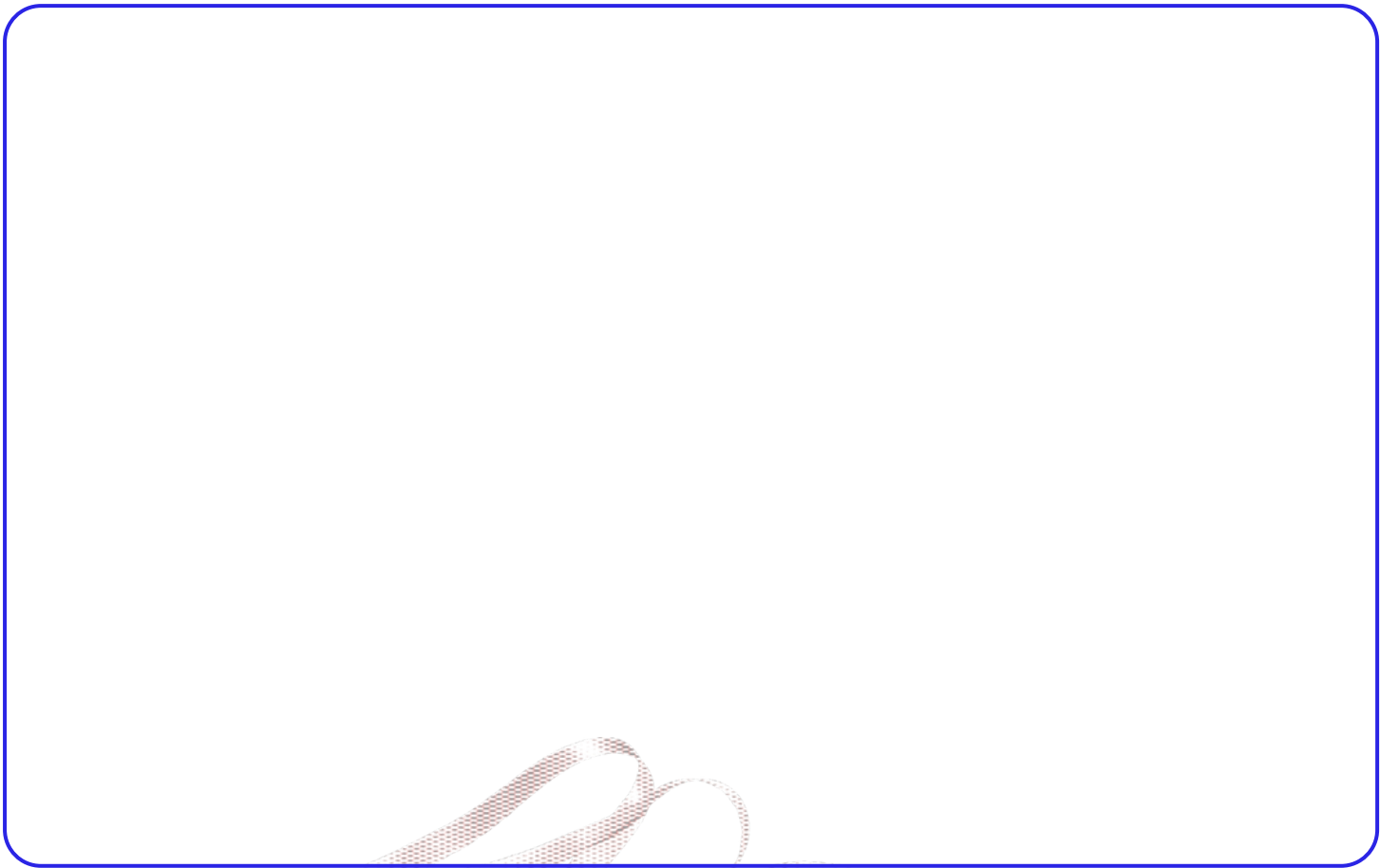
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“

If you are **persistent** as well as **patient**, you can get **whatever you seek.**

Misty Copeland



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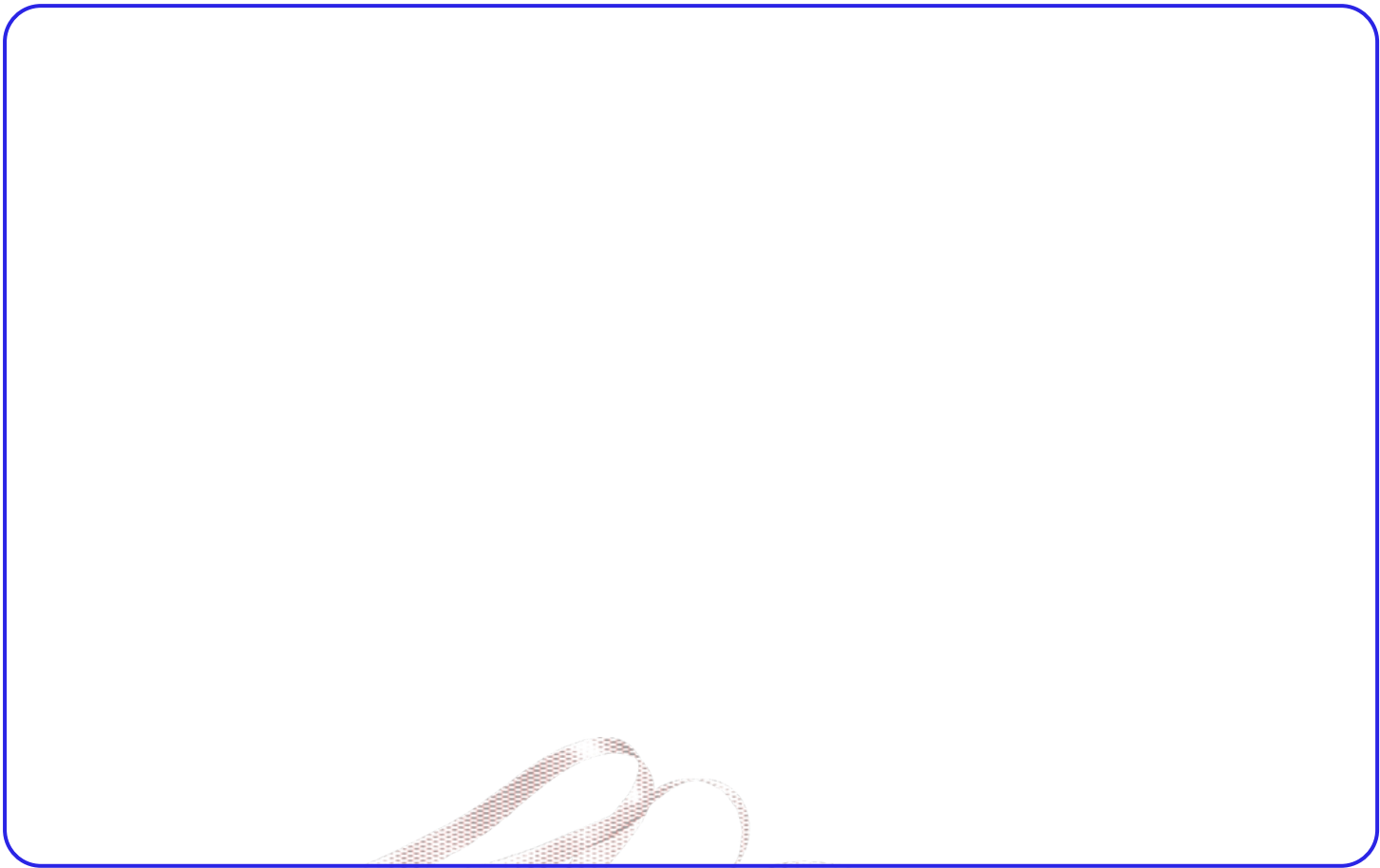
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“

**Don't underestimate yourself. You are more capable than you think.**

Misty Copeland



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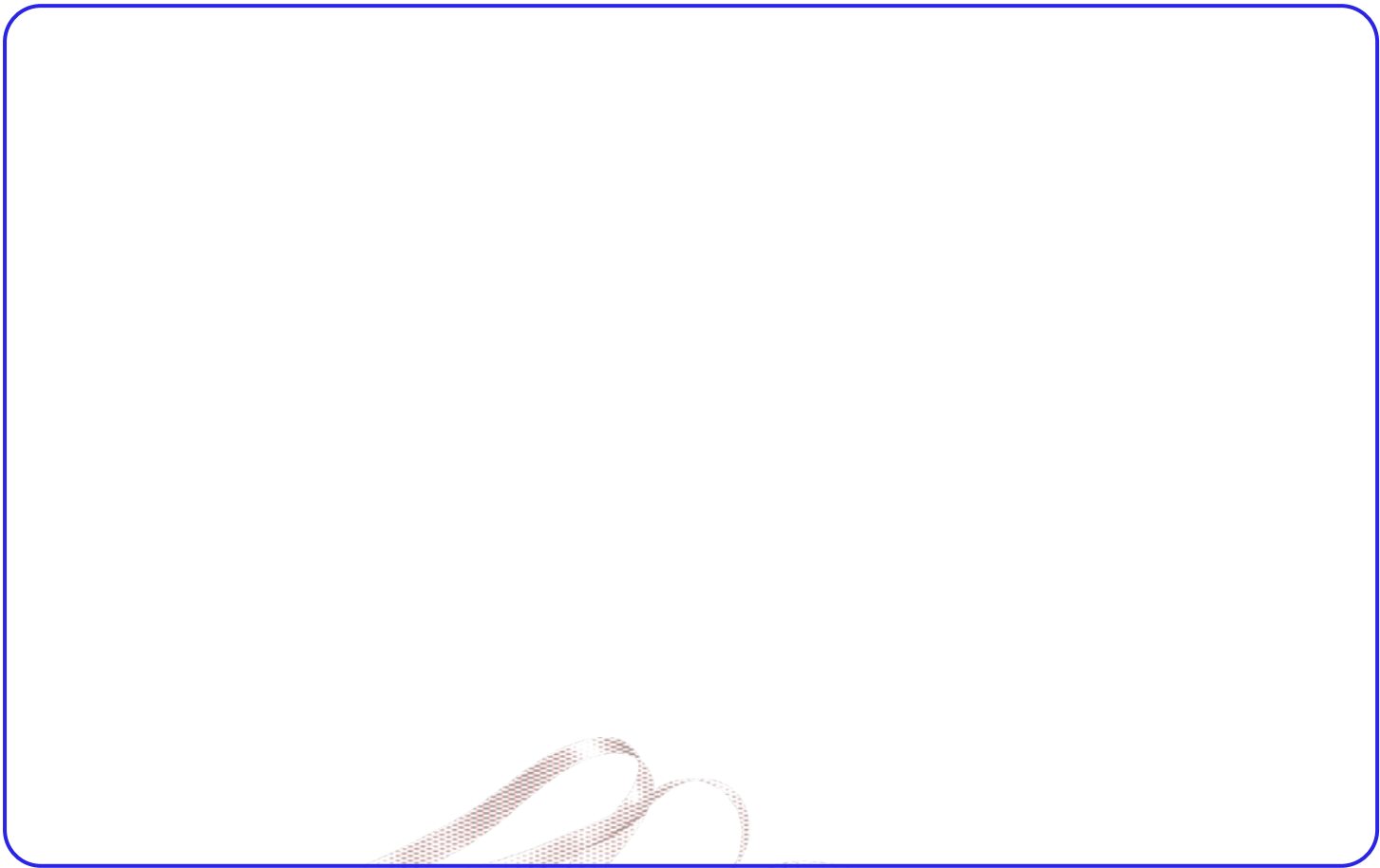
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“

**Anything is possible** when you have the **right people** there to **support** you.

Misty Copeland



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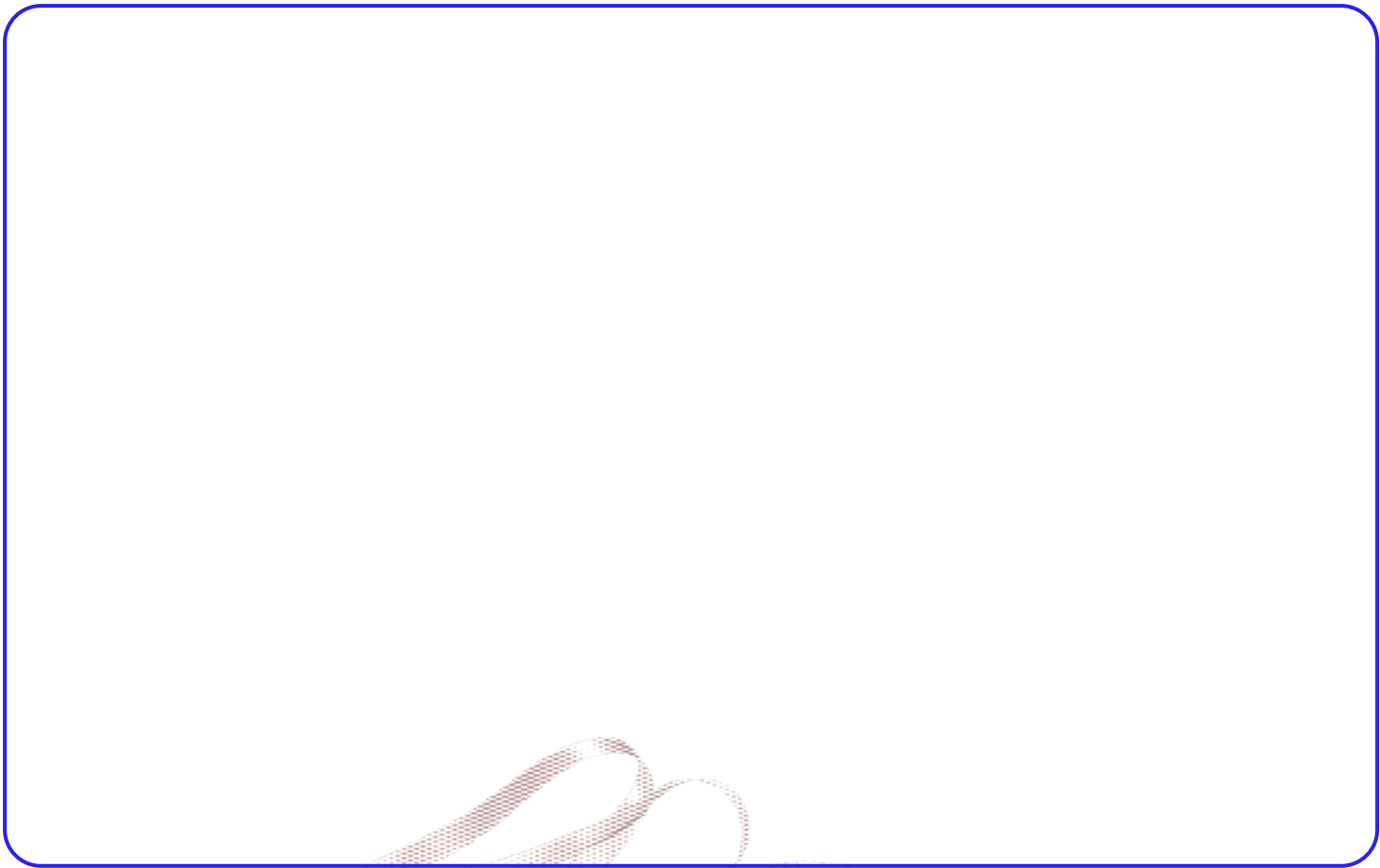
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**Inspire Yourself Everyday**



**Start unknown, finish unforgettable.**

Misty Copeland