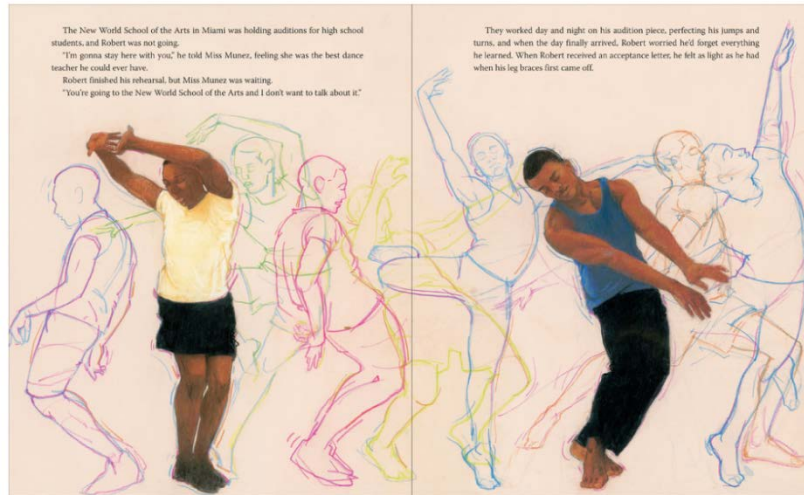


Bookshelf: Breakthrough Lives

By MARIA RUSSO NOV. 4, 2015

New picture-book biographies recount the lives of the first computer programmer, an Alvin Ailey dancer and a blue-eyed singer from Hoboken named Frankie.



From "My Story, My Dance"

My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey

By Lesa Cline-Ransome. Illustrated by James E. Ransome.

The story of a child who overcomes what could have been devastating obstacles to reach the heights of artistic achievement has become a staple of picture-book biographies, but this one has an especially warm glow around it. Robert Battle's journey to the center of the New York dance world — he is currently the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater — started out in Florida, where as a child he was raised by a cousin after his mother wasn't able to care for him, and was forced to wear painful metal braces to straighten his legs. In the hands of the Ransomes, a husband-and-wife team, Robert's life is a classic inspirational story of family love, faith and passionate artistic devotion.

His "mama Dessie," the cousin who takes him in, surrounds him with music and tender care, but sends him to karate lessons too, since the streets aren't quite so nice. "Do you think I can be the first black Baryshnikov?" Robert asks when his braces have come off and he begins to study ballet. His sights are always upward, and yet the story emanates gentleness. In James E. Ransome's realistic pastel portraits, Battle, his family and his teachers all seem lit from within.