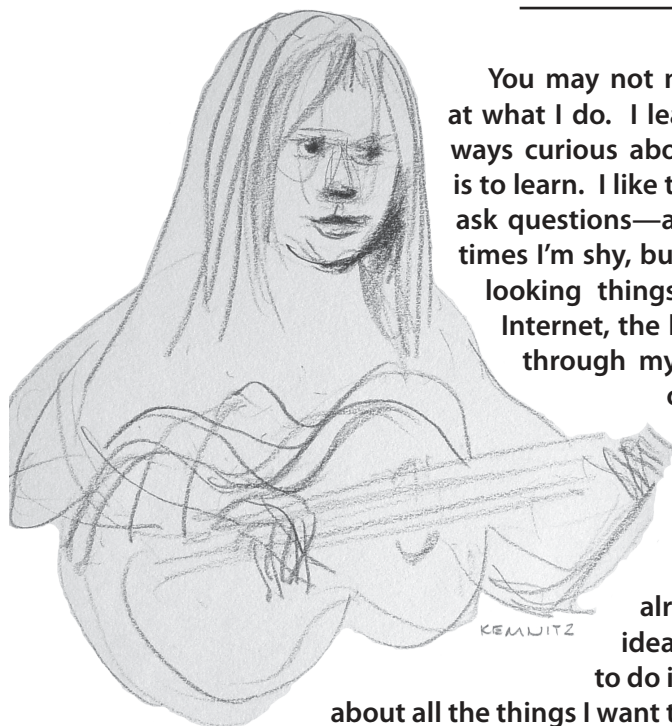


# I. Who I Am:

*I am good at many things and am ready to do more.*



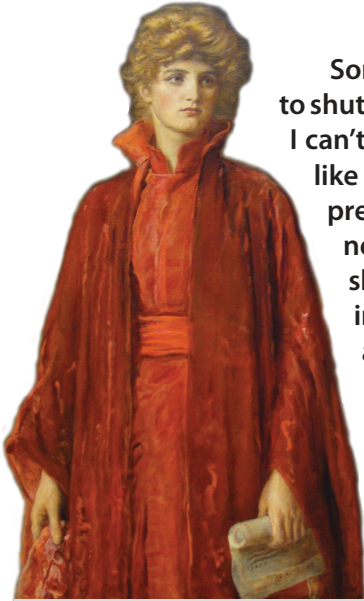
You may not notice me, but look at what I do. I learn fast, and I'm always curious about what else there is to learn. I like to read and talk and ask questions—all the time! Sometimes I'm shy, but you'll still find me looking things up, checking the Internet, the library, and peering through my binoculars. A lot of things I try to do come easily, so I always want to learn more! When a teacher gives an assignment, I already have many ideas about how I want to do it. I wake up excited about all the things I want to do.



There's nothing wrong with girls and women admitting they are good at something. Everyone has special gifts, dreams, and hopes. If you put yourself down, you will lead a small life. Look at Toni Morrison, the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature. What if she said, "You know I'm really nothing much, just a little woman. I'll just hide here under a bush." Your intelligence is your strength but if you pretend you don't have it, then it might as well not exist. Claim it! Be it!

*I live all over the world, belong to every culture and speak every language, but I am still the one with the fire in her eyes.*

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Shakespeare's character Portia,  
as portrayed by Sir John Everett  
Millais, 1886

**Sometimes I feel like everyone wants me to shut up and listen. Sometimes I wonder why I can't be excited and loud and jump around like my brothers. Sometimes it's easier to pretend to be like the good girl, quiet and neat, who hardly ever speaks and never shouts. But watch out! There is a fire in my eyes. I am looking for an escape, and I will find it some day. I may be in a place where women have no rights or I may be in a place where they do. But I will break out of my shell one day, you watch. I am the one with the fire in her eyes.**



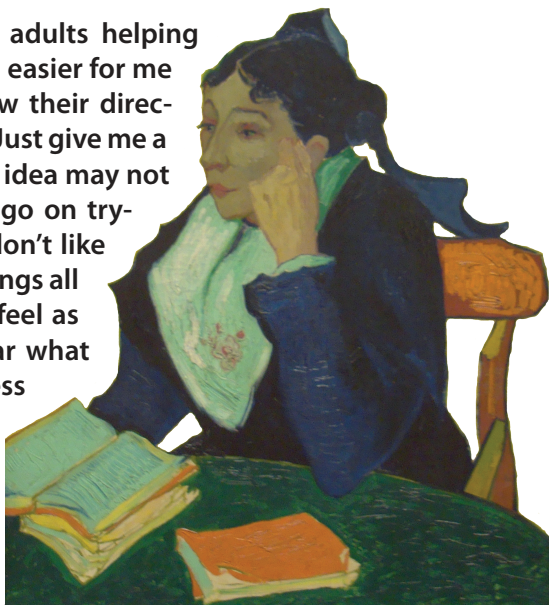
Gifted girls and women don't look a certain way or live a certain life. Some live in societies where women have little freedom to make their own choices in life; others have more choices but get little guidance or encouragement to live larger lives. Like many of these girls and women, you may feel an eagerness to peck open your shell. You may hide this burning fire inside yourself because you don't want to get in trouble or be ridiculed. But remember that you must hold onto this dream and never let it go. You have a right to it no matter where you live, what language you speak, or how much money you have. Keep your eyes open, tell your dreams to someone who will listen, and let these dreams lead you to your path.



*I like to figure things out by myself instead of going to an adult for the answer.*

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**I don't always like adults helping me. Even if it would be easier for me just to listen and follow their directions, that's so boring! Just give me a hint or explain why my idea may not work and then let me go on trying. Can't you see? I don't like to be told how to do things all the time. It makes me feel as if no one wants to hear what I have to say. And guess what? Even if I follow directions, I still may end up finding my own solution anyway and that's the greatest feeling.**



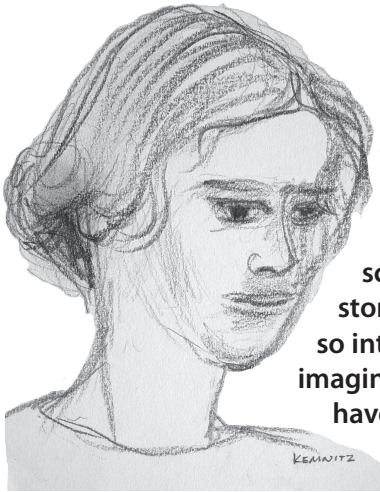
Detail of Madame Ginoux with Books, by Vincent Van Gogh, November, 1888 (or May, 1889?)



Girls and women don't have to be helpless and always look to an adult or a man to solve their problems. If you believe many of the television shows, movies, and other media, girls can't do anything for themselves! Yet, you are smart and can solve problems. In fact, you love to solve problems. So, before you run to someone else because you think you don't know what to do, find your own solutions. Use your mind. Some of the best inventions have come from problems that someone decided to solve in a new way. Be a problem solver! Don't hold back because you're afraid your solutions won't work. Step out and take a risk. Be bold. Solve a problem.

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I am full of surprises because I may not show the creative talents I have or share my imagination as I'd like to.



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I don't like following one track or being one thing. Why does everyone say I have to choose? My Dad says I should go for science and math, not creative writing because there's no real work for creative writers. A kid at school was surprised that I published a story in an online magazine because I'm so into science. Why can't I be creative and imaginative and also love science? Why do I have to give up some parts of myself for other parts? I like to think outside the box, so why should I live inside the box? I imagine stories whether

or not I want to. And I write down stories people tell me in my neighborhood, and sometimes, I hear poetry in my dreams.



One of the challenges gifted women have, especially in the pure science or math fields, is finding a way to include other talents and interests. Don't bar yourself from using and exploring your other passions in life because someone said they're not "practical" or don't relate to your primary interest. If you are creative, there are many ways to use imagination and creative reasoning in any subject. Don't shut the door on anything—you never know when some talent of yours will become important in the future. Your happiness comes from doing what you love and from living close to your heart, not from following what the world says you're "supposed to do."

I am different from a lot of girls, but I still want to feel part of a community.

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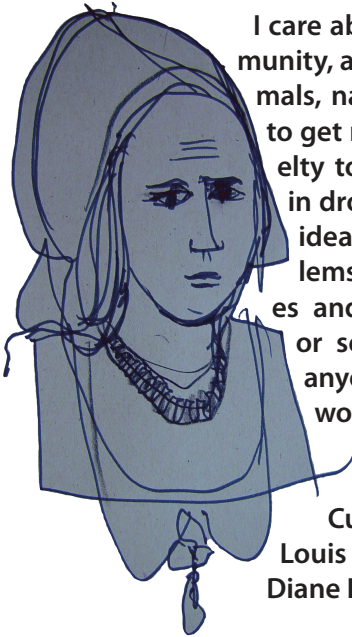
I usually am alone. I am the girl who won't play the games many girls and women play. I won't pretend that I'm nobody, that my ideas don't matter. I won't speak like a second-class citizen, as if I need permission to voice an opinion. I can be bold, and this makes some girls laugh behind my back. The boys stare at me like a specimen from science class. Once in a while, I meet other girls who don't want to shut up and fold their hands. When I'm with friends like me, girls with many ideas, girls who won't let you get a word in edgewise because they have so much to say and they talk a mile a minute, I feel so happy.



Gifted girls and women want to feel the freedom to be themselves. But no one wants to be alone—the girl who can't fit in with anyone. Instead of trying to be like other girls, look for a kindred spirit. Being with others like you will help you feel that it's ok to dream big. If you cannot find anyone like you, then turn to the girls and women who've gone before you—the pioneers, painters, scientists. Put pictures of them on your walls. Their company can help you find what you love and take the first steps toward your own path in life. Pablita Velarde, a painter, once said that another painter, Tonita Pena, gave her “the inner strength that I needed to dare the men to put me in my own place or let me go.”

Whenever people talk about issues or problems in my school, community, and world, I want to do something about them.

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I care about a lot of things in my school, community, and the world. I care about people, animals, nature, and justice. Things I would like to get rid of: bullying of unpopular kids, cruelty to animals, starvation for people living in drought, homelessness in my city. I have ideas on how we could make these problems better. I sometimes write speeches and imagine giving them to politicians or sending them to newspapers. Would anyone listen? I don't learn much about women philanthropists, inventors, or scientists in school. I know about Albert Einstein, but not as much about Marie Curie. Last year, we studied the work of Louis Leakey but what about Jane Goodall or Diane Fossey?



Gifted girls and women are drawn to issues in their environment as well as in the larger world around them. Even though they have more freedoms today than they had in the past, many still hesitate to debate or speak up when they don't agree with a teacher or a male peer. The courage to speak up is important. If you and other girls like you stay silent, then half of the world's population has no voice! If you have strong views about some issue in your community, your school, or your country, find ways to express them. Refuse to be silent. You have every right to care about what happens around you and to express your own ideas, whether you do it through words, art, or action.

*I know I am beautiful, inside and out and don't need other people to define me.*

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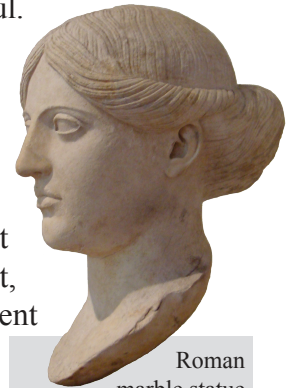


Marie-Elisabeth Cavé, aged 24, by  
Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

**When my mother says I'm beautiful, I smile. Others have a different perspective. Walking down the hall, I feel the eyes of the other kids on my clothes, my hair, my shoes. They aren't as nice as my mom. I know that looks are important in this world, and I try to look my best. A smile is the most important part of my looks, and I wear it everywhere. It says that I am beautiful on the inside where it really counts, and I work harder on that than on my nails.**



Gifted girls and women care as much about beauty as do others. This is normal, but they shouldn't feel pressured to define themselves by what others say is beautiful. Your outer beauty extends from the beauty you hold within you. You can take steps to care for your appearance—discovering new styles of clothing, exploring different applications for hair, skin, or nails. You can do this without becoming trapped by the beauty game that the media plays. You are not a piece of meat, or an object for other people to pass judgment on. You should love expressing beauty, but it should also extend to the inner life of your soul—how you treat others, what you value, and how you express yourself.



Roman  
marble statue  
of the first century  
AD; copy of a Greek  
bronze statue of about  
460 BC



*I have lots of energy and love to express it through athletic skill.*

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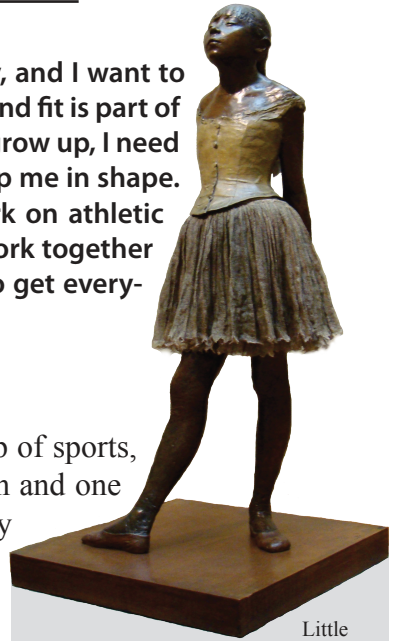
I want to pursue the sports I enjoy, and I want to develop my athletic skills. Being slim and fit is part of looking good and being healthy. As I grow up, I need activities that I enjoy and that will keep me in shape. Team sports give me a chance to work on athletic skills with other kids; we all have to work together to win as a team, and I use my skills to get everyone to cooperate for the same goal.



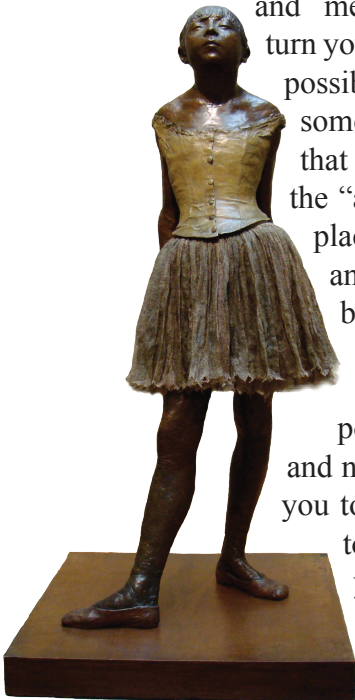
Gifted girls enjoy the comradeship of sports, provided the sport is one they excel in and one that challenges them both physically and mentally. Don't

turn your back on this possibility because someone tells you that you're not the "athletic type."

Athletics can give you a place where you can express your strength and leadership without having to hold back. The team structure also allows you to share leadership and help to create a healthy sense of community. It's important for you to pursue athletic interests and not feel that your academic abilities limit you to intellectual things. Athleticism suited to your needs and interests can increase your strength and give you a body image beyond the traditional feminine one.



Little Dancer Aged Fourteen, by Edgar Degas



*I enjoy having friendly and happy relationships with the important people in my life.*

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**My relationships are important to me, but sometimes I feel torn between my family and my friends. I don't like to trash my family the way some of my friends do because I know my family loves me and how hard they try. But I also want to spend more time with my friends because they give me things that my family can't. I feel different with them. Sometimes my family wants to know everything I'm doing—like I'm four years old—and that makes me want to run out the door. So I try to remember everything my family's done for me and where my roots are. But I also have to stretch out and reach for the skies, and that means friends and new people.**



Because of their unique abilities and needs, many gifted girls have strong relationships with their families or other adults. When you see how your family members, or relatives, or teachers support your abilities, stick up for you when you need it, and help you find outlets for your talents and interests, it's good to be grateful. But it's also normal to value your friendships (with girls or boys), particularly when you feel misunderstood or alone. As you move into adulthood, you will need the support of caring adults *and* friends. The first provides roots for your growth. The second gives you a place in the world outside your doors—a community with whom you can share your values, goals and dreams.

*I can't help feeling the needs of those around me and doing what I can to make their lives better.*

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I feel others' feelings so much that I'm sometimes overwhelmed. When my uncle stayed with us, I could feel his sadness about losing his job and when he took me to the museum, I could tell he was just pretending to be ok. I wish I wasn't so sensitive to everything that lives! A cat yowls outside and I stay awake worrying about the cat. A kid at school gets teased and I want to karate chop the guy who sneered at him. Sometimes I help animals before I even know what I'm doing. My Mom will say, "What are you doing with that blanket?" But she knows I'm putting it in a box outside for the homeless cat. People think I go too far, but they don't lie in bed at night imagining how it would feel to wander around the streets with no warm place to curl up in.



Gifted girls need support in managing their sensitivity for the feelings of others. They want to make a difference—to know what steps they can take to improve their lives. You need to see that your sensitivity toward others is a strength, not a weakness or vulnerability. Examples abound of women whose keen response to the plight of others enabled them to accomplish great things in the world. Eleanor Roosevelt, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony and many others stepped boldly onto the world stage and risked their own safety because they cared for their fellow beings and wanted to do what they could to rectify a wrong. Part of making a difference in the lives of others is knowing when and how to act. Sometimes, other people may rely on you too much and make you feel pressured to help with every problem. You can give your light, but don't give away your oil.

