



Little Melba and Her Big Trombone

Katheryn Russell-Brown , Frank Morrison (Illustrator)

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Melba Doretta Liston loved the sounds of music from as far back as she could remember. As a child, she daydreamed about beats and lyrics, and hummed along with the music from her family's Majestic radio. At age seven, Melba fell in love with a big, shiny trombone, and soon taught herself to play the instrument. By the time she was a teenager, Melba's extraordinary gift for music led her to the world of jazz. She joined a band led by trumpet player Gerald Wilson and toured the country. Overcoming obstacles of race and gender, Melba went on to become a famed trombone player and arranger, spinning rhythms, harmonies, and melodies into gorgeous songs for all the jazz greats of the twentieth century: Randy Weston, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, and Quincy Jones, to name just a few. Brimming with ebullience and the joy of making music, *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* is a fitting tribute to a trailblazing musician and a great unsung hero of jazz.

Little Melba and Her Big Trombone Details

Date : Published September 1st 2014 by Lee & Low Books (first published April 1st 2014)

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From Reader Review Little Melba and Her Big Trombone for online ebook

Kimberly says

I feel like in the past year I've read a good crop of picture books highlighting African-American historical figures. All of them have been so interesting and made me want to read and learn more about these fascinating people! Melba Liston was a self-taught trombone savant. I mean, come on. Does it get any cooler than that?

Love the illustrations in this one. Melba shines on every page.

Sarah says

Summary: This wonderfully illustrated nonfiction text about trombone player Melba Liston tells the story of the ups and downs of her life. It takes the reader through what the journey of a colored female entertainer in the 1930s looked like and also allows readers to visualize the hard times of the Great Depression and the oppression that she faced as a colored individual.

Evaluation: This book was very well written. It had beautiful imagery and the story of it is inspiring to all. However, through research, I have come to find that effective biography texts are best delivered in a way that shows the negatives and positives of that person's life rather than a birth to death timeline, which this is. In this case, it technically wouldn't be the best nonfiction text, however the musical aspect and African American culture of the book makes up for it.

Teaching Idea: Using this book as a way to teach the concept of timelines would be beneficial. Because it is a biography, the class can be led to create a timeline of Melba's life, summarizing her life with important points. The students can then create timelines of their own lives.

Lilly Smithdeal says

Little Melba and Her Big Trombone is a fun biography to read with students in grades 3-4. This book tells the story of a young girl and her love for playing the trombone. She grows up and is able to overcome the obstacles that she faces being a young, black girl to achieve her dreams of becoming a famous trombone player. This would be a great book to talk about overcoming obstacles with students. It would also be a good book to include in a lesson about biographies. Students could read a variety of biographies with partners and then create a presentation about the person they learned about. I could also have a group conversation about the obstacles Melba faced while working to achieve her dreams; I would ask the students to talk about obstacles in their own lives that could possibly hold them back and what they could do to still reach their dreams. This would help implement a growth mindset in the classroom. This was a WOW book for me because of the strong characteristics that Melba exhibited throughout the book. The illustrations in the book were also very pretty and intriguing. I love how this book teaches about the importance of working through life's obstacles to work towards your dreams.

Bookseedstudio says

INTERVIEW WITH KATHERYN RUSSELL-BROWN

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I met the author of **LITTLE MELBA** and **HER BIG TROMBONE** after sweet trombone sounds accompanied her lively library talk.

It was the most musical children's book signing I've ever attended.

Extra fun floated through the room because Dr. Russell-Brown's daughter Sasha, a fifth-grader, stood proudly on stage, playing select notes on her very own big trombone.

When the author kindly asked if a little boy in the enrapt audience wanted to try out Sasha's big trombone, he did! It almost felt like it could be a scene from the author's lyrical Coretta Scott King honor book, illustrated beautifully by Frank Morrison with signature elongated touches.

Some background, from the story

Melba Doretta Liston grew up pushing the pedals on a player piano, while beloved aunties danced in the living room. She was blessed with a mom who bought the seven-year-old girl a trombone on the spot when Melba spied it offered by a Kansas City traveling vendor. She insisted **THAT** was the instrument for her! The rest is history. A history not widely known. But it's told for young readers via a spirited storytelling style in **LITTLE MELBA**.

Melba was one of the first women of any race to become a world-class trombone virtuoso – playing, composing and arranging. The back-of-the-book material shows a photograph of Melba with Quincy Jones. She also played for many others, including Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Aretha Franklin and the Supremes.

Melba experienced discrimination based on her race and for being a woman in a male-dominated artistic realm. Yet she performed all over the world, received many honors such as Jazz Master designation from the National Endowment for the Arts, and she eventually formed her own band. She was composing as recently as the 1990s. She was born in 1926 and died in 1999.

You might suspect the author is a music teacher but at the University of Florida College of Law, she is Dr. Kathryn Russell-Brown, professor of law and director of the Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations.

I know you'll want to learn more about the author of **LITTLE MELBA** and **HER BIG TROMBONE** (Lee & Low Books) so let me bring her onstage. I invite you to visit the rest of my article, from **BOOKSEEDSTUDIO**

<https://bookseedstudio.wordpress.com/...>

Donna says

I read this picture book biography because it's about a female trombonist. I'd never heard of Melba Liston before, but she was born in 1926 and grew into a professional jazz musician who composed and arranged music in addition to touring with the likes Billie Holiday and Quincy Jones.

I don't read a lot of picture books, so I don't have much to compare it to, but dang, it's hard to adequately address issues like racism and sexism in such a brief work. I like that these issues are brought up, though, in both the text and illustrations. I really like the illustrations by Frank Morrison, by the way. They remind me of the Harlem Renaissance paintings by Archibald Motley.

I learned more about her life from the afterward, but the main story is charming. I love the "Hoooooooooonk!" that is the first sound she makes with her trombone (at the age of 7). I love that a discography is appended, as well. I'm going to have to seek out some of her recordings.

Women trombonists are still not all that common, especially not African American women trombonists, so it's awesome that this book exists.

Tamara says

Illustrations = marvelous. Beautiful movement and expression, beautiful colors. Text = meh. It was just so...straightforward and stark.

Lauren says

1. I had a text to self connection while reading this book. I did not become famous for playing an instrument but I played in middle school. I played the trumpet and I felt the same things that she felt. I was nervous when starting and then received more confidence as I got better.

2. This book is culturally specific because the author is of a different culture and it goes into detail about how a little girl grew up. It tells the story of how Melba became a trombone player. It shows the cultural traditions and customs of a different culture. That culture includes a big influence in music, specifically jazz.

3. Remembering - When did Melba learn to play the trombone?

Understanding - Retell the story in your own words.

Applying - Have you ever been afraid of trying something new? What was it and how did you handle it?

Analyzing - What is different about Melba's life and your life?

Evaluating - What did you like best about the story?

Creating - What inferences can you make about Melba and her personality?

Gina says

Music is so central to the book, but can be hard to depict on the printed page. These illustrations swoop and swing and really come alive. The opening scene is of Jazz age Kansas City, and it gives an idea of how environment can influence a child. I don't know if Melba Liston would have been such a prodigy somewhere else, but she grew in skill as a player and composer at great speed.

The book deals gently with racism and sexism, and has supplemental information in the back including some discography.

Should go well with *So Good They Can't Ignore You*, because that's how Liston was.

Sarah says

Whoa! Look at the front cover of this book, *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone*, by Kathryn Russell-Brown. It looks like the little girl, Melba, is really into playing that huge instrument. It's bigger than she is. (Read pages 1-2) Look at the pictures. What does it look like the people are doing? Are they enjoying themselves? What would it be like to hear music on every street corner? During the 1920's jazz music became popular and musicians would play their instruments anywhere for people to hear. (Read pages 3-8) Melba was always thinking about music. Sometimes this happens to me. If I hear a catchy tune I will sing it over and over in my mind. Does that happen to you? Let's read on about Melba and her trombone playing.

Opening Moves:

Draws attention to the genre.

Raise questions in the readers' minds.

Draw attention to the illustrator's craft.

Rationale:

This book fits my text set theme, "How musicians make their mark" because it is about the child prodigy Melba Liston and how she became a famous musician. There were bumps along the way for her because of the time period and the problem African-Americans faced with racism and segregation. Music gave her freedom to express herself through music. She was also one of the first women to become a famous trombonist, composer and arranger. This book works for K-3, but can also be used for older students. There are several themes including American history and the history of Jazz.

Pinnell, G. S., & Fountas, I. C. (2006). *Engaging readers in thinking and talking about texts through interactive read aloud. Teaching for comprehending and fluency: Thinking, talking, and writing about reading, k-8.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishing.

Melissa says

This book is an inspiring story to read. In this book it shows what the support of a loving family can do to a

child. In this story Melba was just a little girl when she picked out a big trombone. Even though she had a hard time in the beginning mastering this large instrument she was encouraged by her family to not let it defeat her. Melba ended the story with a wonderful lesson of determination and what it can do for a person who is supported to pursue the things they love.

Mike says

A picture book about trombonist Melba Liston by Katheryn Russell-Brown with illustrations by Frank Morrison. I'm a trombone player, so this was a must-read. I loved it.

Cara Byrne says

This is a wonderful biography of a Jazz-age trombonist. The illustrations have great personality (I love the dancing aunties and brave teenage Melba playing among boys who are putting her down), and the narrative honors the immense racism and sexism Melba faced during her lifetime without making this the soul focus of the book. Instead, Russell-Brown chooses to honor this lesser known musician and champion her colorful and bold life. By focusing on the fact that even as a little girl Melba constantly tried (no matter the odds against her) and found solace in music, the book is inspirational to most readers - musicians or not.

Maddie Eriksson says

This historical fiction book is interesting and has powerful illustrations. Not only does it talk about the upbringing of a powerful musician, but also depicts the struggles of an African American woman in the early 20th century. Melba's fiery spirit is emphasized through the formatting and bright illustrations. The language was simple but informative enough to keep the readers aware of how Melba is feeling and what she is doing. I would use this book in my classroom when discussing prejudices, race or gender, and use the book as a tool to show my students that it is possible to overcome those obstacles. I think a read aloud then partner discussion would benefit the students because they would be able to share their ideas or connections to someone without having to share to the whole class. After the partner discussion, I would bring it back to a whole group discussion so that those who do have something they want to share would be able to.

Lyndsey Jones says

The book Little Melba and Her Big Trombone is about a girl who loves music and wants to play an instrument of her own. One day she finally got a trombone and taught herself how to play and ended up touring the country making, and playing music on her trombone. This book would be considered a biography because it is based on the events that happened in Melba Doretta Liston's life. I would use this book in any grade level above 2nd (especially as a read aloud). I would highly consider using this book as a read aloud in my class because it would bring up some really great discussion points about perseverance, other character traits, and discrimination and bullying. This is necessary to talk about in elementary school classrooms, even though it may be a touchy subject area, because it is a real world problem. Another way I might use this in my classroom is to lead into a social studies unit on biographies and people in the

past that made an impact on Civil Rights movements. This would be a good segway into that topic. The major reason I would consider this a WOW book is that Melba demonstrated a lot of courage and perseverance throughout her life when teaching herself to play the trombone, continuing to play even when people made fun of her, pushing through discrimination to continue doing what she loved, and being passionate about what she did. This could be used to teach children really great character traits, as well as not to bully or discriminate against people.

Maria A says

The illustrations in this book were very vivid. I especially liked the color schemes that were chosen. There is a page where Little Melba is dreaming that was done in only shades of blue which stood out.

This Picture book gives us plenty of biographical information at the end of the story as an afterword. I would love to share this book during women's history month. This book would be great for second and third grades. I can picture using this book for a class lead discussion. I think students would be able to make connections with the obstacles that she faced as well as the determination that is required to reach your dreams.
