



LITTLE MELBA AND HER BIG TROMBONE

AUTHOR: KATHERYN RUSSELL-BROWN

ILLUSTRATOR: FRANK MORRISON

See the book read aloud here: [Little Melba and Her Big Trombone](#)
**** REMEMBER: HAVE FUN AND THE KIDS WILL TOO! ****

OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE BOOK

Bewitched by the rhythms of jazz all around her in Depression-era Kansas City, little Melba Doretta Liston longs to make music in this fictional account of a little-known jazz great. Picking up the trombone at age 7, little Melba teaches herself to play, supported by her Grandpa John and Momma Lucille. She performs on the radio at 8, and tours as a pro at age 17. Both text and illustrations make it clear that it's not all easy for Melba. "The Best Service for WHITES ONLY" reads a sign in a hotel window, as the narrative describes a bigotry-plagued tour in the South with Billie Holiday. But joy carries the day, and the story ends on a high note, with Melba "dazzling audiences and making headlines" around the world. Includes a bibliography. ([Kirkus Review](#))

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katheryn Russell-Brown is a professor of Law and the Director of the Center for Race and Race Relations at the University of Florida. She grew up in a family of music lovers, where jazz was an integral part of the sounds of daily life. A radio broadcast in 2008 about Liston inspired Russell-Brown to research the musician and eventually to write *Little Melba and her Big Trombone*, her first picture book. Russell-Brown lives in Gainesville, Florida, with her husband and their two children. (www.krbrown.net)

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Frank Morrison's artwork is unique. The exaggerated bodies and flowing motion of the characters are his signature, a glimpse into his endless creativity and talent. Frank Morrison is a well-known graffiti artist as well as an accomplished break-dancer, a member of the Sugar Hill Gang's dance entourage. It was during one of the group's European tours that he visited the Louvre museum in Paris and was so intrigued by the magnificent art that he decided, at that moment, to return to his roots and become an artist. (www.itsablackthang.com/collections/frank-morrison-art-work)

THE READ ALOUD

BEFORE READING

Use these prompts before reading the story to help students activate background knowledge

LITTLE MELBA AND HER BIG TROMBONE

TOPICS & THEMES:

- confidence
- determination
- discrimination
- sexism

Tips for every book!

POWER PHRASES:

I WONDER...

I NOTICE...

TELL ME MORE...

DIGGING DEEPER:

"Tell me more, why do you think that?"

"How do you know that?"

"Why do you think they feel like that?"

"Interesting, did you notice anything else?"

and make predictions:

- (Reader: If you can have Liston's music playing quietly in the background while you read the story, this will add to the experience.)
- I notice that there is an award on the cover. (Reader: read the topics on the award.)
- What do you think this book is going to be about? Why do you think that?
- There are two words that are opposites in the title. What are they? Why do you think the author chose this title?
- Have you ever seen or heard a trombone? (Reader: pantomime playing a trombone, especially the slide.)

DURING THE STORY

Use these prompts while reading the story to help students interpret the action and content;

- (p. 1) I wonder what "You can reach out and feel the music." means. Does anyone have an idea?
- (p. 2) What is that cloud over Mabel's head? How does it illustrate what the author wrote?
- (p. 5) If music has a beat, a melody, and lyrics, what do you think "lyrics" means?
- (p. 6) How do we know Melba is thinking about the music?
- (p. 8) Why was a traveling music store good for Melba and her mother?
- (p. 13) The phrase "no piece of cake" is an idiom. An idiom is a group of words that mean something when you put them all together that may not have anything to do with the actual words. What do you think "no piece of cake" means?
- (p. 14) Why did the boys call Melba names? How did that make her feel?
- (pp. 22-23) What made life hard and lonely for Melba when she was traveling?

AFTER READING

Use these after reading the story to help students understand what they just read.

- What convinced Melba to keep playing her trombone?
- (Reader: only if you've been listening to Liston's music) How did Melba's jazz make you feel?

BRINGING THE BOOK TO LIFE!

- (p. 5) Help me clap the beat of this song. (Reader: rap the ABC song and clap to the beat)
- (p. 10) An onomatopoeia means a word that sounds like what it is, like plink and hum. Clap the six syllables of onomatopoeia with me, one clap for each syllable.
- If you like to listen to music while you are reading, put your finger on your nose.
- If you play an instrument, raise both hands in the air.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

- With a partner, discuss what other award would you give the book? Share with the class.

SMALL-GROUP IDEAS

1. DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

- I read that the author of this book is an attorney who helps people with discrimination issues. How do you think this affected the story?
- Why do you think Melba was so successful?
- How could you tell how much Melba loved music as a child?
- At first, why didn't Melba's mother want to get her a trombone?
- Have you ever seen someone get teased because they are very good at something? Why do you think that happened?
- As an adult, what kind of discrimination did Melba face? How did it make her feel?

- Name one new thing did you learn about music during that jazz age.
- Tell me about something you love to do, as much as Melba loved music.
- Do you listen to music when you're sad? When you're happy? Is the music the same or different?
- What do you think the author of this story wants us to learn from it?

Suggested Optional Activity:

- Draw a comic strip to summarize the book. Include pictures and words.
- Create the award you discussed during the reading. Consider what to put on the award and what it will look like.

2. WRITING ACTIVITY

- As a class, we are going to write an acrostic poem using the letters of Melba's name. We'll do it on the board. An acrostic poem is a type of poetry. In the most common and simple form of an acrostic, the first letters of each line, read downward, spell out a word or phrase. *(Reader: if students have difficulty with writing, they can use one word on each line in their acrostic.)*

3. EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- Design a poster to advertise a performance by Melba, or a movie or your favorite singer to interest people to go to the concert. Remember to include the date, location and cost of a ticket.

COMMON CORE LINKS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1, 3.2,3.3,3.4,3.7,3.7