



Book of the Month

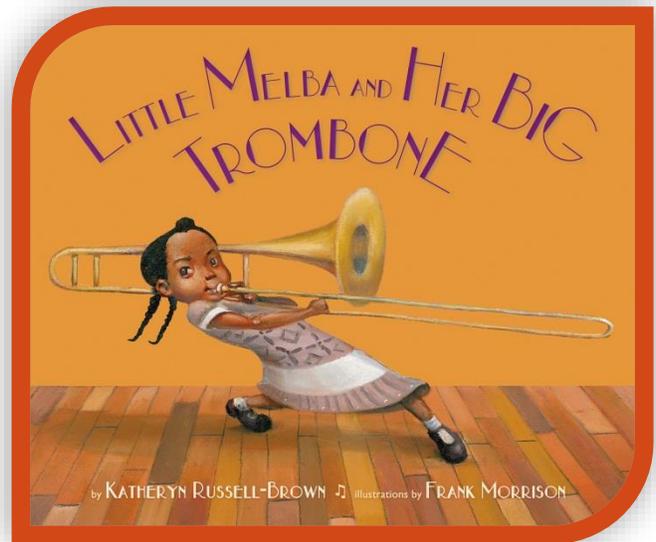
Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from our Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of early childhood and elementary aged children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Little Melba and Her Big Trombone

Katheryn Russell-Brown (Author), Frank Morrison (Illustrator)

Melba Doretta Liston loved the sounds of music from as far back as she could remember. Beats and rhythms danced in her head—from the plink of a guitar to the thrum-thrum of a drum. At age seven, Melba fell in love with a big, shiny trombone and quickly taught herself to play. By the time she was a teenager, her extraordinary gift for music led her to the world of jazz. She joined a band and toured the country. Overcoming obstacles of race and gender, Melba became a famed trombone player, composer and arranger, creating music with many of the jazz giants of the twentieth century. The book contains a two-page afterword about Liston's life, a discography and additional resources.



ISBN: 978-1600608988

Publisher: Lee & Low Books

Year Published: 2014

Age Range: 6-10

Book Themes

Confidence, Determination, Discrimination, Racism, Sexism

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and

remind children of their meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. See also ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- blues
- compose
- cruel
- discrimination
- gig
- gospel
- harmonizing
- headlines
- jazz
- jealous
- kinfolk
- lyrics
- memory
- mesmerize
- racism
- segregation
- sexism
- trombone

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask pre-reading questions:

- What is the title of the book?
- Based on the title, what do you think the book might be about?
- Does the picture on the cover give us any clues?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout the reading to check comprehension and keep the students engaged:

- Why did Melba sometimes have trouble falling asleep? (page 6)
- Why did Melba and her Mom move to Los Angeles? (page 16)
- Even though sometimes Melba wanted to quit, why didn't she? (page 25)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these questions:

- What happened in the story?
- How did you feel while listening to the story?
- What personality traits did Melba have that made her 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? Why did some of the other children call her names? How did that make her feel?
- 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 the discrimination make her feel?
- What new information did you learn about music during that time period?
- Do you have something you are very passionate about, as Melba was about music?
- What is the message of the story?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with children in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Write Your Own Story About a Character Who is Passionate About Something

Engage students in a discussion about Melba and her passion about music and jazz. Ask: *When Melba was a child, how did you know that she loved music? As a child, what barriers did she face about playing the trombone? As an adult, what kind of discrimination did she experience? Why did she almost quit and what made her persist?* Explain that because Melba loved the trombone, jazz and music in general, she was able to overcome some of the teasing as a child and discrimination as an adult. Have students write a story about someone (a child or adult) who is very passionate about something they love, that they want to do all the time. Explain that it can be about anything: skateboarding, ballet, playing jacks or playing piano. Have students write a story in which the person's passion is described and illustrated in the story, the obstacles they may face in realizing their dream and ultimately how they overcome the difficulties. Students can illustrate their stories and then share them with the class as part of a publishing party.

2. Listen to Jazz

Start by having a general conversation with students about their music listening habits and preferences. Ask: *Do you like music? What kind of music do you listen to? Do you play an instrument? What kind of music do your parents listen to? Do you listen to different kinds of music depending on your mood? Do you like to listen to music while you are doing something (reading, cooking, playing)?* Then ask: *What kind of music did Melba Liston play? What instrument did she play?* Using the back of the book, identify some of the Melba Liston songs and listen to them together as a class. You can also listen to some of her music on this [NPR documentary](#) about her life. As students are listening to the music, give them drawing and writing materials and allow them to draw whatever comes to mind, write their thoughts or just close their eyes and listen to the music. After listening, ask some of the following questions: *How did you feel while listening to the music? Did it make you think about anything? Could you hear the trombone? What other instruments could you hear? What is the pace of the music? Did the pace affect your mood?* Other resources you may find helpful are: [Learning with Jazz](#) (Scholastic) and [Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns](#) (PBS).

3. Learn More About Segregation During that Period of Time

Ask students: *What is segregation? Does anyone know what segregation is? Have you heard of the Civil Rights Movement?* Explain to students that during the 1950s and 1960s, there were some regions of the country where black and white people were segregated by law, which means that there were "whites" and "colored" places and African-American people were not allowed in certain "whites-only" places like hotels and restaurants, as you saw in the book. Explain that there were also laws passed that made it more difficult for black people to vote. When these laws were passed, the number of black voters dropped dramatically which meant that they were not able to participate in the process of electing their representatives. Explain that during the Civil Rights Movement, there were organized activities and strategies aimed at overturning or changing these laws, often called "activism." After sharing this information, delve deeper into the topic. Read aloud and/or have students independently read fiction and non-fiction books about segregation and the Civil Rights Movement (see book list below). Develop a culminating project to present what they learned that could include timelines, essays, blog posts, biographies, murals and more.

In addition to these activities, there is an afterword (pages 29–30) which gives background information about Melba Doretta Liston as well as a discography of her musical accomplishments. You may also want to use these additional resources to bring the book to life for your students:

- [Illustrator Frank Morrison takes us behind the art of Little Melba and Her Big Trombone](#)
- [Interview: Katheryn Russell-Brown on the research behind Little Melba and Her Big Trombone](#)

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on stereotypes, racism, sexism and anti-bias teaching strategies.

Curriculum Resources

“Mo’Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/mo-ne-davis-and-gender-stereotypes.pdf.

“Identity-Based Bullying,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/identity-based-bullying.pdf.

“The Civil Rights Act of 1964: 7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary,” www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/civil-rights-act-of-1964-7-ways-to-commemorate-the-50th-anniversary.pdf.

“Job Roles without Gender Bounders” in *Curriculum Connections* Spring 2008 “Moving Beyond Gender Barriers in Our Lives,” http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/spring_2008/lesson2.html.

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Anti-Bias Resources

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/additional-anti-bias-resources.html

These resources provide a wide range of tips, tools and strategies for K-12 educators, administrators, students and family members to promote diversity and anti-bias behavior in learning environments and society.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html

Tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

The Question Corner

www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Biography: Women, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/default6469.html>

Biography: Musicians, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/defaultcb78.html>

Cultural and Religious Groups: African Americans, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/defaultb0f0.html>

Prejudice and Discrimination: Racism, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/default07b8.html>

Prejudice and Discrimination: Sexism <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/defaultc640.html>