

# Melena's Jubilee

Zetta Elliott

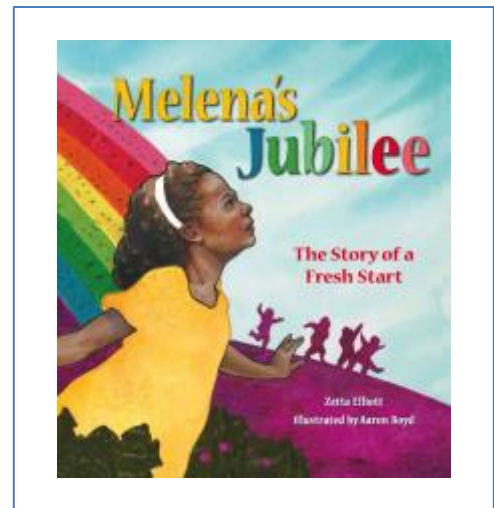
Illustrations by Aaron Boyd

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PK-4



## Summary

After being sent to bed early the previous night, Melena wakes up to a new day with a song in her heart. At breakfast she learns she has been given a “fresh

start,” and she decides to celebrate by doing things differently for the rest of the day.

Melena chooses not to fight with her brother, and shares the money she has rather than demanding to be repaid by a less fortunate friend. This story introduces children to the concept of jubilee, which stresses the important principles of debt relief, generosity, and forgiveness.

This book will lead to discussions about

- Forgiveness
- Debt
- Justice vs. revenge

## Before You Read

### Background (from the Author's Note at the back of the book)

For this story, I used the concept of jubilee to represent Melena's fresh start. She is forgiven by her family after making a mistake, and Melena doesn't make Gavin pay back the money she loaned him. On this otherwise ordinary day Melena tries to do things differently, and the song in her heart fills her with joy and peace.

Jubilee has long held a special place in the hearts of African Americans. Enslaved Africans had their own religions when they were brought to the Americas, but African Americans embraced Christianity over time. Although most slaves were forbidden from learning to read, Bible stories were shared orally, and some enslaved people memorized the verses that gave

them comfort. The practice of jubilee is explained in the Book of Leviticus: every 50 years, slaves were to be freed, debts forgiven, and families reunited. Not surprisingly, jubilee held special meaning for enslaved African Americans who longed for freedom and the chance to be with their loved ones. When President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, African Americans declared it the Day of Jubilee. The proclamation only freed slaves in those states that had seceded from the Union, but African Americans believed the president's gesture signaled the end of slavery. Jubilee Day continues to be celebrated in some parts of the country, and serves as an opportunity for African Americans to reflect on the past and focus on ways to strengthen their communities.

We don't have to wait 50 years to do things that can change our lives and improve our communities. Every day when we wake up we can choose not to hold onto anger or fight with others—we can choose instead to see the beauty in our world and share what we have with those in need.

The spirit of jubilee also lives on in the global campaign for debt relief. Many social justice activists believe that impoverished countries shouldn't be forced to repay loans from wealthy countries—especially when the unfair extraction of resources by the creditor countries created that poverty in the first place. When debt is forgiven, millions of dollars can go toward better schools, hospitals, and roads. Lifting the burden of debt from poor countries can enable them to grow their economies and become independent so that loans aren't needed in the future.

Jubilee remains relevant in our world because everyone understands the value of starting over.

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Zetta explains why she writes: “I write predominantly about Black children because I grew up believing I was invisible in the real world, and it hurt just as much to discover that I was also invisible in the realm of the imaginary. I write the books I wish I had had as a child.” (From the back cover)

### Access Prior Knowledge

1. What is forgiveness? Why is it important?
2. Have you ever been forgiven? How did it feel? How does it feel when you forgive someone else?
3. What is debt? Why do people borrow and why do people lend?
4. What happens when you reboot or restart your computer? What happens when you "reboot/restart" yourself?
5. What is justice? How is it different than revenge?

### After You Read

Revisit the Pre-Reading questions to see what the children have learned about the concepts of forgiveness, debt and revenge.

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### Activities (from the back of the book)

Here are seven things you can do to have your very own “fresh start day!”

See page 31

1. Make a clean sweep! Tidy your room and donate to charity any unused toys or clothes you no longer wear.
2. Give back! Return items you’ve borrowed from others, including overdue library books.
3. Pay it back and pay it forward! Pay back any money you owe to others, including outstanding fines at the library. If you have a little extra, share what you have with others: donate canned goods to a food bank or volunteer to help out at your local soup kitchen or nonprofit.
4. Make the most of what you have! Throw a party, prepare a meal, or dress for a special occasion without going to the store to buy something new.
5. Do something nice for others—just because! You don’t have to wait for a holiday or birthday to make someone in your life feel special. Think about something a loved one needs, and give it without expecting anything in return. You don’t have to spend any money—you can write a poem, share a good joke, or send a letter filled with encouraging words! Doing someone else’s chores without being asked can also give that person time to relax, and time is a precious gift.
6. Choose peace! When someone upsets you, don’t respond with anger. Walk away or pay that person a compliment instead.
7. Try smiling at everyone you meet for the entire day, even if they don’t smile back. Choose to stay positive and show kindness to others without expecting to be thanked.

### Further Reading (optional)

[https://www.amazon.com/What-You-Stand-Kids-Character/dp/1575421747/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1471878611&sr=1-4&keywords=books+on+forgiveness+for+kids](https://www.amazon.com/What-You-Stand-Kids-Character/dp/1575421747/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1471878611&sr=1-4&keywords=books+on+forgiveness+for+kids)

Here's a list of the top children's books about kindness:

<http://community.today.com/parentingteam/post/top-childrens-books-about-kindness>

A teacher module on global debt relief:

[About Us - Youthink! Teacher Module: What a Relief! Debt Relief for the Most Heavily Indebted Poor Countries](#)