

Realistic  
Fiction

# Melanie's Mission

by Katharine Philipson  
illustrated by Luanne Marten



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PAIRED  
READ

Poetry

## STRATEGIES & SKILLS

### Comprehension

**Strategy:** Reread

**Skill:** Theme

### Vocabulary

adventurous, courageous,  
extremely, weird

### Vocabulary Strategy

Metaphors

Word count: 1,226



**Education**

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## Essential Question

How can others inspire us?

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## Chapter 1

# The Visit



Melanie wandered into the kitchen.  
“I’m bored,” she said.

“Why don’t you take these muffins over to Mrs. Ortiz while I finish clearing up here, and then we’ll go and play some tennis,” suggested Mom.

“Okay, Mom, but I’m warning you—you’ve won for the last time. I can’t sing as well as you, but I’m sure I can beat you at tennis!”





As Melanie went downstairs to Mrs. Ortez's apartment, she heard music. It stopped abruptly after she rang the bell. A short time later, Mrs. Ortez opened the door.

"Come in, Melanie," she said, smiling and moving her walker out of the way. "How lovely to see you."

"It's okay, Mrs. Ortez. I'll come in another time, when you haven't got visitors."

"There's no one else here, dear."

"That's weird. I'm sure I heard a piano playing," said Melanie.



“That was me, Melanie. When I moved into this apartment, I left my piano with my son. I didn’t think I would have room for it. Anyway, my fingers don’t work so well any more. However, I missed it so much that I asked him to send it. It arrived yesterday.”

Melanie followed Mrs. Ortez into the sitting room. There, in place of pride, was a piano.

“It’s cool,” said Melanie, passing her hand softly over the polished wood.

“It is beautiful, isn’t it? It belonged to my great-grandmother, and it’s more than 100 years old,” said Mrs. Ortez. “Would you like me to play something, and you can sing along?”

“No thanks, Mrs. Ortez. I can’t sing at all. My mom sings in a choir, but I’m tone deaf. I don’t get music at all. Dad says that I’m an outdoorsy, adventurous kind of girl.”

“You can like being outdoors and enjoy music, too,” said Mrs. Ortez. “I believe that everyone can find some music that touches their heart. Let me play for you.”



Mrs. Ortiz maneuvered her walker close to the piano, and carefully sat on the piano stool. Her fingers were swollen and twisted. They looked painful.

Then Mrs. Ortiz began to play, and Melanie forgot she didn't understand music. She just wanted to dance—and she did! She was carried along by the rhythm of the music.





As Mrs. Ortez finished playing, Melanie came back to Earth. “What was that?” she asked.

“It’s an old song I learned when I was a girl,” said Mrs. Ortez.

As she talked, Mrs. Ortez massaged her fingers. “I love playing, but the arthritis in my hands makes it extremely painful. I taught the piano for 40 years, but now I can hardly play. I really miss it.”



## Chapter 2

# The Idea



As Melanie walked home, she thought about Mrs. Ortiz and her love of the piano. She thought about how courageous Mrs. Ortiz was to keep playing when it hurt so much.

Later that day, as Melanie played tennis with her mother, she kept thinking about the music she had danced to. She thought how sad she would be if she couldn't play tennis. Melanie wondered how she could help Mrs. Ortiz.

The next day, Melanie went to visit Mrs. Ortiz. They had a chat. Then Melanie went home and had a chat with her mom.





Three months later, Melanie gave a thick cream envelope to her mother. It was an invitation for the whole family to attend a soiree at the home of Mrs. Ortez on Friday evening.

“What’s a soiree?” asked Patrigo, sniggering. “Is it something you eat?”

“No,” laughed Dad. “It’s an evening of music and conversation—and food, too, of course.”

On Friday evening, the family went down to Mrs. Ortiz's apartment. She greeted them at the door, then they followed as she walked stiffly down the hall into the sitting room.

A table was filled with delicious-looking food. There was guacamole and salsa, with tortillas. There were wedges of bean and cheese quesadilla, sopes, tamales, and pan dulce. The boys' faces lit up.





Another table had board games, including Dad's favorite game. Some CDs lay beside the games. Cris spied one by his favorite band. The boys grinned at each other. It looked as if tonight would be a lot more fun than they had expected.

Mrs. Ortiz challenged Dad to a game, while Melanie watched Mom and Patrido play checkers. Cris declared that he would be in charge of music.



## Chapter 3

# The Surprise



Two hours passed quickly. Just as Dad started to say it was probably time to go home, Mrs. Ortez clapped her hands for attention.

“Melanie and I have a surprise for you,” she announced.

Melanie went over and opened the lid of the piano. Her stomach was one huge butterfly, fluttering and swooping. She pulled out the piano stool, then turned to face the room.

“The first piece is mainly for my brothers,” she said. “I hope they will enjoy it, and sing along.”



She sat down and began to play *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*, while the boys stared in astonishment. Then they smiled and began to sing. *Turkey in the Straw* came next, followed by *Old MacDonald*.



Melanie stood up and took a bow. She said, “It’s your turn, Mom.”

Mom went to stand beside the piano. While Melanie accompanied her, she sang *Greensleeves*, Dad’s favorite song.

The concert finished with a favorite song from Mrs. Ortiz. Everyone joined in.



As the family climbed the stairs to their apartment, Dad said to Melanie, “It looks as if we now have two musicians in the family. What brought this on?”

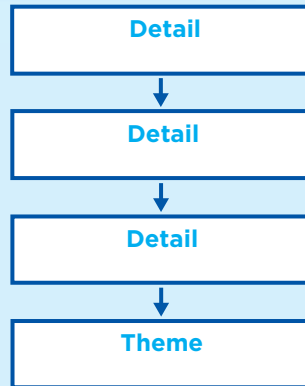
“Mrs. Ortez has the heart of a lion, playing the piano in spite of her pain,” Melanie said. “I thought that if she could be that brave, then I could try to like music. And I do! I just hadn’t ever really listened to it before. I know Mrs. Ortez loves listening to piano music. I hope that if I practice hard enough, one day she will want just to sit and listen to me.”



# Respond to Reading

## Summarize

Summarize the story of *Melanie's Mission*. Use your Theme Chart to help you.



## Text Evidence

1. How do you know *Melanie's Mission* is realistic fiction? Give an example. **GENRE**
2. How does Mrs. Ortez inspire Melanie? **THEME**
3. What did the author mean when she wrote, "Her stomach was one huge butterfly, fluttering and swooping"? **METAPHORS**
4. What is the message of this story? Use details from the story to support your answer. **WRITE ABOUT READING**

## Compare Texts

Read about an adventurous kitten and an inspiring boy.

# In the Land of Lions



Cassandra was a kitten,  
A very curious kitten.  
Her mother despaired,  
And shook her head,  
“No good will come to you,” she said.

Cassandra was a lion,  
At least that’s what she thought.  
She roamed the hot savanna,  
And grappled with the wildebeest.  
Her pride looked on in awe.

Cassandra was a snake.  
She slithered along the ground.  
Unwary mice she made her prey,  
But birds could often get away.  
She'd just pretend that was her plan.

Cassandra was a monkey.  
She liked to climb up high.  
From branch to branch she'd swing along,  
And frighten all the passers-by,  
Then amble slowly home for tea.

Cassandra was a chipmunk,  
But she didn't have to burrow.  
She found a hole already made,  
And crawled and crawled and crawled—  
And that was her mistake!

Rupert was a timid boy  
Who liked to stay indoors.  
He hated meeting spider webs,  
And creepy-crawlies made him shudder.  
He liked to keep his sneakers clean.





Rupert heard a faint meow.  
It seemed to come from underground.  
He wanted to ignore the sound,  
But then he thought, “It must be scared;  
A kitten isn’t very big.”

Rupert thought, “I must be brave.  
I’ll search all through this frightening place.”  
He crawled; he scraped the dirt away,  
Until he found a scared gray face.  
Rupert *was* a lion!



## Make Connections

How did the kitten inspire Rupert?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How are Rupert and Melanie alike? How are they different? **TEXT TO TEXT**

# Focus on Literary Elements

**Narrative Poems** A narrative poem tells a story. Some narrative poems rhyme. Some do not rhyme. A poem that does not rhyme is called free verse. Even poems that do not rhyme have a rhythm.

**Read and Find** *In the Land of Lions* is a narrative poem. It is written mainly in free verse, but there are a few rhymes and some repetition, which give it rhythm.

## Your Turn

Think of someone who inspires you. Write your own narrative poem about the person. You can make the poem rhyme, or you can write it in free verse.

# Thinkmark

## Characters

How did Melanie change during the story?

## Setting

Where did *Melanie's Mission* take place?

When did it take place?

## Plot

What was Melanie's problem in the story?

How did she solve it?

## Conclusions

What are some ways that people change because someone has inspired them?

Grade 3 • Unit 4 Week 5

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