



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Preschool to lower primary: ages 3–6

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social capabilities, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding.
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Sustainability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Language and literacy
- Creative and critical thinking
- Intercultural understanding
- Sustainability themes

THEMES

- Family, community and culture
- Diversity
- Friendship
- Sustainability and nature
- Community gardens
- Pets
- Play
- Grandparents and parents
- Music
- Craft
- Neighbours
- Cooking
- Different festive traditions and celebrations
- Christmas

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia
All illustrations © Deb Hudson

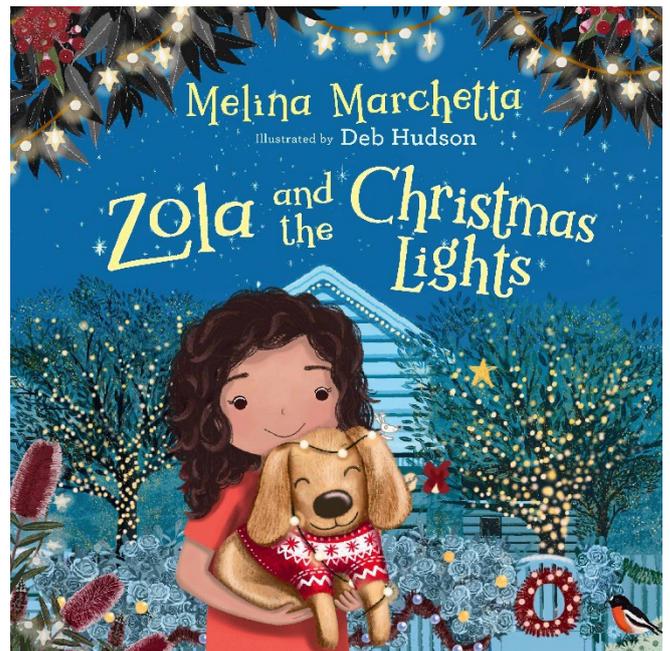
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Zola and the Christmas Lights

Melina Marchetta
& Deb Hudson

PLOT SUMMARY

Celebrate community, kindness, hope and all the wonder of the festive season in this heartwarming and charming Christmas picture book from the bestselling and award-winning author of *Looking for Alibrandi*, Melina Marchetta, together with talented and joyous illustrator Deb Hudson.

Zola lives with her nonna and her mum, and their well-behaved dog, Monty, and her cousin Alessandro and his mum and cavoodle Gigi live in the house behind them. This year, Zola and Alessandro are going to decorate the street with Nonno Nino's Christmas lights. Zola's house and Boomerang Street haven't had Christmas lights for two years. But this year, Zola and Alessandro want to continue the tradition. They've learned a lot about tradition lately – and how some families have different beliefs, and others celebrate Christmas differently. And with the help of their family and friends, this Christmas Boomerang Street is going to shine!

A wonderful children's picture book celebrating community, sustainability, diversity, family and how the different ways we celebrate bring us together.

'I don't know about you but I am getting incredibly fond of Zola and her neighbourhood. . . both boys and girls will just adore these . . . fabulous read-alouds. Highly recommended.'

Sue Warren, *ReadPlus*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melina Marchetta is the bestselling author of seventeen books, which range from beloved young adult fiction and fantasy through to contemporary and crime fiction, and books for younger readers. Her much-loved Australian classic *Looking for Alibrandi* was made into an award-winning film. She lives in Sydney with her daughter and her dog in a neighbourhood very much like Zola's.

Q & A ON ZOLA WITH MELINA MARCHETTA

Your new picture book for young readers is a delight. Why did you write about a character called Zola? My daughter was a very reluctant reader. When she was younger she especially struggled with literacy so I wrote for her. Although the character is named Zola (who is named after a young friend), she is very much based on Bianca. And I'm always searching for diversity in books for any age.

What does Bianca think of these books? She is very excited. Apart from our dog Gigi being in it, so are the dogs next door, as well as my nephew whose middle name is Alessandro. In the books Alessandro lives behind Zola and they hang out via a little gate in the fence. We will soon move into a house that will be separated by a similar door, so they are both excited.

Is Zola's Nonna Rosa similar to anyone in your family? My mum is a bit like Nonna Rosa. We went on holidays once and left our dog Gigi with her and she had to build a barrier around her entire garden. The moment we let Gigi loose in the backyard, she jumped the barriers and went for a dig-a-thon. It's all we heard the whole time we were away.

Are you a passionate gardener? I'm a terrible gardener. The problem is that I love gardens, so I would be the happiest person in the world if I had a personal gardener. Once in a while I tell myself that I'm going to grow tomatoes. I've done that successfully once, but it's all about the quality of the soil. I also love eggplant and capsicum.

The illustrations are just gorgeous. How did you feel when you first saw them? I've never had illustrations in my novels before so the visuals have always been in my head. I love Deb's illustrations because she has captured the personalities of humans and dogs perfectly.

We love the joyous feel to this picture book and its emphasis on how festive traditions bring communities together.



Zola and the Christmas Lights is like a warm hug and is filled with beautiful illustrations by **Deb Hudson**.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Deb Hudson grew up in the country on a hobby farm with a large veggie patch surrounded by fruit trees. She was the youngest of six children, hence the need for a big vegetable garden. Each child tended their own row in the garden, keeping it free from weeds, rabbits, the sheep and other smaller bugs.

Drawing and creating have always been a big part of her life. As a child her mother said she was 'off with the fairies' in her own little dream world, and was often dancing about in dress-ups, talking to imaginary friends and drawing.

Deb feels a lovely connection to the joy of the community garden in the Zola series. She finds that drawing plants and the lovely shapes, textures and colours of flowers feeds her imagination and inspires her creativity. Deb also loves to draw people and the emotion of their relationships.

Deb illustrated her first children's book *The Golden Thread* in 2018, and is also now the illustrator of *All Dogs Bark*, *Pear of Hope* and *Milly and the Mulberry Tree*. She has also created greeting cards, crockery, calendars and packaging.

Deb is passionate about drawing bright, happy and colourful images that evoke emotion and thought in the viewer – the dreamy, joy and wonder-filled moments of the everyday. She has been drawing and creating since she was a little girl and lives in the fabulous city of Melbourne, Australia, with her husband, three children, an energetic border collie and a bright yellow canary.

Questions

1. Before reading this picture book, discuss what you think this story is going to be about.
2. After reading it, were you surprised by the story? Why or why not?



WRITING STYLE

Zola and the Christmas Lights is very satisfying to read aloud. One of the reasons for this is the distinctive rhythm, word sounds and choices, and the overall language used by the author Melina Marchetta and the way in which she dramatises conversations, called 'dialogue'. We call this the author's voice. Take turns reading this book aloud in class. Make sure you emphasise the words in bold. Can you hear Melina's voice telling you the story? Be sure to give each of the characters their own voice when reading out the dialogue.

Questions

- What do you think of Melina's writing style and voice as an author? Did you like it? Why? Did you like the dialogue?
- Did the story make you laugh? When?
- Were there some moments where you felt sad? Why?
- How did you feel after you finished the story?
- Have you had experiences just like Zola? What did you do to make things right?

CHARACTERS

There are so many characters to love in this story: Zola, Alessandro, Nonna Rosa, Nonno Nino, Zola's mum, Mr Walton, Bianca, Omar and Leo and the rest of Zola's neighbours and teachers and friends at school, and of course, the loveable dogs that belong to Zola and Alessandro: well-behaved Monty and naughty Gigi. And Bianca and Omar's fluffy cat, Tim Tam. The beauty of these stories is that we identify with the characters and community, and feel as though we are participants in the stories, seeing ourselves in them.

- Which characters were your favourites? Why?



- Create your own characters and write a story about them. What happens to them? Do they get in trouble? Are there any pets involved? What do they look like? Where do they live? What does it look like? Who else lives there? Do they have lots of neighbours? Describe the community in which they live? Are there any vegie gardens? What activities do people enjoy?
- Have you ever grown your own food? Write a story that features your garden, either real or imagined, and your neighbourhood. Try to include at least two other characters and two animals that you see. Two different types of food growing in the garden? Where do you go? What can you see? Describe the setting and what you love about it.

SUSTAINABILITY, NATURE, COMMUNITY AND FESTIVE TRADITIONS

- Plant some flower or vegetable seeds in some soil in an egg carton or other container. Depending on the time of year and where you live, there are lots of seeds you might choose from. Some good ones to try are tomatoes, sunflowers, carrots, peas. As a class, keep them watered and in the sun. Watch them grow. Plant them out in a painted pot.
- Start your own school community garden and enjoy it all year round, just like Zola and her family. Parent and teachers can involve a child in this rewarding project that teaches children (and adults!) so much about sustainability. Organise a plant sale of seedlings you have grown and raise money for a local charity.
- Join in [National Tree Day](#) and plant some trees. Consider giving someone in your community or family a tree or plant as a present for one of the many festive celebrations mentioned in this picture book.
- Draw your favourite things about gardens and nature. Try to include as many birds, pets and butterflies as you can. You might like to draw your own pet in the garden. Are they getting up to some mischief?
- Make some lasagne with your family and share it with friends or your community for a festive event.
- Organise a 'craftafternoon'. Perhaps some grandparents with the right skills could come in and teach your class different craft activities and you could make handmade cards, decorations and presents for the next festive occasion you plan to celebrate with family and friends.

- Next time it is your local community end-of-year festive fete, get involved as a family, planting seedlings in pots, making cakes or gathering other produce from your school, community or home gardens to sell in a stall, and raise money for the community or a charity.

FAMILY

- Draw a picture of your grandma or grandfather, or your parents or brother or sister or aunty or uncle or someone else in your family. What is special about them? What are the things you love about them? Write under it the sorts of activities they like. Are there special activities that you enjoy together? Describe them. Create a card for them to celebrate a festive tradition and let them know you love them.
- Perhaps the festive card could include an acrostic poem made out of the first letters of their name and list all the things you love about them, making sure that each starts with a letter of their name. Feel free to add lots of illustrations!

VISUAL LITERACY

The illustrator of *Zola and the Christmas Lights*, Deb Hudson, has taken great care to develop the setting of Boomerang Street and all of the characters, working with the author and editor to get them just right. Here are some examples of her character studies:

ZOLA



- Create your own character studies by drawing pictures of the characters from your story in the previous activity. Try drawing them in a variety of poses and with their friends, family and pets.

GIGI



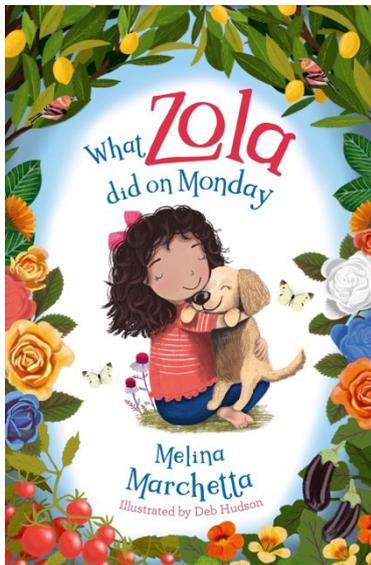
- Now illustrate a scene from the story, including as many of the characters that you can and some of the instruments you or your classmates or someone in your classmates' family plays.
- Look at the illustrations throughout *Zola and the Christmas Lights*. Pick a favourite one and describe what you see. Is there more in it than is described in the text? What are some of the extra details the illustrator has included?
- Draw your own pictures of Zola, Alessandro, Nonna Rosa, Nonno Nino, Mr Walton, Ms Divis, Leo, Bianca and Omar and their parents, and all the pets. Try drawing their street with lots of lights and decorations, too. Use bright colours and vibrant patterns, and include as many details from the story as you can.
- Download more Zola activity packs [here](https://www.penguin.com.au/activities/2707-zola-activity-pack) and [here](https://www.penguin.com.au/activities/2993-what-zola-did-on-thursday-activity-pack) (or at the URLs below):

<https://www.penguin.com.au/activities/2707-zola-activity-pack>

<https://www.penguin.com.au/activities/2993-what-zola-did-on-thursday-activity-pack>



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



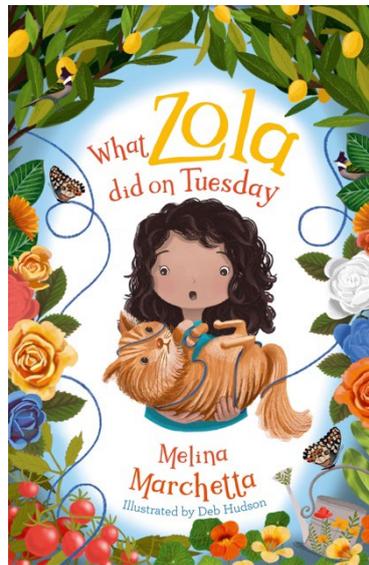
What Zola did on Monday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read the fun-filled and heart-warming first story in the What Zola Did series by Melina Marchetta.

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Monday, when Gigi gets into Nonna Rosa's veggie garden . . .

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, to help her accept responsibility and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

Teachers' resources available.



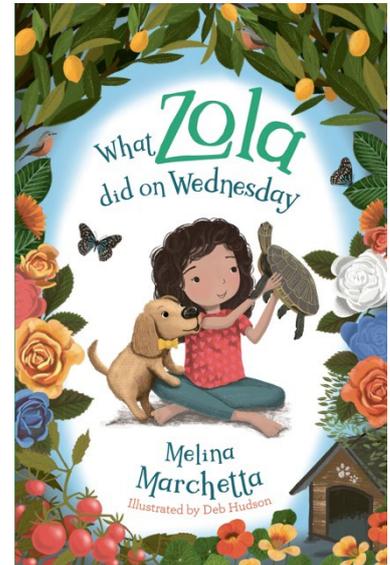
What Zola did on Tuesday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read about more of Zola's action-packed and funny adventures in book two in the What Zola Did series!

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Tuesday, when Zola tries to help Nonna knit a scarf . . .

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, to help her accept responsibility and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

Teachers' resources available.



What Zola did on Wednesday
by Melina Marchetta

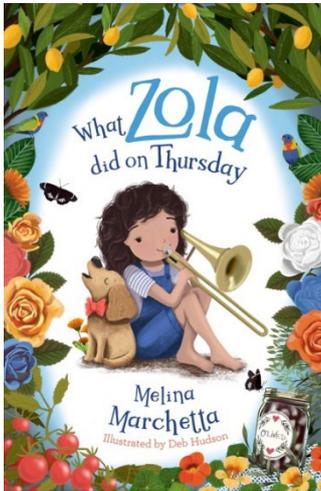
Why this story? Read another fun and mischievous adventure from Zola and her friends in book three of the What Zola Did series!

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Wednesday, when Zola has a plan to help find her friend Sophia's missing turtle but Gigi leads the neighbours on a chase around the street . . .

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, to help her accept responsibility and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

Teachers' resources available.

FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



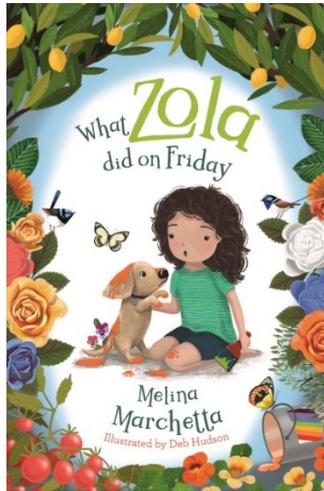
What Zola did on Thursday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read about Zola's musical adventures in the fourth book in the What Zola Did series by Melina Marchetta.

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Thursday, when Zola's cranky neighbour is not impressed by how well she plays the trombone.

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, to help her accept responsibility and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



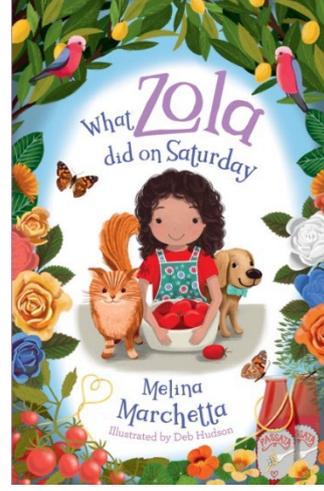
What Zola did on Friday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read about more of Zola's action-packed and funny adventures in book five in the What Zola Did series!

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Friday, when Zola and Alessandro decide to paint Nonno Nino's boat!

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, to help her accept responsibility and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



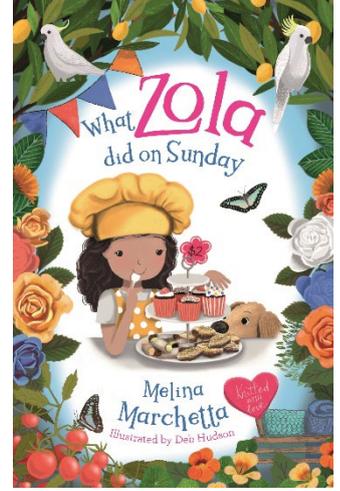
What Zola did on Saturday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read another fun and mischievous adventure from Zola and her friends in the gorgeous seventh book in the What Zola Did series!

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Saturday, when it's tomato day at Nonna Rosa's and Zola is helping out . . .

Luckily, Zola's family and friends are around to make things right in the end, and, best of all, to have lots of fun.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



What Zola did on Sunday
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read another delightful story in this gorgeous series to engage and entertain newly independent young readers. Celebrate community, friendship and kindness in these fun, heartwarming stories full of mischief and humour.

Zola loves living on Boomerang Street with her mum and her nonna. Every day of the week is an adventure. But Zola has a problem. No matter how much she tries, she can't keep out of trouble. Like on Sunday, when it's St Odo's fete and Zola and the gang join in the fun . . .

Collect all seven stories in the series. One for every day of the week!

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Zola and the Christmas Lights	Melina Marchetta	9780143777649	Preschool -1	\$19.99		
What Zola did on Monday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895150	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Tuesday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895167	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Wednesday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895174	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Thursday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895181	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Friday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895020	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Saturday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895211	K-3	\$12.99		
What Zola did on Sunday	Melina Marchetta	9781760895228	K-3	\$12.99		
TOTAL						

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