WHAT IS GIVEN from the HEART

Patricia C. McKissack
April Harrison
ABOUT THE BOOK

“Mirror lens company” Mama tells James Otis. It’s been a rough couple of months for them, but Mama says as long as they have their health and enough, they’ll be okay. One Sunday before Valentine’s Day, Reverend Dennis makes an announcement during the service—the Temple has lost everything in a fire, and the church is collecting anything that might be useful to them. James thinks hard about what he can add to the Temple’s love box, but what does he have worth giving? With her extraordinary gift for storytelling, McKissack—with amusing illustrations by April Harrison—delivers a touching, powerful tale of compassion and remembrance and all that is given from the heart reaches the heart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

PATTY C. MCKISSACK is the author of many beloved books for children, including Let’s Clap, Jump, Sing & Shout!, a 2017 Parent’s Choice Award winner; a New York Public Library, School Library Journal, and KSLA Resource Best Book of the Year, and recipient of three starred reviews; The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural; a Coretta Scott King Honor Book; and an ALA-ALSC Notable Children’s Book, Never Forgotten, a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, and an ALA-ALSC Notable Children’s Book and winner of the 2008 Parent’s Choice Award. Ms. McKissack passed away in the summer of 2017. This is her final work.

APRIL HARRISON is a seasoned folk artist born and currently residing in Greenville, South Carolina. Her work appears in the public collections of Vanderbilt University, the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center, the Atlanta Housing Authority, the Erskine University Museum, and in many private collections. This is her first picture book. Learn more at aprilharrisonart.com.

A PICTURE BOOK STUDY: Looking at More Gems from Patricia C. McKissack

WHAT IS GIVEN FROM THE HEART

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

A BOOK TO GIVE

When James Otis gives Sarah the book he made for her, she says, “I will keep this book forever and ever.” Here each student studies a book to give to someone, modeling their illustration on those in What Is Given From the Heart. Have students study the pictures carefully for ideas. The copyright page describes the illustrations “as rendered in mixed media, including acrylics, collage, pen, and found objects.” Can the students mimic this style? The text for each student’s book could be a story, essay, or poem they write or a poem or folktale that they find. The book should have an appealing cover and an author-illustrator biographical note about the student. (To find ideas and templates for handmade books, consult makingbooks.com.)

SIMPLE GIFTS

Some of the best gifts, like the book James Otis gives Sarah, are handmade items or are not even physical objects at all. As a class, brainstorm a list of gifts that students could create. Crafts like knitting, sewing, woodworking, and paper crafts are possibilities, or as poems or performances of a song or dance. The ideas can come from art, like a sculpture or drawing, or games, like simple toys or board games. Based on the class list, students should make a plan about what gifts they will give to the family members who, like Sarah, may not be expecting it.

SARAH’S THOUGHTS

The story focuses on James Otis, but Sarah plays a pivotal part. Have students consider Sarah’s perspectives and write a letter to her from James Otis. The letter should describe what she’s gone through recently, her feelings about it, and her reaction to his gift. Students should draw from the narrative and illustrations but also use their imaginations to expand Sarah’s character beyond what the book conveys. Have students read the letters aloud in pairs and compare what they wrote.

WORDS OF INSPIRATION

Reverend Dennis tells the congregation, “What is given from the heart reaches the heart.” Quotations and sayings like this can inspire people the way James Otis was inspired. Ask students to write down inspirational quotes or sayings that they already know and then gather more from friends and relatives. Then have each student choose a quote or saying and illustrate a small portion of it to put on a class wall or on a poster.

THE POWER OF PICTURES

Like many picture books, What Is Given From the Heart contains information through its illustrations, some of which can’t be found in the text. Ask each student to choose an aspect of the story that is shown through the pictures, such as house exteriors or interiors, clothing, possessions, marital and weather, church services, and so on. They could also choose to consider how the pictures convey emotion. Have the students examine the book page by page to glean information about the topic, making a list of what they feel. They should then write a thoughtful note to any piece of information that is not part of the text to demonstrate how important the pictures are. Have them share these findings and talk about the role of the illustrations in helping to tell the story.

A PICTURE BOOK STUDY: Looking at More Gems from Patricia C. McKissack

Misty Lee Scott

A MILLION PIES TO MAKE OR LOSE Illustrated by April Harrison Grades K–2 · Lexile: 660 L

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Read aloud at least two of McKissack’s books, and have student spend time with the books independently. Create a large chart with the top of each column. For the rows, list picture book elements, such as characters, plot summary, setting (time and place), art exteriors or interiors, clothing, possessions, marital and weather, church services, and so on. They could also choose to consider how the pictures convey emotion. Have the students examine the book page by page to glean information about the topic, making a list of what they feel. They should then write a thoughtful note to any piece of information that is not part of the text to demonstrate how important the pictures are. Have them share these findings and talk about the role of the illustrations in helping to tell the story.

ON THE FRONT PORCH OF MY MIND

As a class, work up an excerpt from a speech that McKissack read in 2010, posted online by the University of Wisconsin: templeilum/62011. Then hold a class discussion about the speech and how it relates to the context of McKissack’s books. Start by considering the title of the speech, which is “On the Front Porch of My Mind: Stories and Where the Stories Came From.” What details about her childhood are echoed in her books? How do the books reflect her comments about the adults in her life?

GROWN-UP GUIDANCE

Parents, grandparents, and other adults play important roles in McKissack’s stories, offering advice or providing examples of how to act. Divide students into small groups to analyze examples of such adults in the books. Then ask students to each prepare a short speech about an adult who has helped them in some way. It should be someone the student respects, and the speech should give specific examples of why. Have students give their speeches in the small groups and then discuss the similarities and differences in their context.

FAVORITE QUOTES

McKissack’sminus and proverbs reflect a deep love of language. After reading her books, have students go back and find phrases and sentences that they especially like. Each student should write three examples and then add them to a class list of quotes on a whiteboard, blackboard, or canvas. Gather as a class and have students read aloud the quotes they chose. Then have a discussion about what the quotes have in common, addressing aspects such as imagery, alliteration, rhythm, and dialect.

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Music loves company.” Mama tells James Otis. It’s been a rough couple of months for them, but Mama says as long as they have their health and enough, they’re fine. One Sunday before Valentine’s Day, Reverend Dennis makes an announcement during the service—the Temples have lost everything in a fire, and the church is collecting anything that might be useful to them. James thinks hard about what he can add to the Temples’ love box, but what does he have worth giving? With her extraordinary gift for storytelling, McKissack—with stunning illustrations by April Harrison—delivers a touching, powerful tale of compassion and resilience as well as all that is given from the heart reaches the heart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

PATRICIA C. MCKISSACK is the author of many beloved books for children, including Let’s Clap, Jump, Sing & shout, a 2017 Parent’s Choice Award winner, a New York Public Library, School Library Journal, and Kirkus Review Best Book of the Year, and recipient of these starred reviews: The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural, a Newbery Honor Book and Coretta Scott King–John Steptoe Award, and its companion, porch Life: Tales of Whispers, Vibrations, and Other Wily Characters, an ALA-ALSC Notable Children’s Book; Nice Fever, a Coretta Scott King Honor Book; and an ALA-ALSC Notable Children’s Book and winner of the 2008 Parents’ Choice Award. Mr. McKissack passed away in the summer of 2017. This is her final work.

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“Many love company” Mama tells James Otis. It’s been a rough couple of months for them, but Mama says as long as they have their health and enough, they’s likeyed. One Sunday before Valentine’s Day, Reverend Dennis makes an announcement during the service—the Temple has lost everything in a fire, and the church is collecting something that might be useful to them. James thinks hard about what can add to the Temple’s love box, but what does he have worth bringing? With her extraordinary gift for storytelling, McKissack—through moving illustrations by April Harrison—delivers a touching, powerful tale of compassion and reminds us all that what is given from the heart reaches the heart.

THE PICTURE BOOK STORY: Looking at More Gems from Patricia C. McKissack
Mama and Brother Wind
Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
Grade 2–3
HC: 978-0-679-88333-3
F&P: R · Lexile: 690L
Grades PreK–2

A Millon Fish . . . More or Less
Illustrated by Michaela Muntean
Grade 2–3
HC: 978-0-06-084886-6

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When James Otis gives Sarah the book he made for her, she says, “I will keep this book forever and ever.” Here each student must choose a book to give to someone, modeling their illustrations on those in What Is Given from the Heart. Have students study the pictures carefully for ideas. The copyright page describes the illustrations as “rendered in mixed media, including acrylics, charcoal, pen, and found objects.” Can the students mimic this style? The text for each student’s book could be a story, essay, or poem they write or a poem or folk tale they like. The book should have an appealing cover and an author-illustrator bibliographic note about the student. (To find ideas and templates for handmade books, visit makingbooks.com.)

SIMPLE GIFTS
Some of the best gifts, like the book James Otis gives Sarah, are handmade items or are not even physical objects at all. As a class, brainstorm a list of gifts that students could create. Crafts like knitting, sewing, woodworking, and paper crafts are possibilities, as are poems or performances of a song or dance. The ideas can come from art, like a sculpture or drawing, or games, like simple toys or board games. Based on the class list, students should make a plan about a simple gift they will give in the future to someone who, like Sarah, may not be expecting it.

WORDS OF INSPIRATION
Reverend Dennis tells the congregation, “What is given from the heart reaches the heart.” Quotations and sayings like this can inspire people the way James Otis was inspired. Ask students to write down inspirational quotes or sayings that they already know and then gather more from friends and relatives. Then have each student choose a quote or saying and illustrate a small portion of it to put on a classroom Words of Inspiration board.

At the end of the story, Reverend Dennis tells the congregation, “What is given from the heart reaches the heart.” Quotations and sayings like this can inspire people the way James Otis was inspired. Ask students to write down inspirational quotes or sayings that they already know and then gather more from friends and relatives. Then have each student choose a quote or saying and illustrate a small portion of it to put on a classroom Words of Inspiration board.

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FAVORITE QUOTES
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The All-I’ll-Ever-Want
Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
Grade PreK–2
PB: 978-0-399-54957-8
F&P: S · Lexile: 990L
All Grades · F&P: S · Lexile: 990L

With its mix of lovingly crafted prose and simple but effective illustrations, this book provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to examine McKissack’s diverse range of writing styles and subjects. The story of a boy who creates a special book for his mother to help her remember all the wonderful moments they’ve shared is an inspiring tale that will resonate with readers of all ages. The illustrations convey a sense of warmth and care that complements the text, making this a perfect choice for any classroom library.

The Power of Pictures

Like many picture books, What Is Given from the Heart contains information through its illustrations, some of which can’t be conveyed in words. Ask each student to choose an aspect of the story that is shown through the pictures, such as house exteriors or interiors, clothing, possessions, terrain and weather, church services, and so on. They could also choose to consider how the pictures convey emotion. Have the students examine the book page by page to glean information about the topics, making a list of what they feel. They should then put an asterisk next to any piece of information that is not part of the text to demonstrate how important the pictures are. Have them share their findings and talk about the role of the illustrations in helping to tell the story.

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SARAH’S THOUGHTS

The story focuses on James Otis, but Sarah plays a pivotal part. Have students consider Sarah’s perspective and write a letter from her to James Otis. The letter should describe what she’s gone through recently, feeling about it, and her reaction to his gift. Students should draw from the narrative and illustrations but also on their imaginations to expand Sarah’s character beyond what the book conveys. Have students read the letters aloud in pairs and compare what they wrote.

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FOR ALL GRADES

A Million Fish . . . More or Less
Illustrated by Michael Chesworth
Grades PreK–3
PB: 978-0-399-54950-2
F&P: P · Lexile: 510L

This book offers an excellent opportunity for teachers to examine McKissack’s diverse range of writing styles and subjects. The story of a boy who creates a special book for his mother to help her remember all the wonderful moments they’ve shared is an inspiring tale that will resonate with readers of all ages. The illustrations convey a sense of warmth and care that complements the text, making this a perfect choice for any classroom library.

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A CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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