**Patricia McKissack** – Level Five- Narrative

Patricia McKissack is the author of biographies of famous African Americans and of several picture books. Two of her most widely known picture books are *Mirandy and Brother Wind* and *Flossie and the Fox*. Patricia was the oldest of three children whose family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when she was very young. Her parents divorced when she was ten, and her mother moved to Nashville to be close to her parents. Her grandparents in Nashville were very important in Patricia’s life. They gave her a lot of love and attention, particularly her grandfather, who, she says, “spoiled her rotten.” Her grandfather was a great storyteller, and he would always include Patricia’s or her siblings’ names in his stories. He told a story of a girl named Pat who could outsmart foxes, and we all know that foxes are smart. This story forms the foundation of Patricia’s famous book, *Flossie and the Fox*. His many stories are the inspiration for many of her picture books.

Patricia began to see herself as an author in third grade. She wrote a poem, and her teacher put it on the bulletin board and said she liked it. It was thrilling to have other people read and respond to something she had written. She was forever scribbling ideas and thoughts down for future reference, and she realized early that she wanted to be a writer. But she was told black people couldn’t do that. “Girl, you better take something you can do. You’d better be a teacher.” Despite this advice, reading and writing remained an important part of her life. She kept a journal, and always kept a diary. She spent a lot of time in the Nashville Public Library because it was one public place that was open to blacks. Every week she checked out three books, the maximum allowed. The minute she was done, she went back for more. Fairy tales and myths were her favorite, but she was troubled because she never saw people who looked like her in the stories. She searched the libraries for books with African-American characters and found them in books of nonfiction. She began reading biographies of people like Mary McLeod Bethune, and her search led her to the poetry of Langston Hughes. She even searched the encyclopedia for pictures of African Americans.

In college Patricia majored in English and Education. Again she was steered toward getting a teaching certificate “so you can have something to do when you graduate.” When she taught eighth grade, she was bothered by the lack of material for African American children. She loved the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar that her mother had read to her, so she wrote her first
biography of Dunbar. Since then she has continued to write biographies of important African Americans such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, and Jesse Jackson. She is committed to writing strong, accurate, and appealing stories about African Americans to improve the self-esteem of African American children and encourage all children to have an open mind toward cultures different from their own.

(page 2: Patricia McKissack)
COMPREHENSION

Patricia McKissack – Five - Narrative

1. Who is Patricia McKissack?

2. Who was the most influential in developing Patricia’s love of story?
   Implicit: her grandfather

3. How did Patricia’s third-grade teacher encourage her writing?
   Explicit: she liked a poem Patricia had written and put it on the bulletin board (Both ideas must be included.)

4. Why did some people tell Patricia to be a teacher rather than an author?
   Implicit: they told her blacks couldn’t become authors; or they told her she should “do something she could do”

5. How do we know that Patricia was determined to be an author?
   Implicit: reading and writing remained important to her (despite the advice to become a teacher); she went to the library a lot to keep reading; or she kept a journal and a diary

6. Why did Patricia decide to write biographies of African American people?
   Explicit: she found few books in the library on African Americans; or when she taught eighth grade there were few books written about African Americans

7. Name two persons that Patricia McKissack has written biographies about.
   Explicit: Paul Laurence Dunbar, Martin Luther King, W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, or Jesse Jackson

8. How do we know that Patricia McKissack would want children who are not African American to read her books?
   Implicit: by reading her books children would learn about other cultures; or she wants all children to have an open mind towards cultures different from their own

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Number Correct Explicit: _______
Number Correct Implicit: _______
Total _______

Independent: 8 correct
Instructional: 6-7 correct
Frustration: 0-5 correct