

PRECIOUS AND THE BOO HAG

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2008 Grades 3-5

Submitted by Susan Hays Melsheimer, Graduate Student, LSU School of Library & Information Science (Professor: Dr. Margie Thomas); and Dorothy L. Grimsley, Instructor, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Precious and the Boo Hag by Patricia C. McKissak and Onawumi Jean Moss. Illustrated by Kyrsten Brooker. Atheneum (Anne Schwartz Books), 2005. 40 pages.

Summary

The Boo Hag is a legendary creature from the Gullah of South Carolina. Children will be delighted by this rollicking, rhythmic original tale about the courageous girl who is too clever to be fooled by Pruella the Boo Hag. Precious has a stomachache, so she stays home alone while the rest of her family goes out to plant corn. Brother warns his sister that the Boo Hag may try to get into the house, but the others assure Precious that the Boo Hag will not come to bother her. Left alone, Precious sings a song to comfort herself and as a reminder NOT to let Pruella inside. Sure enough, Pruella shows up and wants to come inside the house. Precious refuses to let her in, but the Boo Hag tries to fool the little girl by changing into various forms. Each time the Boo Hag transforms, Precious realizes that it is the Boo Hag. She screws up her courage, sings her song, and does not let her in. This dramatic tale, with lively rhythms and refrains is enhanced by vivacious illustrations. This is a terrific story to read aloud.

Awards

2005 Parents' Choice Award –Silver, Picture Books
2006 ALA Notable Children's Book
Comstock Book Award – 2006 Honor Book
The Irma Simonton Black & James H. Black Award – Honor Book for 2005
Charlotte Zolotow Award Honor Book
NYPL 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
SLJ Best Book of the Year
Storytelling World Award Honor Book, "Stories for Young Listeners"

Patricia C. McKissak's Biography

Patricia C. McKissak was born in Smyrna, Tennessee, on August 9, 1944. She grew up in Tennessee, graduated from Tennessee State University and moved to Missouri. She taught school for nine years and edited children's books for six years before launching her writing career. She has been a prolific and highly praised children's book author. Her rich African-American heritage and its traditions are reflected in the books she has written that include easy readers, biographies, picture books, and informational books. Mrs. McKissack now lives in Chesterfield, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis.

Other Titles By Patricia C. McKissak

The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural
Flossie and the Fox
Run Away Home
Mirandy and Brother Wind
Christmas in The Big House, Christmas in the Quarters
A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl, Belmont Plantation, Virginia, 1859

Onawumi Jean Moss's Biography

Onawumi Jean Moss, a master storyteller, received the Nora Neale Hurston Award for Storytelling, which is the highest award given by the National Association of Black Storytellers. She performs professionally as the Soulful Storyteller. *Precious and the Boo Hag* is her first book collaboration. Ms. Moss, who has been Associate Dean of Students at Amherst College for twenty-one years, is looking forward to retirement.

Illustrator's Biography

Kyrsten Brooker has illustrated several picture books including *They Saw the Future*, *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street*, and *City Angels*. She uses inventive collage techniques and compositions. She received the 2005 Governor General's Literary Award in Canada for her illustrations in *City Angel*, written by Eileen Spinelli. Brooker and her husband, John, live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. They have two young sons and Springer spaniel.

Other Titles Illustrated by Kyrsten Brooker

City Angel by Eileen Spinelli.

Henry's Amazing Machine by Dayle Ann Dodds.

The Night is Singing by Jacqueline Davies.

Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street by Roni Schotter.

Related Titles

Lon PoPo by Ed Young.

Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp by Mercer Mayer.

Flossie and the Fox by Patricia McKissack.

Aunt Nancy and Old Man Trouble by Phyllis Root.

The Cemetery Within by Paul Lathan.

Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales and True Tales by Virginia Hamilton.

Wiley and the Hairy Man by Molly Bang.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.

The Monstrous Memoirs of a Mighty McFearless by Ahmet Zappa.

Emily Windsnap and the Monster From the Deep by Liz Kessler.

Tell Me a Scary Story...But Not Too Scary! by Carl Reiner.

Classroom Connections

- Define the term “**cautionary folktale.**” Read aloud “*Little Eight John*” from *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*.
<http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/bibs/tales/Little8John.htm>
- Research the life and works of **Patricia McKissack**. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a book. Have students try to locate interesting facts in each book. For example, *Christmas in The Big House*, *Christmas in the Quarters* provides the origin of some food names.
- Have students **create stories** involving a Boo Hag or a monster.
- **Character Traits:** Before Brother went out to help his mama in the cornfields, he pulled Precious to the side and warned her about letting Pruella the Boo Hag in their house. He told his sister ten (10) characteristics of Pruella. Discuss the characteristics and find examples in the story. Example: Brother said the Boo Hag tells “whoppers.” In the story, the Addie Louise look-alike said Precious’s mama looked pretty in her blue apron when she wasn’t even wearing a blue apron.
- **Home Alone:** In the book, Mama gave Precious the “dos and don’ts” of staying home. Have a class discussion about staying home alone. List them on your paper. See the web

sites for tips on staying safe when you are at home alone.

www.hqcc.lawrence.ks.us/kids/home_alone.html

www.earthlink.net/software/free/parentalcontrols/tips/

- **Stranger Danger:** In each appearance except one, Pruella was easily recognized as a stranger. However, in one appearance, she looked like Precious's friend, Addie Louise. What difference did Precious notice that caused her to know that it was Pruella the Boo Hag and not her best friend?
- **Art:** Provide students with a wide variety of paper and craft materials such as lace, wallpaper pieces, fabric, and buttons. Have the students create their own Boo Hag inspired by the collage art of Kyrsten Brooker.
- **Cultural Background of Boo Hags:** In the story, Precious asked Brother why the Boo Hag wants to get inside their house. Brother replied, "You don't want to know." Explain the term "**Boo Hag**." Discuss the origin of Boo Hags in Georgia and South Carolina. Find out what Brother knew about Boo Hags but was afraid to tell his little sister. Discuss ways to battle the Boo Hag.
http://www.charlestonghosts.com/boohag_story.html
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boo_Hag
www.charlestonghosts.com/boohag_story.html
<http://sciway2.net/2002/b52b/boohaglegend.html>
www.co.beaufort.sc.us/BFTLIB/gullah2.htm#Ghosts
- **Explore Gullah Culture in South Carolina with Aunt Perlie-Sue:** This kid-friendly site includes 3 Gullah tales with audio with both the English and Gullah versions. It also has lesson plans related to folktales, plus links to music, events and other information. This site is part of ETB the PBS station in South Carolina. www.knowitall.org/gullahnet
- **Art:** Have students draw pictures of a Boo Hag and display them on the bulletin board.