

The Help

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The 1960's in Jackson, Mississippi could be described as a time of extreme and almost violent change for its inhabitants. During this period, the effects of the Civil Rights Movement, technological and cultural innovations, and political turmoil are almost tangible and are faced sometimes with acceptance, but more often than not, with anger and resistance. *The Help* elegantly follows the paths of three women as they each face their own set of struggles, which stem from trying to thrive in the harsh and prejudiced conditions of the south. First there is Eugenia (preferably Skeeter) Phelan, a young woman in her early twenties whose problems include a controlling mother whose main concerns are Skeeter's appearance and social life, unmanageable curly hair, a ridiculously tall build, and the unrealistic dream to become a writer. After graduating from college, she comes home, desperate to find, much to her mother's dismay, the perfect story to write about, and not the perfect husband. After discovering that the beloved maid who raised her has disappeared to a location that everyone refuses to disclose, and consulting with a publisher from New York, Skeeter is inspired to tackle a topic that Jackson is blind to: the treatment of the help. Risking the love and friendship of everyone around her, Skeeter begins the process of uncovering a new perspective. In a rebellion against the city in which she was raised, Skeeter raises a question that most would prefer to never have been asked: What is it like to be the help working for a white family? With narration from Aibileen Clark, a maid who has raised the children of several of her employers, and Minny Jackson, another maid with a ferocity that gets her into trouble with her bosses, *The Help* illustrates these three women's journey to share what nobody wants to hear: the truth.

The combination of fact and fiction displayed in *The Help* makes it an informative and also eye-opening revelation to what life must have been like not only as a white person, but also as a woman of color in Jackson. It smoothly intertwines 1960's culture such as the invention of Valium, air conditioning, and hair-straightening devices, the introduction of rock and roll, and political happenings such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the protests of Martin Luther King, and other events of the Civil Rights Movement with the fictional yet realistic stories of the women of Jackson. Throughout *The Help*, the writing seamlessly describes every emotion and feeling in a beautiful and poetic fashion of which is rarely seen in books. This novel possesses a very special quality. It is able to provoke the distinct feelings of a woman's love for a child, a woman's pain for what has been lost, and a woman's desire to uncover the truth.

Because of the large vocabulary and heavy, sometimes violent, topics that *The Help* covers, this book would only seem fit for someone of about 14 years of age or older. I do however recommend that everyone of the proper age should read it. It is long, (close to 500 pages) but never dull. It is definitely written for a mainly female audience, but men could also find some meaning within its pages as well. It is the perfect gift for anyone who is looking to broaden his or her taste in literature and focus on a story with a bit more depth. Even if you happen to be one of those people who does not read very

frequently or does not have much time to read, *The Help* should be that annual book that you attempt to delve into. It is completely worth it.

Recommended Titles:

Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor