

Southfield Public Library

The Help by Katherine Stockett

Discussion Questions used at SPL -- May 2011

1. How important was that opening chapter, setting the stage for Aibileen's feelings?
2. What did that opening conversation about bathrooms tell you about the ladies?
3. Did the first pages catch you, or did you have to get deeper into the book?
4. What did you think some of the secrets might have been . . . what happened to Constantine and what about that pie that Minnie made!
5. P. 29 -- nobody saying anything and still having a conversation. Why do you think people do that?
6. What did you think of Minnie's job with Miss Celia? What did you think was going on at first?
7. Did you like how the story was told by different characters? Did the author do a good job in giving them unique voices?
8. What was your first impression of Skeeter?
9. Were any of the characters happy? If you had to pick one or the other to be, which would you?
10. Why do you think Skeeter's mother let her go home with Constantine, sometimes? Doesn't that seem like a big taboo to you?
11. Why didn't Skeeter offer to pay Aibileen for her help in answering the cleaning questions for her column? Why didn't Aibileen take it when she finally did?
12. Do you think Aibileen grew fonder of Skeeter because of the connection to her son since he was trying to write about his experiences in the work place?
13. Were you surprised when Aibileen finally agreed to it?
14. Did you enjoy how Aibileen tried to talk Minny into helping? How important is it for people to be heard?
15. What did you think of the Junior Leaguers . . . Hilly, Elizabeth, and the others . . . Why do you think they acted the way they did?
16. What did you think of Minny's white lady, Celia?
17. Would you agree with Aibileen's feeling about women p. 188?
18. Can you build up a callous to things . . . p. 207?
19. Where were all the men in this story? How were they portrayed? Why do you think they were more of a background figure?
20. Why do you think it took a white woman to start things, like Minny thought on p 219? Did it really?
21. Minny keeps saying that she doesn't care about Celia, but do you think she does?
22. Do you think other people felt the way Gretchen did? P. 259
23. What did you think of Skeeter's and John's relationship? Were they being honest with each other in the important thing?
24. What did you think of Skeeter's "mistake" in the newsletter, when Hilly got all the toilets on her lawn instead of coats?
25. Why do you think Hilly and Skeeter were friends anyways? Was she a likable person? Was Skeeter?
26. Did Skeeter really get the seriousness of what she was doing? Did she only worry that the maids would be the ones to face the music or did she understand that she was facing ostracism, too?

27. Minny believes that Celia just doesn't see the lines . . . either between her and Minny or between her and the Junior League ladies . . . Would you agree with that? Would you agree with Aibileen that the lines are only in our heads? P. 312
28. Which character irritated you the most? Hilly? Celia? Elizabeth?
29. What did you think of the description of Celia's entrance into the benefit ball?
30. All in all, what do you think the purpose of this book was? What did you come away with?
31. Were you surprised at with Constantine's story? What did it make you feel about Skeeter's mother? Was it out of character for her?
32. Do you think Minny was right to put the Terrible Awful in the book? Was it the only way to keep them safe?
33. "They say it's like true love, good help. You only get one in a lifetime" That's from Skeeter's mother . . . Just what kind of remark is that?
34. Do you think Aibileen made any difference in Mae Mobley's future?
35. Do you think the woman really didn't recognize themselves? Would you?
36. How did the book change the lives of the women? Lou Anne, Skeeter, Aibileen, Minny?
37. What do you think will happen to Aibileen and Minny? Where do you think Skeeter will wind up?
38. In the afterwords, the author wrote that she worried that she was crossing a line, writing in a black woman's voice . . . what do you think? What other books have you read that someone from the opposite sex, or different culture or background, wrote in a different voice? Does it matter?

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General Discussion Questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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The Help

Questions from ReadingGroupGuides.com

http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_h/the_help1.asp

1. Who was your favorite character? Why?
2. What do you think motivated Hilly? On one hand she's so unpleasant to Aibileen and her own help, as well as to Skeeter once she realizes she can't control her. But she's a wonderful mother. Do you think you can be a good mother but at the same time a deeply flawed person?
3. Like Hilly, Skeeter's mother is a prime example of someone deeply flawed yet somewhat sympathetic. She seems to care for Skeeter – and she also seems to have very real feelings for Constantine. Yet the ultimatum she gives to Constantine is untenable. And most of her interaction with Skeeter is critical. Do you think Skeeter's mother is a sympathetic or unsympathetic character? Why?
4. How much of a person's character do you think is shaped by the times in which they live?
5. Did it bother you that Skeeter is willing to overlook so many of Stuart's faults so that she can get married, and it's not until he literally gets up and walks away that the engagement falls apart?
6. Do you think Minny was justified in her distrust of white people?
7. Do you think that had Aibileen stayed working for Miss Elizabeth, that Mae Mobley would have grown up to be racist like her mother? Do you think racism is inherent, or taught?
8. From the perspective of a 21st century reader, the hair shellac system that Skeeter undergoes seems ludicrous. Yet women still alter their looks in rather peculiar ways as the definition of "beauty" changes with the times. Looking back on your past, what's the most ridiculous beauty regimen you ever underwent?
9. The author manages to paint Aibileen with a quiet grace and an aura of wisdom about her. How do you think she does this?
10. Do you think there are still vestiges of racism in relationships where people of color work for people who are white? Have you heard stories of someone who put away their valuable jewelry before their nanny comes – so they trust this person to look after their child, but not their diamond rings?
11. What did you think about Minny's pie for Miss Hilly? Would you have gone as far as Minny did for revenge?

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Did you know there was a lawsuit?? It was eventually tossed out of court but here's some background

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/02/24/134022783/the-help-spawns-a-lawsuit-and-a-question-how-much-borrowing-is-fair>