

The Help

Kathryn Stockett

Berkeley Books Fiction

530 pgs

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The Not So Helpless

Imagine trying to make a change... without anyone knowing you're the one who done it.

The Help by Kathryn Stockett follows the story of three courageous women as they anonymously rebel against society and find the meaning of friendship without boundaries. In a southern town called Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s, a young white woman sees what many women her age do not see: racial segregation. Skeeter, the protagonist, is faced between fitting in with what society thinks she should do and what she wants to do. Skeeter is an outsider herself, having left 'Ole Miss without an engagement ring and having a love for writing, she is set apart from all of her friends. The thing that especially sets her apart from others is that she sees the mistreatment of the maids in her town. She creates a strong relationship with two black maids in particular and they decide that their voices should be heard which was a dangerous and risky idea at the time. Needing to impress an editor at Harper and Row, Skeeter must write about something interesting and dear to her heart. They create a book together about the lives of maids and their stories of the white children they raise who soon become just like "they mamas."

Kathryn Stockett who grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, expressed her fond memories of the maid that raised her when she was young in many interviews. The characters in *The Help* are based off real people in her life from Jackson. Her strong relationship with the maid that raised her influenced her to write the novel. Before creating *The Help*, she decided to interview people

from Jackson so she could put in realistic experiences which are evident in her fiction/nonfiction mix of a novel. You can feel compassion for the characters because their stories are so real and touching. “I walk out the back door, to the terrible sound a Mae Mobley crying again. I start down the driveway, crying too, knowing how much I’m on miss Mae Mobley... but at the same time feeling, in a way, that I’m free, like Minny.” The characters are very realistic and their heartfelt relationships with one another make them relatable to any reader.

Kathryn Stockett takes the reader back to the early 1960s when white women rarely worked and TV was just becoming a household appliance. This unsteady time period for men and women was filled with distrust and invisible lines between races. At this time, Martin Luther King Jr. was a rising voice in the south and the beloved John F. Kennedy was recently assassinated. Stockett definitely captures this era as the best of times and the worst of times.

In *The Help* the characters are voiced in an original way and have personalities that draw the reader to feel connected to each character. Each character has a different story behind them and their actions show how they deal with the anxiety of what will happen to them if the book’s authors are revealed. “What would happen if somebody found out I was here on a Saturday night talking to Aibileen in her regular clothes? Would they call the police, to report a suspicious meeting? I’m suddenly sure they would.”(pg.169) The constant edge of the possibility that their cover would be blown gave the novel a sense of suspense.

The way *The Help* draws out emotion from the reader through scenarios that make you feel for the characters makes it so relatable. Stockett finds a way to make one feel as though it is set in the present because of the way she shows the characters inner most thoughts and feelings.

The Help's success is evident in all the rewards it received and has been made into a major motion picture. It touched the hearts of people worldwide. Stockett brilliantly weaved together the story of people finding their voice despite the social limitations resulting in discovering who they are as individuals. The three stories of completely different people intertwine to show how they are capable of making a change. The characters are like a family because they learn about what it was like to be in each others' shoes. They create a bond that connects them which is shown through their caring and support for one another.

The length of *The Help* may startle people looking for a quick read, but you will find yourself up at night trying to get to the next chapter. Because of its length this book may not be for everyone since most of the action happens at the end. One should not be discouraged by the fact that it is 530 pages because even though it is quite long, it is definitely worth it. *The Help* would be a wonderful class read because it shows how one can make a change even when they are told it isn't possible and that there are no limitations to friendship.

A BBHS student will love this book because of its unsuspecting main character and its louder than life supporting characters which give you a different perspective on the lives of black maids in the '60s. It also is not facts about liberal rights but stories of peoples lives which, even though it was set fifty years ago, are still relatable. *The Help* is a remarkable story that will have you laughing and crying with compassion for the characters and leave you with yet another example of how it is possible to make a change.