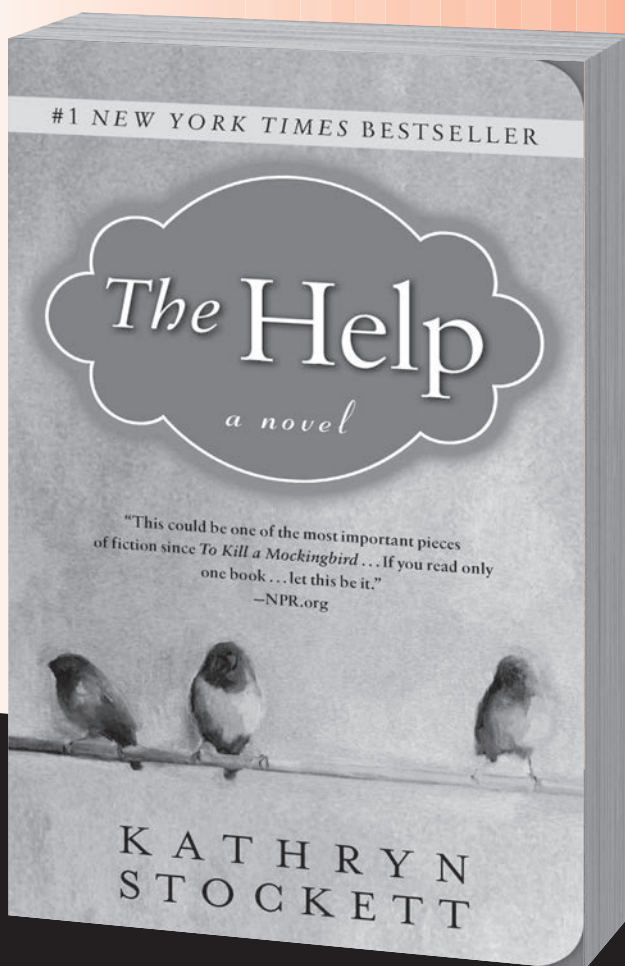


TEACHER'S GUIDE

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

# THE HELP

BY KATHRYN STOCKETT



BY JEANNE M. McGLINN

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## INTRODUCTION

Told through the point of view of three different women living in Jackson, Mississippi, *The Help* chronicles events from late summer of 1962 through 1964. Skeeter Phelan, who has just graduated from Ole Miss, returns home to the family plantation, ambitious to become a writer. Taking the advice of a New York editor to hone her skills, Skeeter begins to write a column for the local newspaper while searching for a topic that she truly cares about. Missing her beloved childhood family maid and confronted by the overt racism of her friend Hilly Holbrook's campaign to require a separate bathroom for the black help, Skeeter proposes to write about the lives of the black maids in Jackson. Knowing she will need to interview black maids to tell their stories but without realizing the danger of what she is asking, Skeeter approaches Aibileen, the maid of one of her close friends. With an increasing sense of bitterness at the injustice of her situation, Aibileen agrees to help, and later recruits Minny and eventually other maids. As they work on this project to tell their true stories, including stories of the prejudice and injustice that the maids experi-

ence in their everyday lives, a close relationship develops between Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny. The three women come to confront and resist the intimidation experienced daily by the black maids. Woven throughout the stories are the key events of these seminal years of the civil rights movement.

Dealing as it does with the social issues of the time, *The Help* may be controversial for students. It is through the agency of Skeeter Phelan, a white woman, that the black maids get to tell their stories and as such it continues the tradition of novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There is the issue of language; all the maids use a version of black dialect created by the author, although their southern white employers mainly use Standard English. Also, the focus on domestic injustices faced by the maids in the novel may come across as avoiding the real brutality faced by blacks during this time period in Mississippi. Teachers can help students confront these issues by posing some of the questions provided in this guide. After they have read the novel, students will have opportunities to evaluate the impact of the novel through suggested follow-up activities.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn Stockett was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, the setting of this, her first novel. In a brief essay at the end of the novel, "Too Little, Too Late," Stockett describes her own relationship with a black maid, Demetrie, who at 28 came to work for Stockett's family and helped to raise her. Stockett also describes her conflict about trying to write the stories of black women.

Ask students to read a section of Stockett's essay on pp. 529-530. Also, Time Entertainment offers an interview with Stockett about writing the novel at <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1937562,00.html>.

Have students share their reactions to the essay or interview in a dialogue journal, addressing these questions: What experiences led the author to write this novel? What does the author state is the reason that she has written this book? Based on this statement of purpose what do you think this novel will reveal about being a black maid in Mississippi? After students have written their responses, ask them to exchange journals to read and react to the comments of another student. When journals are returned, ask students to write a response to their peers' comments. Follow up with a class discussion to see if students have common expectations and how they react to these ideas.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

1. For an overview of the Civil Rights Movement, ask students to check out the brief histories provided at the following web sites:

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html#events-1960> offers a timeline of events. Students can focus on the early sixties, the time covered in the novel.

<http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/index.html> gives an overview of events from the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the march on Selma. There is also a section specifically on the events occurring in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer, including the death of Medgar Evers.

Following their review of events, ask students to write a letter to another student, describing some of the key events of the civil rights era and their reactions. Then have students deliver the letter and have the recipient write a brief response after reading the letter.

2. Show students sections of episode 5 from *Eyes on the Prize*: “Mississippi: Is This America 1962-1964: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zr6QDGpihaE&feature=related>

Ask students to make a concept map about the conditions for blacks living in Mississippi in the sixties after viewing the film.

3. In addition to the background of the civil rights movement, the novel is filled with references to contemporary events. Assign students in pairs to research on the web one of the topics listed below, collecting a series of images that best reflect the subject. Then two pairs can join together to combine their images to make a 30-second video slide show with music and text. Have students go to <http://animoto.com/>, click on the Get Started link and then follow the prompts. Encourage students to select music from the time period to go with their slides.

### Contemporary References:

John F. Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy Onassis (p. 7, p. 231, p. 403), Rosa Parks (p. 15, 79), James Meredith and Ole Miss (p. 97), Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (p. 99), Martin Luther King and the March on Washington (p. 185, p. 245, p. 347), Medgar Evers (p. 191, p. 228), Jim Crow Laws (p. 202), Governor Ross Barnett (p. 212, p.218), KKK (p. 228), NAACP (p. 228), the Space Age (p. 230), Birmingham bombing (p. 347)

Music: Stevie Wonder (p. 25) and Motown Music, Blues (p. 25-26), Patsy Cline (p. 63), Bessie Smith (p. 78), the Beatles (“Love Me Do,” p. 208), Bob Dylan (p. 415).

4. The teacher should carefully assess the maturity and critical thinking skills of students before engaging in this activity which graphically displays the violence under which blacks lived during the Jim Crow era in the United States. Before viewing the photo of a lynching available at the following site, <http://hunniebrown.wordpress.com/lynching-in-america/> ask students to brainstorm what they know about conditions for blacks in the period following WWII.

Teachers may wish to address the following topics to help students add to their background knowledge: Where did most blacks live? What was the Second Great Migration that occurred between 1940-1970? Why did blacks move to the North in such numbers? What kinds of work were typical for blacks in the South? Why? What were the Jim Crow laws? How did this affect the daily lives of blacks, especially in the South? What violence or threat of violence affected blacks? What was the black response? How did blacks resist the violence of racism?

After looking at the photo, ask students to respond in journal format to what they have viewed. If some students find it too difficult to respond, you may instead ask them to add details to their earlier brainstorm.

5. Provide students with copies of Bob Dylan's song "Only a Pawn in Their Game" available at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/onlyapawnintheirgame.html> or have students watch Dylan's performance on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McbSrW4GnRI>

Dylan wrote this song about the assassination of Medgar Evers. It was released in 1964 on Dylan's *The Times They Are a-Changin'* album and he sang the song at the 1963 March on Washington. Discuss with students: What is Dylan's point of view about Evers' killer? What ways of thinking reinforce racism?

## BEFORE READING

1. Characters in the novel are well aware of "rules" governing black/white interactions and the "lines" that divide the races in the South of the sixties. Ask students to consider if they are aware of "lines" that divide students today by constructing a personal sociogram, a visual diagram of their social relationships. Who do they interact with the most? Who would they like to interact with?

After students have constructed their diagrams, ask them to free write about their relationships, using the following questions: Why are they so close to certain individuals; what prevents them from interacting with certain persons? What factors create barriers between people? Do "lines" really exist between people, or are they just made up? Then discuss these questions as a whole group to identify the factors that cause the "lines" that exist among their peers and the reasons for these "lines."

2. Legislators of the South were quick to point out that the laws of segregation were based on the principle of "separate but equal." Ask students to consider this concept by journaling about the following problem situation:

You are working in a fast food restaurant and you feel that your supervisor is prejudiced against you. He gangs up with two of the other employees and tells you that the staff bathroom is now off limits to you and that you must use the public restroom which is across the building and frequently crowded. You don't want any

trouble because you desperately need the job to pay your bills, and work opportunities are very scarce in your community.

Ask students to write about how they would feel and what they would do if confronted by this situation. After students have written their journals, ask them to share with one another. Then as a class, discuss is "separate but equal" a just policy? What is the result of this policy? What is the impact on individuals who are subject to this policy?

3. Ask students to rate their response to the following Anticipation Guide statements, strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, strongly disagree.
- People who hire other people to work for them should maintain a professional distance from the worker.
  - Being a personal servant or maid is a respectable calling.
  - There are certain rules that people should learn and follow when dealing with people of a different social or economic class than their own.
  - People of different races are so different from each other that they should stick with their own kind socially.
  - Telling or writing stories can be a way of personal expression and freedom.
  - Telling or writing stories can be a way of changing society.

Then ask students to write about the statement that they reacted to most strongly. Discuss as a class: What state-

ments did you agree with most strongly? Why? What statements did you disagree with strongly? Why?

Students can come back to the Anticipation Guide after finishing the novel and go through a similar process to discuss whether their ideas have changed and why.

## THEMES

Students may explore the following themes while reading the novel:

- Impact of racism on those who are prejudiced as well as the victims of prejudice
- Social pressures/conformity
- Coming of age
- Searching for truth through writing/the power of the written word
- Growth of a writer/finding one's voice
- Power relationships among people
- Man's inhumanity towards man
- Ambiguity of love/hate relationships

Introduce students to this list of themes and make sure that they understand what each theme means. Ask students to note particular themes in their reading journals or on post-it notes as they read the novel. After students have read several chapters, ask them to review their journal or post-it notes to identify what they consider the main theme of this particular section of the novel. List the theme(s) on a large chart and brainstorm the author's possible meanings. Ask students: What is happening? Why is it important or significant? What does it mean? What is the author saying about this theme?

## DURING READING

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND READER RESPONSE QUOTES

You can use the following questions to engage students in thinking about the characters, the plot, and the themes of the novel. Discussion questions generally build on students' literal recall of the plot to build up inferences about what these events mean. As they discuss the questions, encourage students to go back to the text to identify and analyze key passages that add to their understanding of the overall meaning of the novel. Selected quotes from the novel can be used for open-ended reader response writing. Students can use the quotes provided by the teacher or choose their own quotes as they read, explaining the meaning of the quote and its significance in reading journals.

#### Chapters 1-6: Searching for an Idea

1. Aibileen says: "But it weren't too long before I seen something in me had changed. A bitter seed was planted inside a me" (p. 3). What was the cause of her bitterness?
2. How does "the colored part a town" (p.15) differ from the rest of Jackson, Mississippi? What are some of the forces that contribute to the segregation that arises in cities?
3. Minny hints to Aibileen that she has gotten even with Hilly for claiming that Minny is a thief. Why would such slander be especially harmful to someone working as a maid?
4. What deepens Aibileen's bitterness toward white society?
5. What is it about Miss Celia's background that makes her different from the other club women, and why do you think she wants to be accepted by them so badly?
6. What do the rules for working for a white lady that Minny learned from her mother say about the relations between maids and their white employers?
7. What are some of the rules that Skeeter gets from her mother, and what do these say about the kind of behavior considered

proper for young white women of the time? Why do you think Skeeter and her mother have different attitudes about these rules?

8. In what ways has Constantine helped Skeeter to grow up? How has Constantine taught Skeeter kindness and self respect?
9. How has Aibileen helped Skeeter get the idea for her book?

### Reader Response Quotes

“All these houses they’re building without maid’s quarters? It’s just plain dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do” (p. 10).

“‘Do you ever wish you could...change things?’ she asks. And I can’t help myself. I look at her head-on. Cause that’s one a the stupidest questions I ever heard” (p. 12).

“I say what I know she want to hear: ‘I use my colored bathroom from now on. And then I go on and Clorox the white bathroom again real good’” (p. 34).

“‘Good morning, Minny! It’s real good to see you,’” she says, and I bristle, hearing a white lady being so friendly” (p. 48).

“Mother wouldn’t want me to know this, that Constantine’s father was white, that he’d apologized to her for the way things were. It was something I wasn’t supposed to know. I felt like Constantine had given me a gift” (p. 78).

### Chapters 7-28: Writing the Stories

1. How does Aibileen try to counteract the negative effects of Elizabeth’s criticism and coldness to Mae Mobley?
2. How does Aibileen see racial prejudice being passed down from parents to children?
3. Why does Aibileen say thank you to Hilly for the outside toilet when she feels so demeaned by it?
4. Why does the opportunity to tell the truth about working for white people weigh so heavily on Minny?
5. Why does Minny feel the satisfaction that she does in preparing a BLT sand-

wich for Johnny Foote? Do you think this depiction is authentic to a black maid’s experience? Why or why not?

6. How are the Jim Crow Laws that Skeeter discovers in the library similar to Hilly’s bathroom plan?
7. Does the vindictiveness of white women for violations of racial lines differ from the violence of white men? How and to what degree are they the same or different?
8. Why was prayer considered by some in the black community to be counterproductive to the civil rights struggle?
9. What are some of the ways that Minny shows that she cares about Miss Celia, even though she complains about her?
10. In reference to the book to which she is contributing her story, Minny says, “...it’s a sorry fact that it’s a white woman doing this” (p. 255). What are some of the issues raised by the fact that a white woman is the editor and a contributor to a book about the experiences of black maids?
11. How does the existence of racial hatred and violence in her world affect Skeeter?
12. Gretchen accuses Skeeter of being “‘Another white lady trying to make a dollar off of colored people’” (p. 304). Is this what Skeeter is trying to do? If not, what is motivating her to collect and publish the maids’ stories? Is it personal ambition or something more worthy?
13. How has Skeeter’s life become duplicitous? Is society only to blame for her dilemma, or could she have been more forthright once she realized the injustice experienced by the maids?
14. Skeeter asks her boyfriend Stuart if the civil rights activist that Stuart’s ex-girlfriend cheated with was “colored.” She feels that, even to her, “that would be horrific, disastrous” (p. 321). What do these feelings reveal about Skeeter, even as she realizes the racism of her society?



15. Does Skeeter serve Hilly right when she causes old toilets to be dumped on Hilly's lawn? Why do you think this action is appropriate or inappropriate?
16. Although Minny is very strong in some ways, she submits to physical abuse from her husband. What are possible reasons why she takes this abuse and does not stand up to him?
17. What does the incident with the prowler who harasses Minny and Celia reveal about the personalities of these two women?
18. When Minny complains to Aibileen that Celia her white employer does not see the lines that separate different classes and races of people, Aibileen tells her that she is "talking about something that don't exist" (p. 367). How does Minny subsequently apply Aibileen's words in her dealings with Celia?
19. The print in Chapter 25 "The Benefit" is bordered by vertical lines on both sides. What is different about the narration of this chapter that sets it off from the rest of the novel?
20. What is ironic about the proceeds from the Benefit going to the "Poor Starving Children of Africa" (p. 377)?
21. Why is it that Celia's appearance makes such an impact on the guests at the Benefit?
22. Why does Minny risk her job and explain to Celia the story behind Hilly and the chocolate pie? Is Minny justified in doing the "terrible awful" thing to get even with Hilly for lying about her? How does this act reflect the power relations between the two people? How does it compare to Skeeter's having the toilets sent to Hilly's lawn?
23. What does Celia's chopping down the mimosa tree outside her kitchen window signify?
24. Aibileen tells Skeeter that if they are found out to be the authors of the book, they would be beaten with baseball bats. Is this fear extreme? What evidence of white violence to blacks do you find in the novel?

### Reader Response Quotes

"They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It's that irony, that we love them and they love us, yet.... We don't even allow them to use the toilet in the house" (p. 123).

"I come home that morning, after I been fired, and stood outside my house with my new work shoes on. The shoes my mama paid a month's worth a light bill for. I guess that's when I understood what shame was and the color of it too" (p. 175-176).

"Separate but equal,' Miss Hilly say back to Miss Leefolt. 'That's what Governor Ross Barnett says is right, and you can't argue with the *government*'" (p. 218).

"Things ain't never gone change in this town, Aibileen. We living in hell, we *trapped*. Our kids is *trapped*" (p. 230).

"Y'all think *prayer's* going to keep white people from killing us?" (p. 246).

"She stops crying and I don't have any good things left to say. For a minute, we're just two people wondering why things are the way they are" (p. 276).

"They'd killed Carl Roberts for speaking out, for *talking*. I think about how easy I thought it would be, three months ago, to get a dozen maids to talk to me.... How stupid I'd been" (p. 282).

"There is undisguised hate for white women, there is inexplicable love" (p. 303).

"But the dichotomy of love and disdain living side-by-side is what surprises me. Most are invited to attend the white children's weddings, but only if they're in their uniforms" (p. 304).

"Now I know what I did wasn't Christian. But what kind a person send her own mama to the home to take up with strangers? They's something bout doing wrong to that woman that makes it just seem *right*" (p. 397).

"A lot of colored womens got to give they children up, Miss Skeeter. Send they kids off cause they have to tend to a white family" (p. 421).



## Chapters 28-34: Aftermath

1. How does Skeeter's mother plan to continue controlling Skeeter even after her death? What does this show about her?
2. Why does Stuart withdraw his proposal of marriage to Skeeter? Why is he unable to appreciate what Skeeter has done?
3. How does Skeeter look and dress differently as the events of the novel unfold? What does this suggest about changes in the way she thinks?
4. What is the significance of so many people signing the book that Reverend Johnson gives to Aibileen?
5. Why is Skeeter so eager to get out of Mississippi?
6. After realizing the desperation felt by Lou Anne, Skeeter reflects that the point of the book was: "For women to realize, *We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought*" (p. 492). In what way is this theme revealed in the book edited by Skeeter?
7. How is Aibileen's teaching Mae Mobley not to be prejudiced shown in Mae Mobley's actions?
8. How has Aibileen changed through the events in the novel and the publication of the book?
9. How does the publication of the book lead to Minny's freeing herself from her abusive husband?

## Reader Response Quotes

"They say it's like true love, good help. You only get one in a lifetime" (p. 437).

"Minnie doesn't look worried about book sales. She looks worried about what will happen when the women of Jackson read what we've written about them" (p. 455).

"Point is, we got to watch what get up in these kids' heads. Ever week, she still get her Aibileen lesson, her secret story" (p. 460).

"Then the Reverend hands me a box, wrapped in white paper, tied with light blue ribbon, same colors as the book. He lays his hand on it as a blessing. 'This one, this is for the white lady. You tell her we love her, like she's our own family'" (pp. 467-468).

"So I lean my hand on the sideboard because the baby's getting heavy on me. And I wonder how it is that I have so much when she doesn't have any. He's crying. She's crying. We are three fools in the dining room crying" (p. 476).

"How can I love a man who beats me raw? Why do I love a fool drinker? One time I asked him, 'Why? Why are you hitting me?' He leaned down and looked me right in the face. 'If I didn't hit you, Minny, who *knows* what you become'" (p. 485).

"I think about Yule May setting in jail. Cause Miss Hilly, she in her own jail, but with a lifelong term" (p. 522).

## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

Discussion activities, thematic explorations, and creative exercises after reading the novel are designed to get students to re-read and think critically about their initial reactions. Some of these activities can be done with a partner or in a small reading circle. Again teachers should choose the activities that best meet their goals for students.

1. Aibileen, like Skeeter, finds her voice as a writer during the events of the novel. She

starts by writing prayers in her journal (p. 26, p. 175) and then writes down her story in her words to share with Skeeter when they start the first interviews (pp. 174-179). Imagine that Aibileen writes about one of the significant scenes in the novel, such as: Mae Mobley using the black bathroom (pp. 110-111); the night Medgar Evers is assassinated (pp. 226-231); the special church meeting at which she is celebrated by the black community

(pp. 466-468); or the day that she is accused of stealing and she leaves her job as a maid for Miss Leefolt (pp. 516-522).

Have students reread one of the scenes and then write the brief journal entry that Aibileen might have written in her prayer-notebook.

2. Various critics have reviewed and commented on the novel. Students can do research at the following web sites, jotting down key ideas as they read:

- This web site has links to a range of opinions on the novel: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/05/the-help-kathryn-stockett\\_n\\_346016.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/05/the-help-kathryn-stockett_n_346016.html)
- This statement from the Association of Black Women Historians about the depiction of Black women in *The Help* addresses the dialect the author created for the black women: <http://www.abwh.org/images/pdf/TheHelp-Statement.pdf>
- This review suggests that *The Help* is the “new” *To Kill a Mockingbird*: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-kornbluth/is-the-help-more-than-a-s\\_b\\_333448.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jesse-kornbluth/is-the-help-more-than-a-s_b_333448.html)
- This *New York Times* review identifies some of the potential controversy surrounding the novel but also recognizes its accomplishments: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/books/19masl.html>
- *The Help* is praised for its artistry and depiction of the time period: <http://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/blogcritics/article/Book-Review-The-Help-by-Kathryn-Stockett-2266684.php>
- The Washington Post reviewer praises Stockett’s ability to create African American vernacular: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/31/AR2009033103552.html>

Have students share the list of ideas they compiled while reading the reviews and discuss their reactions to the views expressed by the writers. Then ask them to write their own review of the novel describing what they found personally interesting and worthy of note and what they found controversial in the novel.

3. Ask students to consider the main focus of the novel. Is Stockett telling the maids’ stories or is she telling the story of a white woman coming of age in the South or both? Ask students to journal write their response to this question and then engage in a classroom discussion about their overall understanding of the novel.
4. The novel illustrates the power of story to tell the truth and to change the way people think. Review the times that Aibileen tells Mae Mobley a “secret story,” for example, pp. 234-235, 348-350, 460. What is Aibileen’s goal in telling these stories? Why do they have to be “secret”? What is the effect of the stories on Mae Mobley?

Ask students to think about the maids’ stories. Why is it important that they tell these stories? What do they hope to accomplish? Are the students aware of any stories that need to be told today? Make a list of these stories with the class. As a creative exercise, ask students to take one of the topics they have identified and write a simple and short story, using Aibileen’s stories as a model. Share these stories in small groups.

5. Have students redesign the book cover for *The Help*. First have them analyze the current book cover’s design. How is it laid out? What does it communicate? What does the illustration of the three birds suggest? Then have them identify a central theme of the novel and design a book cover that illustrates and communicates that theme, for example the theme of the impact of racism on those who are prejudiced as well as the victims of prejudice.

6. Ask students to outline the coming of age of Skeeter by gathering quotes that show the three stages of this process: 1. Inexperience, innocence, or lack of knowledge; 2. Confrontations or trials that affect one's views; and 3. Growth, new maturity, and an enlarged concept of right and wrong. Students can organize their quotes in a graphic organizer on a large sheet of poster paper and then share with the class why they choose the various quotes to reflect Skeeter's coming of age.
7. Students can re-envision the novel by choosing a dramatic scene and retelling it with their point of view. For example, a student might choose the meeting between Celia and Hilly at the Benefit. How might the scene develop and conclude differently? Have the students rewrite the scene they have chosen and share in small groups. Students' work can be posted on a bulletin board or published in a class booklet for all to share.
8. What is the impact of racism on those who believe in this ideology? Ask students to identify passages in the novel that show how the employers are affected by their attitudes to their maids. Discuss with students or ask them to write an essay in which they discuss the following questions: What are the assumptions about blacks that control the behavior of the white employers? What are the "rules" that the white employers follow? What is the impact of their assumptions and behaviors on their lives?
9. Some critics have suggested that African American maids or servants depicted in novels and films resurrect the Mammy figure—a mythical stereotype of black women who were compelled, either by slavery or segregation, to serve white families.  
  
Ask students to research the Mammy figure at several web sites, such as

- The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University: <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/>
- "The Stereotype of the 'Mammy'" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ybT1xIYgPk>
- "Time to Move Beyond the 'Mammy' Stereotype": <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5437127>

Then ask students to argue whether Stockett's depiction of the black maids evokes the Mammy figure or does it present the lives of these women in an original way? Ask students to draw examples from the novel to support their position.

10. Ask students to explore how *The Help* depicts the violence of racism. First have them watch several scenes from the film, *Mississippi Burning*, available on YouTube. This film released in 1988 was directed by Alan Parker and stars Willem Dafoe and Gene Hackman as two FBI agents. The film is loosely based on the FBI investigation into the deaths of three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964.

In this scene the two FBI agents discuss the sources of racist attitudes: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlzaBi\\_QxPw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlzaBi_QxPw)

Students can also investigate the Mississippi Burning case of the summer of 1964 at these sites: [http://crime.about.com/od/history/p/ms\\_burn.htm](http://crime.about.com/od/history/p/ms_burn.htm) and [http://www.core-online.org/History/mississippi\\_burning.htm](http://www.core-online.org/History/mississippi_burning.htm)

Then have students identify passages in *The Help* which describe racist attitudes and their accompanying violence. Discuss: What is the main type of violence depicted in *The Help*?

## USING OTHER RESOURCES

### THE FILM

The film of *The Help* was released in 2011. The screenplay was written by Tate Taylor who also directed the film, based on Stockett's novel. Trailers from the film are available at several web sites, like the following: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_ajv\\_6pUnI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_ajv_6pUnI) and <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/461233/The-Help/trailers>

1. Select several key scenes from the film to view with students. First ask students to reread the section of the novel in which the scene occurs. Ask students to visualize the action through a quick sketch or journal writing. Then view the scene together. Discuss the choices made by the director. Where did they agree with the director's visualization of the scene? What might they do differently and why? Do any of the changes substantially affect the ideas of the novel?
2. A storyboard shows the action of a story scene by scene. For more information on story boards, you can direct students to this web site: <http://accad.osu.edu/womenandtech/Storyboard%20Resource/>

Ask students to choose a key scene from the novel and prepare a series of sketches of the action during this scene. Students can display their storyboards and share in

small groups the choices they made to represent the action in the scene.

3. If you decide to view the whole film with the class, you can ask students to keep a list of significant changes they see between the novel and the film. You might choose to stop the film at several points, to discuss what the students have noted. Look especially at the scene in the film where the Footes serve Minny dinner or Skeeter's confrontation with her mother. Discuss: Do the changes from the novel improve the story? Why or why not? What is the screen writer's purpose in making changes to the novel?
4. After viewing the film, ask students to write a review. Christopher P. Jacobs in an essay available online, explains that readers want more than a simple opinion in a film review: <http://und.edu/instruct/cjacobs/PaperGuidelines3.htm> Readers want to know about the filmmaker's intentions and how well they succeeded in making those intentions clear to viewers.

Students can look at samples of film reviews of *The Help* at several sites before writing their own review of the film: <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/461233/The-Help/overview> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/oct/27/the-help-film-review>.

### RELATED BOOKS

1. Ida E. Jones, from the Association of Black Women Historians, offers a list of resources that can provide insight into the lives of black people combating systematic racism. The list of fiction and nonfiction works is available at <http://www.abwh.org/images/pdf/TheHelp-Statement.pdf>

Ask students to select one of these resources to read and review, concentrating on the depiction of life in the South during the twentieth century and particularly the era of the civil rights movement. Students could turn their information into a creative format: a newscast, an interview, a creative dramatization.

2. As a research project for advanced students, ask them to select one of the following novels written by black authors which depict the lives of African Americans:

- *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison
- *Black Boy*, Richard Wright
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou

Organize students into literature circles with set roles for each student, such as discussion director, quote collector, illustrator, travel tracer, connector (Detailed

descriptions of literature circle roles can be found in Harvey Daniels' *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*, 2nd edition, Stenhouse, 2002.) During their discussions, ask students to identify and collect key passages that portray the lives of blacks, especially their encounters with whites and the "rules" that are applied to their daily lives. At the completion of the literature circle, ask each group to create an oral presentation on their findings. Then discuss as a whole class the realities of black lives as depicted in these novels and as compared to *The Help*.

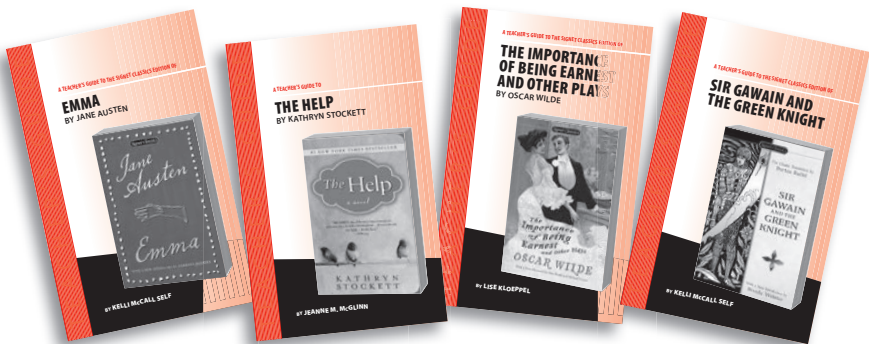
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

JEANNE M. McGLINN, Professor in the Department of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, teaches Children's and Adolescent Literature and directs the field experiences of 9-12 English licensure candidates. She is the editor of the *Language Experience Forum Journal* for the Language Experience Special Interest Group of IRA.

She has written and edited a series of guides to classical and contemporary works of literature published by Penguin. She also writes extensively in the field of adolescent literature, including a critical book on the historical fiction of adolescent writer Ann Rinaldi for Scarecrow Press Young Adult Writers series.

**NOTES**

# FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES



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