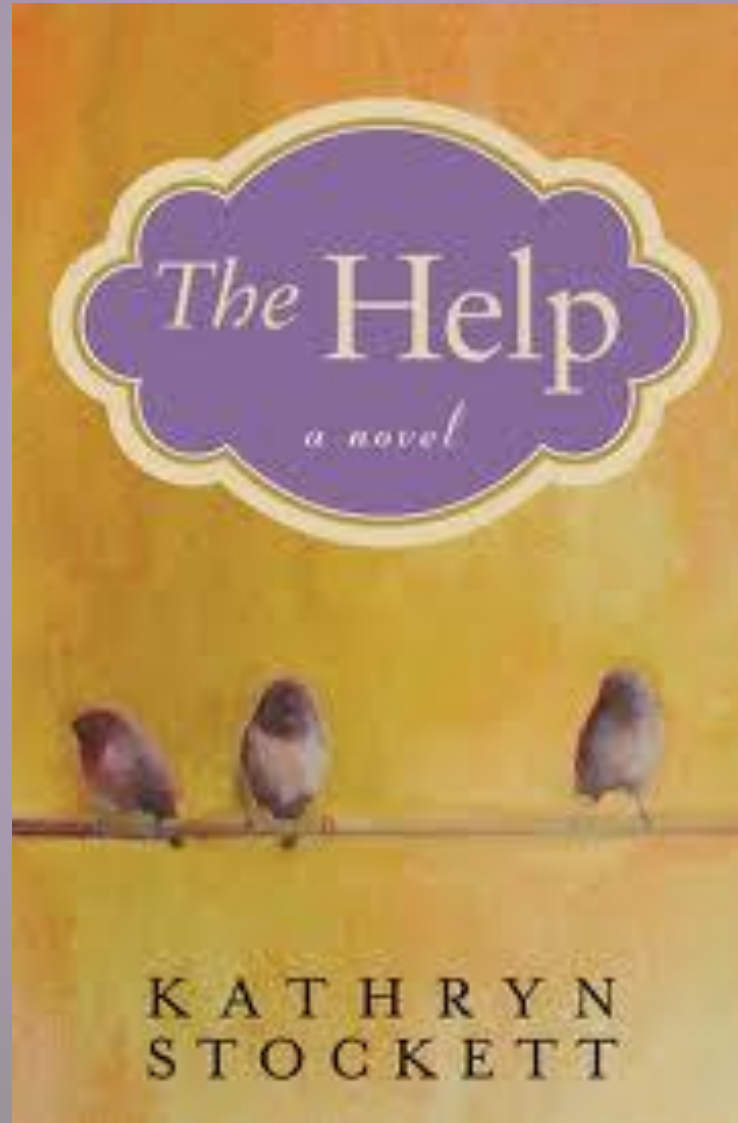


The Help by Kathryn Stockett



Author

Kathryn Stockett was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi and experienced what life really was like with “help”. She attended the University of Alabama and majored in both English and Creative Writing. She went on to work for many years in magazine publishing before sitting down to pen her first novel. This novel took her five years to write and she received more than 50 rejection letters (which caused many re-writes) before a publisher accepted it. It has remained on the best seller list since publication.



<http://boofsbookshelf.com/2010/06/11/interview-kathryn-stockett-author-of-the-help/>

<http://www.kathrynstockett.com/stockett-bio.htm>

Synopsis of book

Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan is an Ole Miss graduate living at home and longing to break free from the expectations set upon her. In a society that defines a woman’s success as getting married and having children, Skeeter’s dreams of becoming a journalist are not taken seriously until she takes things into her own hands. Under the facade of a cleaning column in the Jackson Journal, Skeeter’s dreams take on a life of their own.

Hilly Holbrook, an influential socialite and Skeeter’s friend, is heading up a movement to pass a law that would make it mandatory for white families to build outside bathrooms for their black employees. This movement degrades “the help” and out of it Skeeter’s plan is born. She approaches the women who serve as “help” in town to describe their experiences. They are hesitant until one of the maids, Aibileen, encourages the women to take part. These women have often raised the children of the home they work in more than their own mothers. They have helped families through tragedy and have suffered tragedy themselves. The stories are beautiful, heartbreaking, and at times scandalous. The only problem is that it puts everyone involved in danger. These women all live in a very segregated and prejudiced South. For Skeeter to talk on a personal level with any of the help would cause great rifts in the community. When the book is finally finished and published, it pushes Skeeter and Aibileen on paths that were not originally available to them.

Skeeter's Top Ten Problems

1. Doesn't know a thing about cleaning, but is writing a column about it.
2. Her hair!
3. Hilly's bathroom plan and how to avoid getting it in the newsletter
4. Her mother's expectations of her marrying soon
5. Her boyfriend's ex was a model! Ugh. How do you compete with that?
6. Her boyfriend's mother LOVED his ex. Seriously? How can she win?
7. Her maid that she grew up with mysteriously disappeared/ is no longer employed by her family and no one will tell her why!
8. Trying to convince "the help" she is interviewing that she is a safe person to talk to
9. Finding ways to not be seen/found out when she interviews the help at Aibileen's house
10. Having to play along with the petty social circles that her friends embrace. The Jackson Junior League and the weekly bridge game – yuck.

Soundtrack

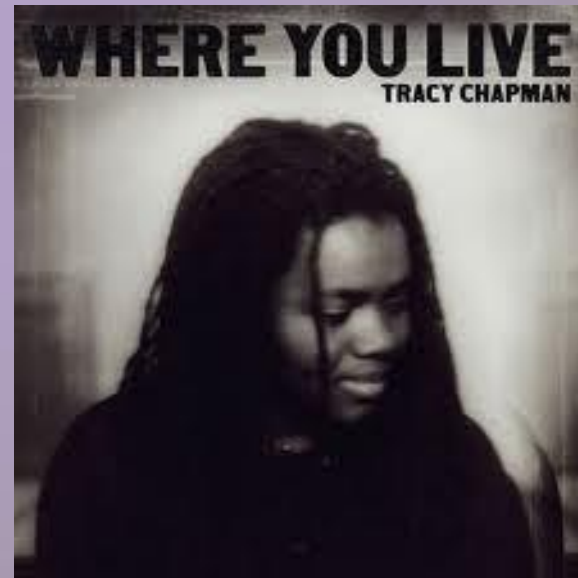
The soundtrack for this book should include a song like “Talkin’ About a Revolution” by Tracey Chapman. Although it was written in the 1980’s it still addresses racial/social prejudices and a desire for radical change.

Lyrics:

*Don't you know
They're talkin' about a revolution
It sounds like whisper*

and

*Poor people gonna rise up
And get their share
Poor people gonna rise up
And take what's theirs*



Recommendation

I highly recommend this book. It kept my interest the entire time and by mid-way through the book, I felt like I really knew these women. Each chapter is told from the perspective of one of the main characters: Skeeter and two of the black maids, Aibileen and Minny. It took a while to get used to that rotating narrative structure, but now I believe that the story is stronger because of it. I also thought that, even though the story was set in the 1960's and the actions that took place were often disturbing, the author was able to clearly give "the help" a voice that was empowering and positive.

This book would appeal to readers that enjoy historical fiction or specifically reading about the civil rights movement. Whoever picks up this book, however, needs to be prepared to be disturbed and unsettled by the way this small town functioned. Although the end does leave the reader with some satisfaction, there are problems that indeed are not resolved and may leave you restless.