

The Help Study Guide

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

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Plot Summary

"The Help" written by Kathryn Stockett is a work of fiction. The book tells the story of Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s, starting in 1962 and ending in 1964. These are turbulent times for the entire country but especially turbulent for the people in Jackson, who are being forced to face up to their old ways - ways that are no longer acceptable to many. For the most part those ways revolve around segregation and the mistreatment of the Negroes that live and work in a white man's town.

The first to be introduced is Aibileen Clark, a 53 year old woman that has been in service nearly her entire life. Aibileen works for the Leefolt family, run by Elizabeth Leefolt. Aibileen takes care of Mae Mobley Leefolt, a two year old girl that is neglected by a mother that does not pay attention to or care for her own child. Aibileen will raise the child, just like she has raised 17 others.

Minnie Jackson is the next to be introduced. Minny is a sassy, loud, irritable black woman that works for Hilly Walters Holbrook. Minny is the best cook in town but talks back to the Holbrooks enough to get her fired. Minny gets revenge on Hilly which haunts her until the end.

The next person to be introduced is Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. Skeeter is best friends with Hilly Holbrook and Elizabeth Leefolt. The 23 year olds have been friends since childhood and have remained close although Skeeter is fading away from the lifestyle she once knew. Skeeter wants to be a writer more than anything but quickly learns that she is sorely under qualified for the position she applied for at Harper and Row, the famous New York publishing house. Skeeter does get advice from an editor at Harper and Row and runs with it. Mrs. Stein, the editor, tells Skeeter to write about something that disturbs her. That is what makes writing good. Skeeter begins to write about the help - the Negro servants in every white household in Jackson and across most of the South.

Skeeter is on a mission to interview maids to find out what their lives are like working for white people. Skeeter is truly interested in knowing their stories and sharing them with the world. The first person Skeeter interviews is Aibileen. Aibileen is reluctant at best but agrees to help Skeeter with the project. The relationship grows between the two women until they become good friends. Minny is the next person to come on board to work on the project. Soon the story becomes a book and Skeeter struggles to get people to help amid all of the turmoil happening around them, including the deaths of Medgar Evers and JFK.

Things in Skeeter's life are not a bed of roses, either. Her mother is dying, her prominent boyfriend withdraws his marriage proposal and Skeeter learns that her maid and lifelong friend has died.

When the book hits the stores the town is in an uproar. Soon, everything changes. Aibileen is fired, Minny might be leaving her abusive husband, and Skeeter accepts a

job in New York. A real hornet's nest has been stirred up by these brave women and Jackson will never be the same.



Chapters 1-6

Chapters 1-6 Summary

Chapter 1-2: Aibileen, August 1962

Chapter 1 starts with Aibileen Clark talking about the birth of Mae Mobley Leefolt, daughter of Elizabeth Leefolt. Mae Mobley was born in August 1960. Aibileen refers to the girl as a church baby because she was born on a Sunday morning. The first day Aibileen laid eyes on Mae Mobley, she was suffering from colic and crying. Elizabeth had no idea what to do with the baby. Aibileen picked up the baby and had her calmed down in no time. Aibileen credits her touch to having raised 17 white children during her working life.

"Taking care a white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning."

(Chap. 1, p. 1)

Mae Mobley begins to follow Aibileen around from the first minute she can walk. Aibileen loves the little girl although the child is fat and not terribly pretty.

Aibileen lost her son, 24 year old Treelore, shortly before going to work for the Leefolts. It took Aibileen five months to be able to get out of bed after the accident.

Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan is the first to arrive for bridge club. Skeeter is a friendly girl although she seems not to fit well in her own skin. Hilly Walters Holbrook and her mother, Mrs. Walters, drive over from next door. Aibileen plays with Mae Mobley while serving the ladies and finishing her chores.

The women talk about various things from the nerve of Celia Foote to Hilly's new idea, called the "Home Help Sanitation Initiative." According to Hilly, every home should have a colored bathroom so that the help do not use the family bathroom and spread diseases.

Skeeter waits in the kitchen for Elizabeth and chats with Aibileen. Skeeter talks about Constantine and how she has disappeared. Aibileen lets it slip that she knows Constantine. Skeeter begins to ask questions about Constantine's disappearance.

Chapter 2: Aibileen discusses the city of Jackson and its surrounding areas. "You'd never know it, living here, but Jackson, Mississippi be filled with two hundred thousand peoples." (Chap. 2, p. 12)

Aibileen chats with other maids on the bus on the way home. There are no strict rules about where they have to sit on the bus, in part because no one cares and in part



because of the recent incident involving Rosa Parks. Aibileen's friend Minny boards the bus and the women talk about the events of the day.

Minny learns that Mrs. Walters has been sent to a nursing home and that she has lost her job. Minny says she doubts she will get another job, especially in light of what she had done to Hilly. Minny tells Aibileen that it has something to do with a pie but will not give the details. Aibileen does not want to know. Still, Aibileen helps Minny get a job with newcomer Celia Foote, a backwoods country girl trying hard - and failing - to fit into Jackson society.

Aibileen describes her day, including the constant attention she must pay to Mae Mobley. Aibileen loves the little girl and does not mind the work. Aibileen is sure that Mae Mobley gets little or no attention after she goes home. At the end of the day Elizabeth "surprises" Aibileen by showing her the new "colored" bathroom in the garage.

Chapters 3-4: Minny

Chapter 3 begins with Minny standing on her front porch preparing to go to a job interview at Celia Foote's house. Minny reminds herself to act appropriately and not to back talk her employer.

"Tuck it in Minny. Tuck in whatever might fly out my mouth and tuck in my behind, too. Look like a maid that does what she's told." (Chap. 3, p. 40)

Minny arrives at Celia Foote's house out in the country. Celia offers Minny the job. The only drawback is that Minny must be gone by the time Celia's husband gets home since he does not know that Celia has hired help.

Chapter 4: Minny discusses her first week at Celia's, including what chores are to be done. Minny notices that Celia sleeps a lot. Celia points out that Minny must be careful to not be too perfect or Johnny will become suspicious.

Chapters 5-6: Miss Skeeter

Chapter 5: Skeeter thinks about her tiff with Hilly about the League. The girls have been friends since they were children and roomed together at Ole Miss. Now Hilly is threatening Skeeter if Skeeter does not play along.

Skeeter drives her mother's Cadillac too fast but does not care even though she slows down as she approaches the house. Skeeter sits and talks with her mother for a while. As usual, the conversation is tense.

Hilly tries once again to fix Skeeter up with Senator Whitworth's son. Skeeter feels awkward, particularly because Hilly has tried before and it has never worked out.

Skeeter thinks about Constantine and their days together, putting together jigsaw puzzles, laughing and talking. Skeeter remembers going to Constantine's house on occasion and how much different everything seemed away from the plantation.



Chapter 6: Skeeter goes to the mailbox to check to see if her copy of "Catcher in the Rye" has arrived. What she receives instead is a letter from Elaine Stein, an editor at Harper and Row. Ms. Stein tells Skeeter that she is tragically under qualified for an editorial position but offers to give Skeeter advice on stories she writes. Skeeter immediately begins to make a list of things about which she might write that would be worthy of Ms. Stein's time.

Skeeter takes another piece of advice from Ms. Stein to go to the local newspaper and apply for a job. Skeeter does and is rewarded with a position as a columnist for the popular "Miss Myrna" column. Unfortunately, Skeeter knows nothing about housekeeping and cooking so she decides to contact Aibileen, Elizabeth's maid, for help. Elizabeth allows Skeeter to talk to Aibileen but is not pleased about it.

Skeeter arrives home and sees a special broadcast on television. Pascagoula is so entranced that she does not realize Skeeter is standing behind her. A local reporter discusses the integration of Ole Miss, Skeeter's alma mater.

"I watch the television, riveted. Yet I am neither thrilled nor disappointed by the news that they might let a colored man into Ole Miss, just surprised." (Chap. 6, p. 83)

Skeeter also recalls the arrival of their first color TV set.

Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Chapters 1-2:

The reader gets the first glimpse of the people of Jackson through the eyes of Aibileen, an older black woman under the employ of Elizabeth Leefolt, a 23 year old Southern belle. Aibileen is a smart woman who knows her job and takes pride in her work. There is a great deal of care that goes into Aibileen's duties, particularly when it comes to 2 year old Mae Mobley, the daughter of Elizabeth. Elizabeth seems to have no maternal instincts and less patience and affection for her own child. Rather, it seems like Elizabeth had a child because she was supposed to and now that Mae Mobley is in her life, the little girl is nothing more than a nuisance that keeps her from friends, shopping, and other important tasks. Aibileen gets upset with Elizabeth but does not dare to speak out. Aibileen has raised 17 white babies in her career thus far so that isn't the problem. The problem is Elizabeth's intolerance of Mae Mobley. Elizabeth also smacks the little girl across the backs of the legs and in other places. Aibileen becomes angry, understandably, but still cannot speak out. Elizabeth's actions constitute child abuse by today's standards.

Aibileen is seen as nothing more than "the help" by her employers but it is clear that Aibileen has a good heart and soul and a depth about her that no one could imagine. Aibileen has had a hard life. Aibileen's latest heartache involves losing her 24 year old son, Treelore, who was killed in an accident. Treelore was Aibileen's pride and joy, a young man with an incredibly bright future. It is Aibileen's link with Treelore that convinces her to work with Skeeter, another enterprising young writer.



The reader learns about the crux of the relationships between Skeeter, Hilly, Elizabeth and Mrs. Walter. Aibileen also has the opportunity to hear all of the local gossip, most of which does not interest her because it seems unimportant and petty. Aibileen does learn, however, that her best friend Minny is about to lose her job. Aibileen has been trained not to repeat anything that happens in her employer's house but cannot keep the news to herself.

The reader gets to see Jackson through the eyes of Aibileen as she rides the bus home to the "colored side of town." Jackson is growing and is being prepared for more houses in the white section of town. Still, the capital city seems small to Aibileen who cannot decide where all of those residents live.

Aibileen is somewhat offended by the appearance of her own colored bathroom in the carport. Aibileen's training takes over and she realizes that it is just par for the course and that she will have to live with the inconvenience. It does pose a problem when Aibileen teaches Mae Mobley how to use the toilet and it becomes clear that Aibileen has let the little girl into her bathroom. Elizabeth, completely affected by Hilly's "Home Help Sanitation Initiative," has been brainwashed into thinking that the worst could happen to Mae Mobley although she overlooks the fact that it is a colored woman who is raising her child.

Minny learns about the loss of her job at the Walters/Holbrook home. Minny never had any issues with Mrs. Walters, perhaps because the woman was practically deaf. It is Hilly who rules the roost and has made it clear that Minny is a terrible employee. Minny confides to Aibileen that she has done something to Hilly but she will not give any details. That moment of temper may have caused Minny to be blackballed in the community and keep her from getting a job she so desperately needs. Aibileen plays a trick on Celia Foote to get her to interview Minny for a job. It may be the only way Minny will be able to support her family in light of the fact that her husband is a drunk.

Chapters 3-4: Minny goes to Celia and Johnny Foote's house out in the country. Minny has heard a few stories about Celia but is willing to give it a try, particularly because she needs the money. The Foote house is large but Minny is not afraid of hard work. Minny is not impressed with Celia who is obviously trying too hard to be something she is not. Celia dresses like a hooker and works at being refined, denying her upbringing as a backwoods girl with little formal education. Celia has never hired help before and it shows. Minny must prompt Celia to decide on pay and what hours she will work. It seems that Celia is in need of a friend more than she is in need of a maid and cook. Celia also treats Minny as more of a friend which completely baffles Minny. After a tour of the house and interview, Minny is discouraged, thinking she has not managed to land a job. Minny's fortitude works in her favor when she learns that Celia had not offered the job for fear of being refused. Minny's main concern is that Celia has no intention of telling her mean-spirited husband Johnny about their arrangement until he has become used to the improvements in housekeeping and cooking. Minny disagrees but the pay is too good to refuse.



Chapters 5-6: Miss Skeeter is one of the central characters in the book. Skeeter is a young woman struggling between her upbringing and desire to make a difference. Skeeter had been thrilled to go away to college and to get out from under her mother. Skeeter's relationship with her father is good. Part of the issue with Skeeter and her mother is that her mother did not raise her. Skeeter's care had fallen onto the shoulders of the family's maid, Constantine. Skeeter is definitely the woman she is today because of Constantine's care, tolerance, and love. Even with all the issues with her parents, Skeeter tries to respect them and the lifestyle she has been given as the daughter of a plantation owner. Still, Skeeter is torn between that lifestyle and what is waiting out there for her, particularly when it comes to having an open mind and heart, which is not permitted in Jackson.

Even though Skeeter has been raised in the South she does not fully comprehend the concept of "The Help" and treating people as lesser individuals. It is true that Skeeter relies upon her family's help but has never looked down on them the way her parents do. Skeeter's relationship with Constantine is of the utmost importance in her life, which is why she is devastated when the woman is fired. Skeeter needs to know what has happened to Constantine and knows that Aibileen is the one who can tell her. Aibileen is fearful of telling Skeeter the truth because it is not her place to do so and she fears getting into trouble. Aibileen eventually tells Skeeter what she wants to know which eases and troubles Skeeter's mind.

Skeeter has high hopes and grand ambitions of becoming a writer. The refusal from Harper and Row comes as a bit of a blow although Skeeter is not surprised. However, the help from Elaine Stein will prove to be invaluable and will guide Skeeter to write about things that truly disturb her and make the work worthwhile.

Skeeter's job at the Jackson Journal will lead her into a relationship with Aibileen. Aibileen is amused by Skeeter's job in light of her inexperience but is willing to help as much as she can without angering Elizabeth.

The admission of James Meredith into Ole Miss brings a series of strong reactions to some of the characters. Pascagoula is stunned and breathless. Charlotte is outraged and believes that blacks should not be "encouraged." Skeeter is interested but not particularly shocked, only surprised at what is happening in the world. It fuels her fire to show that all people are created equal.



Chapters 7-16

Chapters 7-16 Summary

Chapter 7: Aibileen

Elizabeth punishes Mae Mobley for going to Aibileen's bathroom. Aibileen cannot do anything about Elizabeth's behavior and is outraged by the fact that Elizabeth hits her again and again across her bare legs.

Aibileen gets ready to go home, but before she goes home Aibileen keeps her promise to herself and hugs Mae Mobley, telling the little girl that she is smart and good. On the way home, Aibileen thinks about Elizabeth's words and becomes increasingly outraged.

"I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the Negro side of town." (Chap. 7, p. 96)

Things are quiet and Mae Mobley is potty trained now.

Aibileen goes outside to have her lunch. A local boy, Robert, stops by to chat with Aibileen. Robert had been a friend of Treelore's and has become one to watch over Aibileen and mow the yard free of charge. It reminds Aibileen that the anniversary of the day of Treelore's death will be coming up soon. It is the hardest day of the year.

Skeeter continues to visit Aibileen with questions from Miss Myrna. Skeeter also continues to ask Aibileen about Constantine. Aibileen tries to avoid the conversation. Aibileen talks about other things with Skeeter, from the news about the new deacon to every day issues. Elizabeth always finds ways to interrupt the conversations. On this day, Skeeter had been asking about Treelore's book idea.

Minnie calls to check on Aibileen to make sure she has made it through the day of Treelore's death.

Elizabeth continues to interrupt any time Skeeter comes by. Skeeter stays to talk while Aibileen polishes the silver. Skeeter can tell something is wrong.

Elizabeth and her mean mother take Aibileen to the Jitney 14 to pick up items for Thanksgiving dinner. Mae Mobley is squirming in the seat, looking miserable. Aibileen takes the girl into the store to save her from the torturous time spent with her mother and grandmother. Elizabeth all but shoves the girl out the window into Aibileen's arms. Aibileen laments the loss of the days when the farmers would be out on the street with their wares.

A friend stops Aibileen in the Jitney and tells her that Robert has been beaten severely for using the white bathroom at a local lawn and garden. Aibileen works herself to the



bone. There is a vigil for Robert being held that night but Aibileen is just too tired and will have to visit Mrs. Brown tomorrow.

Aibileen leaves early and goes home to find Skeeter on her front steps. Aibileen is distressed that Skeeter would visit her at home. Aibileen is so exhausted. Aibileen likes Skeeter but thinks a phone call would have been nice. Skeeter tells Aibileen she wants to interview her about being a maid. Skeeter tells Aibileen that she wants to write a book. Aibileen is shocked and tells Skeeter that it is dangerous. Skeeter says it can be done if they are careful. Skeeter says they will not tell anyone. Aibileen says she cannot do it.

Chapter 8-9: Miss Skeeter

Skeeter drives to Aibileen's house and is surprised at how different it is from the times she went to visit Constantine. Aibileen sits on her front steps exhausted. Skeeter is not willing to give up and the slightest encouragement from Mrs. Stein only fuels the fire. Skeeter keeps after Aibileen until the woman agrees to the interviews. One day at the Leefolt house Skeeter tries to pay Aibileen for helping on the Miss Myrna job. Aibileen refuses the money and tells Skeeter to take it away.

Skeeter continues to be secretive about her behavior and Charlotte is becoming suspicious. Skeeter finds it more and more difficult to sneak around, especially since she has to use her mother's car. One weekend, just as the holidays approach, Skeeter's older brother Carlton comes home from LSU with his new girlfriend in tow. Charlotte questions the poor girl as if she were on trial. Skeeter needs to borrow the car but does not dare to interrupt. When Skeeter finally tells her mother that she must go to Hilly's because Hilly has a flu bug and she must take care of the children, Charlotte has a fit about taking the Cadillac overnight. Charlotte is flabbergasted when Skeeter takes off with her father's old truck.

The truth behind Skeeter's quick getaway is that she has a blind date with Stuart Whitworth, the son of Senator Whitworth. Skeeter does not want to lie to her mother yet cannot bear to think of all of the questions she will have to answer if Charlotte knows about the date.

Skeeter is supposed to get ready at Hilly's. The delay at home causes Skeeter to be late and Stuart is already at the house. Hilly steals Skeeter away to get dressed. Hilly seems more excited about the date than Skeeter.

The night is an utter disaster. Stuart is rude, drinks too much, and ignores Skeeter. When he isn't ignoring Skeeter, he is insulting her. Skeeter cannot get away fast enough.

Aibileen calls Skeeter and agrees to do the interviews although it is clear she is scared.

Chapter 10: Minny



Minnie is still worried that Johnny Foote will find out about her work at their house. Minny keeps counting the days until Celia will tell Johnny about the hired help. Minny reminds Celia every day. Celia is annoyed but Minny thinks that the money is not worth having a heart attack over the top of a white woman's toilet. The stress is too much.

Minnie thinks about Robert. Minny goes to visit and is horrified by the boy's appearance.

Aibileen asks Minny if she would be willing to talk to Skeeter. Minny flat out refuses, thinking that her old friend is crazy.

Minnie complains about the weather, saying she sweats when it was forty degrees.

Minnie begins to wonder if Celia is sick in the head instead of just being physically sick. Minny cannot figure out why Celia sneaks up the stairs many times a day. Minny wonders what Celia is doing but is relieved when the woman gets out of her hair.

Leroy has been on a tear lately, drinking behind the power plant after work. He warns Minny that Johnny needs to find out about her or else there will be trouble.

Minnie gets a scare when Johnny finds her in the bedroom gathering laundry. Johnny stands in the doorway with an axe in his hand. He asks Minny who she is and what she is doing. Minny sees the axe and does not know what to do. Automatically, Minny thinks Johnny is going to hit her with the axe but she cannot figure out how to get away. After a few minutes Johnny is able to convince Minny that he is not going to hit her with the axe and invites her to talk in the kitchen. Minny is still frightened but does not know what to do. Johnny turns out to be very cordial to Minny and says he is glad she is there. Johnny worries about Celia being all alone in the house all day. As Minny makes lunch for Johnny, he tells Minny that she should just keep on working like she has been. Johnny likes the way Minny cooks and takes care of things. Johnny says Celia will tell him when she is ready.

Chapters 11-13: Miss Skeeter

The weather has the Phelan house in an uproar. Mr. Phelan is in a tizzy getting the seed planted and Charlotte worries that this year will be hotter than ever, meaning Skeeter's hair will be a hopeless mess all season.

Skeeter goes to Aibileen's house for the first interview. It does not go well. Skeeter asks some questions. Aibileen gets sick and asks Skeeter to leave.

LuAnn, a new addition to the bridge club, annoys Skeeter. The usual conversation takes place at the table but Skeeter can only think about Aibileen.

Aibileen agrees to try again. Skeeter hauls her Corona typewriter to Aibileen's house. Aibileen will read what she has written and Skeeter will type it. Skeeter is surprised to find out that Aibileen has a real gift for storytelling and that there will be few if any edits needed for the work.



Skeeter tells her mother every night for two weeks that she is going to feed the hungry. In truth, she is going to Aibileen's house to work. More and more Skeeter likes the work. Occasionally Aibileen will slip into personal anecdotes, sometimes including information about Constantine. Skeeter and Aibileen push to get interviews from other maids but so far there has been little or no interest.

Skeeter finishes typing the pages and sends them off to Mrs. Stein. Skeeter and Aibileen wait breathlessly for ten days. Mrs. Stein calls and tells Skeeter that she likes the work thus far. Mrs. Stein will not commit to publishing the entire book but wants to see the rest of it if it can be finished by New Year's. It could be published by the time Martin Luther King's march on Washington takes place.

Minnie finally meets Skeeter at Aibileen's house. The interview goes poorly because Minny is extremely defensive and rude. When Minny leaves, Aibileen tells Skeeter that that had been one of Minny's good moods. Minny will continue although she will never be the perfect interview for Skeeter.

Stuart Whitworth visits Longleaf to see Skeeter. It has been three months since the horrible date. Stuart apologizes for his behavior but Skeeter is not willing to let him off the hook so easily. Stuart asks Skeeter to go to dinner. Skeeter says she can't think of anything worse. As Stuart sits in his car with a hangdog look, ready to leave, Skeeter calls out and says she will go. They talk over dinner and things go well. Skeeter and Stuart will see each other again. Hilly and Elizabeth are thrilled, as is Charlotte.

Skeeter has begun to take out books from the white library for Aibileen. One day she looks for items on Aibileen's list and comes across the laws of Jim Crow as well as a book on Frederick Douglas that has been vandalized. Skeeter steals them from the library. That afternoon there is a meeting of the League. Skeeter forgets her satchel and panics. Hilly calls to say that she has the bag at her house. Skeeter makes a fuss until Charlotte allows her to drop her off at the hospital for tests. Skeeter takes the car and goes to Hilly's house. It is too late. Hilly has seen the materials in Skeeter's pack. Hilly is polite but very cold.

Chapters 14-16: Aibileen

Aibileen feels nervous about having Skeeter and Minny both in her living room at the same time. Minny is obstinate and disagreeable as usual.

At the Leefolt's house Elizabeth talks about her pregnancy, telling Mae Mobley that she will have a little sister or little brother in October. Aibileen thinks it's nice that Elizabeth is paying attention to her daughter for once.

Aibileen takes Mae Mobley out to swim in the baby pool in the yard. Hilly brings her two kids over to play. Aibileen admires Hilly's love for her children.

Hilly is still obsessed with the colored toilet issue. Aibileen is tired of hearing about it and decides that it is time to tell the truth. If Mae Mobley has to hear that talk Aibileen is determined that Mae Mobley will hear the truth. Hilly talks about reading something from



Skeeter's satchel. Aibileen does not understand everything Hilly is talking about because she never finishes the thought and also takes to whispering to Elizabeth.

Aibileen worries about Skeeter and wonders if she should call. Aibileen worries about what Hilly has said and does not know what Hilly means to do.

Aibileen thinks about what it might be like to lose her job because of what she is doing with Skeeter. She thinks about losing her job, getting evicted, and how the white lady will keep after the fired person until no one has a job or a home and eventually that house would be burned down or someone would die. Aibileen says that the white lady never forgets.

Aibileen is anxious to talk to Skeeter but can't find the right time. Skeeter calls Aibileen late one night to find out if Aibileen has found anyone else to help with the interviews. Skeeter wants to know if Aibileen has asked Yule Mae. Aibileen lies and says she has asked Yule Mae but has not because Yule Mae is Hilly's maid. Skeeter tells Aibileen about the satchel. Aibileen tells Skeeter about the conversation in the yard. Skeeter tries to convince both of them that Hilly had only seen the Jim Crow laws. Skeeter tries to give Aibileen an out. Aibileen says she does not want to quit.

Aibileen hasn't seen Hilly since Hilly is spending so much time at Will's campaign office. Aibileen works late and then walks to the night bus. Aibileen is lost in thought when the bus stops. Police are stopped in the road. The bus backs up and stops on Farish Street where the bus driver tells all the colored people to get off the bus. A colored man has been shot. A man steps off the bus with Aibileen and offers to walk her home. Aibileen refuses and regrets it. Aibileen rushes to get home full of fear. Aibileen stops at Minny's house where Minny sits with all five of her children. Aibileen learns that the man who has been shot is Medgar Evers. The KKK is supposedly behind it. The announcer says Medgar Evers is dead. Minny says that he had been shot in front of his children. Minny panics and wonders what will happen to them if anyone finds out about the interview.

The identity of Medgar Evers' killer is not revealed. The Evers family has sent his body to Arlington National Cemetery. President Kennedy tells the mayor of Jackson that he needs to do better. The mayor refuses.

Elizabeth's mother drops by to visit. The woman is unkind and criticizes Mae Mobley's lack of manners. She also makes Elizabeth take her to the nicest restaurant in town although she knows Elizabeth cannot afford to pay.

Hilly invites Elizabeth and Mae Mobley to go to the pool at the country club. Elizabeth forces Aibileen to lie to Skeeter and say she is not home.

Hilly, Elizabeth, Aibileen and the children are at the pool when Skeeter spots them. Hilly finally confronts Skeeter about the "paraphernalia" regarding the Jim Crow laws. Hilly says she cannot have "integrational friends" in her closet if Will is going to be elected to the Senate. Skeeter succeeds in convincing Hilly that she is just curious about the law and has no intention of trying to change anything. Hilly calms down.



Aibileen continues to ask people to help with the interviews even though 35 people have already refused. Aibileen goes to a meeting where the Deacon leads the people in prayer for the Evers family and to heal. A man comes in and says prayer and marching aren't enough.

Aibileen approaches Yule Mae after the meeting. After some chitchat, Yule Mae asks about the stories. Yule Mae says she can't participate but then asks Aibileen if they can talk about it in private. Aibileen thinks that Yule Mae has just been waiting to be asked.

Chapters 7-16 Analysis

Chapter 7: The reader learns more about Aibileen's life outside the Leefolt house. Aibileen continues to war with herself over speaking out but finds that she cannot because there is too much at risk. Aibileen is horrified to learn that Robert has been beaten so severely that he is blind simply because he had not known that the bathroom he had used was for whites only. The violence in Jackson is increasing and it is a scary thing.

Aibileen is run ragged by all of Elizabeth's demands. Aibileen is tired and somewhat angry when Skeeter shows up at her house. Aibileen thinks about what Skeeter proposes and immediately refuses to participate. There is too much at risk but Aibileen knows that there is no way she can make Skeeter understand. The hesitancy of Aibileen foreshadows the fact that she will change her mind in the near future.

Chapters 8-9: Skeeter takes a big chance going to Aibileen's house. Skeeter thinks of the old days when she used to go to home with Constantine. Everyone was friendly toward her. Now things have changed and she is eyed with disdain and suspicion. Still, Skeeter does not know enough to be afraid. Although Aibileen refuses to help with the interviews, Skeeter has no intention of giving up.

Skeeter gives into Hilly's badgering about Stuart Whitworth. Skeeter is happy to see Carlton but does not want to partake in the grueling session with her parents and Carlton's new girlfriend.

Stuart is utterly horrible to Skeeter, insulting her, drinking too much, and just being rude. Skeeter, however, is no shrinking violet. Although she is hurt, she stands up to Stuart and makes it clear that his behavior is inappropriate.

Skeeter is thrilled beyond belief when Aibileen agrees to do the interviews. This could be Skeeter's big break.

Chapter 10: Minny's worst fear is realized the day she meets Johnny Foote. The confrontation in the bedroom shows clearly how differently they think. Minny feels threatened by the axe in Johnny's hand. Johnny does not even remember he has it and later explains that he had been preparing to cut down the mimosa tree. Johnny is polite and very cordial to Minny, relieving the fear. It is clear that Johnny loves and worries



about Celia. Johnny is not at all angry with the deception and lets Minny know how much she is appreciated.

Chapters 11-13: The interviews with Aibileen start off slow. It does not take long before she and Skeeter are as cordial and friendly as they can possibly be under the circumstances. Skeeter wants to say that they are friends but reminds herself that it would not be acceptable by anyone's standards.

Aibileen really opens up to Skeeter and the stories progress rapidly. Skeeter is pleased by Aibileen's writing ability but wants to write as well. Skeeter tells herself that there will be more stories to write. As the interviews progress it becomes clear that the project is as much Aibileen's as it is Skeeter's. For the first time Skeeter thinks she sees hope and anticipation in Aibileen's eyes.

Skeeter is unsure why she accepted Stuart's invitation except that it is not in her nature to be mean and she feels sorry for him in some strange way. It is that and the fact that she has only ever been kissed once and Stuart actually likes her. Skeeter is pleased with her decision when it turns out that Stuart is not a bad guy even though he behaved badly that night three months ago.

Skeeter has a moment of real panic and fear when she realizes that Hilly has read something from the satchel. Skeeter does not know what Hilly has read and knows that she must tell Aibileen. Skeeter is also concerned about her relationship with Hilly and the supposedly routine tests Charlotte receives that day. It is clear that Skeeter is breaking away from her childhood more and more every day.

Chapters 14-16 show that the segregation and races issues seem to be coming to a head in Jackson. The truth is coming out.

Skeeter and Aibileen are relieved when they learn that the only thing Hilly has read from Skeeter's satchel is the pamphlet on the Jim Crow laws. The experience seems to make Aibileen and Skeeter more determined and bold.

The death of Medgar Evers brings Jackson into the spotlight once again. It is clear that racial tensions are at an all time high and that there is danger and violence up ahead. The tragic events seem to have made others bolder as well, including Yule Mae.



Chapters 17-24

Chapters 17-24 Summary

Chapters 17 - 18: Minny

The heat hits an all time high and everyone is suffering from it. Minny complains that Mississippi has the weirdest weather, snowing one day and then 95 degrees or more for the next nine months. Minny seems to be increasingly irritable. Celia continues to call the society ladies. Minny wishes Celia would take the hint and realize that none will ever return the call.

Aibileen asks Minny to go to the weekly meeting but Minny has been banned because of an argument she had with one of the other women. At the meeting the members discuss local sit-ins and how they can get involved.

Minny thinks to herself about the stories and the work with Skeeter. Minny begins to admit to herself that she really likes telling her stories.

Minny notices that Miss Celia is sneaking up to her room more and more often. One day a large box arrives. Celia takes it and runs upstairs. Now Minny is extra suspicious. Minny sneaks upstairs to one of the "creepy" rooms where she finds Celia putting brown bottles on a shelf. There are 12 new bottles and 12 empty bottles. Minny knows the look of those bottles - they contain homemade whiskey. Minny is furious. She gets into an argument with Celia and gets fired.

Minny tells Aibileen about the entire mess with Celia. Aibileen makes Minny realize that she needs to get that job back, that it is the best one she has ever had. Minny agrees and goes back to work like nothing has ever happened. Minny plans to talk to Celia about getting her job back but something is seriously wrong with Celia. Minny finds her in the bathroom after a miscarriage. Minny explodes, saying that Celia caused it by drinking so much. Celia says that the bottles contain "catch" tonic, which is basically molasses and water. This is Celia's fourth miscarriage. The doctor is called but is less than sympathetic.

Chapters 19-21: Miss Skeeter

Skeeter moves to the screened in porch to sleep because it is too hot. Skeeter wishes Constantine was there with her. Stuart stops by unannounced and asks Skeeter to go to Biloxi overnight. Skeeter refuses. Stuart says he wants Skeeter and her parents to meet his family. Skeeter is equal parts scared and excited. Charlotte is thrilled and is mentally planning Skeeter's wedding. Charlotte and Skeeter will go shopping.

Pascagoula approaches Skeeter one day and says she knows about the interviews. Pascagoula agrees to help; Skeeter is stunned.



Yule Mae seems to have disappeared. Hilly is away so Skeeter can't ask about the maid. Skeeter gets a letter from Yule Mae who is in prison for stealing a ring from Hilly to pay the last \$75 of her son's tuition. Yule Mae should have been sentenced to a few months. Hilly sees to it that Yule Mae is sentenced to four years. Skeeter offers to help but it seems nothing can be done. The church pitches in and pays the tuition. Word about Skeeter's book begins to spread and people flock to her to be part of the interviews. Aibileen has asked more than 35 people who have refused. Some have changed their minds but Minny has convinced everyone else.

Skeeter has interviews every night and is finding it more and more difficult to think of ways to get out of the house. Charlotte questions Skeeter. Charlotte seems more tired and frail than ever which worries Skeeter but also makes it easier to work on the book. One woman, Gretchen, agrees to an interview but then turns on Skeeter. She takes Skeeter's money and storms out. All of the other interviewees donate their money to pay for the tuition for Yule Mae's sons.

The dinner at the Whitworth house arrives. Senator Whitworth drinks too much and says too much. Stuart is angry. The night does not end well. Skeeter finally finds out that Patricia has cheated with an activist. Stuart tells Skeeter he needs time to figure things out.

Chapters 22-23: Aibileen

Aibileen and Skeeter talk about the satchel. Aibileen thinks that Skeeter does not realize the danger involved.

Mae Mobley's third birthday comes and goes. Mae Mobley calls Aibileen "mama." Aibileen tries to explain about her "kids."

Hilly calls Elizabeth, furious, yelling about the newsletter. Elizabeth runs out of the house to go to Hilly's house. Aibileen takes Mae Mobley to walk over to Hilly's house where they find a yard full of toilets. Aibileen and Mae Mobley laugh and count the toilets - 32 in all. Mae Mobley pees in one of the toilets.

Skeeter had printed Hilly's initiative in the newsletter. Instead of announcing the coat drive, Skeeter typed "drop off your old toilets." The event even makes the New York Times. Aibileen thinks it may be one reason why Skeeter leaves town, not just the excuse that she has to take Charlotte to a DAR event.

Hilly is in a rage. Hilly has replaced Skeeter in bridge club and considers kicking her out of the League. Hilly says she can't hang around Skeeter any more.

Will Leefolt comes home for lunch and asks Aibileen if she plans to stay after the baby comes. Will talks about Aibileen leaving and finding a new job even though she is a specialist. Will asks Aibileen about Skeeter and forbids Aibileen to speak to Skeeter.

Skeeter arrives at Aibileen's house. Aibileen thinks that Skeeter must not know about Hilly. Skeeter begins to talk about the final edits in the book. Aibileen tells Skeeter about



Hilly and the order from Mr. Leefolt. Aibileen thinks that Skeeter just does not understand.

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his speech in Washington. Aibileen is surprised at how many white people march.

"Ever colored person in Jackson gets in front a whatever tee-vee set they can find, watches Martin Luther King stand in our nation's capital and tell us he's got a dream." (Chap. 23, p. 296)

Aibileen notices Skeeter is looking skittish and thin.

Aibileen tells Mae Mobley the "secret stories" that she makes up. Aibileen tells stories about how everyone is the same inside. Mae Mobley loves the stories and asks for them every day.

Celia approaches Hilly about the Benefit. Hilly refuses to let Celia help but invites her and Johnny to the event and sells her tickets. Hilly tries to embarrass Celia by trying to sell Celia ten tickets. Celia lets it slip that Minny is her maid and that Elizabeth had recommended her. Hilly is in a rage again.

Chapter 24: Minny

Aibileen calls Minny and tells her about the incident with Hilly. Minny wants to question Celia about Elizabeth. Celia tries to rush Minny out the door because Johnny is coming home. Minny thinks it ridiculous since Johnny knows and Celia knows he knows.

Celia goes out shopping for a dress for the Benefit. Meanwhile, Minny cleans up outside. The phone rings and it is Hilly. Hilly questions Minny and wants to know if Minny is her maid. Minny lies badly saying Celia is out of town.

Celia returns and she can tell something is wrong with Minny. Minny tries to cover up the fact that her face is bleeding again. Minny lies about the fact that Leroy has hit her again. Minny is ashamed of her situation and worries more than usual because this time Leroy had been sober. Celia does not believe the story. Celia tries to get Minny to call the police but Minny won't hear of it.

Celia and Minny look outside and see a naked man in the yard. The man begins to touch himself and then starts to walk toward the house. The man throws a rock through the window. Minny arms herself and goes outside. Minny chases him with a broom. The man taunts Minny and runs toward the house. Minny hits him with the broom. The man punches Minny in the head. Minny has lost the knife and gets scared. Celia comes outside and just stands there looking at him. Then Celia hits the man in the face. Minny is stunned that a white woman would save her. Celia continues to hit the man until he's down. Minny has to stop her. After a few minutes the man gets up and walks away.

Minny does not know what to say but is impressed with Celia's actions. Celia says she used to be a good fighter. Minny compares her to Joe Louis.



Minnie goes home and drives right by Aibileen. Aibileen stops and asks Minny if she is too good to offer her a ride. Aibileen sees Minny's injuries. Minny considers going away for a few days. Minny tells Aibileen about her day.

Chapters 17-24 Analysis

Minnie begins to realize that she needs to take action regarding the civil rights issue. She also begins to be honest with herself about being excited to help with the book. Minny does not want to admit that she cares about Celia but the miscarriage shocks Minny and she paces the floor worrying about the woman and what might be wrong. It all makes sense to Minny now and her opinion of Celia begins to change.

Skeeter is excited to learn that Yule Mae is willing to talk to her. Skeeter is puzzled when Yule Mae disappears and is shocked when she learns that Hilly has had her arrested and imprisoned for much longer than the law requires. Skeeter feels herself becoming more and more distant from her best friend.

Things change dramatically when Skeeter goes to Aibileen's house and finds a church meeting going on. Skeeter says she will leave but Aibileen tells her to stay. Minny's help is the turning point for the book. Aibileen knows Minny is the one who has convinced all those women but the words remain unspoken.

The dinner at the Whitworths is doomed from the start. Stuart knows his father will drink too much and say things that are inappropriate. Skeeter pushes until Stuart talks about Patricia which makes him angry. Stuart says he could have forgiven Patricia except that the man with whom she had slept is an activist. Skeeter breathes a sigh of relief, thinking how smart she has been not to tell Stuart about the book. Skeeter is hurt when Stuart breaks it off but decides she needs to focus on the book.

Things come to a head when Skeeter prints the newsletter and people start taking their old toilets to Hilly's house. Most people think it is hilarious but Hilly reacts in her usual way and declares that her friendship with Skeeter is over. When Aibileen tells Skeeter what happened while she had been away Skeeter is clearly upset and resigns.

The march in Washington takes many by surprise considering the number of white people who march alongside the Negroes. Things in Jackson also heat up. Medgar Evers' death deeply affects the town since he had been one of their own and there is an uprising to stop the violence.

Aibileen's work with Mae Mobley seems to be sinking in as Aibileen had hoped. The secret stories are teaching Mae Mobley things that are important, things that Elizabeth would never teach her daughter. Mae Mobley is learning to understand kindness, tolerance, and that race does not matter.

The incident with Celia is comical, disturbing and telling. It is clear that Celia cares about Minny and will fight to protect her. Furthermore Celia worries about Minny's

abusive situation. Minny begins to let down her guard - one that has been in place since she had been a young girl.



Chapters 25-30

Chapters 25-30 Summary

Chapter 25: The Benefit

The Benefit finally arrives. This year it is expected to raise \$6000. People arrive and Hilly inspects their attire. Celia and Johnny arrive late. Johnny worries that Celia is dressed inappropriately. The men appreciate the dress, the women do not. Celia tries to approach Hilly about the lie regarding not needing help with the Benefit. Hilly goes to talk to Johnny and flirts. Johnny cannot wait for Celia to return. Johnny compares Hilly to Antarctica; Celia to Hawaii.

Hilly wins a pie baked by Minny. Hilly is angry. Celia finally talks to Hilly. Celia tries to walk away and rips Hilly's dress. The conversation takes over the room. Hilly talks about the pie; Celia says she has no idea what Hilly is talking about but Hilly does not believe it. Celia vomits and runs off.

Chapter 26: Minny

Celia spends the day in bed. The phone rings off the hook. Celia will not get out of bed and Minny continues to try to get Celia out of bed. Celia says she should have stayed where she belonged. Celia tells Minny what Hilly said. Minny finally tells the story about the pie. Minny talks about losing her job and how hard it had been to find another. Hilly had offered Minny a job but Minny refused. Hilly says she spread false rumors about Minny stealing from her mother and that she would never get a job elsewhere. Minny still refuses. Minny makes a chocolate pie and defecates in it. Then she watches Hilly eat two large slices and comment on how delicious the pie is, thinking it is a peace offering. Then Minny tells her what is in the pie. Celia does not speak.

Celia finally decides to chop down the mimosa tree in the rain.

Chapters 27-28: Miss Skeeter

President Kennedy's assassination has stunned the world. The only person who calls is the doctor with more bad news about Charlotte.

Skeeter calls Mrs. Stein to tell her that the manuscript will be ready just after the New Year. Mrs. Stein says she must have it by December 21 or else Skeeter loses her chance.

Charlotte's health has disintegrated. Skeeter lies about going to bridge club and about being disowned by her friends. Skeeter is sad about not being invited to any events but is not sorry for what she did. Hilly does not know that Skeeter had paid to have toilets put on Hilly's lawn.



Skeeter goes to a League meeting and tolerates being ignored. Hilly announces changes to the newsletter without checking with Skeeter. Skeeter has been replaced.

Skeeter sends the manuscript to Mrs. Stein and anxiously waits for word. Skeeter checks in on Charlotte who is becoming weaker by the day.

Stuart comes back into Skeeter's life. Stuart comments on Skeeter's new wardrobe. Skeeter finds a new line of fashionable clothes and goes crazy with the blank check from Charlotte. Skeeter begins to worry that her dress is too short. Stuart proposes and Skeeter accepts. Skeeter tells Stuart about the book. Skeeter is proud but Stuart is shocked. Stuart says he cannot marry her.

Charlotte calls Skeeter into her bedroom. Skeeter tells Charlotte that Stuart proposed. Charlotte tells Skeeter that she is not going to die.

Skeeter goes to Aibileen's house and tells her that the book is going to be published. Mrs. Stein tries to keep Skeeter's hopes at a minimum but Aibileen does not seem to care that the advance is so small.

Stuart comes to the house to see Skeeter. Skeeter goes to her room and leaves Stuart outside.

Skeeter starts to work on her own story, including stories about Constantine. Skeeter tells Aibileen that she cannot write about the conflict between Charlotte and Constantine. Skeeter asks her mother about it, needing to hear her side of the story. Charlotte gets upset and tells Skeeter that she had had the entire DAR at the house. Constantine's daughter had been acting like a guest and had said she was going to join the DAR. The girl had stood up to Charlotte and Charlotte had kicked her out. The girl spit in Charlotte's face. Charlotte says that the girl had the nerve to act white even though she was colored. Charlotte had told the daughter that she wasn't wanted. Charlotte says that Constantine could have stayed but she moved to Chicago. Three weeks later Constantine had died. Skeeter is crushed.

The doctor tells Skeeter that Charlotte has cancer in the stomach. Charlotte only has a few months to live. Charlotte tells Skeeter that she must not let herself go after she dies.

Skeeter goes to Aibileen's to work on the book. Aibileen, Skeeter and Minny talk about where they might go if people find out. Skeeter mails the manuscript. Mrs. Stein is not optimistic.

Chapter 29: Aibileen

It has been so hot that everything swells and Aibileen's hair frizzes. Aibileen cannot wait to get to Elizabeth's house to get into the air conditioning. Aibileen thinks everyone has the heat crazies. It is so hot that Elizabeth tells Minny not to bother with pantyhose. Elizabeth's subdued mood does not last.



Aibileen laments the lack of time with Mae Mobley since she has enrolled in pre-school. Aibileen worries that the book will take her away from Mae Mobley and the baby.

The book arrives and everyone is nervous. Aibileen cannot stop thinking about the book.

"The next day at work all I can think about is how stores is putting my book on the shelves." (Chap. 29, p. 394)

The white book store has not sold any books but the colored store has sold a dozen. Skeeter calls to say that the book will be on a TV show. Aibileen goes to see Minny. Aibileen is glad that Minny is pregnant so Leroy will not hit her.

Aibileen and Minny go to a special meeting at the church. Aibileen finds out that the special meeting is for her.

"We want you to know for your safety this is the only time the church recognizes your achievement. I know a lot of folks helped with this book, but I heard it couldn't have been done without you." (Reverend Johnson to Aibileen, Chap. 29, p. 397)

Reverend Johnson gives Aibileen a book that has been signed by hundreds of people. Aibileen cries. Aibileen feels bad that Skeeter is not getting the same kind of attention. The Reverend gives Aibileen a second book to give to Skeeter.

Elizabeth walks in when the TV show is on. Aibileen worries about the fact that Elizabeth is there. Elizabeth raves about her sorority sister on TV while the host speaks about the book. Aibileen struggles to keep still. Elizabeth questions Aibileen about the book wondering aloud if the book is about Jackson.

Chapter 30: Minny

Minny worries about the host saying that the book is about Jackson. Aibileen calls and is worried that everyone will read the book. Aibileen keeps an eye on the book and Elizabeth's progress.

Minny goes to work and finds Johnny there. Minny worries but learns that Celia has told Johnny about the babies. Johnny thanks Minny for saving Celia. Johnny says Minny has a job for life if she wants it.

Minny goes home and everyone is argumentative. Leroy grabs Minny's arm and she worries that he will hit her.

Chapters 25-30 Analysis

There is a confrontation between Celia and Hilly at the Benefit. Celia makes a fool of herself and Hilly is furious over being seen as a spectacle. Hilly is particularly furious



about winning a pie, thinking that Celia knows and is mocking her. Celia ends up getting sick over the entire episode and begins to slip backward into her old ways.

Johnny has seemed like a loving husband up to this point but it is made clear how much he loves Celia and is grateful to be away from Hilly.

Mিনny tells Celia the story about the pie. Celia does not know what to say.

Skeeter's life is in turmoil with the proposal and withdrawal from Stuart, Charlotte's illness and the changed deadline for the book. Skeeter works night and day to get the book finished in time. Skeeter just makes the deadline but Mrs. Stein says it might be too late. In the end Mrs. Stein does take the time to read it and decides to publish it. Mrs. Stein tries to keep Skeeter from getting her hopes up too high but Skeeter bursts into tears, the emotional strain of the past year pouring out. Skeeter tells Aibileen and Minny all of the conditions but Aibileen giggles and cannot stop. There is so much excitement in the air.

Perhaps the biggest blow for Skeeter, except for learning the entire story about Charlotte's health, is finding out the true story about Constantine.

Everyone is on edge about the book being published. Aibileen and Skeeter have a hard time being still. The review on the television show will put the book over the top and open a can of worms bigger than anyone could ever expect.



Chapters 31-34

Chapters 31-34 Summary

Chapter 31: Aibileen

Aibileen eavesdrops and hears Hilly say that she thinks the book is about Jackson and says she is determined that she is going to find out the identity of everyone in the book. Elizabeth reads through her chapter and must not realize it is about her.

Mae Mobley comes home and cries because she had gotten in trouble at school because she had colored a picture and made herself black.

Aibileen sees Mrs. Brown in the Jitney and they overhear women talking about them and the book.

Chapter 32: Minny

"Another day passes, and I can still hear Miss Hilly's voice talking the words, reading the lines. I don't hear the scream. Not yet. But she's getting close." (Chap. 32, p. 411)

Minny thinks about why Leroy beats her and wonders what she could become if he stopped hitting her.

Something wakes Minny and she realizes that it is Hilly's scream.

Chapter 33: Miss Skeeter

Skeeter thinks she hears Hilly scream but it is Skeeter's scream that pierces the air. Skeeter is the only one who does not worry about Hilly any more. Skeeter wants to get out of Mississippi. She has sent out 15 resumes but has not heard a thing. Skeeter feels desperate about moving to New York.

Skeeter misses Aibileen but it is too dangerous to visit. Skeeter sees Lou Anne and Elizabeth in the store and hides. Lou Anne tells Skeeter that Hilly is telling everyone that Skeeter wrote the book. Hilly tells Lou Anne to fire Louvenia but Lou Anne cannot do it. Lou Anne tells Skeeter that she will never fire Louvenia. It is clear that Lou Anne knows Skeeter wrote the book.

Skeeter wonders what life would have been like if she hadn't written the book. Skeeter is restless and goes to the mailbox where she finds a letter from Mrs. Stein. Hilly pulls into the driveway. Hilly tells Skeeter that she intends to sue her. Skeeter knows she is covered in a legal sense. Hilly storms into the house and says she is going to tell Charlotte what Skeeter has done. Hilly is stunned at Charlotte's appearance. Charlotte chastises Hilly for her appearance. Hilly leaves after telling Skeeter to tell the Negroes to watch their backs.



Skeeter tells Aibileen and Minny that she has landed a job at Harper and Row in New York. Skeeter says she cannot take it but Aibileen argues with her. Minny takes the phone and tells Skeeter what to do. Skeeter knows the women are right.

Chapter 34: Aibileen

Aibileen worries that she is going to lose her job and have to say goodbye to Mae Mobley. Hilly keeps insisting that the book is not about Jackson. Everyone else knows that it is and that Hilly is the one who ate the pie.

Aibileen stays late and thinks about Skeeter leaving Jackson. Aibileen can't sleep and visits Minny. The women talk about what is going to happen.

Mae Mobley tries to teach the baby about fighting segregation. Will overhears Mae Mobley's game and asks her where she learned things that. Mae Mobley says it had been her teacher who had taught her. Will tells Elizabeth to change Mae Mobley's teacher.

Aibileen learns that one of the maids had been confronted by her employer but the woman can't fire the maid because everyone will know she is chapter ten.

Someone knocks at Aibileen's door. It's Skeeter at the door. Aibileen is so happy to see Skeeter. Skeeter says that Harper and Row is going to do another run of the book. Skeeter says she has quit her job and has told Mr. Golden to hire Aibileen. Mr. Golden has agreed. Aibileen is flabbergasted.

Skeeter worries about Aibileen's safety. Aibileen gives Skeeter the book from the church.

Hilly is going downhill and is still trying to convince everyone the book is not about Jackson. Minny calls, wailing into the phone. Hilly's husband had caused Leroy to get fired. Leroy goes crazy. Aibileen tries to tell Minny that she can leave Leroy. Minny says Leroy does not know what is going to hit him. Minny says she is going to stay with her sister.

Aibileen goes to work and Hilly is there. Hilly accuses Aibileen of stealing her silver. Hilly fires Aibileen and says she is going to call the police. The kids start to cry out for Aibileen. Hilly threatens Aibileen and Aibileen fires back. Mae Mobley comes out of the bedroom, flush with fever. Mae Mobley is borderline hysterical because Aibileen is going to leave. Aibileen starts to cry, too. Aibileen asks Mae Mobley to repeat what she has taught her Baby Girl. Hilly backs down but Aibileen is still fired. Aibileen thinks about what she is going to do with the rest of her life. Aibileen thinks maybe she will become a writer. It is time to start something new.

Chapters 31-34 Analysis

Hilly prevails in getting some people fired, including Aibileen. Hilly is torn between outrage and denial, with outraging winning the battle. Hilly is quickly losing her power however, except over people like Elizabeth and those who are still afraid of her.

Aibileen seems to be the catalyst for new beginnings. Aibileen and Minny convince Skeeter to take the job in New York; Aibileen convinces Minny that it's time to stand up for herself; and finally, Aibileen works on her own behalf, knowing that 54 years old is not too old to start over.



Characters

Aibileen Clark

Aibileen Clark is an older black woman who works for the demanding and sometimes impossible Miss Hilly. Aibileen is in charge of all of the housekeeping duties and also serves as a nanny for little Mae Mobley, Hilly's two year old daughter. Neither Hilly nor her husband seems to have any real affection or parental instincts toward the child which makes Aibileen angry and perhaps overly protective. Aibileen knows, however, that she cannot challenge Hilly on her lack of maternal care since it would get her fired and most likely, blackballed in the community.

Aibileen is a strong woman with a great sense of morality and honor. She has begun to show some wear after all of her years in service but the wear never shows in her work. Additionally, Aibileen had lost her 24 year old son in an accident, which clearly has broken her heart. Aibileen is also loyal to a fault as can be seen in her treatment of her friends, like Minnie. It is tragic that Aibileen is unable to speak her mind outside the black community since she has a lot of wisdom to share.

Aibileen is faced with a bit of a dilemma when Skeeter comes to her for information on Constantine and to ask advice for her newspaper column, "Miss Myrna." Aibileen is glad to help but is forever afraid of overstepping her bounds, particularly in front of Miss Hilly. Aibileen is pleased to help Skeeter with the column but wars with herself over what she can and cannot tell Skeeter about Constantine. Finally, right wins out over fear and Aibileen is able to be true to herself.

Eugenia Phelan aka Skeeter

Eugenia Phelan aka Skeeter is a 23 year old southern belle. Skeeter constantly butts heads with her mother, the ever proper and snobbish Charlotte Boudreau Cantrelle Phelan. Skeeter's mother hates her nickname and refuses to call the girl anything but Eugenia.

For all intents and purposes Skeeter is raised by her nanny, Constantine. When Skeeter comes home from college one day she finds out that Constantine is gone. Skeeter is extremely upset and feels betrayed when she learns that Constantine had been fired, most likely because she has a bi-racial child.

Skeeter does not feel like she fits in with her family. Her two best friends, Elizabeth and Hilly, seem to be drifting away as well. Skeeter wants to do something important in her life, not just get married and have babies. Charlotte does not support Skeeter's dreams of becoming a writer. Skeeter's journey will teach her how to stick up for herself and live on her own while trying to make it in the competitive world of journalism. Skeeter will also dare to confront one of the most controversial and forbidden topics - the treatment and abuse of African-Americans, particularly "The Help."



Mrs. Walters

Mrs. Walters is a skin and bones older woman who employs Minny. Mrs. Walters, Hilly's mother, has become somewhat frail and practically deaf. Hilly treats her mother like a desk lamp, showing nothing but annoyance at her presence, particularly when Mrs. Walters will not do as Hilly orders. Mrs. Walters is extremely well off which is most likely the only reason Hilly tolerates her at all.

Minny Jackson

Minny Jackson is Aibileen's best friend. Minny is considered to be the best cook in town. However, she is also incredibly mouthy and disrespectful, which creates a great deal of problems when it comes time to find a new job.

Hilly Walters Holbrook

Hilly Walters Holbrook is the 23 year old daughter of Mrs. Walters and wife to William Holbrook. Hilly is a southern belle and snob through and through. Hilly has a great disdain for "The Help" although it is clear that she relies on "the help" for almost everything. Hilly is easily influenced and will do anything to maintain her place in her chosen social circle.

Constantine

Constantine is the housekeeper and nanny who had worked for the Phelans for 29 years. It had been Constantine who raised Skeeter and taught her to be an objective and fair person who would not tolerate racism. Constantine is fired by Mrs. Phelan because she has a biracial child.

Celia Foote

Celia Foote is a young girl from deep in the country who is trying to fit into Hilly's social circle. Celia is naïve, backward, and tries very hard to be seen as a glamorous woman. It does not work and instead Celia appears trashy. Celia is such a bad housekeeper and cook that she hires Minnie on the sly.

The Help

The Help is a blanket term used to mean anyone who is employed as a servant in the house. Some positions include housekeeper, nanny, cook, and gardener. In this story, "The Help" are all African-Americans.



Elizabeth Leefolt

Elizabeth Leefolt is best friends with Hilly Walters and Skeeter Phelan. Elizabeth is also the mother to 2 year old Mae Mobley and the employer of Aibileen.

Charlotte Boudreau Cantrelle Phelan

Charlotte Boudreau Cantrelle Phelan is the mother of Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. Charlotte is an uptight woman with a strict sense of propriety and duty.

Mae Mobley

Mae Mobley, the 2 year old daughter of Hilly Walter, is a smart little girl who is confused by her mother's lack of attention and abuse. Mae Mobley clings to Aibileen.

Stuart Whitworth

Stuart Whitworth is the son of Senator Whitworth. Stuart and Skeeter have a disastrous first date but later become a couple.



Objects/Places

Racism

Racism is the main theme in the book. In 1962 Mississippi, there were no such things as slaves but the "help" were not far removed. African-Americans were still considered to be low class if they were considered to be a part of society at all. Some treated them as animals and acted as if the people were diseased. This thought permeated the society so strongly that people were installing "colored bathrooms" in their houses so they would not have to share with the help.

In the eyes of many, racism was simply representative of the times and considered to be just the way things were. Even Aibileen makes a comment about the Holbrooks not wanting to eat food from the colored supermarket and that she could not blame them. Aibileen believed that they would object due to the nature of the source and in part because the food at those particular markets was substandard and inferior.

Skeeter is appalled at the way "the help" is treated. Her outrage comes to the surface when she learns that Constantine was fired for having a biracial child. Constantine raised Skeeter and to think that Skeeter should be forbidden to communicate with someone she loved so dearly broke the girl's heart. The contributions made by the African-Americans of that time were discounted if not completely ignored.

Jackson, Mississippi

Jackson, Mississippi is the main setting for the story. Jackson is the capital city of Mississippi as well as being the most populous. At the time of the story, Jackson boasted 200,000 people. Aibileen talks about the structure of Jackson including the upscale white neighborhoods like Belhaven, where Hilly and Elizabeth live, as well as Sherwood Forest, White Hills, the Pehlans' Longleaf cotton plantation, and the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Also mentioned is the "colored part of town" in which Aibileen, Minny and most of the other "help" live. Aibileen refers to that part of town as being a big anthill. Because the property is surrounded by state game lands there is no way to expand so the neighborhoods become over crowded. Also mentioned is South Jackson which is where the poor white girls live.

Jackson is also home to the Jackson Journal, the newspaper that gives Skeeter her first job as a journalist. The paper is relatively small but Skeeter is glad to have the job hoping it can springboard her to a more important place like New York.

As the story progresses, Jackson becomes the heart of civil rights controversy. The city even makes the cover of Time magazine. There is also an uproar when Skeeter publishes her book about Jackson, a tell-all that blows the lid off the privileged society.



The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement began to come to the forefront of the South during the 1950s and 1960s. The Help addresses how Civil Rights affected each character and how some found it impossible to change. Mentioned in the story are many of the famous Civil Rights leaders and personalities such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks.

Ole Miss

Ole Miss is the nickname given to The University of Mississippi. It is where Skeeter attended college.

The Jackson Junior League

The Jackson Junior League is a women's social organization. It is considered to be the premier place for young ladies to show their abilities as well as this season's new clothes. The League is planning a children's benefit and while they could use the help, Celia is repeatedly rejected by Hilly and others. Skeeter is the editor of the League newsletter.

Harper and Row

Harper and Row is a famous publishing house located on 33rd Street in Manhattan. Skeeter applies for a job but is underqualified despite her journalism degree. An editor at Harper & Row offers free advice to Skeeter on how to become a solid writer with purpose.

Celia's House

Celia's House is where Minnie finds a new job after being fired by Hilly. Minnie must sneak around and not talk about the job since Celia's husband does not know Celia has hired help.

The Colored Side of Town

The "colored side of town" is where The Help live. That side of town is home to Minnie, Aibileen and others featured in the story.

The Walters/Holbrook House

The Walters/Holbrook House is where Aibileen works. In the beginning of the story Mrs. Walters lives in the house with Hilly, her husband and Mae Mobley. Later Mrs. Walters is

taken to a nursing home. It is Aibileen who runs the household. Minny had also worked at the Walters house until Mrs. Walter had been sent away.

Miss Myrna

Miss Myrna is the title of an article Skeeter is hired to write. It is an advice column filled with household and relationship tips. Skeeter routinely gets Aibileen's help to answer the letters.

New York City

New York City is where Skeeter hopes to end up so that she can make it in the journalism world and not be constrained by the rules and traditions of 1962 Mississippi.



Themes

Racism

Racism is the main theme in the book. In 1962 Mississippi there were no such things as slaves but the "help" were not far removed. African-Americans were still considered to be low class if they were considered to be a part of society at all. Some treated them as animals and acted as if the people were diseased. This thought permeated the society so strongly that people were installing "colored bathrooms" in their houses so they would not have to share with the help.

In the eyes of many, racism was simply representative of the times and considered to be just the way things were. Even Aibileen makes a comment about the Holbrooks not wanting to eat food from the colored supermarket and that she could not blame them. Aibileen believed that they would object due to the nature of the source and in part because the food at those particular markets was substandard and inferior.

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The South

The Help by Kathryn Stockett takes place in the South in 1962. More specifically, the main story takes place in Jackson, Mississippi. In the 1950s and 1960s the South was going through a major upheaval regarding Civil Rights, from the decision on Brown vs. the Board of Education to the integration of schools. Skeeter watches television as James Meredith is allowed to gain entrance to Ole Miss under the orders of President John F. Kennedy. The book also speaks of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others.

The people in the South have very deeply rooted traditions, customs and belief systems that go back for hundreds of years. Many still bicker over the existence and loss of the Civil War. For the most part the Southern white women in the book are dignified and delicate; their main goals include belonging to the Junior League, marrying well, and having children. The forward-thinking Skeeter does not agree with this mentality and wants to make a mark of her own.

The South rebels against change in part because the people are comfortable with what is and believe that the blacks are lesser individuals. Some - black and white - balk at change in general and feel that changing things would be too difficult and not worth the trouble.



Being True to Oneself

One of the main themes in the book is being true to oneself. The help struggle to be true to themselves while finding and working jobs that are less than inspiring and are a source of degradation and humiliation at times. While most of the help know that this is what they need to do and realize that this is their place, it is difficult to swallow that someone could be treated so horribly and that society finds it acceptable.

One person who struggles most with remaining true to herself while trying to fit into her predetermined role is Minny Jackson. Minny is the type of person who may excel at her job but cannot seem to remember that she is hired help and therefore should be seen and not heard. Minny has a strong personality and is not afraid to show it. If something is wrong in Minny's world, Minny is not going to keep quiet about it even if it means jeopardizing her job. Minny tells herself that she needs to be more respectful and know her place but it never seems to work.

Skeeter also struggles with being true to herself. Skeeter wants to write in the worst way but knows that she must write about things that are important, things that no one else would dare to write about. Skeeter appreciates the advice from Elaine Stein and is determined to follow it. As a result, Skeeter publishes a book that tells all about Jackson and exposes the underbelly of racism in the South.

Style

Point of View

The Help by Kathryn Stockett is written in the first person point of view. The three main voices in the story belong to Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, Minny Jackson, and Aibileen Clark. The chapters are separated by character, each giving a unique point of view. Skeeter's view comes from the world of a privileged white girl in the early 1960s in Mississippi. Skeeter is not like her friends and has respect for colored people because she had been raised by Constantine, the family maid. Skeeter tries to break the color barrier by writing a book about the experiences of "the help" and how they view their particular situations.

Aibileen lends the voice of an older, more experienced woman who has been trained to know her place and mind her manners. Aibileen puts up with a lot, mainly because of her love for little Mae Mobley. The reader can see the things only Aibileen sees and hears, knowing that the help are treated as invisible beings although they know everything that goes on in the house.

Minny is about ten years younger than Aibileen and lends the perspective of a woman who has had her fill of impossible demands and employers who treat her poorly. Minny has a lot about which to be angry from her mistreatment by employers as well as her husband, but is not cut out to serve a family with no backtalk.

The book is written in chronological order with some references made to past experiences to fill in the back story and to give details about the lives of the characters, particularly Skeeter and Aibileen. As the book progresses, the lives of the characters overlap regularly until they are telling different sides of the same story. The reader gets the opportunity to see more than one side of the action to get a fuller and more objective picture.

Setting

Jackson, Mississippi is the main setting for the story. Jackson is the capital city of Mississippi as well as being the most populous. At the time of the story, Jackson boasted 200,000 people. Aibileen talks about the structure of Jackson including the upscale white neighborhoods like Belhaven, where Hilly and Elizabeth live, as well as Sherwood Forest, White Hills, the Pehlans' Longleaf cotton plantation, and the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Also mentioned is the "colored part of town" in which Aibileen, Minny and most of the other "help" live. Aibileen refers to that part of town as being a big anthill. Because the property is surrounded by state game lands there is no way to expand so the neighborhoods become over crowded. Also mentioned is South Jackson which is where the poor white girls live.



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Language and Meaning

The Help by Kathryn Stockett is set in a time period in which the language is regional and rough, with a heavy influence of slang and mispronounced words. The language used is representative of many aspects of southern life, from upbringing, to race, class, and education. Some of the people who are well educated still use the accepted slang which sometimes seems out of place although it would be acceptable in that time and place.

There are many references to various stereotypes and monikers that are representative of the times. The most noticeable of these are "Negro," "nigger," and "pickaninny," words that are considered highly unacceptable and taboo in modern society. However, in the context of the stories, the language is appropriate, if the reader can get past being offended by what are considered to be racial slurs.

The reader will not have great difficulty in understanding most of the language although there are some instances when it seems misused. The language often works well when used in dialogue but may seem frivolous when used elsewhere.

There are some instances where the language does not seem out of the ordinary, even by modern standards. Overall, the use of southern vernacular, both slang and proper, works well in allowing the reader to catch a glimpse into the mind of the reader and the thoughts, feelings, and socially accepted behaviors of the time.

Structure

The Help, written by Kathryn Stockett, is a work of fiction. It is comprised of 444 pages broken down into 34 chapters.

The chapters are devoted to particular characters. Some characters will be featured in one chapter while another will be featured in two or more consecutive chapters. Excluding one chapter devoted to The Benefit, the chapters are split between Aibileen, Minny and Miss Skeeter.

The book is written in chronological order with some references made to past experiences to fill in the back story and to give details about the lives of the characters, particularly Skeeter and Aibileen. As the book progresses, the lives of the characters overlap regularly until they are telling different sides of the same story. The reader gets

the opportunity to see more than one side of the action to get a fuller and more objective picture.

The shortest chapter is comprised of 3 pages; the longest chapter is comprised of 5 pages; the average number of pages per chapter is 13.



Quotes

"Taking care a white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning."

Chap. 1, p. 1

"You'd never know it, living here, but Jackson, Mississippi be filled with two hundred thousand peoples."

Chap. 2, p. 12

"Tuck it in Minny. Tuck in whatever might fly out my mouth and tuck in my behind, too. Look like a maid that does what she's told."

Chap. 3, p. 40

"If chocolate was a sound it would've been Constantine's voice singing. If singing was a color, it would've been the color of that chocolate."

Chap. 5, p. 67

"I watch the television, riveted. Yet I am neither thrilled nor disappointed by the news that they might let a colored man into Ole Miss, just surprised."

Chap. 6, p. 83

"I guess I thought it would be like visiting Constantine, where friendly colored people waved and smiled, happy to see the little white girl whose daddy owned the big farm."

Chap. 8, p. 104

"'And,' I felt compelled to continue, 'everyone knows how we white people feel, the glorified Mammy figure who dedicates her whole life to a white family. Margaret Mitchell covered that. But no one ever asked Mammy how she felt about it.'"

Skeeter, Chap. 8, p. 106

"A course we different! Everybody know colored people and white people ain't the same. But we still just people!"

Chap. 10, p. 186

"Ever colored person in Jackson gets in front a whatever tee-vee set they can find, watches Martin Luther King stand in our nation's capital and tell us he's got a dream."

Chap. 23, p. 296

"The next day at work all I can think about is how stores is putting my book on the shelves."

Chap. 29, p. 394



"We want you to know for your safety this is the only time the church recognizes your achievement. I know a lot of folks helped with this book, but I heard it couldn't have been done without you."

Reverend Johnson to Aibileen, Chap. 29, p. 397

"All night long, I swear, I can hear Miss Hilly reading our book. I can hear the words she's reading whispering in my head, in her cool white voice."

Chap. 30, p. 404

"Another day passes, and I can still hear Miss Hilly's voice talking the words, reading the lines. I don't hear the scream. Not yet. But she's getting close."

Chap. 32 p. 411



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Mrs. Phelan lied to Skeeter about Constantine leaving? Is Mrs. Phelan trying to protect Skeeter or herself? Why would Constantine keep the secret from Skeeter, the little girl about whom Constantine knew everything? Discuss Skeeter's range of emotions and what she does in regards to finding the truth. What would you do in Skeeter's place?

Hilly, Elizabeth and Skeeter have been thick as thieves since they were children. Hilly and Skeeter went to Ole Miss together where they were roommates. Suddenly, Skeeter feels alienated from her friends. What happened? What about the trio has changed? Has Skeeter changed or have Hilly and Elizabeth? What do you think will happen to the friends in another 5 years?

Reverend Johnson makes a comment to Aibileen about the book. He says, "We want you to know for your safety this is the only time the church recognizes your achievement. I know a lot of folks helped with this book, but I heard it couldn't have been done without you." (Chap. 29, p. 397)

What does Reverend Johnson mean by this statement? How would acknowledging Aibileen's contribution to the book jeopardize her safety? How many people know about Aibileen's contributions to the book? Does Aibileen keep it a secret or is she open about her part?

When Skeeter first asks Aibileen if she would want to change things in Jackson, Aibileen says no. Why does Aibileen want things to stay the same? Is she comfortable in her lifestyle or is she afraid of how change might impact Jackson as well as her life? What might it take to cause the type of change referred to by Skeeter? Who else feels the same way as Aibileen?

The one word that seems to resonate most with Minny is "truth." It is the truth that Skeeter hopes to find. It is the fact that Aibileen pointed it out to Minny that gets to Minny the most. As crazy as the whole idea sounds, Minny offers to help Skeeter with the interviews. What about the concept of truth affects Minny so deeply? Isn't Minny afraid of being found out? What might Leroy do if Minny gets fired, or worse, because of this? If Minny is willing to help, why is she so suspicious and rude to Skeeter? Why does Minny get so angry when she thinks Skeeter is getting too personal?

Stuart Whitworth is absolutely horrible to Skeeter on their first date. Stuart tries to make it all better by saying he told Hilly he was not ready for a date or anything else. Does this excuse Stuart's behavior? Why did Stuart agree if he was against the date? Why is Stuart so rude to Skeeter? What is Skeeter's reaction? Why did it take Stuart three months to apologize? What makes Skeeter go to dinner with Stuart after she initially refuses?



Discuss the change in Hilly's behavior after she searches Skeeter's satchel. Why does Hilly become cold as ice and yet does not confront Skeeter about the materials in the satchel? What happened to the missing items? Which item do you think offends Hilly the most? Explain. How will this incident change the relationship between Hilly and Skeeter? Explain.