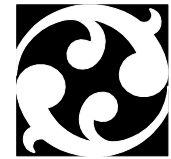




# CAMELOT BOOK CLUB



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## ***THE HELP*** by Kathryn Stockett

The story takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s. It is a story about the lives of black maids and the white women who employ them; it goes behind the scenes and shows the relationships of the maids (“The help”) and their employers.

Enter Eugenia Phelan, a.k.a. Miss Skeeter. Skeeter has graduated from college and has come home to live with her parents. She has the dream of becoming a writer and moving to New York. Realizing how badly the help are being treated by their white employers, she comes up with an idea to interview and write about the black maids in Jackson. The maids, Aibileen, Minny, and lots of others all contribute their ideas to Skeeter, and even at the risk of being found out by the local white ladies, they get a book published by a New York publisher.

Author Stockett tells of many happenings among the characters; some are sad, some are hilariously funny, and all provoke the readers’ interest in finding how the outcome affects each character. There are some unforgettable incidents, such as the wise and regal Aibileen’s inspirational conversations with the little white girl she loves, Minny’s special chocolate pie, the toilets placed on Miss Hilly’s front lawn, the crazed white man who tries to attack Miss Celia and Minny, and many more. Author Stockett has obviously lived this life and tells her story with compassion and understanding of the plight of the “help”. It is a chronicle filled with pathos and hope, and with lessons for us all in many areas of our lives.

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### CAMELOT’S DISCUSSION of the book

It was frightening to hear about the appalling conditions that black people were subjected to during the years portrayed in the book. Many among us who grew up in the south and had “help” in their homes agreed that, although their maids were treated well in their homes, blacks in general had to endure a second-class status. Separate water fountains, separate schools, separate toilets - no black person should share a white person’s space. The Jim Crow laws mandated “separate but equal” facilities for black and white.

We were appalled that the white ladies in the book would put up their jewelry to protect it from the maids, but would entrust the care of their most precious children to the care of their black maids.

We liked the term “relaxing room” referring to what we now call a “den” or “great-room”.

Much of our conversation was spoken “in character” by club members - a little hard for your scribe to transcribe.

We were all moved by the sensitivity of Aibileen and Minny, who told their white children, “You is beautiful. You is smart.”

We’ve come a long way in our treatment of blacks, but all agreed we have a long way to go.



### MEETING NOTES

Sue Ward was our hostess for the day – she had requested that each of her guests come in character, representing one of the characters in the book. We all showed up with our pearls and southern accents, and were greeted at the door by Sue, who was in character as one of the “help”, complete with white apron, and ready to serve. We laughed at Anne Simms, who in character as Elizabeth, declined to get her own coffee, saying she’d rather be served. Barbara was funny as Miss Celia, and Ann Fitzgerald was on-stage all the way, playing the part of Minny, the maid. Peaches, who didn’t know we were playing characters in the book, and was understandably confused by our conversations, had an amusing line of the day when she said, “ I’m just thinking y’all are nuts.”

We admired Sue’s beautiful floral arrangement which included goldenrod and beauty-berries - her usual creative and masterful touch. The dessert, with coffee and tea, was an apple crunch with ice-cream, which we all enjoyed very much.

The efforts required to stage this kind of a meeting with its special touches were applauded by all of us – Sue made it a special day.

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### **CAMELOT COMMENTS**

- ✓ I absolutely loved the book, especially since I grew up in the 40's and 50's. The author made the characters so alive.
- ✓ I really enjoyed reading it. I lot of descriptions of the characters were extreme, but you could envision them.
- ✓ I loved it, – for all the reasons we talked about. Tragic era in a lot of ways. But we all have learned a lot about how to be. Neat book.
- ✓ I loved the book. The author grew up in Jackson, Mississippi - I wonder how Jackson feels about it.
- ✓ Loved the characters - couldn't wait to find out what would happen next. Loved the relationship between Celia, the white lady and Minny, her black maid.
- ✓ Got a little tired trying to read the dialect. Couldn't finish the book.
- ✓ A really good book - I loved the sensitivity the author showed in writing about the maids. And some of the quotes! The ladies of color had much wisdom to impart.

### **Scribe's Notes**

In a literary vein, your Scribe (Peggy/Margaret) noted some of the memorable quotes from this book:

- 1) After Celia and Minny's awful attack of the “nekkid white man”, Minny said, “Seems like at some point you'd just run out of awful.” (Page 309)
- 2) When trying to choose a name for the book, Skeeter said “I think *Help* is a good title.” Minny: “‘Cause if this thing gets printed, Lord knows we gone need some.” (Page 356)
- 3) “They say good help is like true love. You only get one in a lifetime.” (Page 372)

### NEXT MEETING

- When?** Friday, November 13, 2009, 1:30p.m.  
(Note that the November meeting is the **second** Friday instead of the usual third)
- Where?** At Peaches Oakes' house
- Why?** To have fun, and to discuss our November selection,  
*South of Broad* by Pat Conroy, a non-stop drama of  
the lives of a family in Charleston, South Carolina.
- What else?** Please bring baby pictures of your grandchildren.

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### CAMELOT CONVERSATIONS

We continued a new feature in our meetings - that of each member telling of some happening since we last met.

Ann Fitzgerald told of attending a fund-raiser for Gov. Rick Perry at Bo & Patty Pilgrim's house.

Gwen reported no more car accidents - got Elmer's flu shot.

Barbara and Pirk drove with friends through Oregon and up into Washington State. So beautiful - clean, magnificent scenery. Had a reunion with some of the family. Won \$650.00 gambling - packed it up and left. Got laryngitis - can't remember ever not being able to speak. (But Barbara said the family probably enjoyed the break.)

Anne and Mike had a great trip to Lake Greeson in Arkansas with long-time friends - hiking, boating, fishing - a fun time.

Sue and Don had a trip to Chicago to visit daughter Gwen. Other daughter, Carrie, signed papers on the new condo she bought. Carrie's car was stolen from the driveway - later retrieved, after paying over \$400.00 in storage fees at the impound lot. Doesn't seem fair. Sue laid out her clothes this morning, including the white apron, on the bed - Miss Kitty thought it was just for her to sleep on. Miss K. thinks she lives at Sue's house now. Home is where the food is, right?

Peggy/Margaret and Gene had the pleasure of a visit from two of Gene's eight sisters, the oldest and the youngest. A delightful weekend at the lake.

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### Quote of the Day

Lord, please keep your arm around my shoulder and your hand over my mouth.

CAMELOT BOOK CLUB IS GREAT

