



## **Book Review: The Help**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Even though the "The Help" movie has only recently been released, the book on which it is based was actually published in 2009. This 530-page work, written by Kathryn Stockett, relays not only the socio-economic and cultural divisions between white and black people that were prevalent in the past, but also captures the personal perspectives of the individuals who are introduced to us as we read.

Skeeter, the main character, was raised in Jackson, Mississippi by a black maid who worked for her Caucasian family. This situation was similar to that of her friends who were also raised by staff who they all refer to as "the help". Although they view and treat these individuals as being beneath them, they delegate important tasks to them. For example, they depend on the black women to take care of their own children and this includes instilling values in them.

The social rules that divide the white employers and black staff members have been ingrained in the lives of the families portrayed. A situation arises, however, where Skeeter finds herself torn between her friends' view that separate bathrooms should be used according to race and Skeeter's own idea about what she feels is "right".

The dilemma and her desire to become recognized as a good writer by a large publishing house, leads Skeeter to form an idea in which she would interview black maids and then disguise their identities when she tells their stories in a book.

The black women, however, are afraid of the consequences that they might face if they talk to Skeeter about their experiences. Many have already suffered or seen people they care about hurt because of past racial conflicts. Skeeter therefore has to risk not only her relationships with her friends but also figure out ways to encourage the women to help her with her project through secret meetings.

Skeeter reflects on her own experience of being raised by Constantine who has disappeared from the family employment during Skeeter's time at university. No one is able to offer her details about why she left or where she went. And as Skeeter searches for this information, she learns about family secrets that have been kept from her.

As Skeeter writes and builds relationships with the black women who are telling her their personal stories, the gap between herself and those white women who she formerly thought of as friends, widens. In fact, she begins to realize that those who she thought she was closest to in the past do not actually share her values and those who she thought were different from her, actually are very similar in many ways.

The women's tell-all book which was written in secret becomes a best seller and ends up being a source of revelation for citizens of the town that will never again be the same because of it.

Kathryn Stockett has written "The Help" in a very honest and revealing manner. She offers insight into a sociological era of discrimination and abuse between blacks and whites from many perspectives and although the issues are serious, at times she highlights the divisions in a humorous manner. Each page has a unique blend of hurt and hope and there is no doubt that its content and style will change the reader for a lifetime.

At the end of the book, the author has also included a personal essay and a Reading Group Guide of discussion questions.