



## *the Help*

Two new things -  
*the Help* in print, which is an absolute  
 Must Read.  
 And *the Help* on screen, which is an absolute  
 Must See.

Where ? In Mississippi  
 When ? In 1963  
 Key words ? Racial discrimination,  
 negroes, poor white trash, the  
 dawn of change  
 Who ? On the one side,  
 the maids - black of course -  
 whose very names conjure up  
 images of Rosa Parkses :  
 Aibileen (who raised and loved 17  
 White Babies), Minny, Louvenia,  
 Yule May

On the other side, the White Ladies,  
 the Bosses - Miss Hilly, Miss Leefolt,  
 Miss Celia, et al.  
 All very young, very married, and letting  
 the maids bring up their children and do  
 all the housework. All very aware of the  
 Difference between black and white and  
 of the Importance of maintaining  
 separation, barriers between them and  
 us. All very concerned about (and raising  
 money for) the Starving Children in  
 Africa.



In the middle is *The Odd One Out*. Miss Skeeter. College educated, she seems color blind - an affliction that worsens as the book continues. She still isn't married (to her mother's great disappointment). A member of the women's junior league, of the bridge club, she tries to do everything right. But her weakness is her deep affection for the black maid who raised her, and despite trying to feel loyal to her blood family, Constantine's disappearance eats away at her.

She decides to enlist the help of the maids in her town so as to write their stories, to tell of the injustice of racial segregation, from the maid's point of view. It is a bold, daring venture, fraught with danger.

- The book is emotion-packed : you laugh, you cry, you feel frustration, anger, disbelief, disgust. It is a book that should be read by all English teachers (and used in the classroom) for several reasons :
- It deals with a troubled period and is a welcome change from the (nonetheless important) MLK chapters of our school books ; it is rich with cultural references, and really deals with life in the south.
  - The Grammar is amazing (or is it troubling?)
    - dropped "S" on 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular are abundant.
    - Prepositions are either missing, or incorrect.
    - Possessive adjectives ? What are they ?
  - The Language : beautiful, southern-speak, the words seem to jump out of the pages and into our ears as we read.
- A few short excerpts (Aibileen's). The first concerns her late son, Treelore.

*"He had him a little apartment over on Foley street. Seeing a real nice girl name Frances and I spec they was gone get married, but he was slow bout things like that. Not cause he looking for something better, just cause he the thinking kind."*

*"That was the day my whole world went black. Air look black, sun look black. I laid up in bed and stared at the black walls a my house.[...] Took three months fore I even look out the window, see if the world still there. I was surprise to see the world didn't stop just cause my boy did."*

*"That night, I pick me a poke salad and a tomato out a Ida's garden. Then I fry up some ham, make a little gravy for my biscuit. My wig been brushed out and put up, got my pink rollers in, already sprayed the Good Nuff on my hair. I been worried all afternoon thinking about Minny. I got to put it out a my mind if I'm on to get some sleep tonight."*

→ And last, but not least, the seven rules for working as a maid, explained to Minny, by her mother :

*"Rule Number One for Working for a White Lady, Minny, it is nobody's business. You keep your nose out of your White Lady's problems, you don't go crying to her with yours - you can't pay the light bill? Your feet are too sore? Remember one thing: white people are not your friends. They don't want to hear about it. [...]"*

*Rule Number Two : don't you ever let that White Lady find you sitting on her toilet. I don't care if you have to go so bad it's coming out of your hairbraids. If there's not one out back for the help, you find yourself a time when she's not there in a bathroom she doesn't use.*

*Rule Number Three [...] when you're cooking white people's food, you taste it with a different spoon. You put that spoon in your mouth, think nobody's looking, put it back in the pot, might as well throw it out.*

*Rule Number Four: you use the same cup, same fork, same plate every day. Keep it in a separate cupboard and tell that white woman that's the one you'll use from here on out.*

*Rule Number Five: you eat in the kitchen.*

*Rule Number Six: you don't hit on her children. White people like to do their own spanking.*

*Rule Number Seven: [...] no sass mouthing. [...] You sass a white woman in the morning, you'll be sassing out on the street in the afternoon."*

→ I dreaded finishing this wonderful book, but towards the end, I found myself impatient - as soon as it was over, I could start re-reading... Enjoy it !

For the trailer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbuKqzgeUIU>

Listen to Kathryn Stockett's interview on CBS news :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGzmd0q5rTg>