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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



## The Help

by Kathryn Stockelt

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, students will be able to*

1. explain the functions of the book project in *The Help*, both as the focus of the novel and as a representation of the deeper conflicts within the community of Jackson, Mississippi.
2. discuss and identify the role performed by each of the following characters in putting together the book project in the story:
  - Aibileen
  - Minny
  - Skeeter
3. identify the novel's setting and discuss how the setting relates to the conflicts presented in the story.
4. discuss the ways in which group identity and peer pressure can lead people to act against their own sense of right and wrong.
5. discuss the significance and the meaning of the novel's title, *The Help*, citing examples from the text to which the title directly and indirectly refers; point out the various, significant ways in which the women in the novel help one another.
6. identify and explain how the characters of Minny Jackson and Hilly Holbrook are similar, and identify other examples of character pairs in the text.
7. explain how the use of multiple first-person narrators serves to support some of the novel's themes.
8. identify and discuss how the following literary elements are used to distinguish between the different narrative voices used in the novel.
  - Dialect
  - Diction
  - Figurative Language
9. discuss Skeeter's role in the novel.
10. explain the reasons the maids are afraid to participate in Skeeter's book project, citing specific examples from the text.
11. identify the major turning points in the plot.
12. discuss examples of racial policies, practices, and concerns of the people of Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s.
13. explain Minny's reasons for thinking it is a good idea to include the "Terrible Awful Thing" in the book.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Is Skeeter the novel's protagonist? If she is, what evidence proves this? If not, who else can be considered the protagonist of the novel?
2. Discuss the various meanings of the novel's title.
3. Explain how the use of multiple first-person narrative voices helps to support some of the novel's themes.
4. Compare and contrast Skeeter and Celia. What do these characters have in common? What significant traits make them different from each other?
5. In what ways can Hilly Holcomb be seen as a hypocrite? Cite specific examples of attitudes and behaviors associated with Hilly that demonstrate moral contradictions or lack of moral integrity.
6. Consider Stuart Whitcomb's decision to retract his marriage proposal to Skeeter. What are his reasons for making this decision? Is his decision predictable or unexpected? Is it justified?
7. *The Help* presents a number of anecdotes relating to highly moral and highly immoral behavior. Select two anecdotes that highlight good and bad behavior in Jackson. Summarize, and explain how these episodes portray a complex image of Jackson.
8. Is Skeeter's participation in the book project morally defensible if she knows that what she is doing will hurt one of her oldest and best friends? Explain your opinion.
9. How is the book project at the center of the novel related to the Civil Rights Movement, its aims, achievements, dangers, and leaders?
10. One common cliché is that the pen is mightier than the sword. Cite specific examples from *The Help* that imply or discuss the power of the act of writing. Do they prove or disprove the cliché?
11. What sacrifices does Skeeter make in pursuing the book project, and what does she stand to gain if the book is a success? What does Skeeter stand to lose if the book is not a success or if things related to it go wrong?
12. What risks do Aibileen, Minny, and the other maids take in participating in the book project? Since these risks are great and involve money and, in Minny's case, violence, why do you suppose they are willing to undertake the project?

# The Help

## Chapter 1 Aibileen

### VOCABULARY

**bawling** – crying loudly  
**colic** – stomach upset in babies  
**congealed** – settled into a firm gel  
**endorse** – to publicly support  
**favor** – a similarity  
**fuss** – to complain  
**heirloom** – an inherited family possession  
**initiative** – a formally defined, official goal  
**lanky** – thin and long  
**malnourished** – thin and sick from lack of food  
**palsy** – a shaking  
**perk** – to lift up; gain energy  
**plug** – a small chunk  
**rotunda** – a round construction  
**spindly** – thin, long, and weak  
**tacky** – in poor taste

1. Aibileen notices something wrong about Miss Leefolt almost immediately upon coming into the Leefolt house for the first time. What does she notice, and what does it signify?

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2. What is the reader told about Aibileen's background in the opening chapter?

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3. How has Aibileen changed because of her son's death?

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5. Describe Celia Foote.

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6. Outline the rules Minny's mother gave her for working in "a White Lady's house" when Minny was thirteen.

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7. What is the conversation between Minny and her mother called?

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8. At work, what things occur between Celia and Minny?

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9. Who is brought up in the telephone call between Aibileen and Minny?

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10. What is different about this specific chapter, as contrasted with the others?

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**Chapter 10**  
**Minnie**

VOCABULARY

**angina** – a pain in the heart  
**gall** – boldness  
**paunch** – a belly; a protruding stomach  
**peddling** – selling; promoting for sale  
**prim** – formal; orderly  
**pummel** – to repeatedly punch  
**shellac** – a coating used in construction; varnish  
**snippy** – short-tempered; curt  
**tamp** – to lower; decrease

1. Identify some of the complaints expressed by Aibileen regarding the experiences she has had as a maid working for white families.

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2. What piece of information about Celia does Minny possess that helps explain why Celia has such difficulty in making friends among Hilly's circle?

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