

Change begins with a whisper.

the Help



BASED ON THE SENSATIONAL BESTSELLER

DREAMWORKS PICTURES AND RELIANCE BIG ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH PARTICIPANT MEDIA AND IMAGINATION A 1492 PICTURES/HARVINGER PICTURES PRODUCTION "THE HELP"
JESSICA CHASTAIN VIOLA DAVIS BRUCE DALLAS HOWARD ALLISON JANNEY OCTAVIA SPENCER EMMA STONE CASTING KERRY BARDEN AND PAUL SCHNEE MUSIC BY THOMAS NEWMAN COSTUME DESIGNER SHAREN DAVIS
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JEFF SNOLL MOHAMED KHALAF AL-MALZOUKI PRODUCED BY BRUNSON GREEN CHRIS COLUMBUS MICHAEL BARNATHAN BASED ON THE NOVEL BY KATHRYN STOCKETT WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN AND DIRECTED BY TATE TAYLOR
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THEMATIC MATERIAL

Touchstone
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A facilitator's guide for youth workers, leaders, educators and families to accompany the movie, *The Help*.

Ages 13 and up
youthFILMproject.org

The Help official website:
thehelpmovie.com/us



Dear Group Facilitator,

This F.I.L.M. curriculum for *The Help* is structured for use in conjunction with watching the new movie, *The Help*, and reading the book of the same name by Kathryn Stockett.

The Help is a story for ages 13-18. The themes of many of the questions in this guide are appropriate for both older and younger audiences, but some of the activities may need to be altered when moving between age groups. The guide offers discussion topics, activities and service-project ideas for youth. Key themes in this guide include exploring different perspectives, removing judgments and prejudices and embracing the power of storytelling.

Synopsis

Based on one of the most talked about books in years and a #1 New York Times best-selling phenomenon, *The Help* stars Emma Stone as Skeeter, Academy Award ®-nominated Viola Davis as Aibileen and Octavia Spencer as Minny – three very different, extraordinary women in Mississippi during the 1960s, who build an unlikely friendship around a secret writing project that breaks societal rules and puts them all at risk. From their improbable alliance a remarkable sisterhood emerges, instilling all of them with the courage to transcend the lines that define them, and the realization that sometimes those lines are made to be crossed – even if it means bringing everyone in town face-to-face with the changing times.

Deeply moving, filled with poignancy, humor and hope, *The Help* is a timeless and universal story about the ability to create change.

F.I.L.M. curriculum is made possible through the partnership between Heartland Truly Moving Pictures and the National Collaboration for Youth. Heartland is a non-profit arts organization that seeks to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey. The National Collaboration for Youth is a non-profit organization providing a unified voice for its coalition of more than 50 national, non-profit, youth development organizations and concentrates on improving the conditions of youth in the United States and enabling youth to realize their full capabilities.



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The pencil icon designates pages of the curriculum that can be distributed to youth as worksheets.

Objectives For Youth

- Understand the power of storytelling.
- Explore the importance of friendships.
- Learn more about the Civil Rights movement in the south during the '60s.
- Discover the ability a group of people has to transform community.
- Take action in your community.

Step 1.) Read the book and see the movie

The Help opens in theaters nationwide August 10, 2011. It is rated PG-13 for thematic material.

Reading Materials:

The Help is an award-winning novel written by Kathryn Stockett. Both the book and the movie follow the same story of twenty-two-year-old Skeeter who has just returned home after graduating from Ole Miss. Skeeter is eager to pursue a writing career, but her friends and family want her to be married.

In Skeeter's pursuit of her career, she befriends Aibileen, a black maid, and her best friend Minny. Together these three women overcome the cultural and historical expectations of the time.

Step 2.) Participate

Take part in meaningful discussions and activities:

- Uncover the importance of telling stories.
- Learn about inequality around you.
- Explore the diversity that surrounds you.
- Explore how to deal with different expectations.

Step 3.) Take the lead to help others

Engage in a project within your community based on lessons learned in this curriculum. Project ideas are included in the curriculum; there is also a free, downloadable service-learning supplement to assist in the planning and managing of *The Help* service projects. Please visit www.trulymovingpictures.org/institute/film-project/ to download the supplement.

Dear Facilitator,

The Help is a tale that focuses on many important issues, and in doing so, harnesses the power of storytelling. Whether sharing important stories that can lead to great change, or whether sharing simple stories about life and friendship over a homemade meal, stories can impact us in many ways.

The following section focuses on what we can teach, what we can learn and the impact we can have through storytelling.

Objectives for Youth

- Learn to share advice with others.
- Learn to listen to stories and empathize with the story teller.
- Understand the impact stories can have.
- Explore different ways stories can be shared.



Section One: Sharing Advice

ACTIVITY

The Ms. Myrna column is Skeeter's first real job out of college. This column not only provides Skeeter with some work experience, but also a boost of confidence to continue pursuing her dreams of writing and being published.

Even if writing isn't what you want to pursue as a profession, it's a wonderful outlet for generating creativity and building better communication skills. Also, writing in the fashion that Skeeter did helped her develop some research skills and learn about topics she never thought much about before.

Directions: Choose one of the questions below to answer, just as Skeeter would in her Ms. Myrna columns. Like Skeeter, you probably won't know the answer so get some help from someone who does, and then write as though you've known the answer all along.

Writing Activity

Dear Ms. Myrna,

I have my first interview next week. It's at a local grocery store and I don't know what to wear. I also don't know what kinds of questions to expect or how to answer them. Can you tell me what to wear and help me become prepared for three common interview questions?

Sincerely,

Nervous in Nebraska

Dear Ms. Myrna,

I've never balanced a checkbook before and now that I have to pay all my own bills, I can't seem to stay on top of them. How do I keep track of all my spending, especially when I have bills to pay, and things I want to do for fun as well, like go to the movies?

Sincerely,

Broke in Boston

Dear Ms. Myrna,

I'm tired of fast food and really want to make some meals at home, but I've never made anything besides a microwave meal. What is one really great dish I can make using about five simple ingredients?

Sincerely,

Hungry in Houston

Section One:
Sharing Advice



ACTIVITY



A large rectangular area with a dotted border, containing 20 horizontal lines for writing.

Section Two: Discovering Stories

ACTIVITY

The women in *The Help* have touching, thought-provoking and life-changing stories to share in Skeeter's book. Minny shares her stories out loud. Aibileen writes hers down for Skeeter. There are many different ways to share important stories.

Stories are happening all around us, but sometimes it's up to us to recognize them and write them down so that they can be discovered by a larger audience.

Directions: Use the outline below to go into your community and discover some stories waiting to be told and shared with others.

1. Think about a story around you that you have some connection to and that you would like to introduce to a larger audience.

Suggestions of stories include:

- What is it like to have a relative in the Armed Forces?
 - What is it like being a single parent?
 - Who is your family made up of, and how is each person important in your life?
 - What has been your greatest triumph in life?
 - Who has been the most inspirational figure in your life?
2. Take the time to gather at least three individuals who can offer insights on different aspects of the subject you chose. Don't approach just anyone. Ask a teacher or mentor to help you with an introduction.
 3. Interview each person, asking for his or her story and requesting permission to share their stories with a wide audience. Be sure to ask specific questions so that your interviewee knows exactly what story you are trying to tell.
 4. Compile the stories of each individual, and then add your connection and insights to the story to complete the collection.
 5. Think of ways to share these stories with a larger audience. Ideas include:
 - Create a self-bound book out of your stories.
 - Find photos to accompany your story.
 - Make a short film that helps share these stories.
 - Start a website with others in your group that offers a platform for people to read these stories.

Much of *The Help* takes place in the kitchen. Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter sit around Aibileen's kitchen table while they share the stories that contributed to the book. Celia Foote and Minny bond in the kitchen over recipes that Minny knew by heart and passed along to Celia to help her overcome her disastrous ways in the kitchen.

Recipes and food are a way to connect us to our culture and to our family history.

Directions: Use the following questions to think about how food plays a part in the relationships you have with others.

Discussion

1. Minny is a wonderful cook and introduces Celia to some amazing food. Before that, Celia only really knew how to make Corn Pone. What is Corn Pone and how does it help define Celia's background?
2. Is there a certain food that you believe defines your family and culture?
3. Are there certain vegetables, spices or preparation techniques, like frying or roasting or using a tandoor oven, that your family uses often? What is the history of these vegetables, spices or methods used within your family?
4. What is the most special dish that someone in your family makes? Why is it so special to you? On what occasions is this dish prepared?
5. When you eat meals, do you eat them in front of the television or at the table? When you eat with someone do you enjoy conversations more or less? What is the value of sharing meals around a table as opposed to in front of the television?
6. Do you have any specific memories associated with food? What are they?

Activity

As we saw in *The Help*, recipes can be passed from person to person and can help tell stories. Some of the foods featured in the film include fried chicken, chocolate pie and black-eyed peas.

As a group, create a recipe book that tells a story. Have each person select a favorite family recipe. In addition to sharing the recipe, share a memory that accompanies that recipe. Once all youth have submitted a recipe and a story, this recipe book can be shared with others just for fun, or can even be sold as a way to raise funds for your school, club or afterschool program.

Dear Facilitator,

The Help takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, during the 1960s. This time of great turmoil and change is important to the history of the United States. The following section explores the history that surrounds this period of time.

Use the following section to help students better understand why Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny kept their involvement with one another so secretive.

Objectives for Youth

- Explore the history of the Civil Rights Movement in America.
- Compare the laws in Jackson, Mississippi, to laws today.
- Better understand what it was like to live in Jackson during the 1960s through a writing activity.



Section One: A Brief History



While *The Help* is a fictional story, it is set in a real time and place, dealing with real events that occurred in the United States.

One of the real life events rooted in *The Help* is the death of Medgar Evers. Evers was a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, Mississippi. His death is the impetus in the film for Aibileen and Minny to help Skeeter collect the stories of all the women who contributed to the book, *The Help*.

Directions: In order to better understand the events in *The Help*, take the time to research what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States leading up to and during the 1960s.

Research

Select two of the topics below to research and then report on each, relating each to the climate you read about and witnessed in *The Help*. Be certain to explore where the event took place, who it involved and how it impacted not only the city in which it took place, but the entire Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

- Brown v Board of Education
- The Murder of Emmet Till
- Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Freedom Riders
- Project C
- Loving v. Virginia
- The Assassination of Medgar Evers
- The March on Washington
- The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The Birmingham Church Bombing

After you've researched the events you selected, share your information with others in your group or class to learn more about the history of the time.

Section Two: Mississippi Laws in the 60s



In the book, Skeeter goes to the Mississippi History room at the local library and finds the “Compilation of Jim Crow Laws of the South.”

Jim Crow laws were laws that governed the interactions of white people and black people and forced races to be treated completely differently. These laws were enacted primarily from the late 1870s to the mid 1960s and were intended to keep races “separate but equal.” These laws, however, were anything but equal.

Directions: Read some of these laws below and do more research on these laws. After learning more about Jim Crow laws in the south, use the discussion questions on the following page to discuss these laws and how they impacted the story of *The Help* and also the impact they had on history.

Research

As stated in *The Help*, the following is just a short list of some of the mandates laid out in the lawbook.

No person shall require any white female to nurse in wards or rooms in which negro men are placed.

It shall be unlawful for a white person to marry anyone except a white person. Any marriage in violation of this section will be void.

No colored barber shall serve as a barber to white women or girls.

The officer in charge shall not bury any colored persons upon ground used for the burial of white persons.

Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue to be used by the race first using them.

The Help, p. 173

To learn even more about Jim Crow laws of the South, visit Ferris State University’s compilation of the laws. www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/what.htm

Section Two: Mississippi Laws in the 60s

Discussion

1. What stands out to you the most about the Jim Crow laws? How do you believe laws like this could have been enforced for nearly 100 years?
2. In your community do you see any lingering effects of these laws or segregation?
3. In the book and movie, how is Hilly's Home Help Sanitation Initiative influenced by the Jim Crow laws?
4. How does Skeeter respond to Hilly's insistence to print the Home Help Sanitation Initiative in the Junior League newsletter?
5. Hilly and the other women in the Junior League are all fairly wealthy and college-educated women. Celia Rae Foote is from Sugar Ditch, a very poor area of Mississippi, and is not received well by the other women. Kathryn Stockett, the author of *The Help*, said "I wanted to create a character who's so poor that they're beyond prejudice." What do you believe Stockett means by this statement? Do you believe that this statement is accurate?

(Quote excerpted from *The Maids Tale: Kathryn Stockett Examines Slavery and Racism in America's Deep South*: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/5844739/The-maids-tale-Kathryn-Stockett-examines-slavery-and-racism-in-Americas-Deep-South.html)



Section Three: Being There

ACTIVITY

Now that you've learned a bit more about the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and Jim Crow Laws, take the time to imagine what your life might have been like if you'd lived there during that time period. You've studied a bit about the time period and you read about and witnessed Skeeter, Minny and Aibileen's experiences in *The Help*, but what would it be like for you?

Directions: Use the following section to help think about what it might be like for you to live in a different time where things would have been much different for you. After reading through the writing prompts and considerations below, write a journal entry from the perspective of an individual in 1960s Jackson, Mississippi.

Journal Activity

1. Choose a character in *The Help* or choose an actual person from history who lived in Jackson, Mississippi, during the 1960s from whose perspective you would like to write a journal entry.
2. Choose an historical event that happened in 1960s Jackson, Mississippi, that you would like to learn a bit more about.
3. After doing some deeper research about the historical event you have chosen, write a journal entry, at least 500 words in length, about that event in the voice of the character you have chosen. Write as though you are experiencing it then and there. Be sure to include the following information:
 - When does this event take place?
 - Where does this event take place?
 - How do you feel right now? Are you scared, happy, timid, etc.?
 - How is the event impacting those around you?
 - How is the event impacting you directly?
 - How do you personally believe this event will impact your actions in the future?
 - Be sure to include any other unique thoughts you wish.

Dear Faciliator:

Throughout this guide, youth have learned to identify stories that need to be shared. They've also taken time to deepen their understanding of the impact of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the south. This next section helps youth identify some of the ways differences between people and different expectations impact us today, and how those differences might have impacted life in the south during the time period in which *The Help* is set.

Use the following section to help students better embrace differences, understand expectations and determine how to make the ultimate impact in their own community.

Objectives for Youth:

- Explore the differences around you.
- Identify expectations that you have for yourself and for others.
- Take action in your own community and make an impact on the lives of others.



Section One: Exploring Differences



While what was happening around Skeeter was wrong, especially by today's standards, in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s many of Skeeter's peers accepted the uneven treatment of white and black people. The Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s helped change some of the laws in the United States preventing racial equality. However, inequality still exists on some levels in the United States and all over the world, whether racially, socially, between different religions and many other ways.

Directions: As a group, use the prompts below to discuss inequality around you and consider ways to make an impact in your community to change it for the better. After discussing these questions as a group, use the activity on the next page to further explore and embrace differences between those in your group.

Discussion

1. Have you witnessed unequal treatment of people around you? Who is being treated differently? Why do you think people treat this person or this group of people differently?
2. Have you ever treated a person differently than others based on the way they look or because of their beliefs? Why?
3. Have you ever been treated differently than others? Why? How did this different treatment make you feel?
4. If you've ever been treated differently than others based on gender, race or religious beliefs, how did you deal with this unequal treatment? What was the outcome?

Section One: Exploring Differences



Activity

Although changing people's beliefs about why people should all be treated equally is a very big and challenging topic that can't be solved in a day, a lot of it begins with understanding. We can't begin to understand other people unless we open up dialogue with others about our differences. As we learn more and more about people who are different than us, we can begin to realize that differences should be embraced for what they add to the fabric of our communities instead of being feared.

With the group facilitator present, have all youth find a partner, and then have all groups of partners form a circle. Partner Number One will stand on the outside of the circle and Partner Number Two will stand on the inside of the circle. These partners will use the thought prompts below to open up dialogue on differences. Each group will spend a few minutes completing a thought prompt, and after each thought prompt has been discussed, the group facilitator will ask the outer circle to shift left and the inner circle to shift right, forming new partner groups. Each new partner group will complete a different thought, allowing youth to talk to many people in the group about their beliefs and ideals, learning more about people who might be different than them.

- To me, my community is
- One strength I get from my family or culture is...
- I have been taught by my family or community that success is measured in...
- One time I really felt like I was different than others was when...
- Something that made me feel valued for who I am was...

This activity was adapted from the worksheet "Starting the Process: Pathways to Opening Dialogue" distributed by California Tomorrow.

Learn more: www.californiatomorrow.org

Section Two: Expectations of Yourself and Others



Skeeter is a woman who is determined to follow her dreams. She meets some obstacles along the way because her family and her friends have different expectations for her future than she does.

Directions: Use the following questions to talk about expectations in *The Help* and expectations in your own life.

Discussion

1. What are Skeeter's expectations for her future? What are the expectations that her friends and family have for her?
2. How did the different expectations for Skeeter's future conflict with one another and cause unrest for Skeeter?
3. How well do you believe that Skeeter and her friends dealt with these differences? What could they have done to better deal with their differences?
4. Other's expectations for Skeeter in the 1960s caused a good deal of conflict in her life. Do you believe today that these expectations would have conflicted so much with Skeeter's expectations of herself? Why?
5. What are your expectations for your future?
6. Do your expectations for your future conflict with expectations that your family or friends have for you?
7. If your expectations for your future differ from the expectations your family or friends have for you, how do you reconcile those differences?
8. How could ignoring these different expectations impact your relationships with your family or friends?

Section Three: Impacting Your Community



“Change begins with a whisper.”

As we see in *The Help*, change does indeed begin with a whisper. We saw Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter band together, share stories and give a voice to a subject important to them. Just like these ladies, you too can help a whisper be heard.

Be Heard

With a group of like-minded individuals and storytellers, develop a weekly email newsletter or a blog to help give voice to something you want to shed light on. The subject matter can be something you want people to know more about, or it can be something you want to change. Here are some ideas:

- Each week highlight a different citizen in your community having a positive impact.
- Compile a list of places in your community where people can volunteer, then each week write a story about what one of those organizations is doing to make your community a better place.
- Highlight people in your community who are overcoming obstacles and inspiring others.
- Highlight places in your community that are in disrepair and encourage people to band together to beautify them.
- Do you feel safe in your community? If not, use the newsletter or blog to get other citizens involved in being part of a neighborhood watch program. You can also interview members of the police force and fire department so that people in the community can learn more about those who are working hard to protect them.
- Think of things that are important to you and be creative! You have the power to tell important stories and make change in your community.

For even more ideas about how to impact your community, visit Take Part, www.takepart.com/TheHelp.

Dear Group Facilitator,

Please take a few moments to answer the questions in the evaluation for the *The Help* Discussion Guide at www.youthFILMproject.org and click on "Evaluations."

We value your feedback, and your comments and stories can help inspire others and keep the F.I.L.M. Project alive.

Please visit www.youthFILMproject.org at the completion of this curriculum and tell us what you think. You can also send your stories to FILMinfo@trulymovingpictures.org.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely yours,

The FILM team

The F.I.L.M. Team
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