

The Help written and directed by Tate Taylor, 2011

Re-cap: The main characters

Match the names of the main characters to their descriptions below.

Skeeter Phelan **Charlotte Phelan** **Aibileen Clark** **Minnie Jackson**
Hilly Holbrook **Celia Foote**

_____ is a maid who is fired by a local social leader, then hired by a white-trash blonde.

_____ is a relentless social climber who fires her maid after long years of service.

_____ is married to a well-off businessman, is desperate to please him, and never learned anything about being a housewife.

_____ has spent her life as a nanny, raising little white girls.

_____ is a recent college graduate who comes home and finds she doesn't fit in so easily.

_____ hides the secret of Skeeter's nanny's disappearance, and after revealing it undergoes a change of heart in a big late scene of redemption.

Speaking 1: What do you think of the characters?

What do you think of each of the characters above?

Do you understand/sympathize with their behaviour in the story? Give examples from the film to support your answer.

Speaking 2: Scenes from the film

What is the significance of the following words from the film? What scenes do they remind you of?

toilet **pie** **dating** **commodes** **ring**

Reading: Critical review

Read this extract from a review by Roger Ebert. Write your answers to the questions that follow, then compare your answers with the rest of the class.

"The Help" is a safe film about a volatile subject. Presenting itself as the story of how African-American maids in the South viewed their employers during Jim Crow days, it is equally the story of how they empowered a young white woman to write a best-seller about them, and how that book transformed the author's mother. We are happy for the two white women, and a third, but as the film ends it is still Jackson, Mississippi and Ross Barnett is still governor.

Still, this is a good film, involving and wonderfully acted. I was drawn into the characters and quite moved, even though all the while I was aware it was a feel-good fable, a story that deals with pain but doesn't care to be that painful. We don't always go to the movies for searing truth, but more often for reassurance: Yes, racism is vile and cruel, but hey, not all white people are bad.

Questions:

1. Why do you think the reviewer describes “The Help” as a “safe” film?
2. “We are happy for the two white women, and a third,” –who do you think the third woman is?
3. Do you agree that the film is “involving and wonderfully acted”? Give examples to support your answer.
4. What does the reviewer mean by “a feel-good fable”?
5. “We don’t always go to the movies for searing* truth, but more often for reassurance.” Do you agree? Explain your answer. *searing = *extreme, severe*.

Writing

Now write your own review of the film.

Your review should include the following:

- An introduction: a brief description of the subject of the film
- At least three paragraphs dealing with specific aspects of the film (e.g. the plot, the script, the actors, the locations, the costumes, the music...)
- A conclusion: your opinion of the film as a whole.

Approximate length: 500 words.

This piece of work will contribute to your continuous assessment mark for the semester. Please check your work carefully for grammar and spelling mistakes before handing it in to your teacher!