

Help Discussion Questions

1. Who was your favorite character? Why?
2. What do you think motivated Hilly? On the one hand she is terribly cruel to Aibileen and her own help, as well as to Skeeter once she realizes that she can't control her. Yet she's a wonderful mother. Do you think that one can be a good mother but, at the same time, a deeply flawed person?
3. Like Hilly, Skeeter's mother is a prime example of someone deeply flawed yet somewhat sympathetic. She seems to care for Skeeter— and she also seems to have very real feelings for Constantine. Yet the ultimatum she gives to Constantine is untenable; and most of her interaction with Skeeter is critical. Do you think Skeeter's mother is a sympathetic or unsympathetic character? Why?
4. How much of a person's character would you say is shaped by the times in which they live?
5. Did it bother you that Skeeter is willing to overlook so many of Stuart's faults so that she can get married, and that it's not until he literally gets up and walks away that the engagement falls apart?
6. Do you believe that Minny was justified in her distrust of white people?
7. Do you think that had Aibileen stayed working for Miss Elizabeth, that Mae Mobley would have grown up to be racist like her mother? Do you think racism is inherent, or taught?
8. From the perspective of a twenty-first century reader, the hairshellac system that Skeeter undergoes seems ludicrous. Yet women still alter their looks in rather peculiar ways as the definition of "beauty" changes with the times. Looking back on your past, what's the most ridiculous beauty regimen you ever underwent?
9. The author manages to paint Aibileen with a quiet grace and an aura of wisdom about her. How do you think she does this?
10. Do you think there are still vestiges of racism in relationships where people of color work for people who are white?
11. What did you think about Minny's pie for Miss Hilly? Would you have gone as far as Minny did for revenge?
(Questions issued by publisher.)

Crucible Discussion Questions

1. A crucible is defined as a severe test. Discuss the significance of the title. What is "the crucible" within the play and how does it bring about change or reveal an individual's true character?
2. As a minister, Reverend Parris is supposed to devote himself to the spiritual welfare of the inhabitants of Salem. Discuss Parris' concerns and motivations. Is he an effective minister?
3. Discuss Proctor's relationship with Abigail. Why did Proctor have an affair, and what prompted him to end his affair with Abigail?
4. Compare and contrast Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams. What are their individual positive character traits? Negative character traits? How do they feel about Proctor?
5. Elizabeth despises deception. She is a moral woman, devoted to upholding the truth. Discuss Elizabeth's behavior in the court. What prompts her to lie?
6. Discuss Abigail's plan to get rid of Elizabeth. Is the play a fulfillment of the spell she cast in the woods with Tituba?
7. Discussing the effects of the witch trials on Salem. How do the trials affect the community? Government and authority? The church? Individuals?
8. In Act IV, Scene 4, Proctor agrees to falsely confess in order to avoid death. He later changes his mind. Explain why he refuses to confess. What is the "shred of goodness" he discovers?

General Discussion Questions for any book

1. Did you enjoy the book? Why or why not?
2. What were your expectations for this book? Did the book fulfill them?
3. How would you briefly describe the book to a friend?
4. In a book in which the author was not a character or was not doing first-person reporting, was the author present in the book anyway? Was the presence of the author disruptive? Or did it seem appropriate or fitting?
5. How would you describe the plot? Did it pull you in, or did you feel you had to force yourself to read the book?
6. How realistic was the characterization? Would you want to meet any of the characters? Did you like them? Hate them?
7. If the book was nonfiction, do you think the characters accurately portrayed the real events upon which the book was based? If not, what would you have changed to make the book more accurate?

8. Who was your favorite character?
9. Which character did you relate to most and why?
10. Did the actions of the characters seem plausible? Why? Why not?
11. If one (or more) of the characters made a choice that had moral implications, would you have made the same decision? Why? Why not?
12. How does the setting figure in the book?
13. If the book was nonfiction, do you feel the author did enough to describe the setting and how it might have influenced the plot or narrative of the book?
14. How would the book have been different if it had taken place in a different time or place?
15. What are some of the book's themes? How important were they?
16. How are the book's images symbolically significant? Do the images help to develop the plot or help to define characters?
17. Did the book end the way you expected?
18. If the book was based on real events, what did you already know about this book's subject before you read this book? Did the story reflect what you already knew? Do you feel the book helped enhance your knowledge and understanding of the subject?
19. If the book was nonfiction, what did you think about the author's research? Do you think she did an adequate job of gathering the information? Were the sources credible?
20. At which point of the book were you most engaged?
21. Conversely, were there any parts of the book that you felt dragged?
22. How would you describe the pace of the book?
23. What three words would you use to summarize this book?
24. What, if anything, set this book apart from others you've read in a similar genre?
25. What other books have you read by this author? How did they compare to this book?
26. What did you think of the book's length? If it's too long, what would you cut? If too short, what would you add?
27. Would you recommend this book to other readers? To your close friend? Why or why not?