

Theme One: Who Am I?

How do our favorite books about self-discovery help us navigate our life's journey?

Picture yourself in front of a three-way mirror revealing your true self to the world. An imaginary friend stands next to you. This friend invites you on an exciting adventure filled with suspense, happiness, humor, outrageous ideas and the opportunity to discover the hidden secrets to embrace the future. Welcome to the Great American Fiction novel. A chance to transform negative circumstances into positive learning experiences meeting characters facing similar obstacles, cheer them on to success, feel their pain and learn from their mistakes. A safe and creative outlet to brainstorm ideas to face our real problems, inject humor into our serious lives and make some new forever friends.

The Shack by William Young provides a glimpse into the afterlife when Missy Phillips is kidnapped by a man while on vacation with her family in the woods. When the park ranger breaks the news that her body was found at the base of the mountain, her dad desperately searches for answers. We follow him to an abandoned cabin later transformed into a magical doorway to a beautiful field with waterfalls and children playing games. His guide explains this is a heavenly field and points out his daughter playing games with other children. Her death is an unforgivable tragedy, but she teaches him that life isn't over yet. At the end of the story, her dad returns to his grieving family and explains what he learned from his visit to the abandoned shack. Anger, guilt, peace and hope are the recurring themes that flow into us as we digest this important growth rite.

Minnie, Aibileen, and Skeeter share their stories about life in Missouri during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in *The Help*. Stockett uses strong language acceptable at the time when Martin Luther King, JFK and other important groups struggle with racial segregation and upper-class families. We learn about these events in school. Again, these characters bring the story to life injecting humor to soften the harsh reality. Minnie vents her anger toward Hilly with a "chocolate pie" made with secret ingredients to suit her taste. Her prank breaks the tension with laughter from everyone at the benefit, much smarter than physical violence to settle the score. Aibileen teaches Mae Mobley that people with different "wrappings" have the same feelings inside. When Skeeter meets with them to write their stories, she learns the real dangers of outsiders visiting certain neighborhoods. Throughout the book, important values such as street sense, respect, community and change funnel their way into our lives.

We have a choice.

By,

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