Book Title: The Help

Reviewed by: Marisa Masatsugu

Level of Difficulty: Difficult

My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:

This book is definitely for a higher level reading group. The Southern dialect is especially challenging. However, I very much enjoyed teaching this book. It was a great vehicle to bring in many of the historical highlights of the 1960's such as the Civil Rights Era, The Women's Liberation Movement, and the Generation Gap. This book also had many themes that we explored in class discussions: keeping secrets, the nature of friendships, mother/daughter relationships, just to name some of them.

Students' reactions to the book:

My students loved the book! One of my students said that she felt really good after finishing such a long and "big" book. Another student said that she learned so much about American history. And one other student said that she enjoyed talking to her daughter about the book, as she read it in class. Although the dialect was difficult for them to get through in the beginning, they all said that they got used to it and reading the text (especially the Southern dialect) became easier as they read more and more of the book. Because of the many themes in the book, we held many deep discussions about the characters, which the students really enjoyed.

Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:

I would suggest pre-reading activities prior to starting the book: short history of the geographical setting and time period of the story, a character map and vocabulary and idiom list for each chapter will help your students immensely. Start slow with lots of explanations of the dialect until they get used to it. It took me two sessions to read the book, but it was so well worth the time!