

The Invention of Wings ~ Sue Monk Kidd

NMPL BOOK CLUB - JANUARY 13, 2015 @ 6:30

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The title *The Invention of Wings* was one of the first inspirations that came to Sue Monk Kidd as she began the novel. Why is the title an apt one for Kidd's novel? What are some of the ways that the author uses the imagery and symbolism of birds, wings, and flight?

What were the qualities in Handful that you most admired? How did Handful continue her relentless pursuit of self and freedom in the face of such a brutal system?

After laying aside her aspirations to become a lawyer, Sarah remarks that the Graveyard of Failed Hopes is "an all-female establishment." What makes her say so?

In what ways does Sarah struggle against the dictates of her family, society, and religion? Can you relate to her need to break away from the life she had in order to create a new and unknown life? What sort of risk and courage does this call for?

The story of *The Invention of Wings* includes a number of physical objects that have a special significance for the characters: Sarah's fleur-de-lis button, Charlotte's story quilt, the rabbit-head cane that Handful receives from Goodis, and the spirit tree. Choose one or more of these objects and discuss their significance in the novel.

Were you aware of the role that Sarah and Angelina Grimké played in abolition and women's rights? Have women's achievements in history been lost or overlooked? What do you think it takes to be a reformer today?

How would you describe Sarah and Angelina's unusual bond? Do you think either one of them could have accomplished what they did on their own? Have you known women who experienced this sort of relationship as sisters?

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Some of the staunchest enemies of slavery believed the time had not yet come for women's rights and pressured Sarah and Angelina to desist from the cause, fearing it would split the cause of abolition. How do you think the sisters should have responded to their demand? At the end of the novel, Sarah asks, "Was it ever right to sacrifice one's truth for expedience?"

What are some of the examples of Handful's wit and sense of irony, and how do they help her cope with the burdens of slavery?

Contrast Handful's relationship with her mother with the relationship between Sarah and the elder Mary Grimké. How are the two younger women formed-and-malformed-by their mothers?

Kidd portrays an array of male characters in the novel: Sarah's father; Sarah's brother, Thomas; Theodore Weld; Denmark Vesey; Goodis Grimké, Israel Morris, Burke Williams. Some of them are men of their time, some are ahead of their time. Which of these male characters did you find most compelling? What positive and negative roles did they play in Sarah and Handful's evolvment?

How has your understanding of slavery been changed by reading *The Invention of Wings*? What did you learn about it that you didn't know before?

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