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Interracial Relations: History and Cultural Identity in The Invention of Wings

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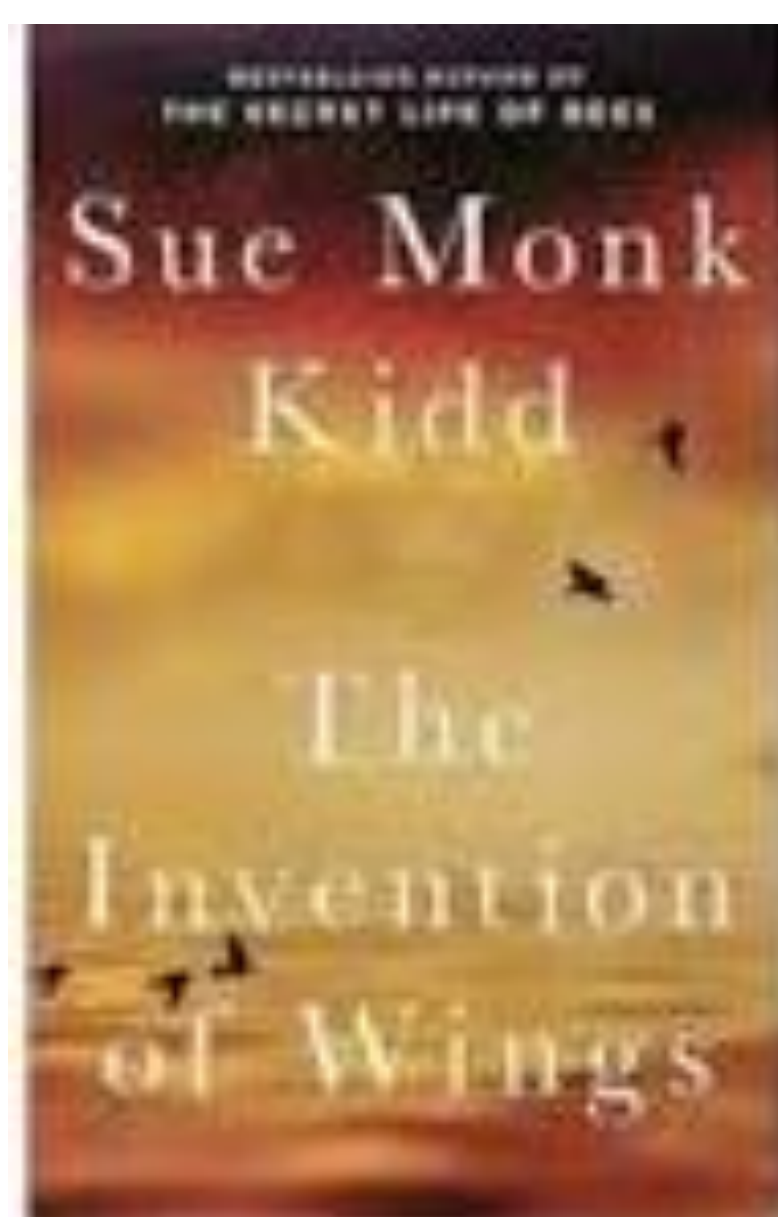
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INTRODUCTION

The historical fiction novel *The Invention of Wings* was written by Sue Monk Kidd. Over the course of thirty-five years, the narration alternates between the two main characters: Sarah Grimké and Hetty Handful Grimké, a young slave on the Grimké plantation. This study explores the relationship between the critical ideas of racial equality and gender equality and their combined impact on Sarah and Hetty's relationship within the novel. Additionally, this project examines barriers between the main characters and a theory that provides an understanding of the difficulty in creating and maintaining their relationship.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- *The Invention of Wings* is based in Charleston, South Carolina
- 19th Century- Antebellum time period
- Slavery was present
- Patriarchal Society
- Gender and racial equality were considered radical ideas at the time



GENDER AND RACIAL EQUALITY

"If a friend is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, someone with whom one shares a 'relationship of mutual trust and intimacy,' we must consider how structures of inequality might thwart mutuality" (Fielder 326).

Sarah

"Sarah darling, you've fought harder than I imagined, but you must give yourself over to your duty and your fate and make whatever happiness you can" (Kidd 81).

Due to the patriarchal society during the time period, females throughout the South were expected to bury their own ambitions and goals for the sake of their husband and family.

Hetty

"Goods and chattel. The words from the leather book came into my head. We were like the gold leaf mirror and the horse saddle. Not full-fledge people" (Kidd 112).

African Americans throughout the South, such as Hetty's character, were enslaved and shared the feeling of being items, not people.

IMPACT

Initially, the tense relations between blacks and whites was evident in the relationship between the two main characters. However, their contrasting experiences led to a relationship based on similar core values around different freedoms: freedom of the body and freedom from social constructs.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

Kidd's *The Invention of Wings* bridges the past and the present, through its two main characters Hetty and Sarah, to educate its audience about a dark time in American history. The relationship between the two characters shows that the shared belief in freedom can lead to a valuable, genuine relationship in the long run. Additionally, it reveals that while people may be of a different skin color, over time one can discover more similarities than differences. Ultimately, their bond reveals interracial relationships can overcome barriers and become friendships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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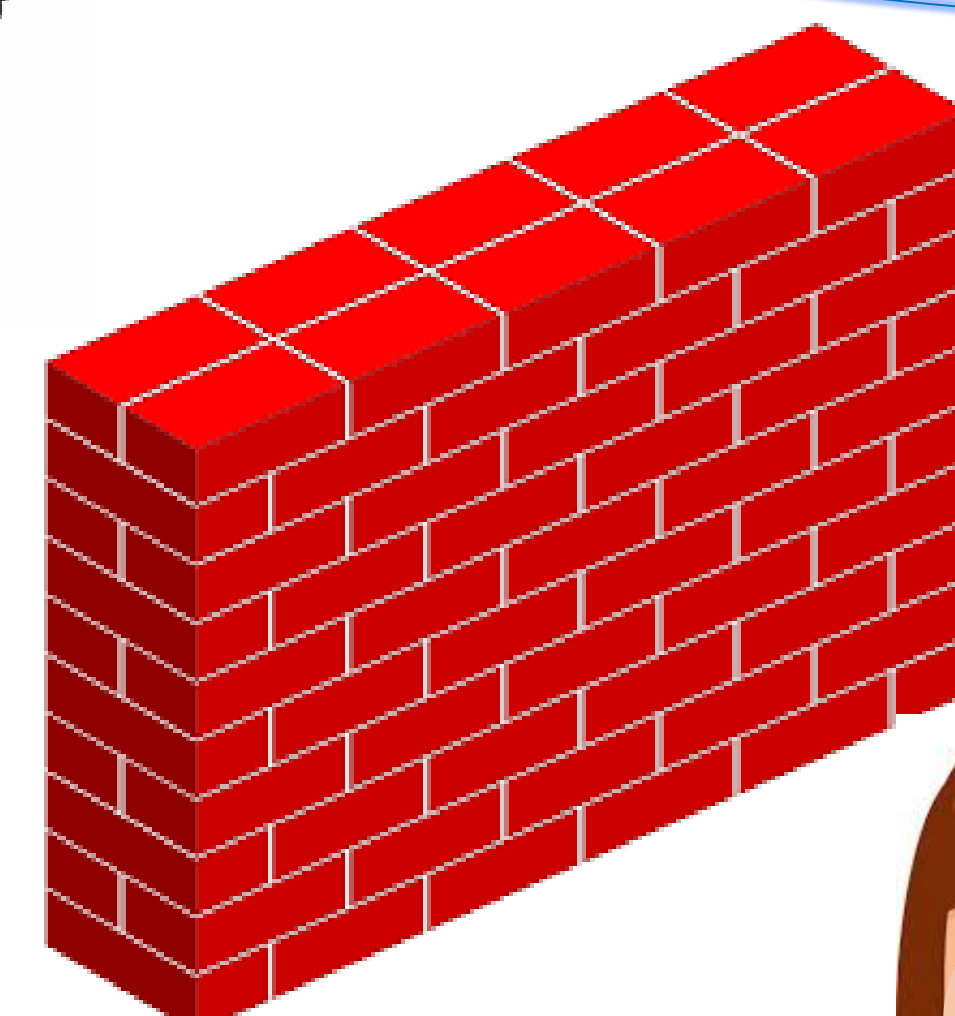
PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES/CULTURAL CONTRACTS THEORY

"Interracial interactions are marked by higher levels of stress and anxiety than intraracial interactions" (West 81)

"So we just the same, me and you? That's why you the one to shit in the pot and I'm the one to empty it?" (Kidd 89).

"I got the hyssop tea she liked, thinking of us when we were little, how we drank it on the roof, her telling me about the silver button and the big plan she had. I'd worn that button in my neck pouch almost every day since she'd tossed it away" (Kidd 134).

Cultural Contracts Theory supports the idea that interaction between individuals of different races is an exchange of cultural identity that enables a shift in how each person involved views others.



IMPACT

The perceived differences created a wall of misunderstanding between Hetty and Sarah that prevented them from seeing each other as individuals instead of a skin color. However, as they began to interact more their perspectives of each other changed.

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