

Shortly before Sue turned thirty, the pull to writing returned. Living in South Carolina, where her husband Sandy was teaching at a small liberal arts college, she enrolled in writing classes with the intention of writing fiction, but was soon diverted to non-fiction. She began a career as a freelancer, writing personal experience articles, most of them inspirational and art of living pieces. Sue published several hundred articles, primarily in Guideposts Magazine, but also in numerous other publications, newspapers and journals.

It was during Sue's thirties that she began to experience an intellectual and spiritual flowering. She embarked on a serious study of the classics of Western spirituality, depth psychology and mythology, while also reading voluminous amounts of literary fiction. She became deeply influenced by the work of monk Thomas Merton and psychiatrist, C.G. Jung, which would impact her writing in the years ahead.

Today Sue lives beside a salt marsh near Charleston, South Carolina, with her husband Sandy and their black lab, Lily.

*(suemonkkidd.com)*

## **Reviews**

"Her writing is so smart and sharp, she gives new life to old midlife crises, and she draws connections from the feminine to the divine to the erotic that a lesser writer wouldn't see, and might not have the guts to follow." - *Time*

"[An] illuminating investigation of midlife malaise...*The Mermaid Chair* honors those who conjure up the courage to rediscover and recommit to their life passions." – *The Seattle Times*

"A woman at life's crossroads, a parent's tragic death and a strong, if eccentric circle of women. Stir in a forbidden love, and the pages all but turn themselves." - *Parade*

*(readinggroupguides.com)*

## **Movie Adaptation**

Already having gained success in Hollywood film industry, Kim Basinger is now trying her hand at something new, starring in TV movie. The actress reportedly is about to make her TV movie debut in *The Mermaid Chair*, a Lifetime film based on the best-selling book by Sue Monk Kidd.

The movie *The Mermaid Chair* revolves around Jessie Sullivan, a married woman who falls in love with a Benedictine monk, and the crisis and self-awakening it ignites. It will premiere on the women's cable network in September 2006.

([aceshowbiz.com](http://aceshowbiz.com))

## **Further Reading**

*King's Oak: A Novel* by Anne Rivers Siddons

*Bed and Breakfast* by Lois Battle

*A Virtuous Woman* by Kaye Gibbons

*Tending to Virginia* by Jill McCorkle

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## **The Mermaid Chair**

### **By Sue Monk Kidd**

#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. How does a woman like Jessie become "molded to the smallest space possible"? What signs might appear in her life? What did Jessie mean when she said part of the problem was her chronic inability to astonish herself?
2. Jessie comes to believe that an essential problem in her marriage is not that she and Hugh have grown apart, but that they have grown "too much together." What do you think she means by that? How important is it for Jessie to find her "solitude of being"? How does a woman balance apartness and togetherness in a relationship?
3. How would you describe Nelle before and after her husband's death? What is your interpretation of the mysterious factors that led her to cut off her finger? What do her fingers symbolize? How does the myth of Sedna --- the Inuit mermaid whose severed fingers became the first sea creatures --- shed light on Nelle's state of mind?
4. Jessie feels that she has found a soul mate in Whit. Do you find this word inviting or repellent? When we speak of looking for a soul mate, what do we mean? Is there really such a thing?
5. Why do you think Whit came to the monastery? Would you describe him as having a crisis of faith? In what ways does he vacillate between falling into life and transcending it? What do you think of his decision at the end about whether to leave or to stay?
6. Islands are often places of personal trial and distillation of self --- such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or *Lord of the Flies*. What are the emotional islands each character is stranded on? What is the significance of the Egret Island setting? How does each character finally escape the island of his or her making? What does the trial on the enchanted island reveal about each character?
7. The mermaid chair is a central image in the novel. What does it symbolize? What role does it play in the novel? In Jessie's life? In her father's? How does it become a place of dying and rebirth for both of them, literally and figuratively?

8. The novel celebrates the hallowed bonds of women and suggests how a true community of women can become a maternal circle that nurtures a woman toward self-realization and helps her to give birth to a new life. How do Kat, Hepzibah, and even Benne, play a role in Jessie's transformation? What has been the importance of female communities in your own life?

9. In perhaps the most moving and cathartic moment in the novel, Jessie goes to Bone Yard beach and speaks vows of commitment to herself- "Jessie. I take you, Jessie .... for better or worse ..... to love and to cherish." What does it mean to make a "marriage" to your self? Paradoxically, Jessie discovered that belonging to herself allowed her to belong more truly to Hugh. Does an inviolate commitment to oneself enhance one's commitment to a relationship?

*(readinggroupguides.com)*