**The Invention of Wings
by Sue Monk Kidd**

**About the Book**

Hetty “Handful” Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke’s daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women.

Kidd’s sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah’s eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other’s destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

Inspired by the historical figure of Sarah Grimke, Kidd goes beyond the record to flesh out the rich interior lives of all of her characters, both real and invented, including Handful’s cunning mother, Charlotte, who courts danger in her search for something better.

This exquisitely written novel is a triumph of storytelling that looks with unswerving eyes at a devastating wound in American history, through women whose struggles for liberation, empowerment, and expression will leave no reader unmoved.

**About the Author**

Sue Monk Kidd's first novel, The Secret Life of Bees, spent more than one hundred weeks on the New York Times bestseller list, has sold nearly six million copies, and was chosen as the 2004 BookSense Paperback Book of the Year and Good Morning America's "Read This!" Book Club pick. It was adapted into an award-winning movie in 2008. Her second novel, The Mermaid Chair, a #1 New York Times bestseller, won the 2005 Quill Book Award for Best General Fiction and was adapted into a television movie. Her novels have been published in more than thirty countries. She is also the author of several acclaimed memoirs and the recipient of many awards, including a Poets & Writers Award. She lives near Charleston, South Carolina.

**If you enjoyed *The Invention of Wings***

* *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
* *Belle Cora* by Phillip Margulies
* *Grant Park by Leonard Pitts Jr.*
* *The Husband’s Secret* by Liane Moriarty
* *We are Water* by Wally Lamb
* *The Mermaid Chair* by Sue Monk Kidd

**Discussion Questions**

1. 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?
2. What were the qualities in Handful that you most admired? As you read the novel, could you imagine yourself in her situation?
3. 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? What was your experience of reading Kidd’s portrayal of women’s lives in the 19th century?
4. How would you describe Sarah and Angelina’s unusual bond? Do you think either of them could have accomplished what they did on their own?
5. 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 the demand?
6. 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?
7. Contrast Handful’s relationship with her mother with the relationship between Sarah and the elder Mary Grimke. How are the two younger women formed – and malformed – by their mothers?
8. Sarah believed she could not have a vocation and marriage, both. Do you think she made the right decision in turning down Israel’s proposal? In what way are women today still asking the question of whether they can have it all?
9. How does the spirit tree function in Handful’s life? What do you think of the rituals and meaning surrounding it?
10. *The Invention of Wings* takes the reader back to the roots of racism in America. How has slavery left its mark on American life? Do you think slavery has been a taboo topic in American life?