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# Novelist Sue Monk Kidd cultivates thoughts, transitions to short form

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By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer | 0 comments

[Read Sue Monk Kidd's "Two Minutes or Two Questions."](#)

The limits of time and space have been on Sue Monk Kidd's mind a lot in recent months.

Kidd is one of 11 writers who have contributed to the Cultivating Thoughts project, crafting short stories or essays that are printed on the carry-out bags and drink cups at Chipotle restaurants.

The project was created by novelist Jonathan Safran Foer and currently features brief pieces by writers such as Jonathan Franzen, Lois Lowry, Anthony Doerr, Colson Whitehead and Laura Hillenbrand.

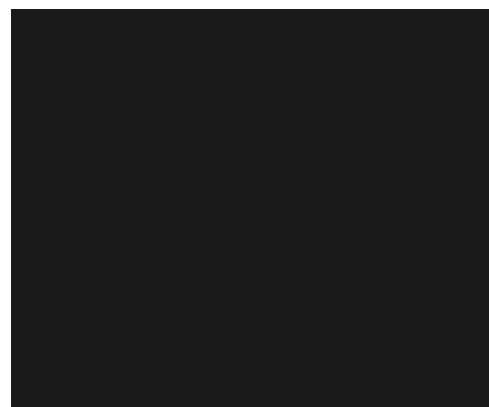
"I had read about this and thought it was an interesting way to put your thoughts into the hands of a voluminous number of people," Kidd said in a recent conversation. "It would be like dropping these briefly stated but substantive thoughts and ideas into people's lives, feeding their minds, as well as their tummies."

"So when they asked me to take part, I jumped at the chance," she said.

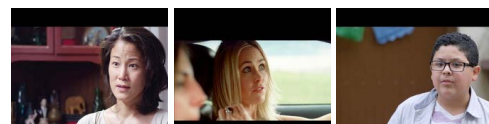
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Sue Monk Kidd will be in Tulsa on Thursday and Friday as part of Tulsa Reads, a collaborative effort of the Oklahoma Center for Poets and Writers, Tulsa Town Hall, Tulsa City-County Library and the Tulsa World. Courtesy



  
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Then came the hard part: Writing something that said everything Kidd wanted to say but keeping it short enough to fit aesthetically and legibly on the side of a paper cup.

“I’m all about the long form when it comes to writing,” Kidd said, laughing. “I knew I wanted to write about two questions that had guided me all my life, and I ended up doing something like 10 drafts to condense it down to the length it had to be.”

The popularity of Chipotle restaurants ensures that thousands of people are likely to read Kidd’s “Two Minutes or Two Questions” during the course of the Cultivating Thoughts program.

They will join the millions of readers who have embraced Kidd’s novels and nonfiction books, which include the best-selling “The Secret Life of Bees,” “The Dance of the Dissident Daughter” and her latest novel, “The Invention of Wings.”

Kidd will be in Tulsa next week as part of Tulsa Reads, a collaborative effort of the Oklahoma Center for Poets and Writers, Tulsa Town Hall, Tulsa City-County Library and the Tulsa World.

She will take part in the Center for Poets and Writers’ event, “Up Close and Personal With Sue Monk Kidd,” on Thursday, where she will read passages from her books that illustrate “certain things I do when I write,” Kidd said.

Friday morning, Kidd will open Tulsa Town Hall’s 81st season with a talk about “The Writing of Life.”

Kidd first came to national fame with her debut novel, “The Secret Life of Bees,” a coming-of-age story about a young woman who finds solace in a community of African-American women and beekeepers, that was later adapted into a stage play and film.

“The Secret Life of Bees” was set in 1964, and the civil rights movement plays an integral part of the story.

Her most-recent novel, “The Invention of Wings,” explores the subject of racism more deeply, in a story based in part on the life of Sarah Grimke, who became a noted abolitionist and advocate for women’s rights in the 19th century.

One of the inspirations for the novel was the fact that as a child Grimke had been presented with a slave girl named Hettie as a birthday present. At first, Grimke rejected the gift but later began to teach Hettie to read and write.

The story Kidd tells in “The Invention of Wings” alternates between Sarah and Hettie, who is nicknamed “Handful,” as they each struggle with the restrictions of society.

Kidd said she was worried that it would be difficult to portray the character of Hettie convincingly as she began working on the novel.

“Writing is always a surprise, and that was certainly the case with Handful,” Kidd said. “I mean, how could a white woman in the south, a century after the fact, write in the voice of an enslaved woman?”

“The surprise was how easy it became,” Kidd said. “I think the reason is she is, primarily, an invented character. Very little is know about her life so I was able to give my imagination free reign.”



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On the other hand, the character of Sarah Grimke was one Kidd said she had to “coax out” because she thought she needed to stay completely faithful to the character’s biography.

“What finally freed her up for me was when I gave myself permission to go off script, so to speak,” Kidd said. “At first I was a little nervous about it, but I told myself I was a novelist and that it was all right to make some things up.”

Still, there is a great deal of history in “The Invention of Wings.” One of the main characters is Denmark Vesey, one of the founding members of the Emanuel AME Church, which was the site earlier this year of a mass murder.

“I was approached to comment when that horrific thing happened, and some in the media made the connection to my book,” Kidd said. “But I didn’t because I did not want to give the slightest impression that I was trying in any way to capitalize on this tragedy.

“I don’t live in Charleston any more, but my friends who still live there tell me there is a very substantive air of change in the community,” she said. “I’m hopeful that change will be lasting.”

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