

HATTIE MAE BEGINS AGAIN



SHARON G. FLAKE

THREE-TIME CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE SKIN I'M IN*

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

From the three-time Coretta Scott King Honor-winning author of *The Skin I'm In* comes a poignant story about a Southern girl far from home at an elite girls' boarding school in the North who must find the courage to be herself and to dream of a brighter future, set against the backdrop of the great migration in South Philly.

Hattie Mae is from Seed County, North Carolina. She knows hard work: milking cows, plucking chickens, minding the garden. Her hands are made for manual labor, her feet for dirt—that is, according to Lisa and some of the girls at Miss Abigail's School for Exceptional Young Ladies in Philadelphia. In their eyes, Hattie Mae will never break into high society and is unworthy of becoming a doctor or a lawyer.

Though Hattie Mae sticks out like a sore thumb and has more in common with the hundreds of Black folks pouring into the city looking for better opportunities away from Jim Crow's South, she knows that she belongs. She just has to prove it to the rest of the girls.

A moving coming-of-age story about finding the courage to be yourself, chasing your dreams, and lending a hand to others along the way.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sharon G. Flake is the author of *The Skin I'm In*, which has sold over a million copies worldwide and has been translated into numerous languages. Since its publication, Flake has authored over a dozen books, winning multiple Coretta Scott King Honors, ALA Notable and Top Ten Recommended Books citations, and an NAACP Image Award nomination, among many accolades. She has been writing books from her home (and Paneras) for over twenty years.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

★ “Every poem in this verse novel is a glimmering snapshot that perfectly captures Hattie Mae’s experiences, with deft worldbuilding and historical tidbits.”

—*The Bulletin*, starred review

“A compelling coming-of-age story enriched by its historical texture.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

BEFORE READING

- Jacob Lawrence, a well-known Black artist who showcased the Black experience through his paintings, created “The Migration Series.” This collection of paintings highlighted the journeys of Black people who migrated from the rural Southern states to the industrial Northern states in the early twentieth century. Visit the [Phillips Collection](#) website to view the collection and listen to Jacob Lawrence discuss his personal ties to the Great Migration.
 - What does his collection teach us about the Great Migration?
 - What image resonates with you the most? Why?
- Conduct research about the Great Migration for additional context. Visit the [History Channel](#) or [PBS](#). Why did many African Americans move north during the early twentieth century?
- Have you ever moved to a new town or school? What was that experience like? Were you able to make friends and connections easily?
- What does it mean to fit in? How do clothes, speech, and background affect perceptions of belonging?
- Where is the Mason-Dixon line? What does it signify?

DURING READING

- Who is the narrator of *Hattie Mae Begins Again*? Describe her. Discuss her character traits.
- Describe the differences between Seed County and Philadelphia. Cite specific imagery used by Hattie Mae to show the contrast.
- What is Hattie Mae's early impression of Miss Abigail's School for Exceptional Young Ladies? Describe her relationship with the head mistress. What must be kept a secret? Why do you think she is not telling that truth to her family? (p. 4)
- Read "Daddy's Instructions" (p. 9). What instructions does he give? Why did he direct her to stay in the "colored" section of the train?
- What was Mr. Gage's experience when he first arrived in Philadelphia?
- Read "Making the New" (p. 39). What assumptions are made about Hattie Mae because she is from the South? What expectations are put upon Hattie Mae?
- Describe the relationship between Alabaster and Hattie Mae. How does their friendship evolve throughout the book?
- What motivates Lisa to treat Hattie the way she does? How does her family situation complicate her actions? In what ways does Lisa challenge Hattie Mae's sense of self? Describe the evolution of their relationship.
- What does the ring from Gran represent? How does its loss and recovery mirror Hattie's emotional journey?
- Describe Bert. What career does she want in the future? Where does she sneak off to when she leaves the school grounds? In what ways does the following statement anchor her community activism: "I want everybody everywhere to come see me in the movies and sit wherever they please"?
- How do characters like Bert and Alabaster contribute to Hattie's understanding of activism and community?
- Hattie Mae has a twin brother. Describe the relationship between the two. What is the significance of her missing him in the poem "Fun" (p. 149)?
- Reread the poem "A Seat at the Table" (pp. 174–175). What is the significance of the women writing Hattie Mae's name with different titles behind it?
- What does Hattie's creation of Hattie's Helpers say about leadership and agency? (p. 219)
- Why does Hattie Mae's mother come to Philadelphia? Why was it important for her to see her daughter? What was the impact of her visit on Hattie Mae?
- Hattie Mae and her schoolmates work to save Miss Abigail's School for Exceptional Young Ladies. How does Hattie Mae generate support? What is the "Women of the Future Club"? Describe the showcase they present.

BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

The following people are mentioned in the book. How are they connected to establishing the historical context of the book? Why are they significant?

- Richard Allen (p. 23)
- Marian Anderson (p. 29)
- W. E. B. Du Bois (p. 29)
- Duke Ellington (p. 174)
- Langston Hughes (p. 174)
- Claude McKay (p. 323)
- Eleanor Roosevelt (p. 323)

AFTER READING

- *Hattie Mae Begins Again* was written as a novel in verse. How might this shape the way the story is told and received?
- What is the theme of this novel? Create a visual representation of your answer.
- In what ways does the setting (1938 Philadelphia) anchor this narrative?
- How does the novel challenge stereotypes about Southern Black girls?
- Create a flyer for the Hattie's Helpers showcase.
- Create a logo for the Women of the Future Club.

Reflect on the following quotes and discuss their significance to the story:

- "When you get to Philadelphia do not shame the family. Our good name is all we have." (Gran to Hattie, p. 5)
- "I do not much care for the North . . . Our people running up there like it's the promised land. But trouble be everywhere. I'm sticking with the trouble I know." (Gran to Hattie, p. 5)

- "She puts on airs." (Bert describing Lisa to Hattie Mae, p. 40)
- "Never you mind . . . When fortune smiles on you accept it. And rise above your station. I have." (Mr. Gage to Hattie Mae, p. 146)
- "I came for an education. Like you and everyone else. You should want every girl to learn." (Hattie Mae to Lisa, p. 159)
- "You are not a charity case. We are family . . ." (Miss Abigail to Hattie Mae, p. 205)
- "Only chickens we need here in Philadelphia are the ones at the grocery store waiting to be plucked and served for supper." (Alabaster to Hattie Mae, p. 255)
- "*Our community must lift all boats not just a few, so donate. Donate. Donate.*" (p. 320)

*This guide was written by Dr. Shanetia P. Clark,
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