

# STEPHEN KING

# CARRIE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### IN BRIEF:

Did you know that the original book manuscript for CARRIE was rescued from the waste basket by Stephen King's wife? Pulling out the crumpled pieces of paper and dusting off the cigarette ash, she encouraged Stephen King complete the story. The result: CARRIE, a seminal work and popular classic, was King's first published novel and the book that launched Stephen King's career as the bestselling writer he is today. The story of a high-school misfit, Carrie White, who gradually discovers that she has telekinetic powers remains as relevant to a young generation of readers today as it did when it was first published in 1974. Repressed by a domineering, ultra-religious mother and tormented by her peers at school, Carrie's efforts to fit in lead to a dramatic confrontation during the senior prom.

### IN DETAIL:

*Carrie* was inspired by an article Stephen King read in LIFE magazine about telekinesis, and how young girls in early adolescence might have the power to move things around just by thinking about them. King had also seen the damage religious fanaticism does at first hand, when kids raised in strictly fundamentalist homes have to try to exist in a secular world. The character of Carrie was based on a combination of two girls King had known at high school and the two ideas of adolescent cruelty and telekinesis came together to create the springboard for *Carrie*.

Carrie is no ordinary girl. Carrietta White, sixteen and brought up by her ultra-religious mother, goes to Thomas Ewen Consolidated High School in fictional town of Chamberlain, Maine. She is a misfit; the one whose reflexes are always off in games, whose clothes never really fit. And so she becomes the joke, the brunt of teenage cruelties that confuse her as much as they hurt her feelings. When showering in the locker room, Carrie starts to have her first period. Only she doesn't know what it is and thinks she is bleeding to death. The other girls – grossed out, horrified – start to pelt her with sanitary napkins. Even her classmate Sue Snell joins in until their gym teacher Miss Desjardin intervenes. That's when a light bulb unexpectedly sizzles and pops overhead.

Back at home, in the living room dominated by a plaster crucifix, Carrie seeks comfort from her mother. Alerted by the school, Margaret White has left her laundry job early to see her daughter. Margaret reaches out her hand to her daughter but uses it to beat her, locking Carrie in the closet, telling her to pray for her sins, sins which brought on the curse of blood.

The following day, the school office punishes the girls involved in the shower incident with a week's detention in the gym. One of the ringleaders, Chris Hargensen, protests so Miss Desjardin refuses her prom tickets to the school's Spring Ball. By contrast, Sue Snell, figures she has earned the punishment; she befriends Carrie and tries to make up for her behaviour by asking her own boyfriend, the handsome and eligible Tommy Ross, to take Carrie to the Ball in her place.

Meanwhile, Carrie has gradually discovered she can make things move - by concentrating on them, by willing it with her mind and body. Small things, like marbles, start dancing. A hairbrush is lifted into the air. Carrie has the gift of telekinesis but must learn to keep it under control, to suppress it like everything else in her life. To be invited to Prom Night by handsome Tommy Ross is a dream come true for Carrie – the first step towards social acceptance by her high school colleagues. Her mother forbids her from attending while Chris Hargensen plans the total ruination of Carrie White. Chris persuades her boyfriend Billy Nolan to slash the throat of two sows at a local farm and drain the blood into two buckets which he rigs on the beam above the Prom stage.

On the morning of 27 May, Carrie puts on the red dress she has made for the Prom. To no avail, Margaret White tries to stop Carrie from going, first with righteous anger, then by harming herself in front of her daughter. When Tommy arrives that evening, Carrie is relieved that it isn't just an elaborate joke. And at the Spring Ball, Tommy calls her 'beautiful', invites her to dance and Carrie starts to enjoy herself, like Sleeping Beauty finally waking up to normality. Meanwhile, Sue Snell is at home – her period is late and she's worried about what is going on at the Ball.

When the guests are invited to vote for the Prom King and Queen, neither Carrie nor Tommy are aware that Chris has organised people to vote for them, so that they will sit on the thrones under the carefully placed buckets. Chris is in the wings, ready to pull the string that will empty the pigs' blood on Carrie and Tommy when they are crowned. And on that fateful night, when the blood pours down on Carrie, the warm applause will turn to laughter and then to horror, as Carrie exercises her terrible gift on the town that mocks and loathes her.

She makes a lighted candle fall. And she locks the doors...

*Carrie* is divided into three parts: Bloodsport, Prom Night and Wreckage. The narrative is interspersed with entries and extracts from fictional newspapers, testimonies, letters, science books, magazines and an autobiography. These include *The Shadow Exploded: Documented Facts and Specific Conclusions Derived from the Case of Carietta White*, by David R. Congress (Tulane University Press 1981); *Carrie: Telekinesis: Analysis and Aftermath* (Science Yearbook, 1982); *My name is Susan Snell* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986) and *The White Commission Report*. The author draws on these fictional documents and witness accounts to put together a complete story of Carrie White. The book opens in 1966, Sue Snell's fictional book is published in 1986 and the King's book *Carrie* was first published in 1974.

(Other titles include; *Westover (Me) Weekly Enterprise, 66; The Shadow Exploded: Documented Facts and Specific Conclusions Derived from the Case of Carietta White*, by David R. Congress (Tulane University Press 1981); *Carrie: The Black Dawn of T. K* (Esquire Magazine) 1980 by Jack Gaver; High School Notebook owned by Carietta White; *Ogilvie's Dictionary of Psychic Phenomena; Telekinesis: Analysis and Aftermath* (Science Yearbook 1982) by Dean K L McGuffin; *My name is Susan Snell* by Susan Snell (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986); *We Survived the Black Prom* by Norma Watson (August 1980 issue of the Readers Digest as a 'Drama in Real Life' article); From testimonies and Q & A in *Black Prom: The White Commission Report*, Signet Books New York, 1980; From the national A P Ticker; *The Lewiston Daily Sun*; Excerpt from letter from Principle Grayle

## QUOTES:

'King's imagination is vast. He knows how to engage the deepest sympathies of his readers...one of the great storytellers of our time' – *Guardian*

'America's greatest living novelist' – Lee Child

'You can't help admiring King's narrative skills and his versatility as a storyteller' – *Sunday Telegraph*

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Stephen King was born in Portland, Maine in 1947. He won a scholarship to the University of Maine and later taught English, while his wife, Tabitha, got her degree.

It was *Carrie*, his first published novel and its subsequent screen adaptation that set him on his way to being the worldwide bestselling author that he is today.

But *Carrie* nearly failed to make it onto bookshelves at all. Having been encouraged by his wife Tabitha to 'think up a monster', King wrote three pages of *Carrie* at his Olympus typewriter in the laundry room of their trailer, before throwing them away. The next night, Tabitha fished them out of the bin, brushed off the ashes and encouraged him to go on. She wanted to know what happened next.

40 years on *Carrie* continues to capture the imagination of millions, as do King's other bestsellers such as *It*, *Misery* and *The Shining*, while Stephen King continues to live in Maine, with his wife, novelist Tabitha.

## STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. *Carrie* was inspired by an article in *Life Magazine* about poltergeist activity in a suburban home. The article put forward the theory that a teenage girl, on the brink of puberty, was responsible for making objects (particularly religious objects) fly through the air. How does Stephen King draw on this in *Carrie*?
2. What role does religion play in *Carrie*?
3. King is a master of short stories, novellas and long novels. Discuss why the short novel/novella is the best vehicle for delivering this story?
4. How does the symbolism of blood work in *Carrie*?
5. Stephen King writes convincingly about women of all ages. Books featuring strong females include *Carrie*, *Misery*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, *Dolores Claiborne*, *Lisey's Story* and *Rose Madder*. Discuss how he creates such credible female characters.
6. *Carrie* was written before the film *The Exorcist*. Discuss how and why *Carrie* was so ground-breaking in the 'horror' genre at that time.
7. Both Sue Snell and Chris Hargensen persuade their boyfriends to act on their behalves. What does the book tell us about the power of teenage boys versus teenage girls?
8. How does the use of (fictionalised) magazine articles, newspaper clippings, letters and excerpts from books contribute to the story?
9. Part of the underlying impulse for Steve's writing CARRIE was to take the CINDERELLA fairy tale and twist it by its tail. How does this tale of a lonely girl wanting to fit in, be liked and go to the dance remain timeless and universal?
10. *Carrie* has been adapted into two major motion pictures. How does a powerful film enhance the reading of a book? And do you prefer to read the book and then see the film? Or see the film and then read the book?

11. Stephen King was a teacher when he was writing *Carrie*. Discuss how the author's understanding of the age group shines through in this novel?
12. Stephen King has been called the master of American literature. In what way is this story an American story, and in which way is it universal? And how does King's local knowledge shine through.
13. King has described *Carrie* as a book written by a young man. How has King's writing changed/developed over time?
14. Discuss the references to Lady Macbeth and to Sleeping Beauty.

## ABOUT THE FILM:

*Carrie* was first adapted into a film in 1976 directed by Brian De Palma, screenplay by Lawrence D. Cohen. Carrie was played by Sissy Spacek with Piper Laurie in the role of her mother. It was nominated for two Academy Awards and gave John Travolta his first significant movie role (Billy Nolan). In 2013, a new version of the film was released, confirming how the themes in King's novel remain as relevant and topical in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as when King's seminal work was first published. The remake is directed by Kimberly Peirce and stars

Chloe Grace Moretz as Carrie and Julianne Moore as Margaret White.

## READ EXTRACT:

News item from the Westover (Me.) weekly *Enterprise*, August 19, 1966:

### RAINS OF STONE REPORTED

It was reliably reported by several persons that a rain of stones fell from a clear blue sky on Carlin Street in the town of Chamberlain on August 17<sup>th</sup>. The stones fell principally on the home of Mrs Margaret White, damaging the roof extensively and ruining two gutters and a downspout valued at approximately \$25. Mrs White, a widow, lives with her three-year-old daughter Carietta. Mrs White could not be reached for comment.

Nobody was really surprised when it happened, not really, not at the subconscious level where savage things grow. On the surface, all the girls in the shower room were shocked, thrilled, ashamed, or simply glad that the White bitch had taken it in the mouth again. Some of them might also have claimed surprise, but of course their claim was untrue. Carrie had been going to school with some of them since the first grade, and this had been building since that time, building slowly and immutably, in accordance with all the laws that govern human nature, building with all the steadiness of a chain reaction approaching a critical mass.

What none of them knew, of course, was that Carrie White was telekinetic.

## OTHER BOOKS BY STEPHEN KING:

### FICTION:

*Carrie*  
*'Salem's Lot*  
*The Shining*  
*Night Shift*  
*The Stand*  
*The Dead Zone*  
*Firestarter*  
*Cujo*  
*Different Seasons*  
*Cycle of the Werewolf*  
*Christine*  
*Pet Sematary*  
*Skeleton Crew*  
*IT*  
*The Eyes of the Dragon*  
*Misery*  
*The Tommyknockers*  
*The Dark Half*  
*Four Past Midnight*  
*Needful Things*  
*Gerald's Game*  
*Dolores Claiborne*  
*Nightmares and Dreamscapes*  
*Insomnia*  
*Rose Madder*  
*Desperation*  
*Bag of Bones*  
*The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*  
*Hearts in Atlantis*  
*Dreamcatcher*  
*Everything's Eventual*  
*From a Buick 8*  
*Cell*  
*Lisey's Story*  
*Duma Key*  
*Just After Sunset*  
*Stephen King Goes to the Movies*  
*Under the Dome*  
*Full Dark, No Stars*  
*11.22.63*  
*Doctor Sleep*  
*Mr Mercedes*  
*The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger*  
*The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three*  
*The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands*  
*The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass*  
*The Dark Tower V: Wolves of the Calla*  
*The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah*  
*The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower*  
*The Wind through the Keyhole: A Dark Tower Novel*

By Stephen King as Richard Bachman  
*The Running Man*  
*Thinner*  
*The Bachman Books*  
*The Regulators*  
*Blaze*

### NON-FICTION:

*Danse Macabre*  
*On Writing (A Memoir of the Craft)*

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