



THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES

by Sue Monk Kidd

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass



LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND Production

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER 1

In her room, 14-year-old Lily Melissa Owens watches bees in her bedroom, where they live in the wall. For a decade, she has made do under the care of a nanny, Rosaleen Daise, a former peach orchard picker. Lily's mother, Deborah Fontanel Owens, died from an accidental gunshot as she packed a suitcase preparing to leave her husband, T. Ray Owens. He becomes so spiteful that Lily hesitates to awaken him to report the bees in her room. At his command, she sells fruit at the family peach booth on the highway. He refuses to let her read books while she works. As an escape, she hopes to earn a scholarship and become a writer.

Lily recalls the day when her mother prepared to run away from home. She grabbed for a gun and dropped it. Lily picked up the pistol and unintentionally killed her mother. Lonely and insecure, Lily grows up at the family farm and longs to go to charm school. She loves Rosaleen, whose mother was a sweet-grass weaver in McClellanville, South Carolina. At age 12, Lily locates her mother's few belongings in the attic. Among them is an image of the Virgin Mary marked "Tiburon, S. C." For two years, Lily boxes her mother's belongings and conceals it in a hole in the peach orchard. Days before her 14th birthday, she falls asleep on the mound. T. Ray accuses her of sneaking out to meet boys.

On Saturday, after eating birthday cake, Lily follows Rosaleen into Sylvan to the colored church where Rosaleen intends to register to vote. When they pause at Ebenezer Baptist Church to escape the heat, Brother Gerald forces Rosaleen to leave. She takes with her two church fans. At the Esso station, white men accuse her of theft. She pours snuff spit on their shoes. After a fracas, she lies on the ground until police arrest her.

CHAPTER TWO

Officer Avery "Shoe" Gaston drives Lily and Rosaleen to the jail while the harassers follow. Franklin Posey, a notorious racist, strikes Rosaleen on the forehead with a flashlight, but she refuses to apologize. Gaston locks Rosaleen and Lily in a cell. A half hour later, T. Ray drives Lily home and threatens to hit her. He insists that Lily's mother deserted her. Lily packs personal items and hides under the house. Brother Gerald gives her a ride to town.

In the colored section of Sylvan Memorial Hospital, where Rosaleen gets stitches in the cut on her head, Lily learns that Gaston let the racists into the cell to batter Rosaleen. Lily phones in a request for the guard to return to the station.

When he leaves, Lily helps Rosaleen escape. Via a black truck driver passing along Highway 40, the runaways travel toward Tiburon. Three miles from town, the two women eat two of his cantaloupes and bed down by the creek. The next morning, they swim in the water before journeying on.

CHAPTER THREE

Lily fantasizes about retreating into nature from T. Ray. At Frogmore Stew General Store and Restaurant, she makes up a story about visiting her grandmother, Rose Campbell. Lily buys food and steals snuff for Rosaleen. A label on a honey jar prompts Lily to ask the owner about the beekeeper, August Boatwright. Rosaleen and Lily scan a newspaper for reports of the jailbreak.

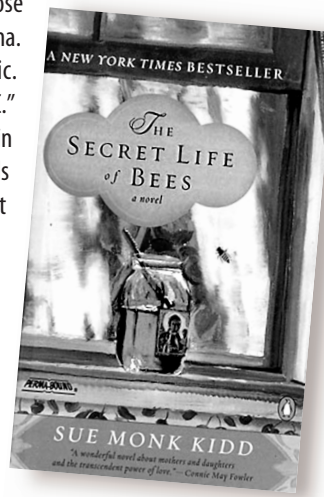
CHAPTER FOUR

In Tiburon, Rosaleen and Lily spy August tending her hives. June and May Boatwright meet Lily at the door of a bright pink house. In the parlor, the visitors spy a black female carving three feet high lighted by a candle. Lily tells a succession of lies to explain their running away. August accepts the women and beds them down on cots in the honey house. She gives Rosaleen a job in the kitchen and invites Lily to help with beekeeping. Lily is surprised to find an intelligent black woman. A wall in the back yard contains a paper memorial stuck between stones honoring the deaths of four children in Birmingham.

CHAPTER FIVE

For a week, Lily enjoys respite from T. Ray and good health from eating and bathing in honey. The Boatwrights buy clothes for Rosaleen. May sees the injuries on Rosaleen's head and begins humming "Oh! Susanna." Lily deduces that May is simple-witted. June teaches high school English and history and plays the cello. August chooses not to send Lily back home. Television news reports heated resistance to integration. May reacts by tearing her blouse and rocking in her chair until her sisters bathe her in honey water. In the evenings, the sisters recite the rosary to "Our Lady of Chains." August encourages Lily to call on Mary for help.

In the bee yard, Lily helps August tend 48 hives and 280 more placed out on farms. August describes May's depression after her twin April committed suicide at age 15 and the need for a stone wailing wall to absorb May's sorrows. Lily thinks of home and nurses mother hunger. Lily places her mother's name on a scrap of paper and tucks it into the wall.



CHAPTER SIX

The next morning, Neil courts June, who avoids marriage because another man jilted her on their wedding day. On Sunday, the Daughters of Mary arrive with Otis Hill and his wife to hear the story of Our Lady of Chains. August tells how Obadiah found the statue washed up along the Ashley River. Slaves honored her in the praise house. A slave named Pearl identified the statue as Jesus' mother. The master locked her in the carriage house numerous times, but she escaped and returned to the slave church. In the pink house, the worshippers dance around the statue and touch its red painted heart. Lily faints and awakens on August's bed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

On July 13, Lily meets Zachary Lincoln Taylor, a handsome black high school junior. She helps with the filling of candle molds and washes mason jars. She tells Zach she wants to write and teach English. Zach wants to be an attorney. August tries to get Lily to divulge her problems. Lily hates the continual lying. She muses over her sexual fantasies about Zach, a black male. In his truck, she begins weeping.

Rosaleen moves into May's bedroom, leaving Lily alone in the honey house. August reads *Jane Eyre*, the story of an orphan girl whose life resembles Lily's. June and Neil fight over June's refusal to marry. Two days later, Zach gives Lily a notebook.

CHAPTER EIGHT

On July 26, August anticipates her own month. She and Lily paste labels on the honey jars. August explains the cult of black madonnas, especially the one on the label, which originated in Breznichar, Bohemia. August believes the virgin's spirit is everywhere. She tells Lily about her grandmother's ownership of the statue and about visiting the house that August eventually inherits. She studied at a teacher's college in Maryland and decided not to marry. May chose to paint the house Caribbean pink.

Lily loses herself in bee colonies. She refuses to tell August the truth about running away from home. Lily accompanies Zach on a honey delivery to Clayton Forrest's law office. She places a collect call to her father, who blames her for making people stare at him. That night, Lily visits the statue and asks that Mary fix her and keeps her out of T. Ray's hands. Lily claims Mary as her mother.

CHAPTER NINE

On July 28, August waters the bees with sugar water to replace the nectar of flowers wilted by summer heat. Lily considers becoming a beekeeper. May, Lily, and June play in the water sprinkler. Lily observes May leading roaches from the house with graham crackers and marshmallows, a trick that Deborah practiced. May identifies Deborah Fontanel as a former resident of the honey house. Lily dreams that her mother is a roach.

For days, Lily dickers over confessing her real identity. She rides to town with Zach, where he becomes embroiled in a racial incident that results in his jailing with other boys for assaulting a white man with an R.C. bottle. Lily walks home. Clayton promises to get Zach out of jail by Wednesday. The sisters keep from May the incident involving Zach. August and Lily visit his cell and find him changed. On August 2, May learns from a phone call about Zach's jailing. She collapses, and then departs to her wailing wall.

CHAPTER TEN

August and Lily locate May's body floating in the river under a rock, which she placed on her chest to hasten her death. Officer Eddie Hazelwurst instructs Lily to leave the houseful of black people as soon as possible and live with white relatives. On August 5, May's body returns from the autopsy for a vigil in the parlor. Lily hopes May will contact Deborah in heaven and ask for a sign that Deborah loves her daughter.

After Zach returns from jail, he blames himself for May's death. August drapes the hives in mourning. The Daughters of Mary bring food to the mourners. August locates May's suicide note. On the strength of May's command to get on with life, August orders June to marry Neil. After the four-day vigil and May's burial, Lily feels herself engulfed in bee hum.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lily writes in her notebook and contemplates the map for a new place to live. August places the suicide note in a crevice in the statue. Lily returns to solitude in the honey house. On Mary Day, the grieving ends with the festive celebration of the Feast of the Assumption. June agrees to marry Neil. Lily hangs streamers and makes a garland. Zach kisses Lily and gives her his dogtag.

CHAPTER TWELVE

That night, Lily waits in August's room to confess the truth. August already knows that Lily looks just like her mother and believes that Lily was meant to find the honey house. August recounts how Deborah left Richmond after her mother died and how Deborah lived in Sylvan. She dated Terence Ray Owens and conceived Lily. T. Ray and Deborah married at Christmas 1949. In 1954, Deborah had a nervous breakdown and came to live with August. When Deborah returned home to get Lily, the child accidentally shot her mother.

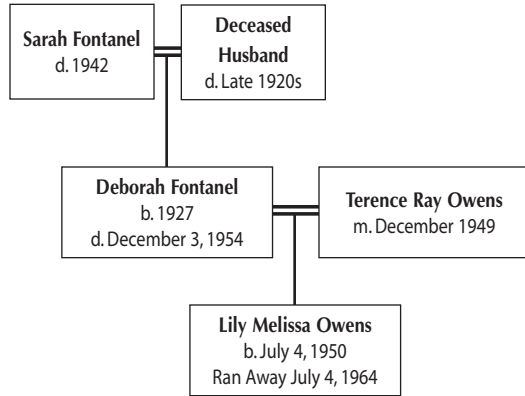
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sleepless with the weight of truth, Lily asks the statue what to do. She begins smashing honey jars. The next morning, Rosaleen helps clean up the goo and broken glass. In the evening, the Daughters eat honey cakes and smear the statue with honey. August gives Lily a hatbox containing Deborah's belongings—a mirror, hairbrush, gold pin, and book of English verse. Lily finds a hair in the brush. An oval frame holds a picture of Deborah spoon-feeding Lily in infancy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Lily withdraws into grief for her mother. Rosaleen registers to vote. Zach plans to integrate the white high school. Lily is wearing her mother's whale pin when T. Ray arrives after tracing her to Tiburon through the collect phone call from Clayton's office. He knocks Lily backward into the statue. He begins calling her Deborah and waves a knife. Lily apologizes for running away and refuses to leave. The Daughters of Mary assemble. T. Ray departs. Lily races after to confirm that she shot her mother.

CHARACTER GENEALOGY



TIMELINE

- 1927** Deborah Fontanel is born.
- 1931** August Boatwright keeps house for the Fontanels in Richmond and tends to Deborah.
- 1940** August gets a teaching job.
- 1942** August begins keeping bees at her grandmother's house.
- 1944** Sarah Fontanel dies. Deborah moves to Sylvan.
- 1949** Terence Ray Owens gives Deborah a whale pin for her 22nd birthday.
- Christmas 1949** Deborah marries Terence Ray Owens, a war hero.
- June 1950** Deborah is disillusioned with marriage.
- July 4, 1950** Lily Melissa Owens is born.
- Late August 1954** Deborah deserts her family. June's fiancé, Melvin Edwards, jilts her.
- November** Deborah recovers from depression.
- December 3, 1954** After Lily accidentally shoots her mother, Rosaleen Daise becomes Lily's nanny.
- September 1956** Before Lily enters first grade, her father tells her about the accidental shooting.
- 1958** Rosaleen buys Lily an Easter chicken. August begins teaching school.
- July 4, 1962** Lily experiences menarche. She locates a photo of her mother in the attic along with a wooden picture of Mary.
- October 28, 1962** Nikita Khrushchev promises to move missiles from Cuba.
- September 15, 1963** Four children—Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carol Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley—die in a bombing of Sunday school classes at the Sixteenth Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama.
- November 21, 1963** An assassin shoots President John F. Kennedy, a supporter of racial justice.
- March 8, 1964** Malcolm X leaves the Nation of Islam.
- March 26, 1964** Malcolm X meets Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- June 1964** Juanita Castro defects from her brother's rule in Cuba.
- June 11, 1964** Authorities arrest Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in St. Augustine, Florida, for attempting to eat in a segregated restaurant.
- July 1, 1964** Lily Owens watches bees fly around her bedroom.
- July 2, 1964** At the White House, President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act.
- July 4, 1964** On Lily's 14th birthday, she and Rosaleen go to jail.
- July 28, 1964** Ranger Seven lands on the moon.
- August 2, 1964** May drowns herself.
- August 5, 1964** Zach returns from jail.
- August 7, 1964** Congress passes the Tonkin Gulf Resolution supporting President Lyndon Johnson's troop build-up in Vietnam. August finds May's suicide note at a live oak tree.
- August 15, 1964** The Daughters of Mary celebrate Mary Day by rubbing honey into the statue.
- October 10, 1964** Lily moves into June's room after June's marriage to Neil.
- Thanksgiving 1964** Clayton plans to get charges dropped against Lily and Rosaleen.

AUTHOR SKETCH

A Georgian from Sylvester, Sue Monk Kidd was born on August 12, 1948. She learned storytelling from her father in an agrarian region settled by her great-grandparents. Brought up a Southern Baptist, she remarks through her protagonist, Lily Melissa Owens, also a non-Catholic: "We didn't allow Mary in our church except Christmas." The author kept a journal and composed stories in her teens. Influencing her style were Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. In 1966, Kidd entered Texas Christian University and earned a B. S. degree in nursing. During a career in surgical and pediatric specialties and as a college nursing instructor, she wed a divinity student, Sanford Kidd, and reared a son and daughter, Bob and Ann. She returned to school in Anderson, South Carolina, and studied writing. Her first works—essays for *Guideposts*, *Readers Digest*, and newspapers—preceded longer inspirational nonfiction.



Kidd studied religious philosophy, Jungian psychology, and the spirituality of Thomas Merton, author of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, from which she "discovered the world of the Eucharist, the world of ritual and spiritual symbol and metaphor." Of her introduction to mysticism, she explained, "It's always the thing that you don't grow up with—that missing thing that you have to go in search of." Under the influence of intuitive feminism, she published *The Dance of The Dissident Daughter* (1996) and began sharpening her writing skills at Emory University, Sewanee, and Bread Loaf. Her turn to short fiction preceded *The Secret Life of Bees*, which she developed from a single short story by the same

name that characterizes the reclamation and sensuality of beekeeping. She chose the Black Madonna as a focus after viewing a ship's masthead that Trappist monks had reclaimed from an antique shop and sanctified. While living in Charleston, South Carolina, she completed *The Mermaid Chair*.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Sue Monk Kidd writes feminist fairy tales in the tradition of Southern Gothic realists Carson McCullers, Harper Lee, and Kaye Gibbons. Before publishing a bestseller, Kidd earned a long list of awards and commendations, including the Katherine Anne Porter Second Prize in Fiction and the Isak Dineson Creative Non-Fiction Award. Maturity and introspection eventually gelled in the form of a coming-of-age quest novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*. She explained, "Some dreams go and sit in the waiting room for a while." To her surprise, the sleeper became a standard on the reading lists of book clubs and feminist literature courses. The woman-centered book created a stir in the literary world uncommon for a first novel. It soothed a world stunned by the 9/11 attacks and generated 25 reprints for a total of 3,000,000 copies by spring 2005.

Kidd's selection of the hive as a controlling metaphor illustrates her belief in female community "awakening to their own capacity for nurturing others and for standing up for themselves." She realized, "I had all of these undigested images and memories and I wanted to witness them, I guess in some hope that they would be redeemed." She commented in an interview with Heidi Schlumpf, a writer for the *U.S. Catholic*, on the importance of Mariology to feminism: "Her darkness has great power in it. She becomes a flashpoint for independent spirit, for women conjuring up their own strength and their own power, being their own authority." For *The Secret Life of Bees*, Kidd won a Book Sense Paperback book of the Year, SEBA Book of the Year, a *Good Morning America* selection, and nominations for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, Boeke Prize and the Orange Prize. The novel appeared in excerpted form in *Literary Cavalcade* and *Best American Stories* (2002). In late April 2004, Denise Wilbanks adapted the novel in a one-woman show for the American Place Theater's *Literature to Life* program. Writers began work on a screenplay to be produced by Winchester Films. In addition to advising Poets & Writers, Inc., Kidd serves the Phoebe Pember House as writer in residence.

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

God's Joyful Surprise, 1987
All Things Are Possible, 1988
Love's Hidden Blessing, 1990
When the Heart Waits, 1990
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 "The Secret Life Of Bees," *Nimrod*, fall/winter 1993
The Dance of the Dissident Daughter, 1996
 "The Most Elusive Love of All," *Reader's Digest*, August 1998
The Secret Life of Bees, 2002
A Luminous Presence, 2005
The Mermaid Chair, 2005
Firstlight: The Early Inspirational Writings of Sue Monk Kidd, 2006

MEDIA VERSIONS OF KIDD'S WORK

AUDIO CASSETTE (ABRIDGED)

The Secret Life of Bees, Highbridge, 2002

AUDIO CASSETTE (UNABRIDGED)

The Secret Life of Bees, Books on Tape, 2002

AUDIO CD

The Secret Life of Bees, Highbridge, 2002

AUDIO DOWNLOAD

The Secret Life of Bees, audible.com, 2002

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The Secret Life of Bees, Thorndike, 2002

SPANISH

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RELATED READING

Isabel Allende, *Daughter of Fortune* and *The House of The Spirits*

William E. Barrett, *Lilies of the Field*

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Michael Dorris, *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*

Kaye Gibbons, *Ellen Foster*

Allen Gurganus, *The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*

Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream"

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees*

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and

The Member of the Wedding

Terry McMillan, *Mama*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of a mother's death
2. To account for the success of black women in the South
3. To interpret shifts in social and religious customs
4. To contrast causes of bias, racial conflict, and police harassment
5. To discuss the themes of redemption and goddess worship
6. To explain the harm of family secrets
7. To analyze mother-daughter relationships
8. To describe attitudes toward suicide and nervous collapse
9. To describe the atmosphere of a region under siege
10. To analyze the roles of foster mothers and nannies

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain how Lily perceives her sins and loss
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To summarize August's importance to family and community
4. To account for April and May's inability to cope with pain
5. To justify Lily's love of Zach
6. To predict how the Daughters of Mary will become mother surrogates
7. To summarize injustice against Zach, Rosaleen, Jackson, and other South Carolina blacks
8. To discuss long-term implications of an accidental shooting death
9. To describe the roles of T. Ray, June, and Our Lady of Chains
10. To list events caused by T. Ray's hatred, suspicion, and spite

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Sue Monk Kidd's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

anti-hero a protagonist or central figure who lacks the usual heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. Lily Owens exemplifies the behaviors of a non-hero because she makes her way out of misery through deceit and lying. She redeems herself in part by rescuing Rosaleen and by remaining true to her mother's spirit. Through August's intervention and love for the Black Madonna, Lily learns that she is not unlovable.

feminist literature literature that stresses the unique perspective of female writers, themes, writing styles, and characters. Sue Monk Kidd incorporates significant feminist themes in *The Secret Life of Bees*, notably, home-centered activities, storytelling, mother hunger, food as therapy, and foster mothering. The setting of the action in a tight female community of goddess worshippers accounts for Lily's conversion to goddess love and to her ability to forgive the shooting death of Deborah.

sociological novel reform literature that uses character and action to delineate a social problem. *The Secret Life of Bees* studies the nature of injustice toward blacks by the police, educational system, and white hecklers. The impact of unjust laws and repression causes Rosaleen to refuse to apologize to racist persecutors and turns Zach into a determined student. Another element of protest is the immurement of women in wretched marriages. Deborah's escape from torment dramatizes the hard choice of a mother who must abandon her home and children in order to find peace and fulfillment within herself.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* places a runaway in a unique nurturing atmosphere. After escaping the isolated farm of T. Ray Owens in rural Sylvan, South Carolina, and the roadside peach stand, where Lily works afternoons, she flees to the peach orchard to commune with remnants of her mother's life, which Lily buries in a box under a tree. A final break with the past takes Lily and Rosaleen, her black nanny, out of town toward Tiburon, South Carolina. Their flight places them in Ebenezer Baptist Church to cool off and at a creek outside Tiburon. The raw, unforeseen racial incidents at the Esso station that cause Rosaleen's jailing and admittance to the black ward of a hospital precede Lily's jail break and flight aboard a truckful of cantaloupes that a black farmer is hauling on Highway 40. At the jail and in the hospital ward, Lily exercises her considerable talent for lying to free her nanny from possible murder by racists. By spending the night at creekside, Lily and Rosaleen encounter healing waters that flow past their salvation, the Caribbean Pink house of the Boatwright sisters.

While living in the loving home of August Boatwright, Lily learns the valuable skill of beekeeping and lives peacefully in private quarters in the honey house. Trips about the countryside in the honey wagon introduce Lily to the extensive layout of August's network—honey stations that require tending and robbing to keep the hives in production. The mechanisms that separate honey from the comb symbolize the refinement process that helps both Deborah and Lily to sur-



vive life with a bully. In the Boatwrights' busy kitchen, Lily receives nourishment and mother love from May, August, and Rosaleen. In the parlor, the women evolve individual responses to female divinity by lavishing love and attention on Our Lady of Chains. On Mary Day, the entire household decks the surroundings in flowers, crimped streamers, and Christmas lights to honor the Black Madonna, the epitome of motherhood. The strength of a wooden earth mother cast ashore along the Ashley River in the plantation South with clenched fish upraised empowers Lily to face T. Ray and to refuse to return to the farm outside Sylvan. The adopted home becomes Lily's sanctuary against the harsh reality of her mother's death.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about beekeeping, Mariology, goddess lore, family dysfunction, the 1960s, racism, Catholicism, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

ARTICLES

Doyle, Jacqueline. "Assumptions of the Virgin and Recent Chicana Writing," *Women's Studies* 26, no. 2 (April 1997): 171-201.

Nicolet, Gilles. "Suiting Up for the Honey Wars," *Smithsonian* (August 2001): 79-83.

AUDIOCASSETTE

Ordinary People, Recorded Books

BOOKS

The Forest House, Marion Zimmer Bradley

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte

Witches, Erica Jong

FILMSTRIP

Self-Fulfillment, Guidance Associates

INTERNET

"The Black Madonna,"

<http://www.saxakali.com/suzar/madonna.htm>

"Black Madonnas,"

<http://www.udayton.edu/mary/resources/blackm/blackm.html>

"The Truth about Mary,"

<http://mariology.com>.

MAP

The American South, *National Geographic*

MULTIMEDIA KIT

Writing about Family Roots, Interact

PLAYS

The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds,

Paul Zindel

I Remember Mama, John Van Druten

POEMS

Helen in Egypt, H. D.

"Madonna of the Evening Flowers," Amy Lowell

"The Making of an Irish Goddess," Eavan Boland

"Our Lady," Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

REFERENCE BOOKS

Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary

Cathedral of the Black Madonna

The Cult of the Black Virgin

The Dancing Bees: An Account of the Life and Senses of the Honey Bee

Daughter Zion

Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the '60s

Judgment Days

The Miracle Detective: An Investigation of Holy Visions

Race and Prejudice in America Today

The Sixties

True Devotion to Mary

The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting

SHORT STORIES

“*Désirée’s Baby*,” Kate Chopin

“*Homeland*,” Barbara Kingsolver

“*The Lagoon*,” Joseph Conrad

Woman Hollering Creek and other Stories, Sandra Cisneros

SLIDES

Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities

An Inquiry into the Nature of Man: His Inhumanity and His Humanity, Center for the Humanities

No Man Is an Island, Center for the Humanities

VIDEO

Beloved

Conrack

Ellen Foster

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

To Kill a Mockingbird

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Secret Life of Bees* should include these aspects:

THEMES

- mother hunger
- racism
- bullying
- escapism
- guilt
- reclamation
- race baiting
- justice
- sanctuary

MOTIFS

- coping with trauma
- understanding the child’s need for mothering
- loving and losing
- assuming the role of rescuer
- comprehending the mindset of a bully

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. She was sure about the place: McClellanville, South Carolina, where her mama had woven sweet-grass baskets and sold them on the roadside. (Chapter 1, p. 12)
(The South Carolina low country produces sweet grass, a thin, tough fiber that makes a unique plait suitable for trays and baskets formed in attractive shapes. These crafts reflect skills that black slaves imported to the New World from Africa.)
2. I’d seen her special shelf with a stub of candle, creek rocks, a reddish feather, and piece of John the Conqueror root, and right in the center a picture of a woman, propped up without a frame. (Chapter 1, p. 29)
(High John the Conqueror, an African folk figure prized by slaves as a protector over the Middle passage by slave ship, is a staple heroic figure in African-American folklore. The root of the morning glory plant carries his name and serves as an amulet used in magic spells, charms, religious ceremonies, and curative rituals.)
3. General Sherman had probably ridden by here and decided to spare it [the store] on the basis of its name, because I’m sure it hadn’t been on looks. (Chapter 3, p. 61)
(Much of Southern poverty and backwardness dates to the end of the Civil War, when General William Tecumseh Sherman led his Union troops from Atlanta east to the Atlantic Ocean on a scorched-earth mission. Because he burned plantations, twisted rail lines, poisoned wells, and stole anything of value, Georgia and South Carolina entered Reconstruction in pitiable condition.)
4. I dug out another one. *Birmingham, Sept 15, four little angels dead.* (Chapter 4, p. 80)
(May’s message, tucked into the stone wailing wall, honors children killed by racist terrorists. On September 15, 1963, four girls—Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carol Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley—died in a bombing of Sunday school classes at the Sixteenth Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama.)
5. “My mother was a good Catholic—she went to mass twice a week at St. Mary’s in Richmond, but my father was an Orthodox Eclectic.” (Chapter 5, p. 90)
(Eclecticism is the extreme opposite of devout Catholicism, which clings to rigid worship rubric dating to the Middle Ages. August’s father, the first black dentist in Richmond, chose the beliefs that suited his faith. The description applies to the veneration of Our Lady of Chains, an unorthodox worship ritual that August, June, May, and the Daughters of Mary appear to create to serve their needs for a nurturing female divinity.)

6. "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here." (Chapter 6, p. 107)
(August honors the folk devotion to oral tradition, which dates to prehistory, before humankind could read and write. Her description of storytelling accounts for cyclical repetitions of slave-era stories to explain events and to console and uplift humanity.)
7. We were working on the jars of tupelo tree honey, which Zach and I had gathered out there on Clayton Forrest's land, plus a few jars of purple honey from the hive where the bees had struck it rich on elderberries. (Chapter 8, p. 140)
(Honey derives value from the kind of nectar it is made from, such as clover, assorted wild flowers, and sourwood. By placing hives near particularly flavorful and fragrant plants, August produces varieties of honey that can be labeled for their appeal.)
8. "You know, she's really just the figurehead off an old ship, but the people needed comfort and rescue, so when they looked at it, they saw Mary, and so the spirit of Mary took it over. Really, her spirit is everywhere." (Chapter 8, p. 141)
(August describes the carved ornament of a vessel that often depicts the ship's name and function. The first figureheads were probably images of sea deities and protective spirits that adorned the craft of Egyptians and Phoenicians.)
9. I was the stamen in the middle of a twirling flower. (Chapter 8, p. 151)
(Lily sinks into a swoon by imagining herself as a stamen, a flower's stalk-like pollen-producing reproductive organ.)
10. "May, did you ever know a Deborah? Deborah Fontanel?" (Chapter 9, p. 173)
(The author chooses for Deborah's maiden name the anatomical term for the soft spot on a baby's head when cranial bones have not formed into a hard bony skull. The word comes from the Latin for "spring" or "fount." The choice of "Deborah," the Hebrew for "wisdom," points to the mother figure as the source of knowing, a crucial factor in Lily's understanding of self, family, and womanhood.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

MOTIVATION

1. What causes T. Ray to mistreat Lily?
(Terence Ray Owens becomes a cruel and unforgiving father after Deborah leaves him in 1954 to live in Tiburon, South Carolina, with August Boatwright, Deborah's former nanny. He leaves Lily with Mrs. Janie Watson, and then hires Rosaleen Daise as a full-time nanny to rid him of his responsibility to a four-year-old. For each infraction of his strict discipline, he forces Lily to kneel on grits until her knees are bruised. He offers no love to his only child, refuses to acknowledge her birthday, and accuses her of sneaking out

with boys after she spends the night in the peach orchard to be near her mother's belongings. Upon his arrival at the Boatwright house in Tiburon, he displays his extreme anger by calling his daughter by her mother's name. Lily begins to understand his lack of parental concern. She realizes how hurt he was by Deborah's abandonment of her family and how he takes out his spite on her.)

SETTING

2. Describe the pleasures of the pink house.
(The Boatwright house, painted a garish Caribbean pink, becomes Lily's sanctuary. Under the mothering of August, Lily receives her own room to sleep in and tutoring in beekeeping. When outsiders question Lily about her intent, August makes clear that Lily and Rosaleen may stay as long as they need to. August leaves open opportunities for Lily to tell the truth about her family and the reasons for running away from Sylvan. The Boatwright sisters treat Lily and Rosaleen to banana cream pies, bologna and tomato sandwiches, and orangeade served in the yard. Both outsiders are welcome at the weekly worship services in the parlor. Lily joins the festivities for Mary Day by stringing Christmas lights and wiring a garland with gladioli. After Lily's confession, August locates the remnants of Deborah's stay at the honey house and gives them to Lily as keepsakes. By displaying her mother's hairbrush and whale pin on a shelf, Lily makes a home for herself and feels loved and accepted.)

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

3. How does Deborah change over time?
(August recalls that Deborah Fontanel was much like Lily in girlhood. Following August's move from housekeeping for the Fontanels in Richmond to a teaching job, Deborah grieves for her nanny. When Sarah Fontanel dies, Deborah returns to August out of a need for mothering. Deborah's long stay in Tiburon after World War II precedes courtship by a decorated war hero, Terence Ray Owens, and an unplanned pregnancy in October 1949. The marriage that follows in December immures her on a farm outside Sylvan and deflates her enthusiasm for her husband, who grows more callous. August judges Deborah's mental state from the tone of her letters, which pass less often between Sylvan and Tiburon. A nervous breakdown forces Deborah to abandon Lily and T. Ray and to live with August until Deborah can recover. On her return to Sylvan, she intends to end her marriage and to take Lily to the pink house, a haven of motherhood.)

HISTORICAL MILIEU

4. Why does the novel use current events as a backdrop of emotional pain?
(Contributing to character suffering is the racism that engulfs South Carolina during the civil rights movement of the mid-1960s. Rosaleen is eager to participate in black voter registration, which she attempts at the black church in Sylvan and accomplishes in Tiburon. Her jailing in Sylvan precedes battery from Franklin Posey and his racist coterie at the Esso station and at the jail. The jailer, Avery "Shoe" Gaston, allows the men to follow Rosaleen into her cell and further assault her for insulting them by pouring snuff spit on their shoes. The beating continues because she refuses to apologize.)

Racial tensions worsen so much during protest marches in Florida and Columbia, South Carolina, that news of the landing of Ranger 7 on the moon, Juanita Castro's spying for the CIA on the situation in Cuba, and President Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin resolution means little to local people. Zach's change of heart occurs after police arrest all black males who witness Jackson assaulting a white bully at the movie theater. Because Zach's plight causes May to drown herself in the river, the lives of the characters alter with the sorrow of her wake and burial. Upon his return from jail, Lily recognizes smoldering rage in Zach that becomes his motivation to do better in school and to become an attorney.)

THEME

5. How does mother hunger affect the plot?

(The loss of mothers empowers the text with opportunities to nurture and love the sorrowing. In *Sylvan*, Lily yearns for information about her deceased mother and for exoneration for Deborah's death. Because T. Ray offers no compensation for the loss, Lily turns to Rosaleen, her nanny, for attention and acceptance, including an angel food cake on Lily's 14th birthday. As T. Ray grows meaner and more spiteful, he forces Lily to seek mothering from the box of keepsakes that she hides in the peach orchard. When that small comfort fails, Lily leaves home in search of a place that once meant something special to Deborah.)

Arrival at the Caribbean pink house in *Tiburon* introduces Lily to a realm of maternal affection that overwhelms her with peace and security. She immediately bonds with August Boatwright and tries to appreciate the mothering cult of *Our Lady of Chains*. As lies and deception corrode Lily's serenity, she longs to tell the truth about her fear that she shot her mother. The daily nurturing of bees and participation in family rituals offer temporary solace, but Lily's burden of guilt refuses to subside. In the plot resolution, August compares Lily's mother hunger with that of Deborah, a longing that gives Lily a means of knowing her mother's heart. The final separation from T. Ray allows Lily to accept a room of her own in the pink house and a place among the *Daughters of Mary*, eight loving foster mothers.)

INTERPRETATION

6. Why does the word "secret" introduce the novel?

(The title introduces hidden yearnings in all the characters. Lily longs for a mother and the truth about her departure from home and death; Rosaleen, Lily's nanny, wants to register for the vote to become a full-fledged citizen. Unknown to Lily, T. Ray suffers unaddressed longings for his wife, whom he adored during their courtship in 1949. In *Tiburon*, Lily discovers the secrets of the Boatwright family. August and June pamper May, a former twin who suffers emotional upheaval after her sister April's suicide. June, a jilted bride, retains suspicions of male suitors and refuses to marry Neil, a worthy suitor.)

August, who bears the most secrets, relieves her years of concern for Deborah by divulging to Lily the nature of Deborah's courtship and the cause of her nervous breakdown in 1954. Although Lily thinks that she has the greatest load of concealment on her heart, she is surprised to discover that August and June know immediately that Lily is Deborah's daughter. When the characters quell their private heartache, June marries Neil and August gains a

new daughter, but May is unable to bear the burden of human suffering that she personalizes. After May's funeral, Lily wheedles the truth about Deborah's death from T. Ray and carries into adulthood the memory of accidentally shooting her mother.)

CONFLICT

7. How does Mary counter brutality in the world?

(Obadiah's discovery of the unidentified ship's female figurehead on the banks of the Ashley River occurs in slave times, when blacks need a deity who will comfort and support them against the sufferings of bondage. Pearl makes the connection between the figure's sweet face and clenched fist and accepts the statue as a token of deity. Slaves place the statue in the praise house and discover that the master's theft of the figure fails to daunt the *Black Madonna's* miracles of reclamation.)

After *Our Lady of Chains* passes to Big Mama Boatwright, the family evolves a unique religion based on need. The *Daughters of Mary* caress the red heart painted on the statue's chest and aims their prayers at the strong arms that reach out to them. When brutality becomes more overt during the civil rights movement, worshippers turn to Mary in hopes of taking shelter from daily humiliations and bias. At Lily's lowest point, she prostrates herself before the statue and pleads for mothering. The example of worshippers honoring *Mary Day* restores peace and hope in Lily as she defeats T. Ray and makes a permanent home among fostering mothers.)

ATMOSPHERE

8. How does Sue Monk Kidd enhance suspense?

(From the beginning, Lily's hazy recall of her mother's death haunts her subconscious mind with fears that she pulled the trigger and shot Deborah. Lily's tangle of lies, a false name, and other deceptions grows burdensome after she flees to *Tiburon*, South Carolina, in search of the place named on her mother's photo. The text implies at various moments that Lily will confess her true identity to August. Each time that Lily's courage fails and the moment passes, she retreats into mental torment and longs for a mother who can ease the hurt and stress. After Lily's confession, the author undercuts the disclosure as unnecessary. Because August recognizes Lily on sight as Deborah's daughter, the suspense exists only in Lily.)

AUTHOR PURPOSE

9. Why does the novel appeal to readers?

(A sleeper-turned-bestseller, *The Secret Life of Bees* took time in rising to a solid feminist classic and staple in literary societies and on school syllabi. Critics surmise that the malaise that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks generated need in American readers for a reassuring novel. The gentle narrative contains so much comfort that fans began recommending the work to others. The feminist themes of nurturing, forgiveness, and female godhood offered a palatable source of information on goddess lore as well as a subtextual aura of rightness of heart. Because Kidd balances turmoil during the 1960s with a legendary folk deity surviving from slave times, readers accept the comfort of *Our Lady of Chains* as a long-lived given in the affairs of oppressed people.)

STRUCTURE

10. Why does the novel include aphorism?

(The placement of citations at the beginning of each chapter is a custom derived from 18th- and 19th-century novels. Although the lines ostensibly comment on crucial elements of beekeeping, they also allude to solitude, dark secrets, and the support of a female community devoted to the queen bee. Kidd chooses statements that reflect on August, Deborah, and Lily's situations, especially the heading for Chapter 14. By describing the queenless colony, the narrative validates Lily's need for a mother and her ongoing mourning for Deborah. Kidd interjects hope of "[introducing] a new queen," a source of substitute nurturance that can ease Lily into adult womanhood.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Sue Monk Kidd speaks through August the supportive, maternal goodness and acceptance that Lily needs at the beginning of her 14th year.

1. To June's complaint about sheltering a white child, August replies with considerable wisdom, "Something tells me not to send her back to a place she doesn't want to be."
2. Through storytelling and bee lore, August addresses the hurt and need in Lily: "Act like you know what you're doing, even if you don't. Above all, send the bees love. Every little thing wants to be loved."
3. In comparing Lily to May, August notes, "It's like we have a built-in protection around our hearts that keeps the pain from overwhelming us. But May—she doesn't have that."
4. Of her childlessness, August is clear about rejecting a proposal of marriage: "I loved him enough. I just loved my freedom more." The statement implies that other people required her love more than her fiancé.
5. In reference to allowing May to live in peace, August remarks about the choice of Caribbean pink to paint Big Mama's house: "The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters."
6. At a pivotal moment in worship of Our Lady of Chains, August intones a feminist benediction, "Our Mother Mary will not be cast down and bound up. And neither will her daughters. We will rise, Daughters. We . . . will . . . rise."

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

RELIGION

1. Make a wall chart of Mariology that covers the growing cult of the Virgin Mary in early Christian times through the Middle Ages. Include reverence for the annunciation of the Angel Gabriel, devotion to the sacred heart, and adoration of black madonnas throughout Europe and the Americas.
2. Compose a speech explaining why Lily lacks the religious upbringing to understand a female cult of the Virgin Mary. Explain why Southern Baptists mention the biblical figure only at Christmas. Comment on mention of the virgin in feminist sources.

3. List aspects of Lily's confession and prayers to Mary that indicate a profound change of heart.
4. Why do Pearl and other worshippers at the slave praise house name the statue "Our Lady of Chains" rather than "Our Lady in Chains?" What other names would reverence her protection of slaves?

DRAMA

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of smoking hives, cleaning up broken honey jars, decking a wagon with a garland of gladioli, pulling a corpse out of the river, catching bees in a jar and letting them go, lying to Brother Garland about Rosaleen's jailing, tracing the red heart with a fingertip, sleeping over a buried box in the peach orchard, trying on Deborah's gloves, kneeling on Martha White grits, playing in the water sprinkler, making a collect call from Miss Lacy's desk, observing Jackson throwing an R.C. bottle at a race baiter, bathing naked with Rosaleen in the creek, and hitchhiking to Tiburon, South Carolina, on a cantaloupe truck. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as box, picture, cantaloupes, grits, R.C. bottle, statue, jars of honey, labels, wire, string, gladioli, truck, telephone, streamers, mason jar and lid, glass shards, candles, gloves, photo, and burning smoker.
2. Create a storyboard account of Rosaleen's wounding, jailing, and hospitalization in Sylvan, South Carolina. Indicate why Lily fears that officer Avery "Shoe" Gaston will let Franklin Posey murder Rosaleen. Include the nurse's flirtation with the police guard and Lily's phone call posing as the sheriff's wife.
3. Perform a shadow tableau or bag puppet performance of Zach's first day at a white high school. Re-enact Becca and Lily's roles in ignoring race baiting and the throwing of paper wads. Indicate that Zach appreciates support for integrating the school.

EDUCATION

1. Role-play the job of a professional beekeeper in training the help in washing jars, cleaning and watering hives, removing honey, rendering honey from the comb, bottling honey by type, and pasting on labels before delivery or mail-order sale. Note which tasks pass to Deborah, Lily, Otis, August, and Zach.
2. Propose curriculum for a class to teach Rosaleen and other new voters about the campaign and election process. Include details about preparing for citizenship, studying candidates, marking a ballot, and following election returns. Suggest methods of encouraging blacks to run for public office, especially for the school board.
3. Compose a newspaper feature on the integration of South Carolina schools in 1964. Explain how the example of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights activists encouraged blacks to demand the vote and equal rights to restaurants, movie theaters, public facilities, and schools.

SPEECH

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle or demonize identifiable groups, especially members of a minority race? How does Zach show his brotherhood with blacks on the street across from the movie theater? Why does Rosaleen seem proud of registering to vote and of her support for Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey? How do editorials, speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, sports, religious rituals, and holiday celebrations help quell hatred and prejudice?
2. Compose a tape introducing newcomers to Catholicism to reverence for the Virgin Mary. Include other female figures in Catholic worship, for example, St. Elizabeth, St. Anne, Mary Magdalene, and other female saints. Comment on the role of the angel Gabriel in introducing Mary to her part in giving birth to God's son.

CINEMA

1. View films about the South during the civil rights struggle, especially during the 1960s, such as *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *4 Little Girls*, *Ghosts of Mississippi*, *Roots*, *Rosewood*, *Miss Evers' Boys*, *For Us the Living*, *Malcolm X*, *Separate But Equal*, *Eyes on the Prize*, *American Experience—The Murder of Emmett Till*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Mississippi Burning*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *The Secret Life of Bees*. Comment on the interplay of authorities, activists, and educators with people of different ethnic, religious, social, educational, and professional backgrounds.

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

1. Compose a lecture on blood loss, bruises, hunger, trauma, and shock among people jailed in Tiburon, South Carolina. List first aid, treatment, and complications for wounds caused by kicking, punching, and striking the head with a flashlight or drink bottle. Account for the importance to the story of Rosaleen's refusal to apologize and of her admission to the black ward of a hospital.
2. Discuss the immediate needs of a victim of nervous breakdown, particularly gentle treatment, rest, and counseling. Explain why honey baths soothe May and why distance from T. Ray enables Deborah to decide on a viable future for herself and four-year-old Lily.
3. Write an encyclopedia entry on beekeeping. Add details that explain why August finds the work rejuvenating as well as profitable. Comment on beliefs that honey has curative and restorative powers.
4. Outline the steps of an autopsy to determine the cause of death in May Boatwright's drowning. List laboratory sampling and the types of results the police expect from forensic examination.

GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

1. Create a mural or web site revealing trouble spots in the South during the 1960s. Include Memphis, Tennessee, Ole Miss, Greensboro, North Carolina, Birmingham, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia, and Columbia, South Carolina.

2. Make a web site or bulletin board characterizing the extremes of heat in South Carolina. Provide sidebars explaining how heat, humidity, and drought impact flowers, overwhelm beekeepers, and reduce the amount of nectar available to bees.

ART

1. Make an illustrated notebook of activities honoring Our Lady of Chains. Name dressing in festive costumes and hats, line dancing, making honey cakes, touching the statue's heart, retelling the virgin's story, lighting candles in red glasses, placing Christmas lights in the hedges, crimping streamers, decorating a wagon with garlands of gladioli, prayers, re-enacting the miracle of Mary's return to the slave praise house, and sealing the statue with honey to preserve the wood.
2. Design additional Black Madonna labels for honey products, for example, packaging for beeswax candles, for honey body rinse and shampoo, and for tupelo and purple elderberry honey.

LAW

1. Brainstorm ways of preparing Zach for entry into law school. Note the importance of the LSAT, a test that discloses aptitude for law. Explain why he wants to begin collecting law books for his library.
2. Read aloud state laws governing the rights of police detainees, particularly females, injured suspects, and minors like Lily and Zach. Determine whether Avery "Shoe" Gaston, Eddie Hazelwurst, and Franklin Posey are liable for lawsuits.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Propose South Carolina celebrations of President Lyndon Johnson's signing of civil rights laws in the White House rose garden. Name characters from the book who should participate in the planning of these festivities, especially Clayton Forrest, Neil, Becca, Lily, and Zach Taylor.

PSYCHOLOGY

1. Discuss with a small group family patterns of behavior and expectations after serious emotional setbacks, such as the death of Sarah Fontanel, Deborah's nervous breakdown, Zach's jailing for assaulting a white man, Melvin Edwards' jilting of June Boatwright on their wedding day, April and May's suicides, May's wailing wall, Deborah's abandonment of T. Ray and Lily, Deborah's death from an accidental shooting, Big Mama's bequest of the pink house and beehives to August and her sisters, Rosaleen's jail break, and the disappearance of Rosaleen and Lily Owens. Explain why Lily and other characters touch May's body in farewell, why June plays "Oh, Susanna" on the cello, and why the Daughters of Mary lavish the Boatwright family with covered dishes.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of their sisters' suicides on the decision-making of June and August. Explain why the recovery of May's suicide note contributes to June's decision to marry Neil and to Lily's return to sharing a room with Rosaleen.

3. Compose an extended definition of social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes Zach, May, T. Ray, Deborah, Rosaleen, Becca, Clayton Forrest, and Lily. Explain why T. Ray calls Lily “Deborah” and demands that she not leave him. How does his confusion affect Lily’s decision to forgive him?
4. Using incidents from the book, comment on gradual changes in Lily and June. Discuss how the two become friends during a lawn battle with the water sprinkler. Why does the author use water as a symbol of emotional force and spiritual change?
5. Characterize the moral integrity and maternal influence of August to Deborah and Lily. Summarize the personal traits that strengthen August’s relationships with Lily and with the Daughters of Mary. Explain why August lets Lily acclimate to the pink house before guiding her through family history and sorrows. Why is August a worthy recipient and guardian of Our Lady of Chains?

MATHEMATICS AND COMPUTERS

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: navigation, self-sacrificing, Feast of the Assumption, Bohemia, Hubert Humphrey, elusive, Castro’s sister, hive, Chattooga River, Ranger Seven, madonna, Ashley River, brood frame, drone, Orthodox Eclectic, Fort Sumter, mortician bees, Khrushchev, queen bee, assumption, Goldwater, field bees, Santa María, skittish, extravagant, *Walden Pond*, Affirmation Vietnam, cloister, bordello, President Johnson, Pawley’s Island, stamen, scout bees, innate, CIA, swarm, Thoreau, Charleston, sterile, agitates, nurse bees, Walter Cronkite, nest builders, foraging, comprising, *Last Horizon*, and *Jane Eyre*.
2. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of public affray, deaths, jailing, low-paying jobs, thwarted ambition, protest marches, school desegregation, police brutality, and terror on Southern black family life. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and employment surveys. For source material, consult the U. S. Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov>.

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH

1. Contrast news releases for radio, television, or print announcing a protest march to Columbia, Zach’s integration of a white high school, Jack Palance’s appearance at the movie theater with a black woman, the arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in St. Augustine, Florida, and black voter registration at the colored church. Typify coverage of each event within and outside of the South.
2. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Clayton Forrest’s accusations against Avery Gaston for jailing Zach without just cause and for encouraging Franklin Posey’s retaliation against Rosaleen in a municipal jail cell. List possible lawsuits that the attorney can bring against the Sylvan police for frivolous arrest and for mistreatment of prison inmates, minorities, women, and children.

3. Lead a debate about August’s role as mother figure to May, Zach, Deborah, and Lily. Explain why Eddie Hazelwurst advises Lily to leave the pink house as soon as possible. How does August express the presence of the Virgin Mary in her heart?

LITERATURE

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, verse, and stories that describe incidents of racism and injustice similar to that suffered by Lily, Zach, and the Boatwright family. Include Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Isabel Allende’s *Daughter of Fortune* and *The House of the Spirits*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins’ *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Michael Dorris’ *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Allen Gurganus’ *The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, Kaye Gibbons’ *Ellen Foster*, Pat Conroy’s *The Water is Wide*, Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Bean Trees* and *Animal Dreams*, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream,” Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, William E. Barrett’s *Lilies of the Field*, Terry McMillan’s *Mama*, and Toni Cade Bambara’s “*Blues Ain’t No Mockingbird*.”
2. Explain in a theme the significance of the title *The Secret Life of Bees*, particularly as it applies to Lily’s deceptions and to her sensual and emotional delight in tending the hives. Propose reasons why bees are a suitable metaphor for high ideals and for female sexuality and godhood. Why does the author choose the cult of the Black Madonna as an appropriate backdrop for a fervid female community?
3. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Eddie Hazelwurst, Sarah Fontanel, Otis, Pearl, Mrs. Janie Watson, Jackson, April, Brother Gerald, the ticket seller, Clayton Forrest, Miss Lacy, the hospital nurse, the black truck driver, Becca, Jack Palance, Mrs. Henry, Obadiah, and Queenie. Determine which characters interact humanely with people of other races and backgrounds and which express sweetness and compassion to those in need.
4. Explain in an impromptu chalk talk why the names Owens, Boatwright, and Fontanel have more than family significance. What does T. Ray Owens “owe” to Deborah and Lily? Why is the soft spot on a baby’s head significant to Lily’s coming of age amid unresolved crises and sorrows from the past? In what way is August a “boatwright” to June, April, Deborah, May, and Lily?
5. Lead a panel discussion of parallels between *Jane Eyre*’s teen years and those of Deborah and Lily. In what way do the three characters share mother hunger? Insert reasons why Lily would enjoy reading James Hilton’s *Last Horizon*?

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of suffering and violence in the lives of the characters, for example, the memories of Deborah's death, the R.C. bottle thrown at a racist, stitches on Rosaleen's head and bruises on her legs, T. Ray's use of Martha White grits as a punishment, tomatoes hitting Neil's car, June's cello recitals for the dying, snuff spit poured on shoes, racists entering Rosaleen's jail cell, May's selection of a stone to place on her chest, Mr. Gaines' death from a drive-by shooting, the murder of four girls in Birmingham, Alabama, the outbreak of war after the Tonkin Gulf incident, racists posed outside the movie theater, the arrest of Martin Luther King in St. Augustine, Florida, and deacons halting black worshippers from entering Ebenezer Baptist Church.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate racism in front of the Esso station, in the parlor of the pink house, at funeral homes, in the investigation of May's suicide, among people outside the theater, at Tiburon's formerly all-white high school, in the front door of Ebenezer Baptist Church, in Columbia, South Carolina, and at Frogmore Stew General Store and Restaurant.
3. Compose a scene in which Neil and June return from their honeymoon to visit August, Lily, Rosaleen, Zach, Otis, and the Daughters of Mary.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Lily's lies, April's despair, Miss Lacy's betrayal, Rosaleen's hot temper, T. Ray's cruelty, Deborah's abandonment of her daughter, Zach's hard heart, June's rudeness toward Lily, Neil's impetuosity and demanding nature, Avery "Shoe" Gaston's violations of the law, Jackson's assault, and Franklin Posey's racism.
5. Account for the circle of women who become Lily's foster mothers.

TEACHER'S NOTES

VOCABULARY

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

agitates	elusive	melancholy	reclamation	sterile
attendants	extravagant	navigation	sedative	stimulates
comprising	foraging	perpetually	self-sacrificing	swarm
curtsy	hive frames	queenlessness	skittish	unifying
drones	innate			

1. New beekeepers are told that the way to find the _____ queen is by first locating her circle of attendants
2. The queen is shy and _____, possibly because she never leaves the hive.
3. She spends her days confined in darkness, a kind of eternal night, _____ in labor.
4. The queen, for her part, is the _____ force of the community.
5. During spring and summer—the most strenuous periods of _____—a worker bee, as a rule, does not live more than four or five weeks.
6. A queenless colony is a pitiful and _____ community.
7. Introduce a new queen and the most _____ change takes place.
8. The queen's substance evidently _____ the normal working behavior in the hive.
9. Each colony is a family unit, _____ a single egg-laying female.
10. The queen's many _____ daughters are called workers.
11. On leaving the old nest, the _____ normally flies only a few metres and settles.
12. Anger _____, while whistling melts a bee's temper.
13. The smoke worked better than a _____.
14. Field bees are the ones with good _____ skills and tireless hearts.
15. The only males are the _____ who sit around waiting to mate with the queen.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: QUOTATION IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

Match each of the following quotations from the novel with its speaker. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. Some of the answers will be used more than once and some not at all.

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| A. T. Ray | F. May | K. Eddie |
| B. Zach | G. Jackson | L. Brother Gerald |
| C. Avery Gaston | H. June | M. Lily |
| D. Franklin | I. April | N. Mrs. Henry |
| E. August | J. Clayton | O. Rosaleen |

- _____ 1. "She stayed out there in the honey house. She was the sweetest thing."
- _____ 2. "Good, Lily, we should all pray."
- _____ 3. "Mrs. Watson took care of me."
- _____ 4. "So you've been here the whole time."
- _____ 5. "I'm not resting till she apologizes."
- _____ 6. "We loved them in the Lord, but they had their own places."
- _____ 7. "You're gonna be a fine writer one day."
- _____ 8. "Nobody is getting out before next Wednesday, it looks like."
- _____ 9. "If you're going to live with your aunt in Virginia, what are you doing here?"
- _____ 10. "You tell your daddy I'm going into town tomorrow."
- _____ 11. "But she's white, August."
- _____ 12. "Zach says you're from Spartanburg County, that your parents both died?"
- _____ 13. "You got to be dumb as dirt to believe Jack Palance is coming to Tiburon."
- _____ 14. "Do you have any idea how smart you are?"
- _____ 15. "He's not letting anybody see her, so you go on back home. You understand?"

PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. During a week of mourning, the Daughters of Mary prepare honey cakes for the two surviving Boatwright sisters.
- _____ 2. June once curled hair and dressed the dead at a funeral home.
- _____ 3. After Sarah's death, Deborah left Richmond.
- _____ 4. August believes that Terence Ray Owens was once a loving person.
- _____ 5. Rosaleen scolds Lily and makes her clean up honey and broken glass.
- _____ 6. After registering to vote, Rosaleen takes an interest in Mr. Goldwater's campaign.
- _____ 7. June plays "Oh, Susanna" on the cello in honor of her sister.
- _____ 8. Zach insists that Lily write in her notebook.
- _____ 9. Lily realizes that her mother learned how to keep bees in Sylvan.
- _____ 10. May heaves a great sigh and dies in August's arms.

COMPREHENSION TEST A (PAGE 2)

PART III: COMPLETION (20 POINTS)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. Among _____'s belongings is an image of the Virgin Mary marked "_____, S. C."
2. Days before her 14th birthday, after Lily falls asleep in the _____ orchard, T. Ray accuses her of sneaking out to meet _____.
3. At the _____ station, where white men charge Rosaleen with theft, she pours _____ spit on their shoes.
4. After leaving _____ in the cell, Lily packs to run away and hides from T. Ray under the _____.
5. At Frogmore Stew General Store and Restaurant, a label on a _____ jar prompts Lily to ask the owner about the _____.

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe T. Ray's arrival at the Boatwright house.
2. Explain what personal faults Lily confesses.
3. Discuss Big Mama's influence on the Boatwrights.
4. Account for April's suicide.
5. Summarize events that precede Zach's return from jail.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: MATCHING (30 POINTS)

Match the following descriptions with names of characters from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left. You will use some answers more than once and some not at all.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| _____ 1. shoots herself | A. T.Ray |
| _____ 2. encourages Lily by helping her tell more lies | B. Zach |
| _____ 3. confuses Lily with Deborah | C. Avery Gaston |
| _____ 4. tosses an R.C. bottle | D. Franklin |
| _____ 5. brings Becca to visit | E. August |
| _____ 6. removes a negro from the church | F. May |
| _____ 7. gives Lily a dogtag | G. Jackson |
| _____ 8. orders Lily to leave a houseful of blacks and return to her own kind | H. June |
| _____ 9. allows racists into the cell | I. April |
| _____ 10. traces a heart with a fingertip | J. Clayton |
| _____ 11. pelts Neil with tomatoes | K. Eddie |
| _____ 12. waits for an apology | L. Brother Gerald |
| _____ 13. believes that Mary lives in the heart | M. Lily |
| _____ 14. goes to jail for stealing fans | N. Mrs. Henry |
| _____ 15. hardens toward racism after getting out of jail | O. Rosaleen |

PART II: SHORT ANSWER (20 POINTS)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Where does May die?
- _____ 2. What remains in the hairbrush?
- _____ 3. Whom does Lily challenge with the water sprinkler?
- _____ 4. What did Deborah write on the back of the photo?
- _____ 5. Whose gloves are too small?
- _____ 6. What picture adorns the labels?
- _____ 7. Who bathes May in honey water?
- _____ 8. What does smoke do to bees?
- _____ 9. Who makes a garland out of gladioli?
- _____ 10. Who informs May about Zach's jailing?

COMPREHENSION TEST B (PAGE 2)

PART III: MULTIPLE CHOICE (20 POINTS)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Rosaleen chooses to
A. label jars rather than separate honey from the comb.
B. drape the hives in black crape.
C. stay in the black section of the hospital.
D. share a room with May.
- _____ 2. Brother Gerald gives
A. Lily a fan, but takes one from Rosaleen.
B. Lily a ride to Sylvan.
C. Avery Gaston a reason for charging Rosaleen with theft.
D. the deacons permission to stand at the door to prevent integration.
- _____ 3. June resents
A. Deborah for August's years as her nanny.
B. Neil for jilting her.
C. August's demand that she marry.
D. having to play the cello for dead people.
- _____ 4. August did not choose
A. to give Lily the hatbox.
B. the color of her grandmother's house.
C. to celebrate the Feast of Assumption.
D. Zach as a driver for the honey wagon.
- _____ 5. At school,
A. Zach finishes his senior year before studying law.
B. August teaches beekeeping to home economics students.
C. Becca and Lily ignore wads of paper.
D. integration of all black students results from President Johnson's signing of the civil rights law.
- _____ 6. August tells Lily about
A. June's lifelong love for Melvin Edwards.
B. the required cursive writing for voter registration.
C. the whale pin.
D. April's fear of bigots.
- _____ 7. Under the live oak tree,
A. August finds the note.
B. Zach kisses Lily.
C. Eddie Hazelwurst examines May's body for signs of struggle.
D. May selects a heavy stone to place on her chest.
- _____ 8. Lily compares herself to
A. Thoreau.
B. the hero of *Lost Horizon*.
C. Beatrix.
D. Jane Eyre.
- _____ 9. The ceremony requires
A. smearing honey on the statue.
B. dragging the figure from the Ashley River.
C. the breaking of chains.
D. tucking messages in crevices in the wood.
- _____ 10. While arguing with T. Ray,
A. Rosaleen lets bees out of the jar.
B. Deborah drops a gun into her suitcase.
C. Lily hands him a knife.
D. August demands that he leave the pink house.

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why May thinks it is time to die.
2. Contrast Mary, Deborah, Rosaleen, and August as mother figures.
3. Describe Lily's first worship service in the parlor.
4. Account for Deborah's emotional distress.
5. How does August prove that Lily is lovable?

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. elusive | 6. melancholy | 11. swarm |
| 2. skittish | 7. extravagant | 12. agitates |
| 3. perpetually | 8. stimulates | 13. sedative |
| 4. unifying | 9. comprising | 14. navigation |
| 5. foraging | 10. sterile | 15. drones |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: QUOTATION IDENTIFICATION (30 POINTS)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. L | 11. H |
| 2. E | 7. B | 12. J |
| 3. M | 8. J | 13. G |
| 4. A | 9. K | 14. N |
| 5. D | 10. O | 15. C |

PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. F | 10. F |

PART III: COMPLETION (20 POINTS)

- Deborah, Tiburon
- peach, boys
- Esso, snuff
- Rosaleen, house
- honey, beekeeper

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: MATCHING (30 POINTS)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. I | 6. L | 11. H |
| 2. O | 7. B | 12. D |
| 3. A | 8. K | 13. E |
| 4. G | 9. C | 14. N |
| 5. J | 10. M | 15. B |

PART II: SHORT ANSWER (20 POINTS)

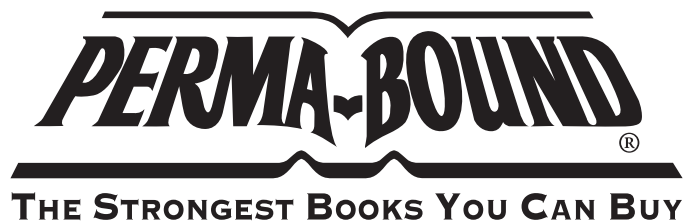
- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. in the river | 6. Black Madonna |
| 2. Deborah's hair | 7. August and June |
| 3. June | 8. sedates them |
| 4. Tiburon, South Carolina | 9. Lily |
| 5. Deborah's | 10. Zach's mother |

PART III: MULTIPLE CHOICE (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. C |
| 2. B | 7. A |
| 3. A | 8. D |
| 4. B | 9. A |
| 5. C | 10. C |

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary



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