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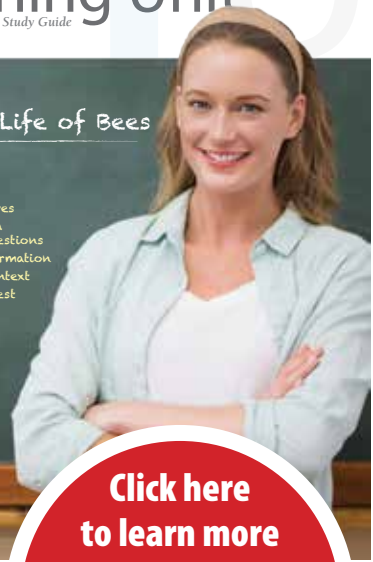
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Secret Life of Bees

by Sue Monk Kidd

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Secret Life of Bees

Notes

All references come from the Penguin Books edition of *The Secret Life of Bees*, Copyright 2002.

SHORT BACKGROUND

Sue Monk Kidd grew up in Sylvester, Georgia. She experienced the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, events which are central to *The Secret Life of Bees*. Like the protagonist, Lily, Kidd had a black nanny and attended a high school at the very start of integration. Kidd wrote stories while a child, inspired by her father's reading to her. As an adult, however, she chose to get a nursing degree. She returned to writing when she began a spiritual journey, and her first three books are nonfiction, spiritual memoirs. *The Secret Life of Bees* is her first novel.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Teachers should be aware that there is some objectionable language in this book, in addition to some mild sexual references and some about bodily functions. There also may be controversy about the religious practices in the pink house, which may be offensive to some more traditional Christians, "communion service" centered on the Mary statue.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define the term *coming of age* and explain how the novel is a coming of age novel for the protagonist
2. define the term *simile* and identify similes in the text
3. identify the need for a mother as a major theme of the novel, find examples from the text that illustrate this, and discuss how the protagonist comes to terms with her mother's death
4. define the term *allusion* and identify allusions in the text and their relevance to the plot
5. discuss how the motif of bees is central to the story by giving examples of where they are discussed and explain their relevance to the plot, theme, and title.
6. discuss the symbolism of the river and find examples from the text illustrating its relevance to Lily's coming of age.
7. examine the setting of the novel and explain how place and time is integral to Lily's story.
8. discuss the problem of race in the novel and explain Lily's growth in relation to her understanding of prejudice in her society.
9. identify the use of foreshadowing in the novel and discuss its purpose.
10. identify the themes of guilt, forgiveness, and redemption and give examples from the text involving Lily's struggle with these issues.
11. examine Lily's mother figures and identify how she feels about each and the impact each has had on her life.
12. characterize the role religion plays in the novel.
13. identify uses of comic relief in the text and explain their purpose.
14. explain how June is a foil to August and explain the purpose of a foil to the plot.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Sue Monk Kidd has said that she and Lily share the same sense of humor. What examples of Lily's humor can you find? What examples of Kidd's humor can you find? How is the narrator's humor distinctive from the author's? What would the book be like without this humorous touch?
2. *The Secret Life of Bees* is considered a coming of age novel because Lily matures during the course of the story. Describe some of the scenes which illustrate Lily's maturation.
3. Describe the various issues Lily has with T. Ray. What is the source of their problems? Lily spends her time looking for her mother. Why does she not feel the lack of a loving father as strongly?
4. Compare and contrast Lily's two primary mother figures: Rosaleen and August. How has each affected Lily?
5. Explain the title of the novel in the context of the major themes of the story.
6. How is the setting of the deep South in the 1960s important to the story. Could it be the same story in any other place or time? Why or why not?
7. Sue Monk Kidd has said that there were bees living in the wall of her house when she was a child. How do you think most children would feel about that? How does Lily feel? Why is she different? Later she sees the bees as a "visitation" and a "plague." What does she mean?
8. Rivers are often said to represent the great flow of life. How is that expressed in the novel?
9. The moon is connected with divine mothers (in Greek mythology, called Selene). The last line of the book emphasizes this. Identify some of the passages where the book refers to the moon, or the phases of the moon, and explain their symbolism.
10. Sue Monk Kidd has explained that her high school was the first to integrate in her hometown in Georgia, and the description of Zach being hit by wadded paper balls is something she remembers. She also remembers the dignity of the black students under such harassment. Why do you think Kidd chose to include this incident in the story?
11. Lily has felt guilty for years for the death of her mother. When she finds out her mother left her in Sylvan, she feels betrayed. How does Lily come to terms with these feelings of loss and betrayal?
12. Lily finds a "hive" of new mothers and learns to love the great universal mother. How does this help her? How is it still not enough?

The Secret Life of Bees

Chapter One

VOCABULARY

abdomen – the stomach
agitation – worry; excitement
carousing – partying
chrome – silver
conjure – to create
disjointed – unconnected
dollops – small piles
gouged – cut out
grits – a type of grain
herringbone – a pattern like fish bones
imbecile – an idiot
impersonating – pretending to be
insomniac – a person who has problems sleeping
lure – to entice
magnitude – large size
motes – spots
orneriness – bad temper
paradise – heaven
pinning – longing
pulsating – throbbing
recoil – to draw back
sashaying – walking with style
scalded – burned
seep – to leak
smirking – smiling smugly
snuff – powdered tobacco
tailspin – a spinning crash
unperturbed – unworried

1. What is happening in the exposition of the story?

14. How does T. Ray punish Lily?

15. Lily says that she “understood that a new rooftop would do wonders” for her. What does she mean?

16. What does Rosaleen plan to do?

17. Why has Lily captured a jar of bees?

18. What else is special about the day Rosaleen is going to register to vote?

19. Lily hints at things to come. What sentence foreshadows the action?

Chapter Three

VOCABULARY

anointed – holy
barricade – a wall
biding – waiting
consternation – alarmed amazement
elusive – hard to find
iridescent – sparkling
madonna – Mary, the mother of Jesus
pesticides – bug killers
salvation – an act of saving, usually from sin
situated – placed
speculating – thinking about

1. Lily alludes to Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, in which Henry David Thoreau chose to live alone, as simply as he could. What about this appeals to Lily?

2. Lily describes her church's attitude toward Catholics. Why do you think the author chose to include this information?

3. What do you think is the significance of Rosaleen's odd dream?

4. What does Lily's question and Rosaleen's answer about the Civil Rights Act reveal about them?
