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The Secret Life of Bees
Sue Monk Kidd



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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Secret Life of Bees

Warning: This book contains instances of profanity and graphic images, including a description of a suicide.

Pre-Reading

1. Some authors try to be vague or enigmatic when they name their books, but almost always, the title relates to the book's theme. While it is very unlikely that this book is only about bees, this title is significant to the plot in some way. Without reading the cover or dust jacket of *The Secret Life of Bees*, write what you believe this book is about by inferring information from the title.
2. Sue Monk Kidd, the author of *The Secret Life of Bees*, dedicates this book to her "son, Bob, and Ann and Sandy" with "all her love."

This is a very brief dedication for a book. Some book dedications are paragraphs long. Imagine that you have written a book, and write the dedication for your book. Make sure to list not just the names of the people to whom you're dedicating the book, but also the reasons why those people mean so much to you.

3. The book begins with a quote from the book *Man and Insects*:

The queen, for her part, is the unifying force of the community; if she is removed from the hive, the workers very quickly sense her absence. After a few hours, or even less, they show unmistakable signs of queenlessness.

In the context of this book, the quote is not about bees, but is a metaphor for something else. The queen may be a person who has held a family or community together, or it could be an idea or principle that has helped define a person and made sense of his or her life. In any case, once that queen is removed, everything changes.

What person or idea has been a major influence on your life? What do you think would happen if that individual or concept vanished? What would you do? Answer these questions in a brief paragraph.

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6. Lily's mother died when she was only four years old. Lily explains that when she tells most people this, they usually ignore her or pretend to be distracted. Lily, however, dreams about what she would do with her mother if she met her in the afterlife. Her biggest wish is for her mother to spend 10,000 years forgiving Lily.

Put yourself in Lily's place, and imagine an afterlife with limitless possibilities. If you had the opportunity to experience life after death, what would you do? Who would you want to meet?

7. Although Lily insists that she is visited every night by bees, her father, T. Ray, thinks she's lying. Lily even calls T. Ray into her room one night to see the bees, but, for whatever reason, her father doesn't see them. He threatens to punish Lily if she keeps saying that the bees exist.

Do you think Lily is really seeing bees, or do you think they are just her imagination? Write a letter to T. Ray advising him on how to handle the situation.

8. Lily says that she can't remember much about her mother. In fact, she only has one memory of her mom, and that is of the day she died. Lily tries to remember, but she cannot think of anything else about her mother. She can't even remember what she looked like.

As Lily, write a journal entry explaining why you can't remember your mom and how it makes you feel to not have any memories of her.

9. Although sweater sets and plaid kilts are in fashion at Lily's school, T. Ray won't let Lily wear them. In T. Ray's mind, this kind of clothing is too sexy for Lily. Instead, he makes Lily wear only the clothes that she makes herself in Home Ec. Class. This, of course, makes her subject to gossip and ridicule at school.

Using Lily's own descriptions of her clothes, write a mock fashion article for high school students, explaining what *not* to wear to school.

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20. On the Sunday morning that Lily and Rosaleen arrive in Tiburon, very little is going on in town. None of the stores are open because it's illegal to sell merchandise on Sunday.

Lily and Rosaleen are relieved to see that there aren't a lot of people around. Even so, Lily is afraid that they'll be recognized and hauled into by the Tiburon police. As a precaution, Lily goes into the town post office to see if she and Rosaleen are listed on any "wanted" posters. She is very happy to find that there is not a single "wanted" poster for either of them.

Write the text for the "wanted" poster Lily expects to see, describing Lily, Rosaleen, and their supposed crimes.

Chapter Four

21. Lily describes the first time setting foot in August Boatwright's house as being electric. Just stepping into the house makes her tremble. In fact, she says that walking into August's house makes her feel as if something is "radiating" from her.

Lily believes this feeling can be attributed to a sixth sense. She says that "the body knows things a long time before the mind catches up."

As a neurologist, a doctor who studies the brain and its functions, write you think what Lily means when she says that "the body knows things before the mind catches up."

22. When Lily first meets August, she is struck by how elegant and refined she is. She is very different from Rosaleen, the only other African-American woman that Lily knows personally. While Rosaleen and August do have similarities, they are shockingly unlike. Write a compare/contrast essay, comparing August with Rosaleen.
23. Lily is an accomplished liar, by her own estimation. While, at first, she tells August the truth when she says that she and Rosaleen have run away from home, she lies about why they left and where they're going.

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27. Rosaleen becomes jealous of all the time Lily spends with August. Lily tells Rosaleen that she *has* to talk to August because August probably knew her mother, and that's Lily's reason for coming to Tiburon in the first place. Rosaleen, however, thinks that Lily should get over the loss of her mother and move on with her life. "She ain't coming back," Rosaleen tells Lily, so what's the point of dwelling on her death?

As Rosaleen, write a letter to an advice columnist asking, first, whether you should expect Lily to get over her loss and, second, how to help Lily deal with her mother's death.

Chapter Six

28. When Lily meets Neil, June's boyfriend, she makes a point of looking him in the eye when she speaks to him. Lily also watches June's eyes during the introduction. According to Lily, if you look carefully at people's eyes in the first five seconds of eye contact, you will see that person's true feelings. This is a way, in Lily's opinion, of finding out what someone really thinks of you.

Watching someone's eyes may be a way to read someone's feelings, but often there are also other types of body language that hint at what people really think. For example, if you're speaking to someone and she abruptly turns away, it means that she no longer wants to talk to you and is probably in a bad mood.

Write a short section for a book about interviewing for a job, giving people advice about how to read an interviewer's body language and how to alter your own body language to impress an interviewer.

29. In many ways, August is a spiritual sage, a wise woman. She is intuitive, and presence has healing powers for Lily. It's also clear that August loves to tell a good story. She told Lily the story of Beatrix, the wayward nun who, once she left the convent, found that what she wanted most of all was to be a nun. Afterward, August tells Lily and Rosaleen the story of Our Lady of the Chains.