

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Secret Life of Bees

by Sue Monk Kidd

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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.

Chapter One

4. Rosaleen tells the narrator, whose name we do not yet know, that “bees swarm before death.” This may be important because we know that the narrator’s bedroom is filled with bees.

The statement that “bees swarm before death” is a superstition, a belief that certain actions or items are signs of good or bad luck. For example, a well-known superstition is that it is bad luck for a black cat to cross one’s path.

Make a list of at least five other superstitions. Then, write a sentence or two explaining where you think that superstition came from.

This may be a good way to start

Superstition

A black cat crossing one’s path

Explanation

Black cats are believed to be pets of witches.

If a black cat crosses your path, it may mean that a witch is nearby, casting spells on you.

5. Even though Rosaleen warns the narrator that bees are a sign of death, the narrator is not worried. Instead, she tells us that death isn’t that bad. She says that “people who think dying is the worst thing don’t know a thing about life.”

What does the narrator mean by this? What could be worse than death? Write a humorous paragraph in which you explain at least three things that are worse than death.

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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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10. Lily finds a paper bag in the attic containing some of her mother's personal belongings. Among these items are a pair of white gloves and a wooden picture of an African-American Virgin Mary.

Lily has a secret place in the peach orchard where she boxes up the few things of her mother's that she has. This place in the orchard is very special to Lily. She says that it is a place where she can just "lie under the trees and be peaceful." It is likely, in fact, that the only place she can find peace is in the orchard with her mother's things.

Where do you go to find peace? What do you do to relieve stress? Write a letter to Lily telling her where you like to go and what you like to do to relax.

11. Although Lily loves to read, T. Ray discourages it. Even so, Lily's reading ability has helped her to get a perfect score on her school's verbal aptitude test. Math, however, is not a subject in which Lily does well, the way she sees it, "people aren't meant to be overly bright in everything."

Do you think, like Lily, that no one can be equally smart in every subject, or do you think that it is possible to be a top student in everything? Write an editorial for your school paper saying whether teachers should expect every student to excel in every subject or whether that idea is unrealistic.

12. The day before Lily started first grade, T. Ray found her at the peach stand and told her what happened the day her mom died. According to T. Ray, Lily, who was a toddler at the time, found a gun on the floor, picked it up, and accidentally shot and killed her mother. Lily remembers that night differently, however. She remembers picking up the gun, but she also remembers hearing a shot much later, not at the same time the gun was in her hands. What do you think really happened?

Write an article for a gossip column telling people what you think really happened the night Lily's mom died. Make sure to use examples from the text to support your argument.

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13. Lily's birthday is coming up. Although T. Ray has never acknowledged her birthday, Lily still hopes to get a silver charm bracelet as a birthday gift. All the girls at Lily's school have charm bracelets, and Lily wants to have one so she can fit in. If T. Ray would buy Lily the bracelet, it would be the best gift she ever received.

What is the best gift you have ever received? Write a short essay for a holiday catalog insert describing the best gift you ever received and why it was your favorite.

14. T. Ray is the only relative that Lily has. Rosaleen feeds her and is a role model for her, but Rosaleen is only an employee of T. Ray's.

Although T. Ray is Lily's only blood relative, he is very cruel to her. In fact, one could argue that T. Ray is an abusive father. Use examples from the text to write an article for a parenting newsletter telling people what T. Ray does that is abusive.

15. Lily's birthday is on the Fourth of July – Independence Day. However, unlike most people, Lily never receives cards or presents on her birthday.

Create a card for Lily to make this birthday special. Write a brief saying or poem for the front cover, as well as a paragraph or two for the inside.

Chapter Two

16. When Rosaleen goes to register to vote, she is taunted by a group of racist, white men. In response, she pours her snuff juice on the man's shoes. The men gang up on her and attack her. Even though the men are the ones who beat up Rosaleen, she is the one who is accused of assault.

As a policeman who is investigating the incident, write a statement from one of the white men, telling what happened the day Rosaleen was arrested.