



PENGUIN GROUP (USA)



**A TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**to SUE MONK KIDD'S**

*The Secret Life of Bees*



ACCOMPANIES THE RELEASE  
OF THE MOTION PICTURE

by Lisa Winkler

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## SYNOPSIS

*The Secret Life of Bees*, set in the American South in 1964 amid racial unrest, tells the coming-of-age story of Lily Owens, a white 14-year-old girl who is searching for the truth about her deceased mother. She lives on a peach farm with her cruel father, T. Ray, who tells Lily that she accidentally shot her mother, Deborah, when she was four.

Lily accompanies the family's black housekeeper, Rosaleen, to town to register to vote. Taunted by white men, she spills the contents of her snuff jar on their feet, is beaten, taken to jail, and later to the hospital. T. Ray reacts by punishing Lily, prompting her to runaway. Back with Rosaleen, she heads to South Carolina to investigate a picture of her mother's of a black Madonna with the words "Tiburon, SC" written on the back. In a store she sees jars of honey with the same picture, leading her to the black Boatwright sisters—August, June, and May—who raise bees and harvest honey, live in a bright pink house, and practice their own religion.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Monk Kidd listened to her father's stories growing up in the tiny town of Sylvester, Georgia. Teachers encouraged her to write her own stories and keep journals. Two books which she read at the age of fifteen—Thoreau's *Walden* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*—had a deep impact on her.

She graduated from Texas Christian University in 1970 with a degree in Nursing, working throughout her twenties as a registered nurse on surgical and pediatric hospital units, and as a college nursing instructor. She met and married Sanford Kidd, a graduate student in theology, and had two children. The pull to writing returned, and she took writing classes. She soon began a career as a freelancer, writing personal experience articles, and found immediate success.

Her first book was a spiritual memoir describing her advent into contemplative Christian spirituality, *God's Joyful Surprise*



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Though the sisters provide a loving home for Lily, she's reluctant to ask about her mother. She befriends Zach, a black boy who works with the bees, and witnesses additional examples of racism in the town. Eventually, she learns the truth about her mother.

(Harper 1988). Her second book, *When the Heart Waits* (Harper 1990), recounts her spiritual transformation. *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (Harper 1996) explores her interest in feminist theology.

She enrolled in a graduate writing course at Emory University, and also studied at Sewanee, Bread Loaf, and other writers' conferences. In 1997 she began writing her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*. Her second novel, *The Mermaid Chair* (Penguin 2005) explores a woman's pilgrimage to self-belonging, and the inner life of mid-life marriage.

Sue serves on the board of advisors for Poets & Writers, Inc. and is Writer-in-Residence at The Sophia Institute in Charleston, SC. Today Sue lives beside a salt marsh near Charleston.

*Text adapted from [www.suemonkkidd.com](http://www.suemonkkidd.com)*

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

*The Secret Life of Bees* is set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement in the tumultuous summer of 1964. Minority groups in America, especially blacks (African-Americans), believed they were being denied the basic human rights provided for other American citizens (namely, whites) by the U.S. Constitution, through the legacy of slavery and racism that accompanied the formation of this country. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 fueled fears that the civil rights work he initiated for American minorities would be lost. Yet in his first address to Congress, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the new President, urged for the passage of a civil rights bill that would further the progress made under Kennedy.

The original purpose of the congressional bill, which became law as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was to provide protection for black men from discrimination based upon race, and was

expanded to protect women from discrimination as well. Under this act, racial segregation and the infamous "Jim Crow" laws were declared abolished.

When the Civil Rights Act passed, as illustrated in the story, many whites were angered by it, and continued to treat African-Americans cruelly. Despite the action and progress addressed in the new laws, racial tensions mounted. Racism persists as a deep root in American society, despite political movements and social change.

Other events make the 60s a compelling time in American history. The escalation of and subsequent protests against the Vietnam War; the continuation of the Cold War, manifested through the race to conquer space; and the changes in popular culture—rock and roll, the sexual revolution and the overall anti-establishment atmosphere—contributed to this volatile period.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE

*The Secret Life of Bees* intertwines historical events with a study of honey bees. Before each chapter, Monk Kidd includes a fact about bees' life cycles or honey production, taken from various resources she lists at the end of the book. Pre-reading activities could include in-depth research of the history and politics of the time, and about bees and bee keeping. Many resources are available in libraries and on the internet.

The study guide is organized chronologically by chapter and includes vocabulary words, references to explain to students, or to have them research, and quotations.

The quotations can be used as writing prompts or to initiate discussion. You can assign the discussion questions and writing prompts as students read the novel, or as a final assessment. The themes and symbolism can be discussed during or after reading. They provide opportunities for students to make connections to other works of literature, movies or theater they've seen, historical and current events, or their own lives. The general reading response topics can be used for journal writing. The creative projects and the activities extend the reading experience, promote critical thinking, and bring the novel to life for students.



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## Vocabulary Activities

There's a selection of vocabulary words identified for each reading section. You may want to either add to this list or decrease it depending on your students. You can decide whether to introduce vocabulary before reading the section, during, or after. Vocabulary activities could include looking up definitions, writing original sentences, finding the words on the pages and making a guess based on context clues and so on. You can quiz students on each section of words, assign them to write their own stories with vocabulary words, or play games to reinforce word meanings.

## Quotations & References

As you read each chapter, look for sections that might lend themselves to readers' theater, acting out, or debates. You can have students do mini-research projects on the various references from the novel that are mentioned in the guide. Students can present their findings to the class in the form of oral reports. The quotations can be assigned as writing topics or used to spur classroom discussion.

## Themes

The book presents many opportunities for discussing themes with students as they read the novel and at its conclusion. Themes are also good sources for essay writing, and making reading connections.

The major theme, as expressed in the title, comes from August's statement: "Most people don't have any idea about all the complicated life going on inside a hive. Bees have a secret life we don't know anything about" (148). Throughout the novel, the reader learns how most characters are not what they seem on the surface. Secrets and secret lives are major themes.

Other themes to explore include:

- Coming of age
- Search for identity
- Relationships with parents
- Resilience of the human spirit
- Man's inhumanity to man
- Discrimination, prejudice, bigotry, class structure
- Literacy—the role of writers
- How death gives way to life

## Symbolism

### *The Bee Hive*

Throughout the novel, Kidd builds on the hive and bees as a metaphor of life. Bees represent people working together in a society, which is represented by the hive. The queen, or mother-figure, presides over the hive. August shows Lily how the bees become confused when the queen bee dies; however, if she replaces her with a new queen bee soon enough, they will be okay. Like the worker bees, Lily has been confused and saddened by the death of her mother. Through the intervention of the women in this novel—particularly Rosaleen and August—Lily is saved.

### *Our Lady of Chains Statue*

The statue of Mary is symbolic on two levels. On one level, it is an obvious representation of The Blessed Mother, an important Catholic icon. In this sense, the women are not praying to the actual statue, but to whom it represents. On another level, this statue (or Mary) represents all women's need for a mother—for guidance and strength. Our Lady of Chains is mother and queen to the women in the novel. Mary is frequently called "The Queen of Heaven" and as their "queen," Mary provides a guiding force for the women. As August tells Lily, Mary is also a source of strength, which can be found within.

### *The Whale Pin*

The whale pin that T. Ray gave to Deborah when they were dating is a symbol of T. Ray's complexity. August tells Lily that T. Ray treated Deborah like a princess. Lily is shocked to hear that T. Ray was not always a cruel man. Lily wears the pin when she confronts T. Ray. During this confrontation, T. Ray changes. T. Ray momentarily experiences the rage and sadness he felt when Deborah left him. He acquiesces to Lily's demand to stay with August. Lily has always assumed T. Ray is a mean man by nature; she never considered why he might be that way. The whale pin illustrates that, at one time, he was kind and gentle. But T. Ray's heart was broken and he has been bitter ever since.



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## General Reading Response Topics

One way to assist students in finding more meaning in their reading is through response journals. You can assign topics or allow students to select their own. This could be a ten-minute activity at the end of class.

- 1. Connections:** text to text, text to self, text to the world. Compare and contrast your book to others you've read, to situations or people in your own life, to events in history or the news.
- 2. Characters:** Do you like the main characters or not? Why? Do you have any advice for them? Comment on the narration. Who's telling the story?
- 3. Social question:** Look for race, gender, or class inequalities and injustices. Who has the power in the story and how is it used? What do you think? Does it make you think or feel differently about those of another race or gender than your own?
- 4. Setting:** Is it realistic? Does it fit the story?
- 5. Dialogue:** Is it realistic? Can you "hear" the characters talking? Could you change the dialogue? If you changed the dialogue, how would it change the story?
- 6. Emotions:** How were you emotionally involved in the story?
- 7. Literary devices:** How does the author use flashbacks and foreshadowing? Is it effective?
- 8. Themes:** To what extent is *The Secret Life of Bees* a morality tale?
- 9. Ending:** Would you have liked the book to end differently? How?

# CHAPTER 1

## Vocabulary

Presumptuous, 2  
Insomniac, 3  
Orneriness, 3  
Cowlick, 9  
Mercantile, 11  
Imbecile, 11  
Carousing, 12  
Smirking, 13  
Oblivious, 21  
Impersonation, 31  
Sashaying, 32  
Unperturbed, 32  
Recoil, 32



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## Quotations

“People who think dying is the worst thing don’t know a thing about life” (2).

## Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

- Lily plans how it will be when she sees her mother in paradise. She dreams that her mother will fix her hair. Most people, or at least girls, can relate to a hair story. Have students write about their own hair and any stories they remember (3).
- Many people can remember a person or a place by scent. Lily remembers her mother’s scent (6). Students can write about how they associate different smells with different people or places.
- Have students write about an argument between their parents (7).
- Many students can relate to an argument they might have had with their parents about clothing or felt peer pressure to have certain things. How does this relate to Lily’s experiences? (9)
- Have students bring in old photographs and write stories to accompany them (12).
- Lily hides her mother’s things in a secret hiding place. Have students write about their own secret hiding places—what do they put there? (14)
- “I sat on a Coke crate and watched pickups zoom by till I was nearly poisoned with exhaust fumes and boredom” (15). This sentence juxtaposes a concrete and an abstract noun. See if students can write their imitations of this sentence, creating the juxtaposition of a concrete and abstract noun.
- On page 16, Lily mentions how she wrote “My Philosophy of Life” for a school assignment. Based on what you know so far, what would be her philosophy? Think about her philosophy and how it changes in the novel. Students can write about their own philosophies of life.
- While Lily’s working at the peach stand she passes the time by making up poems. How can a place you hate inspire writing? What are ways to pass the time if you’re bored? How can imagination help pass time? (16)
- On page 18, T. Ray asks Lily what she remembers about her mother’s death. She was four at the time. What are students’ earliest memories? How early do we have the capacity to remember? Have students support their opinion.
- Lily’s birthday is July 4. She feels ignored because it falls on Independence Day. Have students write about their own birthdays—many may have birthdays on holidays—and if they’ve ever been disappointed by one, or have felt that they’re not noticed.
- Lily wants a charm bracelet for her birthday. Students can speculate about what she would want on her charm bracelet or design one as an art project. They could design one of their own to represent themselves.
- Page 22 offers some lovely images of the bees. Have students write a poem using some of the words.
- What do we learn about T. Ray on page 24 when he tells Lily: “You act no better than a slut.” How does he punish her?
- Discuss the metaphor about Lily’s mother on the bottom of page 24: “Like she was bits and pieces of insulation molded against my skin, helping me absorb all his meanness.”
- On page 26, Lily realizes she has to leave her father. What does this say about her? Have students write about a time they felt they needed to run away.
- How does the minister react to seeing Rosaleen in his church? What does this tell us about the time period? What do students think of his response?
- On page 32, the mob quickly becomes a riot. Discuss how a small event can trigger violence.
- Page 33, the last paragraph provides a great image for a writing prompt. How can a small sound fall across the whole world?

## References

Sophia Loren, 9  
Khrushchev, LBJ, 1964, Civil Rights Act, 20  
Martin Luther King, Jr., 21

## CHAPTER 2

### Vocabulary

Deliberate, 38  
Brazen, 38  
Beseeching, 40  
Pious, 44  
Blaspheme, 44



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### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. What does T. Ray tell Lily about her mother? (39) How do you think she feels?
2. Why does Lily say “I was thinking how much older fourteen had made me. In the space of a few hours I’d become forty years old” (43). What occurred to make her feel this way? What makes children grow up too fast?
3. Monk Kidd describes the Sylvan Memorial Hospital with a list of smells (45). How can smell characterize a place?
4. The Supremes song that Lily hears makes her think: “There’s nothing like a song about lost love to remind you how everything precious can slip from the hinges where you’ve hung it so careful” (50). Have students write about a song that resonates with them, reminds them of something, etc. Play a tape of the song to introduce them to the time period.
5. “Loss takes up inside of everything sooner or later and eats right through it” (55). Discuss this quote, its relevance to the novel so far. Have student connect to their own lives.

### Reference

The Supremes’ *Where Did Our Love Go?*, 50

## CHAPTER 3

### Vocabulary

Speculating, 63  
Consternation, 64

### Quotation

“I realized it for the first time in my life: there is nothing but mystery in the world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don’t even know it” (63). What is Lily referring to? How does this connect to your own life? What is meant by “mysteries of the world?”

### References

Shakespeare, Thoreau, Eleanor Roosevelt, 57  
Dixie, Confederate Flag, Fort Sumter, hula hoops, Goldwater for President signs  
Vietnam, Castro, Malcolm X, Saigon, 65  
The Beatles, 66

## CHAPTER 4

### Vocabulary

Corrugated, 71  
Meander, 80

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. Kidd describes August Boatwright with images of food and candy. Students can try describing someone using food (71).

2. Students can research the process of making honey and do research on bees (77).
3. Every teen wishes to be normal; Lily is no exception (79). Have students write about their own attempts at being normal and fitting in.

### Reference

Church bombing in Birmingham, 4 girls killed, 80

## CHAPTER 5

### Vocabulary

Consolation, 82  
Ambrosia, 84  
Naïve, 84  
Unassuming, 85  
Bona Fide, 85  
Bristled, 86  
Revelation, 87  
Righteous, 87  
Indignation, 87  
Eclectic, 90  
Immunity, 92  
Etiquette, 92

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. Honey making, bees, and bee keeping are central to the novel. Students can write their own honey songs (83), collect recipes, and make posters advertising honey (84).
2. On page 87, June says: “But she’s white, August.” Lily overhears her. Why is this unusual for Lily to hear? Discuss how white people can experience discrimination.

3. On page 92, August teaches Lily about “bee yard etiquette.” How does she compare the world to bees? This could be written into a poem or a song. Students could extend the metaphor with sayings of their own.

4. What caused April to become “deflated about life?” (97) What does this mean?

5. May Boatwright’s heart can’t bear all the pain and sorrows in the world, so in order to cope, she writes them down and hides them in her “wailing wall” (97). Start a discussion with students about how they deal with painful things, and have them write down things about the world they wish they could change. Then create your own “wailing wall” in your classroom (a secure box or billboard) for the students to release their troubles to.

### Quotation

“The world will give you that once in a while, a brief time-out; the boxing bell rings and you go to your corner, where somebody dabs mercy on your beat-up life” (82).

### References

Walter Cronkite, 88

## CHAPTER 6



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### Vocabulary

Ingenious, 104  
Deliverance, 107  
Solace, 109

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. Have students design and create hats for the Daughters of Mary (106). They could use recyclable materials and art supplies.
2. On page 112, Walter Cronkite reports that a rocket will be sent to the moon. Students can research the space race, or write to NASA for information, as ways to extend the reading.

## CHAPTER 7

### Vocabulary

Incessantly, 120

Consignment, 125

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. Lily's friendship with Zach is growing. Discuss how probable a friendship or a romance could be between a white girl and a black boy during this time period in the American South.

2. On page 130, Lily sees August reading *Jane Eyre*. Could this be symbolic? Students might want to know who Jane Eyre is and about the story.

3. "Lily, I like you better than any girl I've ever known, but you have to understand, there are people who would kill boys like me for even looking at girls like you," Zach tells Lily on page 135. What does this comment say about the social climate of the times? What other stories do students know about where young lovers face prejudices from society?

### References

Fats Domino, Miles Davis, 117. Play samples and/or show film clips of their music to help students understand the discussion between Lily and Zach.

*The Fugitive*, 123



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## CHAPTER 8

### Vocabulary

High-caliber, 137

Kamikaze, 151

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. On page 137, Lily decides if she could have picked a month to be named for, she'd have selected October and gives her reasons. Asking to students to do this would be a fun writing assignment. It could be a persuasive essay: Why I'd like to be named \_\_\_\_\_; or any other type of writing. Students could describe how they'd spend their special month.



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2. Lily's list of what she loves can be written as a list poem. Students can write their own lists of what they love (139). What does Lily's list say about her? Students could write these lists for other characters.

3. Lily saved a Coke bottle from Massachusetts "as a tribute to how far something can go in life" (139). What does she mean? Why is she attached to something like an old Coke bottle?

4. Students can write their own "tall bee tales," like the one on page 143.

5. What does August mean when she says: "the hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters" (147).

6. Why does Lily call her father? Is she homesick? Worried about him? What did she expect to gain from talking to him? (159-160)

7. On page 162, Lily writes an acrostic poem about her father. Have students write an acrostic about themselves or someone they know, or other characters in the book.

8. Though writing her letter to T. Ray brought Lily some relief, it didn't bring her any joy. Sometimes writing a letter and not sending it can bring relief. Students can write letters to people or themselves and not send them but as a way to express feelings they can't say.

### Reference

Jack Palance, 154



## CHAPTER 9

### Vocabulary

Ambitious, 165  
Magnitude, 172  
Oblivious, 173  
Cunning, 173  
Crevice, 176

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. On page 170, Lily thinks: “Every human being on the face of the earth has a steel plate in his head, but if you like [Lisa, double check quote, is it “if you look”?] down now and then and get still as you can, it will slide open like elevator doors, letting in all the secret thoughts that have been standing around so patiently, pushing the button for a ride to the top. The real troubles in life happen when those hidden doors stay closed for too long.”

What does Lily mean? What is she referring to in her life? How can students connect this quote to their own lives?

2. On page 173, Lily asks May if she ever knew a Deborah Fontanel (Lily’s mother).

How is May’s response a turning point in the story? How does Lily react to her answer? Why does May suddenly need to go to her wailing wall?

3. Lily tells Zach: “I’ll put it in a story.” She shares her thoughts: “It’s something everybody wants, for someone to see the hurt done to them and set it down like it matters” (185). What prompted her to say this? How are events in society affecting her personal life?

### References

Niagara Falls, people going over in barrels, 165  
Civil Rights Act, 166  
*American Bandstand*, Dick Clark, 175  
Ed Sullivan, 185

## CHAPTER 10

### Vocabulary

Anguish, 199  
Vigil, 200  
Hovering, 202  
Ritual, 205  
Induction, 206  
Catacombs, 206  
Taffeta, 211

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. After May commits suicide, August announces that they’ll be sitting vigil. Discuss how different cultures and religions

observe rituals regarding death and burial. Why are they important? What do they do to the bee hives? (206) Why do they do this?

2. Why do they eat seeds during the vigil? (207) What can seeds be a symbol of?

3. On page 209 Lily decides “everybody being colorless” would be better than trying to have whites get along with blacks.” Discuss: at what age do children become aware of differences? Of races?

### Reference

Aristaeus, Greek myth, 206

## CHAPTER 11

### Vocabulary

Dillydallying, 214  
Industrious, 219  
Sauntered, 224  
Quiver, 225  
Taunting, 239

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. How is Zach changing? Why is he changing? (216)

2. Lily’s and August’s favorite dessert is peanuts in a Coke bottle. Students can write about their favorite desserts and have a dessert party. Or have them try peanuts in Coke!

3. What is Mary Day? (220) How do the Boatwright sisters celebrate it and what is its significance in the novel?

4. What does Zach mean when he tells Lily: “That jail cell is gonna make me earn grades higher than I ever got” (230).

### References

Florida Everglades, 219

## CHAPTER 12

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. On page 237, August tells Lily about her mother, who she took care of as a child. She mentions she hid in a tree to avoid having to memorize Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." Lily remembers learning the same poem. Share the poem with students and discuss the themes that connect to the novel.

2. When Lily learns the truth about her mother, she thinks, "Knowing can be a curse on a person's life. I'd traded in a pack of lies for a pack of truth..." (255). How is she coping with this knowledge? What is she feeling now?

3. August tells Lily, "There is nothing perfect, there is only life" (256). Discuss and have students respond in writing, giving their own examples of life's imperfections.

## CHAPTER 13

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. In this chapter, Lily confronts many of her feelings about her mother leaving her. Students may be able to write about being left, about broken families, etc. These can be private journals.

2. Describe the ritual of Mary Day (268-269). How does the ritual help Lily overcome her anger?

3. August gives Lily some things she had kept that belonged to Lily's mother. Among them is a mirror, a hairbrush, and a volume of William Blake's poems. Lily finds a poem that her mother had underlined. How does seeing something that belonged to a relative help a person know that relative?

4. How does seeing the photograph of her mother holding her make Lily feel? (275) How is this a sign to Lily?

## CHAPTER 14

### Vocabulary

Demoralized, 286

Melancholy, 287

Skittish, 291

Resolve, 298

Perpetually, 301

### Writing Prompts & Discussion Topics

1. What is the significance of Rosaleen getting a voting card? (281)

2. What is Zach's news? (283) How probable is it this would have occurred?

3. What does August mean when she tells Lily she has to "find a mother inside yourself" (288). What are the characteristics August tells Lily she needs?

4. Why does T. Ray call Lily "Deborah"? (294) What has happened to him?

5. What does Lily mean when she says she believes in the "goodness of imagination"? (300)



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### References

Goldwater/Humphrey election, 283

Nat King Cole, 285

## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

Extending the reading experience for students, through a creative project or dramatic production, makes the reading more memorable and empowers students to have some ownership of their work. Many activities can be done in small groups.

1. Write a diary of one of the characters. Tell his/her secret thoughts, motivations, history, ideas for the future, and thoughts about others. For example, write Deborah's diary explaining what really happened the day she died.
2. Rewrite part of the novel in poem or song form.
3. Pretend you're one of the characters. It's 20 years from the end of the novel. Write a letter to another character in the book about what you've been doing with your life. For example, does Lily ever see her father again?
4. Write a series of letters between any two characters.
5. Write a letter to the author about what you think about the book. (Mail or email the letter)
6. Based on research, write news articles or create a newspaper article about a section of the novel. Create a timeline of world events.
7. In a group, select a chapter or scene to dramatize. Write a script, design costumes and props, and perform for the class. This can also be done as Readers Theater.
8. Write interview questions for the author and /or for the main characters. Pretend you're a talk show host and have invited the characters to speak. Stage the show before the class.
9. Write a sequel (or the next chapter) to the novel.
10. Listen to some music of the Civil Rights era. Some singers include: Marian Anderson, Odetta, Peter, Paul and Mary, Mahalia Jackson and other folk singers. Study the lyrics and themes that were prevalent. Select music to accompany different scenes from the novel, and explain why each song represents that particular scene. Or, compose an original song(s).
11. Choreograph a dance for a particular scene.
12. Create a mural depicting a chapter or scene from the novel. Or create collages of characters' personalities using words and images from magazines.
13. August lived in Richmond, Virginia, during the 1920s and 1930s. Research Richmond during these times and then write a story of August's life with Deborah, Lily's mother.
14. Research the mythology of Black Madonnas and show how Monk Kidd weaves legend into this novel.
15. How are the words and teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr., reflected in this novel?
16. Research an artist of the sixties. Based on the artist's style, develop a portfolio of illustrations from this novel.
17. Lily Owens cherishes a box with the few remaining things that belonged to her mother. Have students bring in some of their favorite things, or things that represent who they are, and have them place in a box to either decorate as a keepsake, or bury as a time capsule. Students should discuss why they chose their items.
18. Cook Off or Bake Off: Make honey recipes inspired by *The Secret Life of Bees* and bring in as a treat for everyone. You could post the recipes on your school website! In the process, learn about the different kinds of honey and honey bees.



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## ACTIVITIES FOR USING THE FILM ADAPTATION IN THE CLASSROOM:

### Field Trip – The Book Comes to Life

The film adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, will be in theaters on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. After your class has read the novel, take a field trip to see the film and discuss with students how they felt about the differences or similarities between what they read and what they saw.

### Adapting a Novel into a Film

**Background Information:** Gina Prince-Bythewood is the director of the film version of *The Secret Life of Bees*, which she adapted from the novel by author Sue Monk Kidd, into a screenplay.

**“Adapting the novel *The Secret Life of Bees* into a screenplay was a joy because it was a chance to bring to life characters I had grown to love. That is the beauty of writing, it is the chance to create, live and breath in a world different from your own.”**—Gina Prince-Bythewood, screenwriter/director of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

**Discussion:** The challenges of adapting a novel into a film

- Explore vocabulary like “adaptation” and “screenplay”
- Explore the styles and formatting for a screenplay
- Bring up questions like:
  - What themes would be most important to keep?
  - Which story line is the most important?
  - What could be cut from the novel or condensed?

**Activity:** Adapting a Novel

- Have the students write out a brief adaptation or “spec script” of the novel and also write about the challenges they discovered while deciding what to keep and remove from the story
- Students could even pick some of the best “scripts” from the exercise and break into groups to film a scene or film a trailer for their new version

### Playing Casting Director

Background Information: In the film version of *The Secret Life of Bees* the following actors were chosen to play the main roles: Dakota Fanning (Lily Owens), Paul Bettany (T. Ray), Jennifer Hudson (Rosaleen Daise), Queen Latifah (August Boatwright), Alicia Keys (June Boatwright), Sophie Okonedo (May Boatwright), Nate Parker (Neil), and Tristan Wilds (Zachary Taylor).

**Discussion:** Casting Choices

- When you read a book, does it play out like a movie in your head?
- Other than the descriptions in the book, how do you see each character?
- What current actors would you cast in each role?

**Activity:** Casting Director

- If the film is available on DVD, have students discuss a certain scene from the book and then watch how it plays out in the film. Discuss if it’s what they pictured or if they would have done it differently (especially if the scene was changed for the film)
- Pick a couple of “casting directors” and have each student make their casting choices from students in the class to “play” each role and explain their choices
  - The students who are “cast” could do a dramatic reading from the book or
  - Have the “cast” adapt a scene from the book and film it. The “casting directors” can act as film director

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The internet and libraries can provide resources for researching topics in the novel. The American Place Theatre, based in New York City, presents professionally staged verbatim adaptations of *The Secret Life of Bees* and other literature. Professional teaching artists travel to schools and conduct staff development and student workshops and perform for students. Their resource guide provides many ways to dramatize the novel.

For more information visit [www.americanplacetheatre.org](http://www.americanplacetheatre.org)

Learn more about the film *The Secret Life of Bees* at [www.foxsearchlight.com](http://www.foxsearchlight.com)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

**LISA K. WINKLER** holds a Master’s of Education from New Jersey City University and a BA from Vassar College. Her master’s thesis focused on censorship in public schools. She’s taught middle school Language Arts for more than 10 years and serves as a master teacher in the Newark, NJ public schools

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FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES PRESENTS AN OVERBROOK ENTERTAINMENT/DOWNERS' COMPANY PRODUCTION A GINA PRINCE-BY-THE-WOOD FILM QUEEN LATIFAH DAKOTA FANNING "THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES" JENNIFER HUDSON ALICIA KEYS SOPHIE OKONEDO AND PAUL BETTANY MUSIC BY LINDA COHEN SUPERVISOR MUSIC BY MARK ISHAM COSTUME DESIGNER SANDRA HERNANDEZ CO-EDITED BY CATHELL, INC. EDITED BY TERILYN A. SHROPSHIRE, A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER WARREN ALAN YOUNG DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROCHER STOFFERS, N.S.C. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JADA PINKETT SMITH PRODUCED BY LAUREN SHULER DONNER JAMES LASSITER WILL SMITH JOE PICCHIRALLO BASED UPON THE NOVEL BY SUE MONK KIDD WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN AND DIRECTED BY GINA PRINCE-BY-THE-WOOD

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED  
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13  
THEMATIC MATERIAL AND SOME VIOLENCE

DISNEY

READ THE NOVEL FROM PENGUIN BOOKS

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