

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Secret Life of Bees

by Sue Monk Kidd

written by Rita Truschel

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The Secret Life of Bees

Objectives

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

1. analyze conflict in the narrative arc of character, setting, plot and theme.
2. identify the genre of Bildungsroman and analyze the development of the protagonist from childhood to mature understanding.
3. analyze the first-person and unreliable narrator compared with other points of view.
4. identify and analyze literary elements such as allusion, antagonist, diction, epigraph, imagery, impressions, personification, parable, pace, suspense, symbolism, persona, tone and voice.
5. analyze themes of identity, parenthood, civil rights, faith, feminism and nature.
6. offer a close reading of *The Secret Life of Bees* and support interpretations and assertions using evidence from the text and knowledge of cultural and literary allusions and social history.
7. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Lecture

I. CONFLICT

Conflict is essential to narrative. A story requires action; that's plot. The characters' motives and behavior should justify their actions in a believable way. Something has to be at stake to make the plot move toward a climax and sustain readers' interest in the outcome of events. Writers create tension and suspense by arranging conflict in the structure of a story.

What happens in a conflict could involve physical obstacles, verbal disagreements, or mental, emotional and moral problems.

There are several classic conflicts in literature and drama:

- character vs. character, the most important being the protagonist against an antagonist
- character vs. self, when a character struggles with personality traits, feelings, secrets, beliefs or conscience
- character vs. nature, in which the setting or some natural force is the challenge
- character vs. society, in which oppression, justice, or conflicting roles cause action
- character vs. the supernatural, including an unworldly force
- character vs. technology, pitting a human against a mechanical or technological threat
- character vs. fate, when a person's will and choices are overpowered by a predetermined destiny

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, novelist Sue Monk Kidd weaves multiple conflicts around 14-year-old protagonist Lily Melissa Owens. Lily is haunted by neediness and guilt since the accidental shooting death of her mother, whom she barely remembers. Lily's sense of shame, lovelessness, and lack of guidance represent a character vs. self conflict.

Lily's father, T. Ray Owens, compounds Lily's problems because he has been unkind and uncommunicative since his wife's death. He shocks Lily by revealing that her mother had abandoned her. T. Ray is Lily's antagonist in a character vs. character struggle. Lily realizes she hates her father and he hates her. She runs away from home, setting the plot in motion.

The novel's setting in South Carolina in 1964 involves social conflict during the era of racial segregation and black Americans' struggle for civil rights. Lily confronts injustice when the Owens' housekeeper, Rosaleen, goes to register to vote and is beaten by racists. Lily and Rosaleen find a refuge with the Boatwright sisters, who are black as well as feminists.

Lily's idealization of her dead mother, Deborah, could also be a character vs. supernatural conflict. The Boatwright sisters' devotion to the Virgin Mary as a source of spiritual strength provides a model for Lily to confront her shame and see her mother realistically.

II. POINT OF VIEW

Stories can be told from different points of view.

A first-person viewpoint involves the narrator as a character in her or his own story. It can be identified by use of “I” or “we” in the telling. This creates intimacy and concentrates on the protagonist’s motives, goals and reactions. However, the first-person narrator may be unreliable. This principle character could be withholding or misjudging information out of ignorance, faulty memory, bias or self-protection.

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, protagonist Lily Owens is an unreliable narrator for all these reasons. Lily was only 4 years old when her mother died, so she cannot remember the fatal accident clearly. Lily is biased against her callous father and refuses to believe her mother might have abandoned her. For most of the novel, Lily protects herself from learning the truth about her imperfect mother and her parents’ unhappy marriage.

Third-person or omniscient point of view makes use of an unspecified but knowledgeable narrator apart from the action. This offers the greatest flexibility and degrees of insight. The omniscient narrator can know more than any or all of the characters.

Author Sue Monk Kidd provides exposition and insights within the limit of Lily’s first-person perspective—and uses several techniques to expand this viewpoint. Over the course of the plot, Lily is either present in the action, or sees, hears or reads about events. Notice Lily’s dialogue with knowledgeable characters, plus allusions to photographs, books, newspapers and television to add information.

The literary device of flashback also allows the author to describe earlier incidents beyond the protagonist’s knowledge or understanding. For example, Lily’s encounters with her father, Rosaleen and the Boatwright sisters include flashbacks about her mother’s youth and marriage, which Lily couldn’t otherwise know. In fact, the entire novel is structured as a flashback, in which Lily looks back on what she learned after her fourteenth birthday in 1964.

Pay attention to the narrator’s persona, the attitude and image projected to readers. Persona comes through actions, thoughts, statements, diction and imagery. This is also called voice. Persona can change over the course of a story too.

For example, Lily’s desperation for her mother is evident in her hyperbolic longing and preoccupation with maternal images and female experiences. Her rebelliousness and resourcefulness are evidenced in her confrontations with her father, her vulgar outbursts, and her elaborate lies after she runs away from home.

The author can have a separate and different persona from the narrator. This also is evident in attitudes, narrative elements and language usage. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the nature imagery, references to the Virgin Mary and bee folklore suggest more maturity than Lily possesses. Author Kidd uses allusions to mythology, theology, literature and history—often in dialogue with older characters—to develop her themes in the novel.

III. BILDUNGSROMAN

Bildungsroman is a German term for a novel about the growth of the leading character's personality from youth to adulthood. As a genre, these stories are often called "coming-of-age" or "education" novels. The narrative follows the protagonist's intellectual, moral, and psychological development. Mistakes and challenges in pursuit of a goal form this person's **identity** or sense of self in relation to society.

Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795) was the influential early model in literature. It's the story of a naïve young man who chooses a career in the theater and an unfaithful lover rather than join his family's business as expected.

Other examples are Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. So is the Harry Potter series.

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily Owens grows from a child to a young adult without help from her parents. Lily faces the usual challenges of adolescence: a maturing body, relationships with the opposite sex, independence, identifying talents, choosing a career, and adjusting responsibly to community life. Her separation from her parents is more difficult because Lily remains grief-stricken over her dead mother and hostile father. She also lives in a rural South Carolina town during a period when women and black people faced social restrictions, including segregation and violence.

As is typical in such novels, Lily leaves home to search for the truth about herself, her family and her place in society. The plot involves challenges she overcomes by drawing on her own abilities, and aid from influential characters she encounters. By the end of the novel, Lily has answered her essential questions about her parents and herself, and found a new home, better relationships and adult goals.

IV. THE VIRGIN MARY

The Virgin Mary is revered in Christianity and Islam as the mother of Jesus.

The Christian New Testament and Muslim *Quran* tell that the angel Gabriel was a messenger from God to Mary, a chaste young woman. The angel told her that she was blessed—meaning favored—and would have a baby without a man as the father. Christians believe her son, Jesus, to be the son of God and, through his crucifixion, the redeemer of human sins. This episode of Gabriel's revelation and Mary's subsequent acquiescence is called the Annunciation.

Muslims regard Jesus as a holy prophet.

The crucifixion of Jesus made Mary the emblem of motherly sorrow, sacrifice, and compassion for suffering. According to Christian Catholic belief, Mary's status as blessed included being born and living without sin, and then rising to heaven at the end of her life. Thus, her attributes make her a mediator between God and humanity.

In culture and literature, Mary often appears as a feminine archetype. As the plot of *The Secret Life of Bees* progresses, Mary is a constant reference for the girl, bride, wife, mother, and religious devotees.

As protagonist Lily Melissa Owens discovers, the lily is the symbol of the Virgin Mary, representing purity and innocence. So her name has a thematic meaning.

Mary's attributes appear throughout the novel. In the beginning, Lily imagines her absent mother as perfect, like Mary—endlessly loving, forgiving and consoling. After Lily runs away from her father and learns more about her mother's unhappy marriage, Mary becomes an allegorical model for fortitude and duty. When Lily finally acknowledges her mother's flaws and mistakes, she finds solace in praying to Mary as the sympathetic mediator of sorrow. The worship rituals of the Boatwright sisters and Daughters of Mary also help Lily see Mary as an affirmation of the value of women.

Novelist Sue Monk Kidd further explains her influences and rationale for *The Secret Life of Bees* on her website www.suemonkkidd.com.

V. THE BLACK MADONNA

In Europe, about 500 medieval paintings and statues depict a Black Madonna—a depiction of a dark-skinned Virgin Mary. Significantly, these representations do not have African features other than the dark or black skin. Their origin and meaning is disputed by scholars. Some are, apparently, the result of wood, stone, or paint pigments that darkened with age, soot or grime. Others, however, were apparently intentional and originally made with dark materials like ebony.

One explanation for depicting a "Black Madonna" cites the Old Testament's *Song of Songs*, a love poem in which an Arabian bride declares, "I am black but beautiful" and compares her dark skin to her tribe's black tents (Chapter 1, verse 5). Early theologians interpreted this *Song of Songs* as an allegory for God's love of the faithful, or God's love of Mary as the bride. French abbot and theologian Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) wrote sermons on the *Song of Songs* using this theme of spiritual union.

In other parts of the world, images of the Virgin Mary have been modeled on the appearance of the indigenous people. *Our Lady of Guadalupe* in Mexico is one example. Modern artists continue to rework the Virgin's image.

Some modern commentators link the Black Virgins to creation myths, ancient goddesses, and religious cults celebrating feminine roles and power. For example, the Egyptian goddess Isis was the daughter of the earth and sky gods, making her the model mother, wife, and mediator of prayers, as well as the patron of nature.

In the novel, the Boatwright sisters' names are emblematic of this feminist linkage.

May is named after Maia, the Roman earth goddess and the mother of Hermes, the gods' messenger. Maia was characterized as beautiful and shy. Only women could enter sacred sites dedicated to Maia. In Christian cultures, the month of May is dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

June is named after the Roman goddess Juno, guardian of the state and women, including marriage and childbirth. Juno had a jealous and vindictive nature. Women held a yearly festival in her honor.

August means "great" or "like a lord," and was named for a Roman emperor. Also, Augustine of Hippo was an early Catholic bishop, philosopher and teacher. The Catholic feast day celebrating the Assumption of Mary's body into heaven is August 15.

VI. BEE LORE

Folklore about bees is a motif throughout the novel, and also draws from ancient sources. Bee symbolism was inspired by the value of honey, wax, and pollination; hives' resemblance to peaceful and industrious human society; and the maternity and miniature monarchy of the queen.

Melissa—Lily Owens's middle name—means "honeybee." It refers to Greek myth about the supreme god Zeus, who as an infant was fed honey by a nymph, a female spirit. This nymph, Melissa, discovered honey and taught humans its use. Similarly, priestesses of the Greek goddess Demeter, patron of agriculture, were called Melissae or "bees."

The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans knew how to keep bees. In Egypt, bees were a metaphor and symbol of royalty. Egyptians and Greeks believed bees were messengers from the gods. Bees were believed to originate from the carcass of a dead bull, thus representing regeneration from death and a connection to the spiritual realm. (Apparently wild bees were prone to nest in the skeletons of animals.)

Beekeeping had become common in Europe by the Middle Ages, and the skill came to America with immigrant settlers in the 17th century.

A widespread European custom was "telling the bees" of a death in the family, to assure they would not desert the hives because of neglect. The custom attests to bees' value. Hives also were told about marriages and births.

In fact, bees swarm when they are overcrowded, without room to raise young or store honey. In warm weather, scout bees look for a new nesting site—like the wall of Lily Owens' house—and will direct the old colony there to resettle with a queen bee.

VII. FROM SLAVERY TO CIVIL RIGHTS

The Civil War (1861-1865) ended slavery in the United States, but black Americans were not equal citizens by law or social practice for another century. Black and white advocates of self-improvement and civil rights challenged racist attitudes and institutions in the South and North.

In 1865, Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, outlawing chattel slavery.

Southern states and locales immediately enacted Black Codes to restrict personal freedom as well as access to education, voting, political office, and other benefits of citizenship. The economics of farm ownership and labor established a system that still strongly resembled slavery, keeping blacks tied to land they did not own.

White supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan aroused mobs and incited riots to enforce segregationist laws and policies. Journalist Ida B. Wells launched an editorial campaign against lynchings.

This legal and social system of inferiority was called “Jim Crow,” after a 19th-century black-face minstrel character. Legal and systemic segregation and discrimination persisted until the 1960s.

In 1868, the 14th Amendment decreed that all native-born or naturalized residents were citizens of the United States and of their respective states, entitled to due process and equal protection under the law.

In 1870, the 15th Amendment recognized a citizen’s right to vote regardless of race, color, or previous enslavement. States retaliated again by ordering voters to pay poll taxes for the “privilege” and to pass literacy tests. These discriminatory laws had “grandfather clauses” that exempted any man who had voted before 1870, or whose father or grandfather had voted. That meant poor and illiterate white men could vote, but black men were prohibited (since no black man would have voted before 1870). In 1915, the U.S. Supreme Court declared such grandfather clauses to be in violation of the 15th Amendment and, thus, unconstitutional.

The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920.

In 1892, in order to protest segregationist laws in Louisiana, a man of mixed-race ancestry, Homer Plessy, was arrested for violating a Louisiana law that ordered black and white passengers to sit in separate train cars. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court decided his lawsuit *Plessy v. Ferguson*, ruling that states were not required to integrate public facilities so long as black people had equal accommodations. This established a standard of “separate but equal” treatment of black Americans. In effect, it made segregation legal and failed to enforce the adequacy of public facilities for black people.

In the 1890s states also barred black voters from participating in primary elections, so that black political candidates would not be nominated or succeed in general elections. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court forbade white-only primaries as a violation of rights.

In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was formed. Journalist and teacher W.E.B. Du Bois was a founder and an outspoken campaigner for the rights of black Americans. NAACP lawyers challenged discriminatory state laws in court.

In 1925, social activist Asa Philip Randolph became the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a trade union of railroad employees. During World War II he challenged President Franklin Roosevelt to stop discrimination in defense industry jobs and the military. President Harry Truman ordered the armed forces and federal government jobs to integrate in 1948.

Randolph organized civil rights marches through the 1950s and 1960s, including the famous 1963 March on Washington.

In 1954, the NAACP's efforts to end legal segregation prevailed in the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The complaint was about black students forced to attend separate, inferior schools, and the court decided that "separate but equal" laws violated the 14th Amendment. This meant that the earlier *Plessy v. Ferguson* standard was invalid under the Constitution. States were ordered to integrate schools.

However, officials in segregationist states ignored or rejected the principle of equality. In 1955, NAACP member Rosa Parks was arrested on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, because she didn't sit in the designated black seats. Activists organized a year-long bus boycott, led by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Supreme Court again ordered desegregation. The bus boycott's success created the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, involving churches in civil rights.

In 1956, 96 members of Congress from Southern states issued a declaration saying the Supreme Court abused its power by desegregating schools. This Southern Manifesto argued that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision violated the Constitution's separation of powers by intruding on states' rights to regulate education.

In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower sent soldiers to protect nine black students who had enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eisenhower also signed the federal Civil Rights Act. It created the Civil Rights Commission to investigate voting and other discrimination and gave the U.S. attorney general the authority to intervene.

Children and students also disrupted businesses by sitting at lunch counters, theaters and other public places that refused to serve black people. They helped teach potential voters how to pass registration tests.

From 1961 to 1963, Dr. King and other leaders joined demonstrations in Georgia and Alabama.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy ordered federal marshals to escort James Meredith to register as the first black student at the University of Mississippi. In 1963, Kennedy had soldiers escort two black students to the University of Alabama, where Gov. George Wallace scorned desegregation. In response, Kennedy delivered a televised speech repudiating segregation as a moral crisis and drafted a new civil rights bill. The president's brother, Robert Kennedy, was the U.S. attorney general from 1961 to 1964 and committed to enforcing civil rights laws.

The NAACP's organizer in Mississippi, Medgar Evers, was murdered in June 1963. The March on Washington occurred in August 1963. This was the occasion of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. A few weeks later, in Birmingham, Alabama, the 16th Avenue Baptist Church was bombed, killing four girls.

President Kennedy was assassinated in November.

In the summer of 1964, civil rights workers and church and college volunteers traveled to Southern states to register voters—especially disenfranchised black citizens—for that year's presidential election. "Freedom Riders" Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were murdered in Mississippi.

That summer, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act that Kennedy had introduced. The law banned discrimination in employment and public places such as restaurants, hotels, theaters, and parks. The 24th Amendment prohibited poll taxes in federal elections.

In December 1964, Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1965, civil rights marchers gathered in Selma, Alabama, and were attacked by police. Dr. King continued the march to Montgomery with the protection of soldiers and federal agents. That year the Voting Rights Act banned literacy tests and let the U.S. attorney general supervise elections in states and locations where voter discrimination had existed.

Race riots rocked cities, including New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles during the 1960s. Militant black groups challenged white authority and police as well as the concept of nonviolent civil rights progress. In 1965, black nationalist Malcolm X was assassinated.

In 1967, Thurgood Marshall, who had been an NAACP lawyer on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, became the first black Supreme Court justice.

In April 1968, Dr. King was assassinated. Days later, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 outlawed discrimination in housing.

In June 1968, Robert Kennedy was assassinated while campaigning as a candidate for president.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. To what extent does the protagonist's story transcend gender, time period or place?
2. Are the characters inspired to change by social leaders and visionaries, or do their aspirations rise from themselves?
3. In what ways do narrative fiction and journalism differ in their approaches to historic events?

Practice Free Response Items

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 1

Read the passage from Chapter 1 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning, "My first and only memory of my mother was the day she died," and ending, "She was all I wanted. And I took her away." Then write a well-reasoned and -supported essay in which you analyze the literary techniques Kidd uses to establish and sustain such narrative elements as character, conflict, setting, and plot.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 2

Read the passage from Chapter 11 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning, "Zach caught up with me as I reached the tomato garden," and ending, "Wading in up to my neck." Then write a well-organized and -supported essay in which you identify the predominant symbols and explain their contribution to the structure of the passage.

Avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 3

Read the passage from Chapter 13 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning, "Heat collected in the creases of my elbows," and ending, "all these people tucked away in the secret world of consolation." Then write a well-organized and -reasoned essay in which you evaluate how sensory impressions are described and what they contribute to the overall impact of this passage.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 4

Read the passage from Chapter 14 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "The next day I actually felt like eating," and ending with "I wished again that I'd been there." Then, write a well-reasoned and -supported essay in which you analyze the writer's attitude toward her subject and explain how the tone affects the overall meaning of the passage.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 5

Read the passage from Chapter 14 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "The third time the knocking came, I got up and opened the door," and ending with, "You need a lesson, is what you need." Then, write a coherent essay in which you explain how the antagonist's actions reveal aspects of the protagonist's character as well as his own, while advancing the narrative to its denouement.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 6

The structure of much social-commentary literature involves the actions of one compelling individual acting within—and being acted upon by—larger cultural currents. Select a character from *The Secret Life of Bees* and analyze how this person represents a larger social challenge and the author's response to it. Then, write a well-supported essay that identifies the conflict and cites narrative and literary elements in the novel.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 7

The Bildungsroman is a novel that develops a theme of personal growth and identity. Such stories often involve personal transformation through experience, often requiring the character to sacrifice something valuable as a result of his or her challenges and personal choices. Using *The Secret Life of Bees* as an example, explain a transformative incident that is a loss for the protagonist.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 8

In literature, nature often serves as a parallel or counterpoint to human values and experience. In a well-supported essay, analyze the use and meaning of nature imagery in *The Secret Life of Bees* to reveal the author's attitude toward the protagonist's goals.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE ITEM 9

A novel may be judged as a self-contained world or a reflection of the "reality" that the reader brings with him or her. Consider *The Secret Life of Bees* in those terms, then write a well-supported essay in favor of one viewpoint or the other. Be sure to evaluate narrative elements, use of language and literary techniques.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1—5:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 2 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "We stood on the side of Highway 40," and ending: "And for your information, I don't exactly have a plan." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

1. "I wanted her to pat life back into place, but her hands lay still in her lap" suggests a mood of
 - A. comfort.
 - B. loneliness.
 - C. love.
 - D. tension.
 - E. regret.
2. The narrator's sense of self-reliance is most apparent in the line
 - A. "everything precious can slip from the hinges where you've hung it."
 - B. "we waited till his taillights turned to specks no bigger than lightning bugs."
 - C. "every cell in my body had a little flame in it."
 - D. "I stepped into the pages of fairy tales where unthinkable things were likely."
 - E. "my voice rising like something had seized it from below."
3. In paragraph 21, Rosaleen and the narrator think of the black Virgin Mary as being
 - A. implausible.
 - B. emblematic.
 - C. absurd.
 - D. ironic.
 - E. anachronistic.
4. The narrator's refusal to believe that her mother left her is
 - A. justified.
 - B. logical.
 - C. contradictory.
 - D. anecdotal.
 - E. unreliable.
5. Rosaleen's conclusion takes the form of
 - A. ironic diction.
 - B. persuasive argument.
 - C. internal conflict.
 - D. rhetorical question.
 - E. internal monologue.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6—10:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 3 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "Next to Shakespeare I love Thoreau best," and ending: "Counting it as summer vacation from jail." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

6. The narrator's personification of nature as Eleanor Roosevelt implies
 - A. history.
 - B. well-being.
 - C. wisdom.
 - D. respect.
 - E. maternity.
7. The narrator's attitude toward Brother Gerald's church can best be described as
 - A. bewilderment.
 - B. intolerance.
 - C. rebellion.
 - D. subservience.
 - E. zeal.
8. Rosaleen's dream about the Rev. Martin Luther King suggests that Rosaleen is
 - A. candid.
 - B. prophetic.
 - C. arrogant.
 - D. sensual.
 - E. devout.
9. The contrast between Lily's and Rosaleen's understanding of the Civil Rights Act can be best summarized as
 - A. progress vs. ridicule.
 - B. forgiveness vs. hostility.
 - C. idealism vs. realism.
 - D. opportunity vs. impossibility.
 - E. cooperation vs. ignorance.
10. The nature imagery throughout the passage reflects
 - A. literary allusions.
 - B. church teachings.
 - C. Rosaleen's peril.
 - D. Lily's mood.
 - E. social disapproval.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11—15:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 8 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "The office was situated one block off Main Street," and ending: "So what?" Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

11. Miss Lacy's attitude toward Zach and Lily can best be summarized as
 - A. inscrutable.
 - B. empathetic.
 - C. antagonistic.
 - D. disinterested.
 - E. perceptive.
12. Clayton Forrest's role in the town is distinguished by his
 - A. legal challenges.
 - B. inquisitive nature.
 - C. financial success.
 - D. happy family.
 - E. racial attitudes.
13. By having Lily count the objects in the lawyer's office, the author establishes a
 - A. slow pace.
 - B. suspenseful incident.
 - C. juvenile personality.
 - D. potential solution.
 - E. period setting.
14. In this passage, the rhetorical questions in paragraph 27 are contradicted by the
 - A. persona.
 - B. imagery.
 - C. climax.
 - D. denouement.
 - E. theme.
15. A reader may infer that Lily's telephone call to T. Ray caused her to
 - A. compare T. Ray to Clayton Forrest.
 - B. regret causing Rosaleen trouble.
 - C. understand T. Ray's outrage.
 - D. become realistic about relationships.
 - E. stop craving petty things.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16—20:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 10 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "I sat in the kitchen with August, June, and Rosaleen," and ending, "This was the thing they'd been waiting for half their lives without even realizing it." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

16. The image of the singing night bird has the effect of
 - A. soothing the searchers' anxiety.
 - B. indicating a moonlit setting.
 - C. showing the narrator's alertness.
 - D. signifying time of death.
 - E. emphasizing the incident's pathos.
17. The reference to the "Hail Mary" adds meaning to the passage because
 - A. the sisters hoped for a miracle.
 - B. May was a beloved woman.
 - C. Lily became a religious believer.
 - D. Mary prays for the dying.
 - E. Mary appeared in the river.
18. The tone of the dialogue in this passage can best be described as
 - A. poetic.
 - B. ironic.
 - C. pleading.
 - D. understated.
 - E. melodramatic.
19. The author represents nature as being
 - A. sympathetic.
 - B. pathetic.
 - C. mystical.
 - D. cruel.
 - E. oblivious.
20. The sisters' anticipation of May's state of mind is best suggested in the line
 - A. "May had been gone a whole five minutes when August got up and began to pace."
 - B. "Walk slower, look closer, call louder."
 - C. "Finally August said, 'June, you go to the house and call the police.'"
 - D. "It wasn't till August said, 'Good, Lily, we should all pray,' that I realized I'd been repeating it out loud.
 - E. "'Oh, May,' she whispered and looked away, squeezing her eyes closed."

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21—25:

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 13 of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, beginning: "We left Our Lady in the yard while we ate," and ending, "The one that would let me know I was loved." Then, select the best answers to the following multiple-choice questions.

21. When Lily pondered her choice of biblical miracles, her tone of voice can best be described as
 - A. flippant.
 - B. confused.
 - C. sarcastic.
 - D. judgmental.
 - E. desperate.
22. Lily's reason for resisting looking in the hatbox is most likely that she was
 - A. exhausted.
 - B. disappointed.
 - C. uninterested.
 - D. hostile.
 - E. defensive.
23. Lily's memory of Christmas gifts suggests
 - A. past disappointments.
 - B. orderly habits.
 - C. juvenile behavior.
 - D. revived curiosity.
 - E. sincere gratitude.
24. In this passage the author emphasizes the impact of the old photograph by
 - A. having August forget it existed.
 - B. suggesting a face in the mirror.
 - C. revealing the baby photo last.
 - D. framing it in tarnished silver.
 - E. contrasting it to Blake's poem.
25. The sensory impression of Carolina jasmine serves to indicate
 - A. the passing rainstorm.
 - B. Lily's emotional relief.
 - C. the poem's meaning.
 - D. an authentic setting.
 - E. a spiritual messenger.

Answers and Explanations

1. The narrator uses the image of Rosaleen's hands as a metaphor for their altered relationship in an unfamiliar situation. The narrator desires reassurance and comfort, but Rosaleen doesn't respond that way. The first-person point of view means readers don't know Rosaleen's thoughts unless she expresses them in dialogue. The two characters are traveling together, but there is some mental distance between them. **The narrator's melancholy observations and Rosaleen's silence create a mood of tension (D).**
2. The vivid images throughout this passage suggest emotions. Answer (A) clearly refers to lost love. (B) describes the departing truck and the isolation of the hitchhikers. (D) evokes childish anxiety and suspense. (E) depicts the narrator's anger. (C) **is a simile for feeling alive and responsive despite the lack of help, so the travelers must be self-reliant.**
3. The picture of the black Virgin is a revelation to Rosaleen about women's spiritual authority. She reacts with surprise and wonder, yet doesn't dismiss the image as implausible and unbelievable (A). To call the image absurd or ridiculous (C) is too strong. Rosaleen's remark is a literal observation, not ironic or contradictory (D). The spiritual significance of the Virgin is timeless, not something anachronistic or misplaced in the wrong era (E). **The best answer is the black Virgin Mary is emblematic (B) of the neglect of women.**
4. The narrator rationalizes her emotions about her mother's abandonment by faulting her father and citing examples of maternal instinct. But Rosaleen reveals something that the child didn't know: that her mother was unhappy. So the girl's thinking is not strictly justified, logical, or supported by a comparable anecdote. Her faith in her mother is consistent and not necessarily contradicted by Rosaleen's news. **Still, the fact that the girl didn't know her mother was sad makes her an unreliable narrator (E).**
5. Rosaleen's conclusion is a straightforward recitation of her thoughts in colloquial language. Ironic diction (A) implies she doesn't mean what she says. She isn't trying to persuade anyone (B), nor is she asking a rhetorical question (D) that doesn't require an answer. Her conclusion is dialogue spoken to the narrator, not internal monologue in her own mind (E). **Rosaleen does express a conflict (C) between escaping from jail and feeling responsible for a runaway child, who really is intent on finding her mother.**
6. The narrator imagines some similarity between nature and Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the wife of President Franklin Roosevelt and an advocate of social improvement and human rights. Lily thinks about Mrs. Roosevelt after she wakes in the woods, so pay attention to her mood in this setting. On a literal level, Mrs. Roosevelt was part of history. She was considered wise and respected by some but controversial by others, and she was a mother (A, C, D, E). **More significantly, Lily's thoughts arise from her sense of well-being in the woods (B).**

7. Be careful to separate the narrator's attitude from the opinion of Brother Gerald, the minister, and the actions of church members. The narrator admits to ignorance about Catholicism, the Virgin Mary in particular. Yet she is clearly aware that her clergyman and congregation are outright intolerant. Female members who carry the plastic gloves are subservient or submissive to the church's anti-Catholic salvation campaign. They participate with zeal. **In contrast, Lily the narrator's thrill that her mother was "mixed up" with Catholics indicates rebellion (C).**
8. Rosaleen's dream should be interpreted in context. After spending a night outdoors, the beaten woman tells the girl that she had a vision of the Rev. King humbling himself and adorning her toes in red. The diction is plain enough. However, given the circumstances, Rosaleen could be sarcastic rather than sincere and candid (A). She is a fugitive from jail. Her pride was injured along with her body, so her implied arrogance is tempered by mockery. While King was a respected clergyman with a social vision, the dream is not meant as prophecy or religious devotion. So eliminate B, C and E. **The interplay of man and woman and the vivid attention to their bodies is sensual (D).**
9. Lily and Rosaleen have different ideas about what the Civil Rights Act can do for them because of its impact on other people's attitudes. Focus on what Lily and Rosaleen think themselves, not how they characterize other people's reactions. Lily thinks the law advances black people's access to public services. Rosaleen understands the merit of the law, but is skeptical it can be enforced effectively. Rosaleen doesn't ridicule (A) the law's intent, though. Forgiveness (B) is not necessary to respect the law, nor does public resistance make the law an impossibility (D). Resisters aren't ignorant (E) of what the law requires. They oppose it because it means social change. **The best summary is (C) a contrast between Lily's idealism about the prescription of the law and Rosaleen's realism about how society works.**
10. Nature imagery extends throughout the passage, with nuances of meaning from beginning to end. The allusion to Thoreau's book "Walden Pond" suggests independence and self-discovery away from society. Lily's segregated, anti-Catholic church is located in the town of Sylvan, which means woodland. Rosaleen rests in the woods because she is a fugitive from jail. The woods represent both exile and sanctuary. So there are hints of A, B, C and E. Most consistently, however, Lily the narrator observes the natural setting in ways that mirror her mood changes. **The woods look lush and lovely when Lily is optimistic. Then she sees the crop-dusting airplane over the fields when she is hot, hungry and discouraged. So the best answer is (D).**

11. Miss Lacy, the lawyer's elderly secretary, functions as a representative of the town. She doesn't say much to Zach and Lily, but her curt tone conveys her negative attitude. She doesn't want to be bothered by them or the honey, and thinks Lily's stay with the black Boatwright sisters is peculiar. Inscrutable (A) means mysterious or hard to understand; but Lily does understand Miss Lacy's remarks. Miss Lacy is not empathetic (B), sensitive or understanding toward the visitors. Nor is she disinterested (D), which means impartial and unbiased. Miss Lacy makes racial distinctions. So she isn't perceptive (E) about the friendly relationship of Zach, Lily and the Boatwrights. **Miss Lacy seems antagonistic (C), opposed to Zach and Lily for racial reasons.**
12. Lawyer Clayton Forrest serves as a contrast to his secretary and T. Ray, who is Lily's father. The question specifically asks about his role in the community. Mr. Forrest told Zach that his legal work was ordinary deeds and wills, not challenging cases (A). He asks questions of Lily, but they are cordial rather than unduly curious and investigative (B). His financially comfortable lifestyle and happy family (C, D) are evident from the photos that Lily inspects. What most distinguishes Mr. Forrest in his public role is his helpful friendship with August Boatwright and Zach, who are black. **His racial attitudes (E) are different from other white residents.**
13. After Lily declines to go with Zach and Mr. Forrest, she's left alone in the waiting room to set up the honey jars. Her attention to the furnishings is motivated by normal curiosity and a way to kill time. She thinks about the photos and compares them to her bad relationship with her own father, T. Ray. Lily's anxiety about telephoning him foreshadows another disappointment in their life together. The office setting seems ordinary, regardless of the period. **So the common thread of counting signifies time (A) and the slow pace of waiting.**
14. The key word here is "contradiction." The rhetorical questions in lines 84 to 88 are in keeping to the persona of a heartbroken girl (A). The imagery (B) represents small acts of intimacy and affection. The climax (C) is when she asks T. Ray whether he knows her favorite color and he threatens to beat her. These questions summarize the theme of craving love and acceptance (E). **The contradiction comes in the denouement (D) after Lily hangs up the phone. She asks another rhetorical question that attempts to deny how much T. Ray's love meant to her.**
15. Lily had compared T. Ray and Clayton Forrest before she made the telephone call, which gave her hope that her father might express love for her. So chronologically, (A) is wrong. T. Ray asked about Rosaleen (B), but Lily's thoughts were about herself. Lily apologizes to T. Ray, but his unabated outrage (C) confounds her attempt at better understanding and affection. The small gestures she craves aren't petty (E), but symbolic of love. **The best answer is (D) Lily recognized the harsh limitations of her relationship with her father.**

16. The singing bird appears twice in this passage. Lily hears it as the searchers leave the house, then doesn't hear it when they reach the riverbank. Perhaps the bird became silent—or Lily stopped listening because she was concentrating on what August found by the water. The searchers' tension is constant, so the bird doesn't have a soothing effect (A). There are other direct references to the moonlight (B). Though May left about a half-hour before the search began, the actual moment of death is unknown (D). While the death scene evokes pathos—sorrow or pity—the bird's singing is described as urgent, mimicking the rescue attempt (E). **It indicates Lily is an alert observer of the woods and river (C).**
17. The “Hail Mary” prayer praises the mother of Jesus and asks for her intervention in the situation. August told June to call the police and kneel in prayer to Mary, begging that she watch May. That's a humbler request than expecting a miracle (A). May was a beloved sister, but the prayer is a tribute to Mary (B). Lily recited the prayer out of fear of what might happen (C). The figure of Mary in the Charleston river does not refer to the prayer's text (E). **The prayer does ask that Mary pray for the dying, like May (D).**
18. Most of this passage is in the voice of the narrator, Lily. There is only a little dialogue from the other characters. Lily's voice is poetic (A), using sensory images and figurative language to describe the search. Ironic (B) refers to a contradiction between a statement and the speaker's intention. The fact that the sisters looked for May while fearing for her safety is apprehension, not irony. The prayer to Mary is a plea, but the dialogue consists of exclamations and instructions. The women's few words are the opposite of melodramatic, exaggerated emotion (E). **The searchers control their emotions and speak in an understated manner (D).**
19. The description of the woodland setting in this passage conveys an attitude about nature. The narrator Lily describes the heat, darkness and terrain as impediments to the search, not sympathetic to it (A). May's drowning is pathetic (B) to her loved ones, but “the river went on about its business.” The mystical religious elements (C) come from the women. May's death was self-inflicted, not the result of nature's cruelty (D). **While May was dying, nature was oblivious (E), not conscious or aware of her distress.**
20. After May's body was found, Lily the narrator concluded that August and June were prepared for her death. So what is the earliest indicator in the passage to anticipate the action? The search started urgently, slowed to a methodical pace, then became frantic as they waited for the police (B, C, D). June's whisper, “Oh, May,” occurred after the body was discovered (E). **(A) is the best answer since August's apparent concern is evident after a such a short time.**

21. A character's voice is evident in diction and patterns of thought. Lily's musing about biblical miracles intrudes on her depressed state, yet she deliberates to a serious conclusion. So she is not flippant or careless, confused or mockingly sarcastic. (A, B, C). Wishing to be raised from the dead would be a miraculous improvement, which is the opposite of being desperate and without hope (E). **In her thought process she "eliminated," decided "what's the point?" and finally "settled" on her preferred miracle. She is being judgmental (D).**
22. Lily's resistance to looking in the hatbox implies conflict. She welcomed August, so she wasn't simply exhausted or hostile (A, D). She didn't expect a gift, so she wasn't disappointed (B). She panicked before looking at her mother's belongings, so she wasn't uninterested. **Lily was defensive (E), protecting herself from further hurt.**
23. Lily's habit of arranging things reflects her need to order her life (B, C) so that it makes sense to her. Receiving her mother's keepsakes revived her curiosity (D) about her family, including her father's missteps (E). **Her father's impersonal and predictable Christmas gifts were a disappointment (A).**
24. This question considers pace and the ways parts relate to the whole passage structurally and thematically. The author creates suspense as August unwraps Deborah's belongings for Lily. Imagine the effect if the objects were presented in a different sequence. Recall that Lily rearranged her disappointing Christmas gifts to detect love. Opening the forgotten box provokes several powerful emotions (A). Lily resists the hint that the mirror still reflects Deborah's face (B). The tarnished silver frame attests to its age (D). And the loving gestures in the photo are a contrast to the despair in the Blake poem (E). **The photograph's significance is emphasized by making it the final impression Lily receives of her mother (C).**
25. The scent of jasmine is an echo of the rain (A). The pleasant fragrance is a counterpoint to the blighted rose in Blake's poem (C). At the literal level, the flower does add regional authenticity (D). However, the heavenly sign Lily wanted is the photograph of her mother (E). **Her reinvigorated mood and deep breathing at the window indicate her emotional relief (B).**

The Secret Life of Bees

Chapter 1

1. What is Lily longing for? What obstacles prevent Lily from getting what she desires? What are her conflicts?

Lily longs for her mother, who died when Lily was four years old. She longs for forgiveness because she accidentally shot her mother. And she longs for attention and guidance as she grows up to become a woman herself.

Lily's guilt is a conflict within herself, aggravated by her youth and her vague memory of the shooting that killed her mother. She has a conflict with her mean father, T. Ray, as she becomes a woman. And she is in conflict with society because she is a motherless working-class girl, who loves her housekeeper Rosaleen despite the prevailing racial bigotry in her town.

2. What words and figurative images indicate the strength of Lily's feelings?

There are several that point to the tone and theme for the book, including:

Metaphor: Her heart "split down its seam." Her life was "spinning off into a whole new orbit." Rosaleen's heart "was more tender than a flower skin."

Simile: Bees "like a flock of angels" could sting her to death.

Hyperbole: Lily's dead mother would tell her she was not to blame for "ten thousand years." Lily would complain about T. Ray for "four or five centuries."

3. Explain the allusion to the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary.

In the Christian New Testament and Muslim Quran, Gabriel was a messenger from God to Mary, a chaste young woman. The angel told her that she was blessed and would give birth to a son, Jesus. Christians regard Jesus as the son of God and the redeemer of human sins. Muslims regard Jesus as a holy prophet. This revelation to Mary is called the Annunciation.

Mary's child was special from conception. Mary also grieved when her son was crucified. Mary understood faith and suffering.

4. Compare Lily's ideas about the bees to the angel. Identify how the bees and the angel serve as literary devices.

A comparison identifies similarities. The narrator, Lily, believes the bees were sent to her as portents, messengers of coming events—like the angel that came to Mary. As literary devices, the angel and the bees foreshadow developments in the story. The bees also are a motif for a spiritual connection that transcends even death.

5. Compare Rosaleen's reaction to the bees to Lily's beliefs.

Rosaleen repeats a superstition that a swarm of bees foretells a death in their owner's family. This causes Lily to imagine that if she died, she would be reunited with her mother in heaven. This reinforces Lily's preoccupation with her mother as a theme.

6. Describe Rosaleen's relationship to Lily.

Rosaleen is a poor black farm worker hired as a housekeeper and nanny. She disappoints Lily because she cannot help Lily fit into town society like other white girls. Still, Lily knows she is loved because Rosaleen is kind to her and contemptuous of T. Ray. Lily wishes Rosaleen could adopt her.

7. Contrast T. Ray's reaction to the bees to Lily's beliefs.

A contrast identifies differences. The bees are gone when Lily's father, T. Ray, enters her room. He doesn't believe they exist. He calls Lily crazy for waking him and threatens to punish her. His scorn motivates Lily to catch bees in a jar to show him. The bees symbolize connection to Lily, yet she can't connect with T. Ray.

8. Describe T. Ray's relationship to Lily.

*T. Ray is angry and mean, and Lily is afraid of him. T. Ray is an **antagonist**. He told Lily she was responsible for her mother's death, though he softened this revelation by saying it was an accident. He tried to shield her from strangers' gossip. He won't tell her what her mother was like, but he provides a mother substitute in Rosaleen. Lily thinks she must hide her mother's keepsakes from her father.*

T. Ray is responsible but indifferent to his daughter's interests and needs as she gets older—her clothes, physical maturity, school work, college and career aspirations. He insists that she work at the farm stand. Lily has no school friends, yet T. Ray suspects she's got a boyfriend and could get pregnant. He tries to control her with physical punishment, using his prerogative as head of the household. Lily realizes she hates him and must find a new home.

9. Lily narrates this story in the first person, so readers know only what she observes, thinks and feels. List examples of things Lily does not know because of her limited point of view.

*Lily's youth and conflicts suggest she is an **unreliable narrator**. She doesn't know what her mother was doing in the closet, why her parents quarreled, or what happened to the gun after Lily picked it up. She doesn't know what her parents' marriage was like. She doesn't understand why her father is so harsh and unkind to her. She doesn't know much about Rosaleen's personal life either.*

10. What traits of women are important to Lily? Rosaleen? T. Ray?

Lily values appearance, etiquette, social popularity, love, and tender devotion. Rosaleen values independence, outspokenness, and maternal devotion. T. Ray values obedience and self-denial.

11. What traits of men are important to Lily? Rosaleen? T. Ray?

Lily values affection, support and intelligence. Rosaleen values intelligence and competence. T. Ray values authority and control.

12. What is important to Rosaleen about her religious ritual in her home?

Draw conclusions from part to whole. This will reveal their differences. Rosaleen's ritual is intimate and tactile. The photograph of her mother and ordinary objects from nature touch her heart, mind and senses.

13. What is important in Brother Gerald's church? What does this imply about the church's religious ideals and its role in the social life of the town? Is there a conflict?

Brother Gerald's brick church belongs to a Christian denomination but explicitly excludes black people. The church supports segregation. The minister talks of "loving the Lord" but his actions are petty and hostile. The church deacons are racist enforcers. There is moral and social conflict between Christian and democratic ideals and racial bigotry.

14. How does the author foreshadow Rosaleen's confrontation with the men at the gas station?

When Rosaleen rejoiced over the TV news about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Lily called her "oblivious."

Lily knew enough about the civil rights movement and the attitudes of white people to worry about what might happen to Rosaleen. Lily recognized the hypocrisy and hostility in her church, where black worshippers were not welcome and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was held in contempt. She heard a deacon tell T. Ray there was a literacy test to prevent black voter registration. TV news reported that a black voter was murdered.

However, Rosaleen believed the federal Civil Rights Act actually would change society. Rosaleen was proud, outspoken and determined to register to vote at a black church rally. She practiced to be prepared. She intended to defy local bigots, including T. Ray.

Earlier incidents in the exposition showed men in the town used physical intimidation. For example, T. Ray punished Lily, and the church deacons kept black people from entering services.

15. The novel begins with Lily's telling about the bees' arrival in the summer of 1964. As Chapter 1 continues, does Lily narrate events as they happen? Are events in chronological order? Cite language from the text to explain the time sequence of the story, and when time shifts occur.

Lily the narrator is not telling about events as they happen. Events are not described in chronological order. Chapter 1 has several time shifts and flashbacks. It begins in the past tense in the summer before Lily's 14th birthday and proceeds to Rosaleen's arrest on July 4.

In the third paragraph, the verb tense changes from past to present. Lily says, "Looking back on it now, I want to say the bees were sent to me." Lily is viewing all these events in hindsight, and how the bees were "setting events in motion I could never have guessed." She says, "Right now it's enough to say that despite everything that happened that summer, I remain tender toward the bees."

In the middle of the chapter, flashbacks jump further back to Lily at age 4 remembering her mother's shooting; Rosaleen taking over as housekeeper; Lily in first grade remembering T. Ray's account of the accident; Lily at age 8 getting the purple Easter chick; other experiences at home, in school, and the Women's Club the previous spring.

In this way, the author provides exposition and sustains the narrator's first-person point of view. The author also creates suspense about what happened and how the protagonist's understanding of events changed.

16. An **epigraph** is a quotation at the beginning of a piece of writing that adds context to the text and reflects the author's theme. Explain how the epigraph at the top of the chapter relates to Lily, Rosaleen, and T. Ray.

This epigraph about the absent queen bee relates to the absence of a mother in Lily's home. Similar thematic connections should be apparent in the other chapters.

Chapter 2

1. Lily doesn't understand why the men from the gas station call the policeman "Shoe." How would you explain the implications of this nickname to her?

A nickname indicates familiarity, perhaps friendly or disrespectful. Either way, the men knew the policeman well. So when the men assaulted Rosaleen and then followed the police car and beat her again at the station, the officer likely knew what would happen. The police officer also is a racist.

2. Contrast Lily's expectations of the policeman to how he actually does his job. Be sure to cite examples. What kind of conflict is this?

Lily speaks to the policeman respectfully, calling him "Mr. Gaston." She feels relatively safe in the police car and expects the officer will protect her and Rosaleen from the racist men. Instead, the policeman threatens to use his gun to make Rosaleen move and stands by while Rosaleen is struck. He covers Lily's mouth when she screams and tells her to hush. This is another example of Lily and Rosaleen's conflict with social institutions in the town.

3. What did T. Ray know about the men at the gas station that Lily and Rosaleen didn't know? What does this imply about T. Ray's character?

T. Ray is not naïve about town life. He knew the men could kill Rosaleen and harm Lily. T. Ray didn't risk rescuing Rosaleen. He didn't confront the racists.

This could imply different motives. T. Ray could condone segregation, or he could be afraid of retaliation.

4. Lily's decision to leave home is a turning point. Has the author justified this transition on a rational or emotional basis?

Lily has struggled emotionally because of her mother's death and her father's coldness. Now T. Ray has told her in a cruel, menacing tone that her mother left her. Lily refuses to believe him, but she really doesn't know what's true. T. Ray is crushing her spirit.

Other than receiving physical necessities, Lily is growing up largely on her own. The threat of punishment from her father and the bigots in town make leaving seem rational. Running away could save her life. However, Lily is only 14 years old and can't support herself.

5. What does Lily's decision to leave home and rescue Rosaleen reveal about her character?

Lily is resilient, loyal, and resourceful. She is brave in the face of dangerous racism. She's also a convincing liar.

6. How has Rosaleen changed? How does this affect Lily?

Rosaleen is injured, frightened, and timid. She follows Lily out of the hospital and Sylvan to Tiburon. But then Rosaleen confronts Lily about treating her with disrespect and putting her in danger with a foolish plan that's really focused on her dead mother. Their relationship of childhood dependence and adult independence has changed.

Rosaleen and Lily quarrel and separate for the night. But Lily has learned from Rosaleen that her mother was attentive but sad. Lily keeps blaming T. Ray for her mother's absence, but the reality might be different.

7. How does the creek help Lily and Rosaleen reconcile their conflict?

Lily and Rosaleen both undress and bathe in the water after a hot, stressful day. Rosaleen's freedom helps Lily overcome her self-consciousness about her body. As two women together, they forgive each other. Readers know that Rosaleen collects natural objects on her ritual shelf. Lily observes that the woods are undisturbed by inevitable change and loss. Lily manages to cope with her desperation for a mother. The setting has a calming effect on them.

Chapter 3

1. What qualities does the narrator evoke by personifying nature as Eleanor Roosevelt?

Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was first lady from 1933 to 1945 and the mother of six children. Though born into a prominent New York family, she was an outspoken social reformer on behalf of poor workers, women, and black Americans. After her husband's death, Mrs. Roosevelt was a U.S. delegate to the United Nations, where she was an advocate for human rights. A plain woman in appearance, she represented equality and benevolence.

2. Compare Brother Gerald's attitude toward Catholics to his church's treatment of black worshippers, as described in Chapter 1. Why is this attitude ironic?

Just as blacks are excluded from worship in Brother Gerald's church, Catholics are also unwelcome. The irony is that none of the townspeople even know any Catholics.

3. Contrast Rosaleen's dream about the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the expectations of the white church.

Rosaleen retells her dream with bravado, or perhaps sarcasm. She imagines the Rev. King in a subservient posture that glorifies her body. Her dream imagery is sensual and celebrates femininity.

4. What **impression** does Lily the narrator provide of the town of Tiburon?

The outdated signs in Tiburon indicate that the pace of change has been slow. Strangers are noticed. The Black Madonna Honey is considered peculiar because it's sold by a black woman.

5. Why does Lily expect to read about herself and Rosaleen in the newspaper? Why is she glad not to read about herself?

On a literal level, Lily is a teenage runaway and Rosaleen is a fugitive from jail charged with theft and assault. More significantly, they are challenging racial segregation. Lily sees an article about a Mississippi motel that reflects resistance to black civil rights. She's grateful to have escaped public notice in order to survive.

Chapter 4

1. Contrast August Boatwright's property and house to T. Ray's peach farm. How does Lily's impression of each setting affect her?

August Boatwright's land is lush and inviting, and beekeeping and honey making seem exotic and complex to Lily. The bright pink house is comfortably furnished. The carved figure of Mary inspires Lily with a feeling of being known, just as August sees through Lily's lies about running away but welcomes her to stay anyway.

By contrast, Lily hated the boredom of working at her father's peach farm. The Great Fanny sign embarrassed her. Their house was shabby and Lily felt she had to hide her most important possessions, her mother's keepsakes, from her hostile father. Her father couldn't see the bees that crept from the wall, an indicator of their estrangement.

2. What feelings does Lily confront in herself after arriving at the Boatwright home?

Lily feels relief from her shame and strikes a balance with her good qualities. Though she loves Rosaleen, who's been a mother substitute, she criticizes her uncouth behavior. She feels welcome, yet is aware of the oddity of being in a black home. She acknowledges her sense of superiority and surprise that August is intelligent, capable, and sophisticated. She confronts racial prejudice in herself.

3. Lily finds a note in the stone wall referring to "Birmingham, Sept 15, four little angels dead." Explain this **allusion**.

On Sept. 15, 1963, a bomb exploded in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four girls attending Sunday school and injuring 20 other people. The church was a center for the civil rights movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, rallies. Riots disrupted the city after the bombing.

Days before the explosion, Alabama public schools had prepared to integrate black students. But segregationist Gov. George Wallace closed the schools instead, ordering state police to block attendance. Gov. Wallace defied President John F. Kennedy and court enforcement of civil rights laws.

Four Ku Klux Klan members were suspected of planting dynamite in the Birmingham church. But FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover interfered with the prosecution. Three of the men were finally convicted of murder in 1977, 2000 and 2001. One suspect died in 1994 without facing trial.

4. Describe Lily's **mood** at the river near the stone wall.

Lily feels peaceful observing the flow of the river and wildlife. The natural setting feels safe from her father and the police who threaten her and Rosaleen.

Chapter 5

1. The names of the “calendar sisters” have a connection more significant than the summer months. Briefly explain the meaning of the names May, June and August to identify this theme.

May is named after Maia, the Roman earth goddess and the mother of Hermes, the gods' messenger. Maia was beautiful and shy. Only women could enter the sacred sites dedicated to her. In Christian cultures, the month of May is dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

June is named after the Roman goddess Juno, guardian of the state and women, including marriage and childbirth. Juno had a jealous and vindictive nature. Women held a yearly festival in her honor.

August means great or like a lord, and was named for a Roman emperor. Also, Augustine of Hippo was an early Catholic bishop, philosopher and teacher. The Catholic feast day celebrating the Assumption of Mary's body into heaven after her death is Aug. 15.

2. What character traits distinguish May, June and August Boatwright?

May is childlike and obsessive in her simple pleasures, such as enjoying perfect bananas. She nurtures and shares pleasure by cooking. She is so gentle and sensitive that she won't harm insects. Since her twin sister's suicide, conflict and suffering make her distraught. Her sisters must shield and comfort her against the outside world. May comforts herself by singing or hauls stones to her wailing wall by the river and leaves notes there about disturbing events. May's grief never ends.

June is a teacher and musician who plays cello for dying people. Though loyal to her sisters, June is suspicious and bitter.

August, the oldest sister, owns the property and operates the honey business successfully regardless of racial prejudice in the town. Her customers extend beyond South Carolina. She is dignified, considerate and generous with people. August draws wisdom from the bee hives, her Catholic religion and the Lady of Chains statue.

3. Why does August Boatwright agree to shelter Lily and Rosaleen? What conflict does this decision create?

August understands that Lily is too young to be alone and Rosaleen's wounds indicate she was beaten. She is willing to give them time and shelter to reveal and resolve their troubles because a white girl and black woman won't find other accommodations in the racially segregated town.

June, however, doesn't like Lily because she's white, and she doesn't want Lily in the Boatwright house. May becomes disturbed by Rosaleen's injuries, so she can't be told the truth.

Lily wants to stay in this refuge, away from her father and her guilt over her mother. Yet she owes August an explanation. To learn why her mother had a black Madonna picture, she will eventually have to tell who she really is and confront the truth about her mother.

4. What is the effect of watching the television news in the Boatwright house? How does the TV news function as a literary device in the narrative?

August says that Tiburon won't escape violent confrontations over civil rights. May becomes hysterical. Lily senses June's resentment and feels ashamed of being white. The news brings social conflict to the characters in a realistic setting and serves as foreshadowing in the story.

5. August calls her religious worship Orthodox Eclectic. What do those words mean?

Orthodox means adhering to religious Scripture or the tenets of a church. Eclectic means selecting elements from a variety of sources or styles. August is using the words' denotation to describe the women's adhering to "traditional" religion, but drawing from a variety of traditions to express their own unique faith.

6. Lily interprets the parable of the nun Beatrix as being about running away from home. From your reading of the parable, in what ways could Mary help Lily?

Students can make inferences. Lily understands that the parable is not literal; it's not about disguising her absence from T. Ray's house. The parable presents Mary as understanding human sorrows, mediating with compassion on the sufferer's behalf, and being an example of a strong and faithful woman. By implication, Lily could become strong despite her grief over her mother and T. Ray's mistreatment. She could face the truth about her mother, even if Deborah did abandon her. Lily's suffering has value as a human experience. It teaches her compassion.

7. When August tells Lily about May and the wailing wall, Lily wonders whether telling her sorrows would ease her hurt. What answers does August's story imply?

People need to find ways to tolerate their own emotional pain and cope with the world's misery. Expressing grief may be helpful and necessary, but dwelling on pain can destroy a person.

Chapter 6

1. What does Neil and June's relationship tell Lily about love?

A man may be attractive, compatible and devoted, but a woman's doubts and fears can prevent marriage. Pettiness and bitterness stand in the way of happiness.

2. What elements of the story of Our Lady of Chains make it believable?

The story has a realistic setting on the Ashley River and islands near Charleston's coast. The historic period of slavery provides sympathetic characters Obadiah and Pearl, who are challenged by conflict and powerful antagonists thwarting their freedom. The statue was a ship's figurehead, another realistic element. The statue's ability to communicate seems magical, but her diction is simple and direct in keeping with the time and place.

3. Compare the Lady of Chains to the parable of Mary and Beatrix in Chapter 5. What themes do they have in common?

The statue of the Lady of Chains also represents Mary's understanding of suffering and promises strength and relief to endure hardships. The Lady of Chains appeared to slaves when and where she was needed, just as Mary did for the nun Beatrix.

4. How are the Daughters of Mary different from the women in Lily's church back in Sylvan?

There are obvious contrasts. The Daughters of Mary feel a personal connection to the mother of Jesus and rejoice in their identity as women. Their flamboyant dress and nicknames indicate confidence and friendship. They are not subservient to a minister's instructions on how to act or think. The one man in the group does not dominate the women. They are open to strangers.

Chapter 7

1. What effect does meeting Zach have on Lily?

Lily realizes she's physically attracted to Zach even though he's black. This surprises her. This is her first experience of love. Zach raises her aspirations for the future as a writer, when he says he wants to be a lawyer. Lily confronts more aspects of racial prejudice that block relationships, job opportunities, personal fulfillment and influence in society.

2. The author provides parallel incidents involving June and Neil, and Lily and Rosaleen. What is the effect of these incidents in the rising action of the novel?

June and Neil fight and break up over June's unwillingness to marry. Lily learns about the difficulties of love by eavesdropping on them. Structurally, first-person narration requires that Lily be present in some way. June's fear of marriage also is parallel Lily's resistance to discussing her mother with August.

When Rosaleen moves into May's room, she makes Lily less dependent on her as a mother substitute.

Chapter 8

1. August tells Lily about the Boatwright family and growing up in Richmond in another flashback. Why does the author use this literary device again?

Logically, Lily would be curious, while August is establishing rapport to learn why Lily ran away from home. Structurally, flashback provides exposition within the first-person narrative framework. By going backward chronologically to establish a connection between characters, the action can then advance in a believable way.

2. What does August teach Lily about love?

August asks Lily what she loves, which T. Ray never did. She talks about the importance of making people happy. She makes Lily feel good by sharing her favorite things. August offers Lily the motherly guidance that she's longed for, as a continuum from August's mother and grandmother.

3. August explains the secret life of bees involves special roles that support the hive. Using this motif, what roles in the bee hive correspond to the people in the novel? Who has a "secret life" unknown to others in the book?

August resembles the queen, attended by her sisters and the Daughters of Mary. Rosaleen and May could be nest builders and nurses. Lily, Zach, Neil and Clayton Forrest seem to be field bees who excel at navigation for resources. June is a mortician. T. Ray is a drone.

The women and black characters in the novel have secret lives that support each other, yet are unknown to men and the dominant white society in this historical setting.

4. Why does August hesitate to send Lily with Zach to Clayton Forrest's law office?

A rumor in the town of Tiburon about movie actor Jack Palance taking a black woman to the theater has upset segregationists. Because Lily is white and Zach is black, they could be in danger. Zach could be killed. Yet August lets them go together despite her fear. This is more foreshadowing.

5. How is lawyer Clayton Forrest different from others in Tiburon?

Clayton Forrest does not support racial segregation. He says he's a friend of August Boatwright and supports her honey business. He helps Zach prepare to be a lawyer. His office photos indicate he supports U.S. Attorney General Robert "Bobby" Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy was President John F. Kennedy's brother. He assisted the civil rights movement with legal protection and enforcement, and helped create the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

6. What causes Lily to telephone her father, T. Ray? What effect does this call have?

Clayton Forrest's cordial welcome and the photos in his office show he is a good father. Lily wonders whether T. Ray might regret how he treated her and miss her. However, T. Ray's harsh answer confirms for Lily that he does not love her. Lily hangs up and vents her rage in writing. This foreshadows that Lily is unlikely to return home to T. Ray. Lily finally reaches out to the Mary statue for relief.

Chapter 9

1. After Lily learns that her mother, Deborah, had stayed with the Boatwright sisters, she dreams that her mother looked like a roach. What change does this image symbolize regarding Lily's attitude and understanding?

Lily idealized her mother as pretty, loving, and forgiving. She refused to believe her mother left her. But a roach is ugly, tough, and unwanted. May's admission that Deborah came to Tiburon confirms that T. Ray told a true story about her. Perhaps Deborah had gone away and abandoned Lily, as T. Ray said she did.

2. When the black boys in Tiburon confront the armed men by the theater, one man calls them a "bunch of cowards." Do you think the boys were cowards in this social conflict?

Civil rights activists had to be brave to challenge racists. However, the boy who taunted the men and threw the bottle was foolhardy and committed a crime, losing moral authority. Zach was brave to stand with his friends. Identifying the boy who broke the man's nose could have gotten someone beaten or killed.

3. Lily tells Zach that she'll write down his story about being in jail, to show that it matters. Cite additional examples from the novel on the theme that stories and writing make a difference to people.

Lily longs for stories about her dead mother, as a source of love and identity. She values literature, such as "Walden Pond," to understand experiences. She writes to T. Ray when she finally accepts that he doesn't love her. August uses stories to affirm her family and racial identity, gain religious strength and support others. Stories of the Virgin Mary are a motif. May relies upon notes in her wailing wall to express her emotional suffering.

The novel's references to newspaper and television journalism enlarge the personal and social conflicts confronting the characters.

4. Compare and contrast how Lily and May face crises in their lives.

Both Lily and May have suffered from childhood because of the tragic death of a loved one. While Lily has been mostly alone with her mean father, May has been supported by a loving family. However, Lily has social advantages as a white girl. May's grief is rooted in racial hostility because the Boatwrights are black. Lily struggles with personal guilt for accidentally shooting her mother. May faces the enormity of racism in society.

Lily understands that life isn't fair or kind. Yet she remains optimistic and resourceful to survive, even if she has to lie and run away from home. She challenges her father, the clergyman Brother Gerald and police. Lily is strong and clever enough to help others too, like Rosaleen. May grieves over every unhappiness and injury that she knows about. She needs her sisters' protection and can't face society beyond their home. Her reliance on notes and building her wailing wall offer temporary relief but do not change the circumstances that cause pain. Because May is so sensitive, she can never hope to escape suffering.

Chapter 10

1. What images foreshadow the discovery of May?

The description of the search for May notes August pacing the floor, the frantically singing bird, the moon rising toward heaven, hot wind like the "breezes of hell" and the prayer for Mary's intercession at the hour of death.

2. Lily compares May's drowning to the legend of Our Lady of Chains pulled from the river in Charleston. What other characteristics did May have that resemble the statue?

May was a humble person in the black community. Harsh experiences wore down her spirit, as the wooden statue was worn. May's heart was figuratively exposed, like the statue's painted red heart. May's death has greater significance than her personal sadness. The stone crushing May's body symbolizes the weight of the cruelty and injustice that she felt so keenly. Chains around the statue were emblems of slavery.

3. After May's tragic death, what is the tone of the incidents that follow in this chapter?

Lily's interview with policeman Eddie Hazelwurst has a tone of absurdity, in that the policeman is more concerned about Lily's living with black people and Lily tells elaborate lies to distract him. Lily recalls May's silly habits, such as putting socks on the bathtub feet, with affection.

Zach's release from jail is cause for gladness. August reassures him he's not responsible for May's suicide. August tells June to stop wasting her life and marry Neil. The custom of covering the beehives and the myth of Aristaeus focus on life after death. The Daughters of Mary feast and irreverent story about the drive-by funeral home lighten the somber episode.

Chapter 11

1. Explain the purpose of the Boatwrights' rituals after May's death.

The vigil, funeral, and covering the bees provide time to accept death. These rituals make the loss common knowledge in a respectful manner, support mourners, and share grief and memories. They prepare for the renewal of life.

Mary Day and the re-enactment of the Lady of Chains legend express the symbolic presence of the mother of Jesus. These celebrations unite believers, re-educate them and revive their faith joyfully. They are alternatives to endless grief.

2. This chapter concludes with the words, "Wading in up to my neck." What does this mean as a transition in Lily's life and the structure of the novel?

Lily told Zach about the time she was afraid to wade into deep water to save the fish strung around her neck. Lily warned Zach about becoming bitter and mean, like the boys who tormented her at the fish pond. After Zach admits his affection and gives her his dog tag, Lily's concluding remark implies she is not afraid to venture deeper into a love relationship despite the social difficulty for an interracial couple.

This transition signifies Lily's growing maturity. And it prepares for Chapter 12, when Lily finally asks August about her mother, Deborah.

Chapter 12

1. What kind of mood does the author establish by describing August's room as Lily waits to speak with her?

Lily is nervous about finally talking about her mother. Describing the room adds suspense by delaying the conversation. But the room is comforting because it is Lily's favorite color, blue. The objects are reminders of August's personality, interests and knowledge. They've become friends. Lily looks at a book about the Virgin Mary and learns that the lily is associated with the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of Jesus. Since the flower is Lily's namesake, she might hear good and important things about herself.

2. Lily realizes that her name is a symbol. Her middle name, Melissa, is also symbolic. Explain what Lily Melissa means and how these names relate to the themes of her story.

The lily is the symbol of the Virgin Mary, representing purity and innocence. Melissa means "honeybee." It refers to Greek mythology about the supreme god Zeus, who as an infant was nursed on honey by a nymph—a female spirit. The nymph Melissa discovered honey and taught humans its use.

The names suggest Lily's mother valued her child and the experience of motherhood. They refer to women's power to nurture and connect spiritually with nature and God.

3. Summarize what Lily now knows about Deborah and T. Ray that she didn't know when she left home. Identify motives and plot elements that are different from Lily's point of view.

Deborah grew up in Richmond, Virginia, but both her parents died by the time she was 21. Deborah had been young, motherless and lacked guidance herself. Deborah moved to South Carolina, met T. Ray and liked him because he was a war hero. She didn't like the peach farm, but got married because she was pregnant. By the time Lily was 4, Deborah was depressed and went to her former caregiver, August Boatwright, for solace. These events further explain why Lily couldn't remember her mother; Deborah was absent. Deborah was not solely focused on Lily as an endlessly loving and attentive mother. Her marriage was a mistake, and her alternatives were unclear. June Boatwright resented Deborah as a white woman of privilege who intruded on the black family.

T. Ray loved Deborah and treated her well. He tried to be a good husband and father. He took care of Lily and shielded her from the truth about her mother's flight and cause of death. But his anger and grief ruined his relationship with his daughter and made him abusive.

4. How does August help Lily accept the truth about her mother's abandonment?

August shares good memories of Deborah's childhood and marriage to T. Ray to temper Lily's disappointment. She speaks kindly and shares Lily's sadness. August has become a trustworthy and loving mother figure for Lily. She counsels Lily about human failings and resilience. Though Lily learns Deborah wasn't an ideal mother, other women have taken Deborah's place and love Lily too.

Chapter 13

1. What conflict is at the root of Lily's anger as she sits in front of the Mary statue?

When Lily blamed herself for her mother's fatal shooting, her conflict was internal. Now Lily confronts her mistaken judgment of her parents. Her conflict is with an unexpected antagonist, her deceased mother who abandoned her.

2. What insight does Rosaleen offer Lily about her mother? Compare this conversation with their dialogue in Chapter 2. How is Lily's reaction different now than in Chapter 2? Did Rosaleen do the right thing?

Rosaleen knew that Lily's mother had gone away, having overheard T. Ray and Mrs. Watson years ago. In Chapter 2, Lily insisted that abandonment wasn't possible and blamed T. Ray for her mother's unhappiness. Now Lily is receptive to the truth and wishes she had known earlier. But she blames her mother rather than idealizing her. Lily realizes that bitterness could spoil her life.

Opinions about Rosaleen's decision to spare Lily pain may vary. Was Lily too young to understand? Was Lily allowed to grow up loving her mother? Was it Rosaleen's role to tell Lily about Deborah? In Chapter 2, Rosaleen had her own worries about escaping from jail.

3. Compare the ceremony of Our Lady of Chains in Chapter 13 with the tale in Chapter 6. How is the narrative similar and different? Why would the author repeat this tale?

In Chapter 6, the story emphasizes that the slave who found the statue didn't know it represented Mary. The power of Mary's compassion becomes known as the statue escapes its chains to be with the people who need her.

In Chapter 13, the women celebrate Mary's ascent into heaven at the end of her life. They remove the chains themselves and identify with the completion of Mary's promise of salvation.

Repetition shows Lily's emotions and actions have changed in line with the meaning of the statue. In Chapter 6, she felt like an outsider and resisted the statue despite her neediness. Now she wants to reach beyond her obsession with her mother. Lily participates in preserving the statue and is content.

Note Lily's metaphor comparing the honey on her hands to gloves. Lily also treasured her mother's gloves, yet knew she was outgrowing them.

4. How does the author pace the denouement?

Lily's reconciliation with her mother begins with thinking about a miracle to raise Lily from emotional deadness. She's hoping to change. August arrives with a forgotten box of keepsakes, which creates surprise and suspense. Lily's panic indicates more internal conflict between idealism, guilt, anger and self-pity. Can Lily face reality?

Lily's feelings are altered by the tangible objects representing Deborah's life. The order of presentation is significant and sustains tension. Deborah's hair in the brush transcends death. Lily loves jewelry and literature; now she has her mother's. The Blake poem comments on Deborah's despair. Then finally, the photograph of Deborah with Lily as a baby attests to mother love.

Try imagining the objects' effect in a different order. For example, what if the photo came first, making the other items anticlimactic? Or the poetry book came last, ending on a tone of despair?

Chapter 14

1. Lily goes to the river to contemplate her new knowledge. What other episodes in the novel were set at a river? What meaning can you infer from this motif?

The novel uses rivers as a motif for transition and reconciliation. After leaving Sylvan, Rosaleen and Lily argued by a creek, then reconciled by bathing in it, signifying a new adult relationship. Lily waded in the river when she first arrived at the Boatwright property, relieved to be away from T. Ray. May sought peace by drowning in the river. Lily and Zach walked by the river when they kissed and admitted their affection.

2. What other events happened while Lily was preoccupied? What is the tone?

June and Neil planned their wedding. Rosaleen registered to vote. Zach enrolled at the white high school. The tone is understated, with melancholy tempering optimism.

3. August explains a unifying theme evident in the queenless bee hive and the parable of Beatrix and the Virgin Mary. State this theme in your own words.

Just as bees need a queen to regenerate the hive, and Mary took Beatrix's place in the convent while the nun dealt with her distress, people need a source of strength and resilience to survive.

4. What traits does Lily show when T. Ray finds her at the Boatwright house?

Lily controls her emotions and politely invites him inside. She lies to protect Rosaleen, but tells the truth about Deborah. Lily feels empathy for T. Ray over his lost love. She has the strength to resist his attack and subdue his rage. Lily has the maturity to apologize for causing trouble, yet insist on staying with the Boatwrights in order to live a better life.

She also can ask for the truth about her responsibility for her mother's death.

5. Compare what Lily longed for in Chapter 1 to her new life in Tiburon. What has she gained? What has she lost?

Lily has the love of several substitute mothers who guide her. Her new home is safe and comfortable, and she is no longer abused. She has a girlfriend and tentative boyfriend. She is strong enough to ignore the taunts of hostile classmates. She appreciates her writing talent and has ways to express her feelings. She has responsible work as a beekeeper.

Lily lost her ideal of perfect love. She lost a relationship with her father as well as her illusion that her mother was selflessly devoted. She lost her childish reliance on caregivers and obsessive self-pity. She understands cruelty that includes violence and death.

6. Why does the narration change from past tense to present tense at the end of this chapter? Compare this to the novel's beginning.

The sentence structure changes because Lily is living with August Boatwright in the autumn of 1964. Structurally, the entire novel has been a flashback of events that brought the protagonist to her new home. It echoes the novel's beginning, when Lily spoke in the present tense of "events in motion."

The Secret Life of Bees

Chapter 1

1. What is Lily longing for? What obstacles prevent Lily from getting what she desires? What are her conflicts?

2. What words and figurative images indicate the strength of Lily's feelings?

3. Explain the allusion to the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary.

4. Compare Lily's ideas about the bees to the angel. Identify how the bees and the angel serve as literary devices.

5. Compare Rosaleen's reaction to the bees to Lily's beliefs.

6. Describe Rosaleen's relationship to Lily.

7. Contrast T. Ray's reaction to the bees to Lily's beliefs.

8. Describe T. Ray's relationship to Lily.

9. Lily narrates this story in the first person, so readers know only what she observes, thinks and feels. List examples of things Lily does not know because of her limited point of view.

10. What traits of women are important to Lily? Rosaleen? T. Ray?

11. What traits of men are important to Lily? Rosaleen? T. Ray?

12. What is important to Rosaleen about her religious ritual in her home?

13. What is important in Brother Gerald's church? What does this imply about the church's religious ideals and its role in the social life of the town? Is there a conflict?

14. How does the author foreshadow Rosaleen's confrontation with the men at the gas station?

15. The novel begins with Lily's telling about the bees' arrival in the summer of 1964. As Chapter 1 continues, does Lily narrate events as they happen? Are events in chronological order? Cite language from the text to explain the time sequence of the story, and when time shifts occur.

16. An **epigraph** is a quotation at the beginning of a piece of writing that adds context to the text and reflects the author's theme. Explain how the epigraph at the top of the chapter relates to Lily, Rosaleen, and T. Ray.

Chapter 2

1. Lily doesn't understand why the men from the gas station call the policeman "Shoe." How would you explain the implications of this nickname to her?

2. Contrast Lily's expectations of the policeman to how he actually does his job. Be sure to cite examples. What kind of conflict is this?

3. What did T. Ray know about the men at the gas station that Lily and Rosaleen didn't know? What does this imply about T. Ray's character?

4. Lily's decision to leave home is a turning point. Has the author justified this transition on a rational or emotional basis?

5. What does Lily's decision to leave home and rescue Rosaleen reveal about her character?

6. How has Rosaleen changed? How does this affect Lily?

7. How does the creek help Lily and Rosaleen reconcile their conflict?

Chapter 3

1. What qualities does the narrator evoke by personifying nature as Eleanor Roosevelt?

2. Compare Brother Gerald's attitude toward Catholics to his church's treatment of black worshippers, as described in Chapter 1. Why is this attitude ironic?

3. Contrast Rosaleen's dream about the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the expectations of the white church.

4. What **impression** does Lily the narrator provide of the town of Tiburon?

5. Why does Lily expect to read about herself and Rosaleen in the newspaper? Why is she glad not to read about herself?

Chapter 4

1. Contrast August Boatwright's property and house to T. Ray's peach farm. How does Lily's impression of each setting affect her?

2. What feelings does Lily confront in herself after arriving at the Boatwright home?

3. Lily finds a note in the stone wall referring to "Birmingham, Sept 15, four little angels dead." Explain this **allusion**.

4. Describe Lily's **mood** at the river near the stone wall.

Chapter 5

1. The names of the “calendar sisters” have a connection more significant than the summer months. Briefly explain the meaning of the names May, June and August to identify this theme.

2. What character traits distinguish May, June and August Boatwright?

3. Why does August Boatwright agree to shelter Lily and Rosaleen? What conflict does this decision create?

4. What is the effect of watching the television news in the Boatwright house? How does the TV news function as a literary device in the narrative?

5. August calls her religious worship Orthodox Eclectic. What do those words mean?

6. Lily interprets the parable of the nun Beatrix as being about running away from home. From your reading of the parable, in what ways could Mary help Lily?

7. When August tells Lily about May and the wailing wall, Lily wonders whether telling her sorrows would ease her hurt. What answers does August's story imply?

Chapter 6

1. What does Neil and June's relationship tell Lily about love?

2. What elements of the story of Our Lady of Chains make it believable?

3. Compare the Lady of Chains to the parable of Mary and Beatrix in Chapter 5. What themes do they have in common?

4. How are the Daughters of Mary different from the women in Lily's church back in Sylvan?

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2. This chapter concludes with the words, "Wading in up to my neck." What does this mean as a transition in Lily's life and the structure of the novel?

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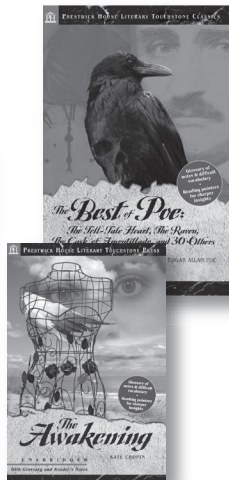
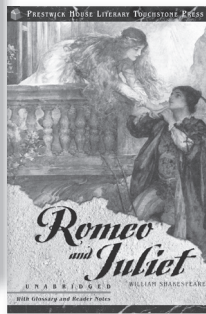
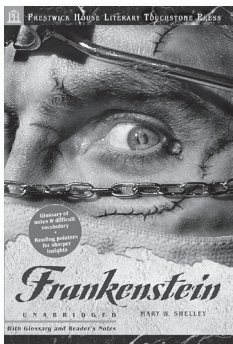
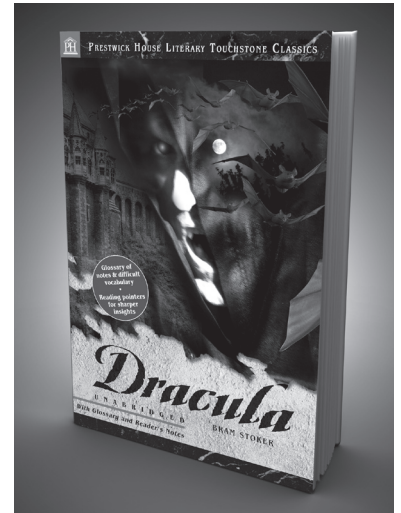
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