

# ***The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (Published by Penguin)**

Approved for use in Honors Communication Arts II and Communication Arts II

## **Summary**

Spunky 14-year-old Lily Owen and her black nanny, Rosaleen, flee their world of an abusive father and racial volatility of small town South Carolina in 1964. Armed with the feeblest of memories and a picture of a black Madonna, they find the quirky and loving world of three beekeeping sisters. As Lily discovers the complexity of beekeeping, she allegorically finds the home and family she's longed for and gains insight into the nuances of adolescence, family, race, and motherhood.

## **Connection to the Curriculum**

This fictional novel does a superb job of teaching foreshadowing and allegory with Kidd's addition of an outside quote on the art of beekeeping to introduce each chapter. This book allows students to inject emotion into their existing knowledge on the civil rights movement as they watch Rosaleen's heartbreaking journey to vote. Lily's decisions (and their consequences) fluctuate, and varied tones and moods accompany them. Beyond the large beekeeping motif, many symbols, idioms, and breathtaking images invite interpretation. While heroes remain central to the sophomore communication arts experience, Lily offers readers a confident female protagonist to freshen the romantic hero role. Students will see depth of character and breadth in point of view as they float between laughter and sympathy. Featuring historic realism and a punchy narrator, the novel's use of powerful characters and their beliefs will ultimately challenge sophomore readers to further define their own.

## **Standards**

### **Course Objectives (Benchmarks)**

**Reading:** 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text

**Writing:** 3- The students write effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

### **Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)**

#### **Reading:**

1.2.1- The student adjusts reading rate to support comprehension when reading narrative texts.

1.3.5- The student identifies, interprets, and analyzes the use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, and symbolism.

1.4.9- The student uses prior knowledge, content, and text type features to make, revise, and confirm predictions.

1.4.12- The student analyzes and evaluates how authors use text structures to help achieve their purposes.

1.4.17- The student analyzes themes, tones, and the author's point of view using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.

#### **Literature:**

2.1.2- The student analyzes the historical, social, and cultural contextual aspects of the setting and its influence on characters and events in the story.

2.1.4- The student analyzes themes, tone, and the author's point of view across a variety of literary works and genres using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.

2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices in a text.

#### **Writing:**

3.4.10- The student writes a cohesive piece with a clear introduction, well-developed ideas, and an insightful conclusion.

3.4.11- The student uses transitions to connect ideas within and between paragraphs.

3.4.12- The student uses sequence that is logical and effective within each paragraph as well as within the entire written piece.

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)  
*The Secret Life of Bees* traces the journey of a young woman who has witnessed the death of her mother (at the hands of her father) and who also suffers from abusive treatment. These situations result in some limited violence in the book including child abuse and mild profanity. One of the beekeepers suffers from mental illness and eventually commits suicide. The book also deals with religious exploration (as she searches for answers about her mother through a picture of a black Madonna) and race relations. Lily comes to realize that a mother's love is not bound by either race or biological connections.

## **AP Connections**

The rich motifs and symbols found in this novel provide honors students the opportunity to examine this stylistic device and its effect on the writing. This skill is essential for students advancing to AP III their junior year.

## **Additional Unit Design Connections**

Coming soon