Study Guide Questions for *The Secret Life of Bees*

1. What does the narrator (Lily) seem to long for at the very start of the novel?

2. What year did the bees come?

3. Who is Rosaleen?

4. Who is T Ray?

5. What about the name T Ray suggests anything about the relationship between Lily and T Ray?

6. How old was Lily when her mother died?

7. What about Lily’s mom’s death is alluded to on p. 3?

8. Describe the relationship between T Ray and Snout.

9. How is that relationship (question 8) different from that of T Ray and Lily’s?

10. How did Lily’s mother die?

11. Describe the setting of the story.

12. What id Lily hope to get from charm school and what really happened?

13. Describe the relationship between Lily and Rosaleen.

14. What items did Lily find in the attic?

15. What dreams did Lily have for her future? Who influenced these dreams?

16. What on t.v. had Rosaleen so interested?

17. What is the Martha White punishment?

18. Why did Rosaleen go into town on the 4th of July?

19. What did Rosaleen take from the church?

20. Why did Rosaleen get arrested?

Explain the meaning of the chapter 1 *epigram as it relates to the first chapter of the novel.

*epigram: is a brief, clever, and usually memorable statement
21. Who caused Rosaleen’s head injury and why?

22. Describe the exchange between Lily and T Ray the evening after he picked her up from jail.

23. Explain the simile “like I was making an inner tube that might keep me afloat.”

24. Lily describes herself as having “such a moment right then….” (41) And then goes on to say she heard a voice say “Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open.” Explain the significance of that revelation.

25. How was Lily able to get into Rosaleen’s hospital room undetected?

26. Why was Lily so insistent that Rosaleen leave the hospital?

27. Where does Lily plan to go once she and Rosaleen leave the hospital?

28. When Lily shows Rosaleen the picture that says Tiburon, S. Carolina on it, what does Rosaleen comment on?

29. In Lily’s desperate search for Rosaleen, she notices a tree. Explain what connection she makes between that tree and life?

Explain the meaning of chapter 2’s epigram as it relates to the chapter.

30. What problem do Lily and Rosaleen confront when trying to figure out food and lodging?

31. Lily finds herself making choices based on signs she interprets. What is she trying to decide based on seeing the crop duster flying over the crops in Tiburon?

32. What does Lily steal from the store and why?

33. What on the honey jar gets Lily’s attention?

34. Who is August Boatwright?

Explain the significance of the epigram for chapter 3.

35. Describe June and May Boatwright.
36. Describe the experience Lily has once she sets her eyes on the statue of the black Mary.

37. Describe August Boatwright.

38. What surprised Lily about what she revealed to August?

39. What appears odd about May’s behavior?

40. What reason does Lily give August for running away?

41. Where did Lily and Rosaleen stay while with the Boatwright sisters?

42. Lily thinks of a metaphor for spinners… explain it. (77)

43. What let Lily know she had some prejudice built in her?

44. Describe the stone wall.

Explain the significance of the epigram for chapter 4.

45. What was the mystery of “Oh Susanna?”

46. What were May’s talents?

47. What were June’s talents?

48. What did Lily overhear June and August talk about one night on the back porch?

49. Explain the reverse discrimination Lily felt while she listened to the aforementioned conversation.

50. What is the significance of the Beatrix story for Lily?

51. Explain the purpose of the pieces of paper stuck into the stone wall.

52. How and why did April die?

53. What is the historical event that took place on Sept. 15 in Birmingham?

54. What does Lily put in the wall?

Explain the significance of the epigram for chapter 5.
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55. Who is Neil?

56. Who are the Daughters of Mary?

57. August says, “Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can’t remember who we are or why we’re here” in reference to Our Lady of Chains, but how does this quote also apply to Lily?

58. Who is Obadiah?

59. According to the legend, why was it assumed that the statue was that of Jesus’ mother, Mary?

60. Why was the statue called Our Lady of Chains?

61. What was the “amazing secret” Lily stumbled upon?

62. Why is August critical of the NASA mission?

Explain the significance of chapter 6’s epigram.

Anticipate what might happen in chapter 7 based on the epigram.

63. Who is Zach Taylor?

64. Both Zach and Lily question the prospects of their futures, but for different reasons. What are those reasons?

65. Why does Lily break down crying with Zach?

66. Why was Rosaleen leaving the honey house?

67. What is significant about the book August began to read?

68. What are Neil and June fighting about?

69. What gift did Zach bring Lily?

Anticipate what might happen in Chapter 8 based on the epigram.

70. Why does August use the Black Madonna on her honey jars?
71. What educational background do June and August have?

72. August tells Lily, “I’m not against marrying…..I’m just against __________.” (145)

73. Why did August paint her house bright pink?

74. Explain the title of the book as it applies to the story lines.

75. What event surrounded the arrival of Jack Palance?

76. Explain the disconnection between Lily’s imaginary beach scene with her father and the real phone conversation they have.

77. What one question does Lily ask her father and what’s his response?

78. What upset Lily about the Father’s Day card she made him when she was nine?

79. To whom does Lily pay a visit the night she goes to the house to use the bathroom?

Anticipate what might happen in chapter 9 based on the epigram.

80. What playful event broke the tension between June and Lily?

81. What event made Lily believe even stronger that her mother may have been in the pink house?

82. What is May’s reaction to Lily’s question about Deborah Fontanel and why is it significant?

83. What is the reason Lily gives to explain the weird dream she has about her mom being part roach?

84. What prevents Lily from telling August the truth?

85. How did May learn about Zach’s arrest?

86. What foreshadowing occurs at the end of chapter 9 by the imagery of its last line?

Anticipate events in chapter 10 based on the epigram.

87. Choose two lines from the chapter that builds the suspense leading to the discovery of May. Explain.

88. What is significant about the connection Lily makes between May and Our Lady?
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89. What is a vigil and what is its purpose?

90. What request does Lily make of May?

91. What were the circumstances surrounding the release of Zach from jail?

92. Why does Zach blame himself for what happened to May?

93. What was the reason behind covering the bee hives?

94. What does August explain is the reason for rituals?

95. What impression is given to the reader about the vigil?

96. Why is June afraid to marry Neil?

97. What is significant about the bees buzzing around the day of May’s burial?

Anticipate events in chapter 11 based on the epigram.

98. How much time has past since Lily ran away from home?

99. How had Zach changed since his arrest?

100. Why couldn’t June go for a ride with Neil?

101. What happened that later allowed her to go?

102. Why is it significant that August answered about Lily’s favorite color before she could tell the lady offering to make her a hat?

103. What story does Lily reveal to Zach about the boys back home?

104. What is the metaphor expressed by both Lily and Zach from her terrible experience?

105. What same poem did Lily and her mother have to learn for school?

106. Explain the quote, “August chewed more than she bit off.” (244)

107. Who is Tica Tee?

Explain the significance of chapter 12’s epigram.
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Chapter 13

108. What question about her mother torments Lily?

109. What is the reason that the Daughters spread honey all over the statue?

110. What items (be specific) does August share with Lily?

111. What do the poetry lines reveal about Deborah’s marriage to T Ray?

112. What one item that August shares, helps heal Lily’s broken heart?

Chapter 14

113. “People in general would rather die than __________.”

114. What new venture was Zach undertaking in the fall?

115. What does a queenless colony look like?

116. From whom does August say Lily can get her strength, consolation, and rescue?

117. What is the only purpose grand enough for human life?

118. How did T Ray find Lily?

119. What item on Lily caught T Ray’s attention and why?

120. What utterance snapped T Ray out of his trance?

121. What finally made T Ray decide to leave Lily with the women?

122. Who is Clayton and how is he helping Lily and Rosaleen?

123. Who is the wall keeper and why?