

## The Secret Life of Bees

1. Were you surprised to learn that T. Ray used to be different, that once he truly loved Deborah? How do you think Deborah's leaving affected him? Did it shed any light on why T. Ray was so cruel and abusive to Lily?
2. Had you ever heard of "kneeling on grits"? What qualities did Lily have that allowed her to survive, endure, and eventually thrive, despite T. Ray?
3. Who is the queen bee in this story?
4. Lily's relationship to her dead mother was complex, ranging from guilt to idealization, to hatred, to acceptance. What happens to a daughter when she discovers her mother once abandoned her? Is Lily right—would people generally rather die than forgive? Was it harder for Lily to forgive her mother or herself?
5. Lily grew up without her mother, but in the end she finds a house full of them. Have you ever had a mother figure in your life who wasn't your true mother? Have you ever had to leave home to find home?
6. What compelled Rosaleen to spit on the three men's shoes? What does it take for a person to stand up with conviction against brutalizing injustice? What did you like best about Rosaleen?
7. Had you ever heard of the Black Madonna? What do you think of the story surrounding the Black Madonna in the novel? How would the story be different if it had been a picture of a white Virgin Mary? Do you know women whose lives have been deepened or enriched by a connection to an empowering Divine Mother?
8. Why is it important that women come together? What did you think of the "Calendar Sisters" and the Daughters of Mary? How did being in the company of this circle of females transform Lily?

9. May built a wailing wall to help her come to terms with the pain she felt. Even though we don't have May's condition, do we also need "rituals," like wailing walls, to help us deal with our grief and suffering?
10. How would you describe Lily and Zach's relationship? What drew them together? Did you root for them to be together?
11. Project into the future. Does Lily ever see her father again? Does she become a beekeeper? A writer? What happens to Rosaleen? What happens to Lily and Zach? Who would Zach be today?

Adapted from [www.us.penguin.com](http://www.us.penguin.com)

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