



The Secret Life of Bees: Mentor Guide

By
The F.I.L.M. Project
Finding Inspiration in Literature & Movies

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youthFILMproject.org

The Secret Life of Bees official website:
www.foxsearchlight.com/thesecretlifeofbees

Introduction

The young people in your life have an amazing opportunity to grow and mature through inspiring stories told on film. The F.I.L.M. (Finding Inspiration in Literature & Movies) Project captures the learning potential in movies and provides guides like this one for you to help young people develop.

The F.I.L.M. Project is a free resource of movie guides for mentors, teachers, parents and leaders of young people to accompany movies with meaningful messages. F.I.L.M. guides provide the ability to share and explore ideas through reading passages, discussion prompts and activities based on themes found in Truly Moving Picture award-winning movies.

What are Truly Moving Picture award-winning movies? Simply put, they are movies that celebrate the triumph of the human spirit. They are movies that can help make the world a better place. They are movies that meet an intricate balance of thought-provoking, inspiring and humanly triumphant criteria. They are movies worthy of this Heartland Truly Moving Picture award designation:



You'll see it in print advertisements for movies, on official movie Websites, and on DVD boxes.

There is so much to learn from movies with inspiring stories, and knowing what those movies are is not always easy in this world saturated with choices. That's why there is Heartland Truly Moving Pictures - the organization that produces the Truly Moving Picture award program and the F.I.L.M. Project.

At Heartland, we believe that in a world filled with negatives, there's still a place for the positive. We support films that celebrate the triumph of the human spirit. We believe these films are the perfect antidote to the negativity, uncertainty and anxiety that are all too common in modern society, and particularly in the lives of innocent children.

When you are looking for films with inspiring messages for both adults and young people, look for ones with the Heartland Truly Moving Pictures award logo on them. For a complete list of Truly Moving Pictures, visit trulymovingpictures.org.

Thank you for taking an interest in movies that can help inspire young people to new heights, and in movies that can help make the world a better place. Enjoy the movie, and all the fun you will have with it afterwards.

Respectfully yours,

The FILM team

How To Use This Guide

1. This guide is designed for use after watching the movie. It is helpful to read through the guide beforehand to get an idea of what the story is about to be prepared for the discussion and activities afterwards.

Watching a movie with youth people doesn't have to be a challenge. Here are some ways you can find and enjoy a Heartland Truly Moving Picture:

- **Visit the website.** Go to www.youthFILMproject.org to find a list of Heartland Truly Picture award-winning movies and their accompanying F.I.L.M. guides.
- **Go to a library.** Visit your local library and check out a Heartland Truly Moving Picture to watch at school, a youth facility, church or in the library (where capability is available). Taking young people to the library is a positive way to spend time together, and you can check out the book while you are there too.
- **Visit a rental or discount store.** Renting a movie is certainly costs less than going to one in the theater. Also, rental and discount stores often carry used movies for sale at a lower price if its one you'd like to add to your movie collection or give away.
- **Go to a movie theater.** If going to the movie theater is feasible for you to do with your young people, great! Getting to go to the movies can be a very special outing for young people if circumstances allow it. Daytime matinee tickets typically cost less than tickets for evening show times, and you can also watch for Heartland Truly Moving Pictures playing at your local discount theater.

2. After watching the movie, go through the F.I.L.M. guide together -- reading, talking, reflecting, sharing and exploring all the fun and interesting aspects from the story. This experience helps enrich the time you spend together and helps expand young people's knowledge and understanding of their world.

3. Please share with us your experience using F.I.L.M. guides at www.youthFILMproject.org. Your valuable feedback helps us continue to offer more programming for the benefit of young people.

The Story

The Secret Life of Bees

Rated PG-13

Runtime: 110 minutes

Starring: Dakota Fanning, Queen Latifah, Jennifer Hudson, Alicia Keys

The Secret Life of Bees is based on the bestselling book by Sue Monk Kidd. The movie released in theaters October 17, 2008 and to DVD on February 3, 2009.

Synopsis of the Book and Movie

Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the touching story of Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning) as she leaves her troubled life in pursuit of her deceased mother's past. Accompanied by her caretaker, Rosaleen (Jennifer Hudson), the two seek shelter in the Boatwright home, a family of three intelligent, talented African-American sisters who manage their own honey business.

In this new home, Lily begins to confront her guilt and pain over the loss of her real mother, whom she accidentally killed as a small child. Yet, troubles continue as the harsh realities of a still racially segregated South confront Lily and her new friend, Zach. In spite of numerous challenges that face Lily and the Boatwright sisters, Lily realizes that love and happiness are possible, even if it requires leaving home. *The Secret Life of Bees* touches on many powerful themes including the importance of love and home, the consequences of secrets, finding courage, learning about the Civil Rights Movement, and valuing empowered women.

Getting Started

Together or to each other, read the following excerpts from the book *The Secret Life of Bees* and the other information, and talk about what you have read. As in the movie, the book is narrated from the voice of the main character Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning).

Use the additional information and activities to enhance the learning experience and have fun.

Part 1: All About Bees

Symbolism

Understanding the way bees live reveals their symbolism in the story.

“Honeybees are social insects and live in colonies. Each colony is a family unit, comprising a single, egg-laying female or queen and her many sterile daughters called workers. The workers cooperate in the food-gathering, nest-building and rearing the offspring. Males are reared only at the time of year when their presence is required.” (p. 67)*

Discuss: *What symbolism do you see in the bees and the characters in the story?*

Livelihood

Bees are not only responsible for the flowers we grow and fruits we eat, but they also produce a variety of products that humans use.

“We lived for honey. We swallowed a spoonful in the morning to wake us up and one at night to put us to sleep. We took it with every meal to calm the mind, give us stamina, and prevent fatal disease. We swabbed ourselves in it to disinfect cuts or heal chapped lips. It went in our baths, our skin cream, our raspberry tea and biscuits. Nothing was safe from honey. In one week my skinny arms and legs began to plump out and the frizz in my hair turned to silken waves. August said honey was the ambrosia of the gods and the shampoo of goddesses.” (p. 84)*

Discuss: *Why did they use honey in so many ways?*

Fear

Many people get nervous around a buzzing bee, fearful of getting stung. Yet Lily is not and embraces their secret and productive life - much like the one she is living. In a conversation with August, August remarks,

“Most people don’t have any idea about all the complicated life going on inside a hive. Bees have a secret life we don’t know anything about.” (p. 148)*

Discuss: *What secrets was Lily holding, and why?*

* Sue Monk Kid. *The Secret Life of Bees*. 2002. Penguin Books. New York, New York

Part 1: All About Bees

Fun Facts

Throughout the story Lily learns some of the bees' secrets, such as the power the Queen bee possesses and the roles that other bees play. Read these intriguing facts* about bees to learn how truly special they are to the world.

- There are nearly 20,000 species of bees in nine recognized families, though many are not catalogued and there are probably more!
- Honeybees live in hives or colonies. A small hive contains about 20,000 bees, while some larger hives may have over 100,000 bees. Hives include one queen, hundreds of drones, and thousands of worker bees.
- The worker bees are female, but they do not breed. The queen bee is female and creates all the babies for the hive! The drone bees are male and do not have stingers.
- Bees communicate with each other about food sources using dances. The sounds from the movement of the bees are picked up by the tiny hairs on the bee's head. Bees without stingers communicate only by sounds.
- The honeybee's hive has cells made of wax. This is where the queen bee lays her eggs. She can lay 2000 eggs in one day during spring and 1000-1500 during foraging season.
- Bees could travel as many as 55,000 miles and visit more than 2 million flowers to gather enough nectar to make just one pound of honey.
- Most bees gather only pollen or nectar. As she sucks the nectar from the flower, it is stored in her second stomach ready to be transferred to the honey-making bees in the hive. If hungry she opens a valve in the nectar "sac" and a portion of the payload passes through to her own stomach to be converted to energy for her own needs.
- When her nectar "sacs" are full, the honeybee returns to the hive. Nectar is delivered to one of the indoor bees and is then passed mouth-to-mouth from bee to bee until its moisture content is reduced from about 70% to 20%. This changes the nectar into honey.
- The bee is a wonderful flying machine and can carry a load of nectar or pollen close to her own weight.
- When a bee stings, the stinger, poison sac and several others parts of the bee's anatomy are torn from the bee's body, and it soon dies.

**The Secret Life of Bees* Production Notes. (2008). Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

Part 1: All About Bees

Contribution

In addition to bees, think about what other animals produce food or products for human consumption. Make a list of them in the chart below. A few are listed to get you started.

Product(s)	Animal	How is it made?
Eggs	Chickens	They lay them
Wool		
Silk		
Leather		
Pearls		

Part 2: Independent Thinking

Courage

Rosaleen was determined to register to vote, and she was very courageous in her efforts to do so. Rosaleen and Lily had conflicted emotions when they learned the Civil Rights Act had been passed.

“I looked over at Rosaleen, who sat there shaking her head, mumbling, ‘Lord have mercy,’ just looking so disbelieving and happy, like people on television when they answered the \$64,000 questions.

I didn’t know whether to be excited for her or worried. All people ever talked about after church were the Negroes and whether they’d get their civil rights. Who was winning – the white people’s team or the colored people’s team? Like it was a do-or-die contest. When that minister from Alabama, Reverend Martin Luther King, got arrested last month in Florida for wanting to eat in a restaurant, the men at church acted like the white people’s team had won the pennant race. I knew they would not take this new lying down, not in one million years.” (pp. 20-21)*

Discuss: *Why is Lily conflicted?*

The Secret Life of Bees takes place in 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was signed by President Johnson. This comprehensive piece of legislation represented years of African-American organizing, non-violent actions and perseverance in courts to gain equal rights under law. This passage not only indicates Lily’s disbelief at the new changes that will occur, but also the fear that it will take time to be accepted. Much of the success of the movement for equal rights can be attributed to the non-violent methods that the leader, Martin Luther King Jr. espoused. King believed that violent action to overcome violent action is often counterproductive. In his words,

**“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”**
(King, 1964)

As cited in Willie, Ridini & Willard (2008). *Grassroots Social Action: Lessons in People Power Movements*

* Sue Monk Kid. *The Secret Life of Bees*. 2002. Penguin Books. New York, New York

Part 2: Independent Thinking

Prejudice

It can be hard to admit one's own assumptions or prejudices towards certain groups of people. Even worse is to be the subject of prejudice or stereotyping. Lily comes to realize that her own preconceptions about black people were wrong.

“T. Ray did not think colored women were smart. Since I want to tell the whole truth, which means the worst parts, I thought they could be smart, but not as smart as me, me being white. Lying on the cot in the honey house, though, all I could think was August is so intelligent, so cultured, and I was surprised by this. That’s what let me know I had some prejudice buried inside me.” (p. 78)*

Discuss: *What has enabled Lily to begin to develop different ideas about black people?*

Stereotyping

Lily is amazed to see three African-American sisters living independently, thriving off their own business. It may not be shocking to us today, but in the 1960s due to racial segregation and gender limitations, it was uncommon to see a black female-run business in the South. Even Lily, and being a white girl, is hindered from pursuing her dreams.

“What kind of person is against reading? I think he believed it would stir up ideas of college, which he thought a waste of money for girls, even if they did, like me, score the highest number a human being can get on their verbal aptitude test.” (p. 15)*

Discuss: *Who is Lily referring to here, and why do you think he felt this way?*

* Sue Monk Kid. *The Secret Life of Bees*. 2002. Penguin Books. New York, New York

Part 3: Inspiration

Your Future

What do you like to do? Do you enjoy music, cooking, drawing, helping people, or playing a particular sport? With determination and hard work, you can be successful at anything you want to do – start a band, open a restaurant, sell a product like the Boatwrights, go to college, start a community organization, play a competitive sport, or whatever you dream to do.

Activity:

Think about a business you would like to have and visualize what it would be and what you would call it. As the Boatwrights used the image of the black Madonna for the logo for their business, create a logo or slogan for your business to express what you want to do. Let these be an expression of you and your dreams.

My business:	
Name of my business:	
My business logo/slogan:	

Part 3: Inspiration

Role Models

Lily found female role models that helped guide her through painful memories towards a better future. She needed these strong women to show her that happiness and success are possible for a woman. Lily indicates that one of her teachers had a big impact on her aspirations.

“Up until Mrs. Henry came along, I’d believed beauty college would be the upper limit of my career. Once, studying her face, I told her if she was my customer, I would give her a French twist that would do wonders for her, and she said – and I quote – ‘Please Lily, you are insulting your fine intelligence. Do you have any idea how smart you are? You could be a professor or a writer with actual books to your credit. Beauty school. Please.’” (pp.15-16)*

Discuss: *Why did Lily think she wasn’t capable of higher achievements before knowing Mrs. Henry and her sisters?*

Gratitude

Can you think of a person like Mrs. Henry who inspired you to try something new or aspire to greater heights? How did that make you feel?

Activity:

Express your thanks to this person whom you feel has made a positive impact on your life. It could be a relative, teacher, mentor, neighbor, or friend. Write a short letter, send an email, draw a picture, make a phone call, whatever method works for you. Thank this person for being a positive role model and for the encouragement he or she has given you. Recognizing the positive things in your life and expressing gratitude for them is the best way to succeed.

* Sue Monk Kid. *The Secret Life of Bees*. 2002. Penguin Books. New York, New York