

Annotation for *The Secret Life of Bees*

Lily Owen's mother was accidentally shot and killed when Lily was four. As the novel opens, we learn it was Lily herself who allegedly pulled the trigger. Unconvinced that she could have done such a thing, and believing her abusive father might just be lying to her, Lily runs away from home with her African-American nanny to search for her mother. They follow the only clue Lily has about her mother which is a picture of a Black Madonna with the words, "Tiburon, South Carolina" written on the back. Together Lily and her nanny find the source of this picture – the home of three African-American sisters who run a business selling a brand of honey called Black Madonna. These women take Lily and her nanny in and while living with them, Lily learns the truth about her mother, the meaning and importance of love, lessons on racism in America, and even more about herself.

This book is recommended for teens and adults who appreciate unhurried, sensitive stories with much emotion. While males can certainly enjoy the novel, it is a true winner for female audiences.

Review of *The Secret Life of Bees*

In her first novel, Sue Monk Kidd delivers an exceptionally well-written story about a fourteen year old girl's coming of age. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, we meet a teenage girl suffering from neglect, and searching for love. As Lily begins her journey, the reader also begins a sojourn that teaches about human nature and relationships.

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This novel offers the reader so much about life in the South of the 1960s when the civil rights movement was strengthening. It also offers a great deal about what it means to love and be loved. The book's themes are wide-ranging and all are handled deeply with tremendous sensitivity. The author writes beautifully. It is a pleasure to become immersed in her flowing, descriptive style. The book makes you feel good about life.

Some readers might find the novel a bit too slowly paced. While reading one wants to know exactly what happened in Lily's past and it takes the entire novel to answer that question. Additionally, the author spends a lot of time on the Black Madonna image and connected rituals that some local women in Tiburon practice. Some of this was excessive and readers may find it a bit boring.

Overall, this book deserves four stars. *The Secret Life of Bees* is simply an excellent novel that makes the reader more conscious of the beauty of our relationships and our language. Lily's growth and realizations inspire us to deepen our connections with others. And readers might also appreciate bees and honey in ways they never considered before.

-- Suzanne Valenza