

INFORMATIVE— LITERARY ESSAY

A Family's Bee Nest

The hot, dry summer of South Carolina is the setting in Sue Monk Kidd's *Secret Life of Bees*. The story tells of Lily Owens, a young girl growing up in the South in the midst of the Civil Rights movement. After a series of racist and hateful acts towards Lily and her black housekeeper, Rosaleen, they decide to run off together to start a new life away from Lily's Father T. Ray. Soon Lily and Rosaleen find themselves in a small town called Tiburon. They are taken in by a trio of bee keeping and honey selling sisters, who soon create a close bond with the runaways. After some tragic heart-breaking events, Lily learns that family is one of the most important parts of life, whether they are actually related to you or not.

The theme of family and its importance is strong throughout the whole text, but there are some certain parts of the book that speak about it and support it the most. "Honeybees depend not only on physical contact with the colony, but also require its social companionship and support. Isolate a honeybee from her sisters and she will soon die." (136) This quote is from the beginning of a chapter and is used metaphorically to relate to the story. This quote talks about how honeybees, which in the case of this story relates to humans, cannot survive without family around them. It is stating that dependence upon family members is an essential part of life and that one cannot survive happily without it.

This relates directly to my theme and supports it as one of the topics of this book. "August layed the note down and turned to June. She opened her arms wide and June walked into them." (210) This quote is from right after August and June's sister May kills herself. They had just read her final good-bye note and are very saddened by it. Almost everyone knows how hard it can be to lose a family member, but having people who love you around you can always help out. This is just more proof that family is so important and that your family will always be there for you when you are feeling down.

Another quality of having family is learning to trust one another. While gaining trust in each other, some fights and disputes may ensue. An example in *Secret Life of Bees* that shows this is from when Lily learns about her mother from August. "'You knew she was my mother all along.' I said, uncertain whether I felt anger, or betrayal, or just plain surprise." (235) When Lily learns that August had known her mother for a long time, she is very upset that August had never mentioned it before. Lily begins to feel unsure about whether she can trust August and cannot control her feelings. Eventually, August comforts Lily and she finds even more trust in her newly adopted mother. This an example of how one person may betray or lie to another person, but family bonds and love

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for one another will always prevail. This is just another reason why family and trust is a main theme in this story.

One last quality that is important to family is defending and sticking up for one another. "T. Ray needed a face-saving way to hand me over, and August was giving it to him." (298) This quote is from when T. Ray, Lily's father, comes to Tiburon and tries to take Lily home with force. August and June then over hear the commotion and stand up for Lily. This part shows that love is a strong bond and that family is not meant to be broken apart. In the beginning of the story, August

and June take in Lily and Rosaleen to their home because they feel sorry. But very soon the two sisters create a loving bond with the castaways, and it is shown here when August convinces T. Ray to leave Lily with her.

The *Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd is a great story overall. Its realistic plot, setting, and characters can relate to almost every reader in some sort of way. The story shows how family and trusting is a key component to a happy life, which is a great lesson for anyone to learn. Lily goes through some difficult changes and loses some family members along the way of her journey, but in the end she learns that family is one of the most important parts of a happy life.