

## Approved for use in English IV

### Summary of the Work:

In Sylvan, South Carolina, (1964) fourteen-year-old Lily Owens has spent the last ten years growing up without a mother. Her mother's death was somewhat mysterious, and while she isn't able to remember the exact details of her death, she blames herself for the loss of her mother. Lily's father, T. Ray, is the epitome of an abusive, egotistical father. He too blames Lily for Deborah's death, and as a result, he treats his daughter as a mere servant in her own home.

Fed up with the verbal and physical abuse, and longing for the memory of her mother, Lily leaves T. Ray behind and sets out on a quest to find her mother's past. The only clue Lily possesses is a picture of a Black Madonna with the words Tiburon, S. Carolina, on the back. Lily's clue leads her to the Boatwright sisters. The three Black women take Lily in and the process of discovery and growth begins. Through their love and support, Lily is able to forgive herself and realize the love her mother shared for her.

### Rationale:

*The Secret Life of Bees* is a great opportunity for students to further study America's Civil Rights Movement. The turmoil of racial prejudice is the backdrop for the novel's setting. It adds to both the internal and external conflict Lily Owens experiences. The novel promotes the value of tolerance and acceptance, while illustrating the destructive force hate propagates.

The language is beautiful and poetic. The author uses great technique in her writing, such as many examples of figurative language, epigraphs, and symbols. The novel is a good example of regional writing. Through Lily's experience, the reader can apply the hero quest pattern to a work of contemporary literature.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- *Booklist*. December 1, 2001.
  - *Library Journal*. December 1, 2001.
  - *Publishers Weekly*. November 12, 2001.
  - *Wilson's Fiction*. April 4, 2004.
  - *New York Times*. May 5, 2003
  - V.O.Y.A. August, 1, 2002.
- <http://www.suemonkidd.com/Author.aspx>

\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

### Noted Distinction:

- (2004) Book Sense Paperback Book of the Year

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: 840
- Readability Level: 7.2

### Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

### Standard Alignment: *(link)*

### Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: May 2005

### Notes on the Text:

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

The novel is appropriate for mature readers as the themes of the novel deals with sensitive issues such as racism and abuse. The Boatwright sisters also practice a hybrid form of Christianity.

The novel is an excellent source to frame the Civil Rights Movement of 1964, which has cross-curricular ties to the seniors' American Government course.

### Connection to the Curriculum:

The novel connects to the curriculum as students will recognize and understand conventions and devices used by the author to present ideas and themes. For example, the writing style provides outstanding examples of figurative language. The hero quest and hero traits are also a focal point of the unit.

### Additional Connections:

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*

Civil Rights Movement

-A Time for Justice: America's Civil Rights Movement (Film at HHS Library)