

# The secret life of bees analysis

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In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the main character, Lily Owens. The story takes place in the fictitious town of Sylvan, South Carolina where Lily Owens lives with her abusive father whom she calls T-Ray. Lily Owens, seeks refuge in Tiburon, South Carolina, in a house with three black women. Lily decides to run away from home to save her friend Rosaleen, from further abuse, and to discover more about her mother's past. Through the course of the book, Lily experiences events that will forever impact her life. Without a doubt, the main character, Lily Owens, has changed morally, psychologically, and intellectually.

When the novel begins, Lily is an innocent, young girl that is living with her father, T. ray. Lily has lived with the shame of accidentally killing her mother, Deborah, when she was a toddler her entire lifetime. Lily presents the ideal image of a typical teenage girl, giving in to propriety and just trying to live a normal life. She is very imaginative and innovative, for instance she can think up swarms of bees wandering in her room at night. I would consider her depressed since she bears the responsibility of her mother's death. This quote, " Just put it out of your head Lily. It was an accident. You didn't mean to do it..." (pg 3), clearly expresses Lily's guilt.

After T. Ray tells Lily that Deborah, her mother, was planning to leave them both, Lily begins to change dramatically. He claims the only reason Lily's mother returned was to pick up her things before moving on. This idea of her mother not loving her deeply disturbs Lily , causing a sense of doubt to brew up inside of her. This quote, " I sat on the edge of the bed, replaying his words over and over. Each time there was a wrench in what felt like my heart. I don't know how long I sat there broken to pieces..." (pg 40),

obviously displays her uncertainty. She does not want to believe T. Ray, however his words haunt her, Lily is no longer satisfied with the story she has always believed in about her mother, now Lily wishes to find out the truth.

After leaving T. Ray and living with the Boatwright sisters, Lily becomes a mature young woman. She may be considered precocious, due to the fact she has been able to cope with the death of May, and deal with the truth about her mother. Lily has developed mentally and psychologically. She is mature enough to forgive her mother for her past mistakes and is able to deal with the truth more properly. Before this point, Lily was very childish.

She was unable to control her anger. This quote, " I threw every last jar on the table, until the honey was splattered everywhere, flung like cake batter from electric beaters. I stood in a gooey room full of broken glass, and I didn't care. My mother had left me. Who cared about honey on the walls?" (pg 259), shows her uncontrollable frustration. By the end of the novel, most of this anger dissipates. Lily becomes a more understanding, grateful, and loving person. She is sympathetic of her mother's mistakes. Lily's change in heart exhibits her inner development throughout the novel.

I noticed three major themes in *The Secret Life of Bees* that are indicators that the novel is a bildungsroman. Racism is a significant theme; it is a factor that influences much of the plot. The racial barrier causes Lily to reflect upon her morals. Many question her acceptance of black people, especially the police officer Mr. Hazelhurst. The novel at some points focus on Lily's decision to stick to her morals and treat black people fairly despite the

unpopularity of the decision. Lily's search for identity is also a significant theme. During Lily's journey to find out the truth of her mother, she finds many clues from the past with leads back to her, Lily discovers multiple personalities from within herself which she never would of expected. She finds how hateful, angry, destructive, and motivated she can be.

The final recurring theme is the loss of her innocence. This theme takes effect when lily finds out that her mother actually left her, Lily gains knowledge that dismantles her " perfect" image of the world. Lily forms an idea of what the world actually is with all of the negative aspects of society. Because of this, her mentality is greatly influenced. She is exposed to new thoughts and ideas.

The Secret Life of Bees is clearly based upon Lily and her formative years. Due to the moral and intellectual changes Lily undergoes throughout this novel, it is difficult to contradict this argument. Lily endured a lot through her years and this book goes to show that many people have a breaking point, including Lily. Having the image of her mother, her idol, smashed into a million pieces must have taken a big toll upon her. However, in the end, Lily emerges a mature, young woman.