

Single Text Explained

- This section of Paper Two is worth **60 marks**.
- The single text is the first section examined in Paper Two. There are a number of different single texts set each year, and these are listed on the first page of your exam paper, along with the relevant page number.
- The set texts for 2011 are:

○ BINCHY, Maeve	Circle of Friends (O)
○ BRONTË, Emily	Wuthering Heights (H/O)
○ IBSEN, Henrik	A Doll's House (H/O)
○ JOHNSTON, Jennifer	How Many Miles to Babylon? (O)
○ MONK KIDD, Sue	The Secret Life of Bees (O)
○ MURPHY, Tom	A Whistle in the Dark (H/O)
○ O'CASEY, Sean	The Plough and the Stars (O)
○ SHAKESPEARE, William	Hamlet (H/O)
○ STEINBECK, John	The Grapes of Wrath (H/O)
- You are only required to study **one** of these single texts.
- Remember, there will be questions on each of these single texts, but you must **only answer those on "The Secret Life of Bees"**. This is vitally important, as "Wuthering Heights" is a Single Text option in 2011. You are **not** to answer the questions on "Wuthering Heights", as this is your chosen novel for the comparative study section of the course. If you answer it as a single text, you will not be able to use it for your comparative study.
- You are required to know your single text in far more detail than you know your comparative study texts.
- Because we are studying a novel rather than a play, you do not need to learn a large number of quotes. However, if you are hoping for a high grade, it would be no harm to familiarise yourself with some of the more important quotes from the novel. I have included these in my notes.

Types of Question Asked

The single text question is divided into three ten mark questions and one thirty mark question. There is no choice in the ten mark questions; you must answer all of them. There is usually a choice between three different thirty mark questions. You need only answer one of these.

TEN MARK QUESTIONS

I have listed below the types of question most commonly asked. They are organised according to the frequency with which they occur.

1. Character

This is undoubtedly the examiner's favourite type of question. You will be asked to comment on one or more of the main characters, and why they act the way they do in the novel.

2. Relationships

These questions generally focus on the central relationships in the novel.

3. Plot questions

In these questions, you may be asked what happens at a particular point in the novel. For example, you may be asked, "What happens when Rosaleen goes into town to register to vote?"

4. The world of the text

Here, you may be asked questions about the social setting of the novel (refer to the notes I have given on social setting in the comparative study section of the course).

5. Theme or issue

You may be asked to comment on the theme of the novel.

6. An important moment in the text

You may be asked to describe a happy/sad/pleasant/disturbing/violent/frightening/important/amusing/enjoyable/dangerous moment. Remember, when describing this moment, to say why it is happy/sad

etc.

7. The ending

You may be asked to comment on the ending. Was it what you expected? How were things resolved for various characters?

8. Writer's attitude towards the subject of the novel

Be sure you are able to say what this attitude is and how it is conveyed to us by her writing.

THIRTY MARK QUESTIONS

Many of the questions in this section are similar to the ten mark questions. The principal difference is the length of answer expected.

Your answer here is effectively a short writing task, similar to the Comprehension Question B answers. You should bear this in mind when planning and writing your answer.

As it is a thirty mark question, you should be aiming to write around six paragraphs, each containing a valid point.

There is an element of personal response here, but be very careful to ensure that your answer is based on the novel. There is occasionally some scope for you to use your imagination, but generally only in the way you express yourself. In other words, if you are asked to pretend you are one of the characters and are writing a diary entry after a significant event, you must be sure to stick to the facts of the event as they are presented in the novel. This is a test of your knowledge of the novel. Don't be fooled by seemingly vague questions. The answers must all be based on the single text itself, and nothing else.

If you are asked for your opinion of the novel, try to be positive. You may not like the book, but it was chosen as a good example of its genre, and you would be unwise to criticise it, especially in bad prose.

As in the section on ten mark questions, I have listed the types of thirty mark question according to the frequency with which they have occurred in the past exams.

1. Character study

This is a very common question, as it is in the ten mark section. In this question, you may be asked to pretend you are one of the characters in the novel, and to write the diary entry he or she might make after a significant event. You may also be asked whether or not you could live with one of the characters. Could you write a speech defending or prosecuting a certain character? The question may simply ask you to analyse one of the main characters, but it is more likely to be framed as a short writing task along the lines of those given in Comprehension Question B on Paper One.

2. World of the text

This is similar to your social setting mode in the comparative study section. You may be asked what differences there are between the world of the text and the world in which you live. Would you like to live in the world of the text? What have you learnt about the world of the text from reading the novel?

3. Relationships

These questions generally focus on the central relationships in the novel.

4. Review

You may be asked to write an article or a speech in which you give your opinion of the novel. In general, you will be asked to present this speech or article to an audience of your peers. In other words, you should be prepared to tell other students your age what you thought of the book and whether or not you would recommend it to them.

5. Report

Here you will have to imagine that you are a reporter or possibly a police officer, writing a report on an event that has taken place in the novel.

6. Theme or issue

What view of life do you get from the novel? Is it uplifting or depressing? Are there life lessons to be learnt? What is the author's attitude towards the theme of the novel?

7. An important moment in the text

You may be asked to describe, in some detail, a

happy/sad/pleasant/disturbing/violent/frightening/important/amusing/enjoyable/dangerous moment. Remember, when describing this moment, to say why it is happy/sad etc.

8. Alternative endings

Occasionally, you are asked to imagine how the events in the novel might have turned out if characters had made different choices. This is a difficult question to tackle, as the temptation to wander far from the text itself can be great. I would avoid this question if possible. There are too many possible pitfalls.

There are a number of other types of thirty mark question, but I feel that it is better to concentrate on a few certainties and to prepare for them well rather than to try to touch briefly on every possible option.



Guidelines for Answering Exam Questions

This section is worth 60 marks and should take you a little less than an hour to complete.

- When you read the question, underline the key words: "describe", "explain", "outline" etc.
- Study the question carefully. Try to paraphrase it. What exactly are you being asked? Is the question on plot or character, for example? Is there more than one part to the question? (Look for the word "and". This can be an indication that there are two parts to the question.)
- Plan your answer. It is well worth taking the time to do this.
- Think in terms of key moments; this will ensure that you refer to the text and will help you to keep the sequence of events in the right order.
- Do not, under any circumstances, simply summarise the plot.
- Remember that, as a general rule, (although you must be guided by the question first and foremost) five marks equals one well-developed point. One well-developed point equals one paragraph. So, if a question is worth thirty marks, you should try to make at least six points. You may also wish to include a brief introduction and conclusion.

It cannot be stressed enough that simply retelling the story will not get you marks. The examiner knows the plot and it is assumed you do too. Avoid falling into the trap of simply describing the world of the text, for example, without saying what effect it has on the characters' lives.

In order to get high marks, you need to:

1. Answer the question asked (30%)
2. Make sure every paragraph develops that answer (30%)
3. Use varied and appropriate language (30%)
4. Keep an eye on your spelling and grammar (10%).
5. Think about points 1 and 2 when you are planning your answer.

Introduction to "The Secret Life of Bees"

The author, Sue Monk Kidd, was born in 1948 in Sylvester, Georgia. She grew up there on land that had been in her family's possession for over two hundred years. Sylvester was a small, rural town and Kidd has spoken of it fondly in interviews. However, the town was not perfect, and as a youngster, Kidd saw racism and the problem of segregation between black and white southerners. At the same time, she came under the influence of African American women working in her home, and was greatly impressed by their stories. By the 1960s, the process of desegregation was underway, at least in theory. In reality, there were still a great number of injustices.

Slavery was outlawed in America in 1865, but the blacks living in the American South were subject to some new laws – the Jim Crow laws – which were enacted to ensure that there was still segregation. Black people living in the southern states were treated like second-class citizens and were not allowed to attend the same schools as whites, to marry whites or even to sit in the same sections of the cinema, for example. They couldn't even drink from the same water fountain.

This idea was that blacks and whites would be "separate but equal", or so it was claimed. The reality was that blacks were treated very poorly in many cases and the laws simply made prejudice, discrimination and racism legal and acceptable. In 1954, segregation in schools was abolished, but it was still difficult for black students to attend white schools in many cases, because of the racism and abuse they suffered there. In 1964, the year the novel opens, the rest of the Jim Crow laws were finally abolished. Still, there were lingering problems in certain areas for some time after equality was made law.

In 1964, the southern states still required prospective voters to pass a literacy test. This was an attempt to prevent black voters from exercising their legal right to vote. There were loopholes for illiterate white voters. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson abolished this discriminatory policy.



Summary and Analysis of Chapters

Note:

- ⦿ There are fourteen chapters in "The Secret Life of Bees". Lily is fourteen when the book opens.
- ⦿ Each of the fourteen chapters begins with a quotation, or epigraph. These epigraphs give us an idea of the theme of the chapter to which they are linked.

Chapter One

The novel opens with the Lily lying on her bed, waiting for the bees to arrive. The bees live in the walls, and at night they fly around her room. Lily says that the bees' freedom almost breaks her heart. This is our first clue that Lily might be less than happy herself, and that she might feel less free than the bees. She says that "The way those bees flew, not even looking for a flower, just flying for the feel of the wind, split my heart down its seam. There is also an initial mention of religion in this opening section. Lily says that she feels the bees were set to here, like "the angel Gabriel appearing to the Virgin Mary". Like that visitation, the bees arrival signifies the beginning of a momentous change in Lily's life.

Lily's only happiness comes from the love she receives from Rosaleen, a childless black woman who T-Ray has hired to look after his daughter. Rosaleen warns Lily about the bees, saying that they swarm before death. To Lily, the bees are a symbol of hope, but to Rosaleen they are a symbol of something more ominous. Bees, of course, are led by a queen – a mother figure – and this is so different to Lily's own life that by capturing them, she may feel she is in some way being included in their secret life. The idea of the bees being associated with death does stay with Lily, though. Unusually for a young girl, she says that even if she were to be stung to death by the bees, she wouldn't care all that much. She claims that "People who think dying is the worst thing don't know a thing about life." It is clear that Lily has endured some terrible sorrow in her life.

Despite Rosaleen's warnings, Lily is determined to catch the bees in a jar. She is clearly an independent soul who makes her own decisions. Her cruel, uncaring father and the lack of a real mother in her life may have helped to form her strong character. Lily says, "I had asked God repeatedly to do something about T. Ray. He'd gone to church for forty years and was only getting worse. It seemed like this should tell God

something." This comment is our first indication that organised religion may have failed Lily.

When Lily does succeed in capturing a bee, it doesn't want to leave the jar when she releases it. That, and the fact that the bees land on the map she has hung on the wall, foreshadow Lily's later connection with the bees in Tiburon.

The first chapter introduces the idea of race tension. As Lily and Rosaleen watch the Civil Rights Act being signed into law, Lily is unsure whether to be excited or worried. While she is glad for Rosaleen, she recognises that the new act will bring trouble in its wake. Lily is aware that those who favour segregation will not take kindly to this news and will fight it bitterly. Rosaleen and Lily's relationship is a complicated one. For all that Lily might wish that she and Rosaleen could live like mother and daughter, she knows it isn't possible.

It is clear from this opening chapter that Lily is trying to come to terms with her mother's death, her father's lack of love for her and her own passage into womanhood.

Chapters Two and Three

The idea of religion – or rather of religious spirituality – is picked up again in these chapters. Lily wants to believe that her mother's spirit watches over her and protects her. T. Ray is quick to mock this idea when Lily tells him that Deborah will stop him from beating her. "Why it's the funniest goddamn thing I ever heard: you thinking your mother is your guardian angel." He cruelly tells Lily, "The woman could have cared less about you."

Lily believes she hears a voice telling her to run away from home and to leave T. Ray. She wants so desperately to feel loved and belonged that she attaches significance to the picture of the Black Madonna Honey, and leaves for Tiburon simply because of the words printed on the back of the label. This desire to belong and to seek an answer to life's important questions is part of almost every religion. Lily's journey is partly a personal one but also partly a spiritual one.

The issue of race is dealt with further in these chapters. To Lily, Rosaleen's refusal to apologise is senseless. She, Lily, doesn't see that in order for the status quo to be changed, people must stand up to those who oppose them and try to deny them their rights. In Lily's simplistic view, the racism in the south is not something that can be changed but must be endured. She even becomes angry with Rosaleen for antagonising Posey and his friends and for not apologising to them. Lily's anger should be directed at the men who stand in Rosaleen's way when she is trying to

exercise her rights, but at this stage in the novel she is still of the opinion that – no matter how unpleasant it may be – racism is a part of life and that can't change.

There is a sense that the events in these chapters are like a fable or a fairy-tale. Lily says that the place she and Rosaleen choose to rest for the night is like "a Grimm Brothers forest, drawing up the nervous feelings I used to get when I stepped into the pages of fairy tales where unthinkable things were likely – you just never knew." The idea of the importance of storytelling was introduced in the first chapter, when we learned that Lily hopes to be a writer some day and has been encouraged in this by a kindly teacher. Mrs. Henry told Lily she should aim high in life, and Lily took this to heart. For all that she is independent, she still needs a mentor. Lily and Rosaleen's flight is reminiscent of Huckleberry Finn and Jim running off into the woods together. The importance of literature is raised again at the start of the third chapter, when Lily compares herself to Thoreau, seeking a new start and a new way of life. This idea of a fresh start is also linked to spirituality, when Lily and Rosaleen bathe naked in the river. This symbolises a baptism and a rebirth for both of them.

Chapters Four and Five

Lily is fascinated by her first view of August tending to her bees. Rosaleen is less impressed, and merely comments unfavourably on the colour of the Boatwright house. When Lily is introduced to August, she is even more awestruck. For the first time, she realises that she herself has racist tendencies, because she is astonished at the elegance of the house and the cultured women who live there. She admits that she had never thought black women could be clever than she. Lily has gone to Tiburon searching for information about her mother and when she meets August, she finds a substitute mother figure. Interestingly, she becomes a little ashamed of Rosaleen and her lack of manners and culture. Up to now, Rosaleen has been a mother figure in many ways, but she is replaced by the more educated August. This fact is not lost on Rosaleen.

Everything about the Boatwright house is new and amazing to Lily. She longs to belong and to be accepted and she willingly undertakes any task she is given. She is intrigued by the black Mary statue, but accepts its power because it is connected to August.

The Boatwright sisters and their friends are a community of strong, independent women. There are no men in the house, and there is a sense that they are not needed. August has chosen not to marry, and is "against how it is set up." Marriage is not portrayed in a very positive light. T. Ray loved Deborah, but once they married (which they had to do because Deborah was pregnant) things seemed to fall apart.

Rosaleen was married, but it ended in divorce. June's fiancé left her at the altar, and when she finally accepts Neil's proposal, it is difficult for her because of "the surrender she has to make inside. Not just to Neil, but to life."

Lily realises for the first time that discrimination can go both ways. She is shocked when she overhears June complaining to August that they shouldn't be keeping a white girl in the house. Her anger and hurt help her to realise the ridiculous nature of racism. She cannot understand why anyone should view her differently just because of the colour of her skin.

May's depression is also something new to Lily. She sees, however, that May has no control of her emotions when she is overcome by sadness, and perhaps this helps Lily to understand her own mother's depression when August explains it to her later on. Lily is guided through all of these new experiences by August, who is increasingly filling the void left by Lily's absent mother.

The importance of storytelling in the novel is shown again when August tells Lily the tale of Beatrix, the nun who ran away from the convent. In the story, Mary took Beatrix's place and in doing so, allowed her to return to her convent – to her home. August is telling Lily to put her faith in Mary. There is a strong religious undercurrent running throughout the book, but it is not organised religion. When Lily asks August if they are Catholic, August explains that she and the other women are a mixture of several different religions and do not really belong to a particular church. They pray and worship in the way they see fit. This is attractive to Lily, who seemed disappointed by organised religion. After all, it had done little for T. Ray. Nor was she overly impressed by the minister in the church in Sylvan. He did not preach tolerance and inclusion, but rather intolerance and exclusion. He spoke against Catholics, and his lack of compassion for others was shown when he refused to let Rosaleen have a fan, even though she was suffering badly from the heat.

There is a sense of protectiveness in these chapters. The sisters protect May from the outside world whenever they can, even if that means lying to her. August realises that Lily is lying, but is willing to protect her nonetheless and to allow her to keep her secrets.

Chapters Six and Seven

Unlike mainstream religion, which allows segregation and racism, the religion practised by the Daughters of Mary is based on personal spirituality and close community ties. The Daughters represent feminine spiritual power. They pray to the Black Mary, who is also a symbol of their ancestors' slavery. The religious gatherings in the Boatwright house are unconventional and mix parts of organised religion with

whatever prayers and celebrations they feel are appropriate to them. They don't need a minister or a priest; they support one another and embrace all forms of worship.

The story of the Black Mary is yet another example of the thread of storytelling woven throughout the novel.

Lily comes to understand a little more of the problems of racism and segregation when she realises that she is attracted to Zach. She didn't think that such a thing was possible, but when she accepts her feelings, she also has to face the fact that the world in which she lives is not ready to accept a black boy and a white girl going out together.

Again, the idea of parallels between Lily's life and the lives of characters in works of literature or fables is explored. At the moment when Rosaleen announces that she is moving into May's room to keep her company, Lily notices August reading "Jane Eyre". Lily, who is feeling a little lost because Rosaleen is moving out of their room, asks August what the book is about. August answers that it is about a girl whose mother died when she was little. Lily asks how it ends, and August replies that she doesn't know as she has only just started reading. She says, however, that the girl is "feeling lost and sad."

Chapter Eight

Lily's admiration for August continues to grow, and she views her as a role model. August did not follow the path that most women chose, but instead decided to lead an independent life. Although Lily may not want this for herself, it does show her that people are in charge of their own lives and that their happiness and success need not be tied to other people. Lily's self-esteem was low when she came to the Boatwright house, and August has been working to build it up. Like Lily's teacher, Mrs. Henry, August wants Lily to realise that she is capable of great things. Lily reasons to herself that August must have had "a good, fine mother" to turn out the way she has.

When Lily allows the bees to surround her, she experiences a sudden realisation that the bees in Tiburon and the bees in Sylvan are somehow connected. She feels that they were sent to set her free and to help her flee from T. Ray.

Lily's desire to be loved is still strong and she and August spend some time discussing the nature of love. Above all, Lily still longs for parental love. She is so moved by the photograph in Clayton Forrest's office – showing him playing with his daughter – that she decides on impulse to ring T. Ray. She wonders if perhaps he is missing her now that she is gone, and imagines that perhaps he does love her after all. The phone call is a disaster, with T. Ray shouting abuse and threats at Lily and telling

her she was "a goddamn fool" to leave. His only concern seems to be for his neighbours' opinion of him and for the peaches that were spoiled when he took time off to look for his daughter. Lily hangs up and tries not to cry. Her sorrow and disappointment lead her to the Our Lady of Chains statue. She prays to Mary, and calls her her mother. Like the queen bee, Mary is "the mother of thousands."

Chapter Nine

Lily is now a real member of the Boatwright household. She helps August with the bees, and even makes her peace with June. There is a note of warning introduced in the opening pages, however. Civil rights marches are taking place all over the country. Trouble is coming, and it can't be avoided. Lily is stung by one of the bees. She feels betrayed, but August explains that no matter how well we protect ourselves and no matter how loving we are, bad things can happen. This foreshadows Zach's arrest and May's death.

Lily is still longing for her mother, but her time with the Boatwrights has helped her to begin to heal and to find her own path in life. She says that "The wanting-her was still in me, but it wasn't nearly so fierce and raging as before." She tries on her mother's gloves, but realises that she is outgrowing them. This is symbolic of her outgrowing her childhood and her burning, all-consuming need for her mother.

It is May who unwittingly tells Lily that Deborah spent time in the pink house. The connection is made via a story: the story that T. Ray told Lily about her mother tempting the roaches out of the house with marshmallows and crackers. This is a tangible clue, adding to the metaphorical crumbs of information that have been dropped throughout the book.

Zach's arrest throws the Boatwright house into turmoil. Lily has to accept that Zach and she are further apart than she had realised. She may be growing up and becoming a stronger person, but her strength is no match for the racist hatred that she sees in Tiburon. She cannot help Zach and she must distance herself from him when she visits him in prison, for his own sake. He also, chooses to stay with his friends when the white men offer the boys a chance to go if they just admit who threw the bottle. Lily wants Zach to leave with her, but he doesn't.

Yet again, the importance of the story is emphasised here. Lily tells Zach that she will write his story in her notebook. She says, "it's something everybody wants – for someone to see the hurt done to them and set it down like it matters."

Chapters Ten and Eleven

May's death makes Lily realise how happy she has been in the Boatwright house. She also sees that May's reaction to the loss of her sister when they were younger changed her in a negative way. When Lily thinks of May, she remembers "the blaze of love and anguish that had so often come into her face. In the end it had burned her up." This may be sobering for Lily, to realise that if someone cannot accept the tragedies and traumas of their life and come to terms with them, the pain will eventually be too much for them to bear. May's death also establishes Rosaleen firmly as one of the Boatwright household. She has become part of the family and part of the Daughters of Mary.

The bees are used to show Lily more about the spiritual world. She explains the importance of rituals and symbols. When Lily asks if putting the cloths over the hives will help get May into heaven, August replies that it won't but that: "Putting black cloths on the hives is for us. I do it to remind us that life gives way into death, and then death turns around and gives way into life."

There is celebration in these chapters, when June accepts Neil's proposal. This sign of happiness and life cheers the Daughters of Mary, and Lunelle offers to make Lily a hat. When she asks what colour Lily would like, August says that it should be blue. This is significant, as it was the question Lily asked T. Ray when she was searching for any sign that he loved her or even knew anything much about her as a person. He couldn't answer, but August can.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

The story reaches a climax here, as Lily finally talks to August about her mother. She feels confident of August's love for her, something which August keeps repeating, and the two exchange stories about Deborah. Lily is finally strong enough to hear the truth, and August does not lie to her. Lily is shocked to learn that her mother abandoned her, and tells August that she hates Deborah. August tries to explain that Deborah was suffering from depression, but all Lily can think about is the fact that she was an "unwanted" baby and clearly an unwanted child too. August again tries to get Lily to forgive her mother. She says, "Every person on the face of the earth makes mistakes, Lily. Every last one. We're all so human. Your mother made a terrible mistake, but she tried to fix it." Lily doesn't respond to this, and as August is leaving the room she says, "There is nothing perfect. There is only life."

Lily, left alone, reacts with grief and violence to the things August has told her about her mother. Her actions are good in one way, in that she is not repressing her feelings

or lying to herself, but they also echo her father's violent reaction to grief and abandonment.

By the end of chapter thirteen, Lily has come to accept that her mother did love her. When August gives her the photograph of Deborah with Lily, Lily believes that May must have spoken to her mother in heaven and asked her to send Lily a sign: "The one that would let me know I was loved." Lily's journey is over at last.

Chapter Fourteen

The book ends by bringing us in a full circle. In the first chapter, Rosaleen sets out to vote, but is prevented from doing so. In the final chapter, she registers successfully. Lily is initially fearful for Rosaleen's safety, remembering what happened in Sylvan, but quickly comes to realise that she is proud of her former nanny and wishes she had gone with her to town. It was Rosaleen's courage and determination in the first chapter that led to Lily's finally having the strength to leave T. Ray and to go to Tiburon.

August takes Lily out to the field, and helps her to understand finally that she does not need symbols or other people to make her complete. She explains that searching for the answer outside of oneself is pointless. She tells Lily that Our Lady is inside her and is a part of her now. She says, "You have to find a mother inside yourself."

T. Ray's arrival at the Boatwright house also shows us as readers how far Lily has come. Although she is frightened, she takes charge of the situation, inviting T. Ray in and telling him to take a seat if he likes. T. Ray's reaction – gouging the arm of the chair with his knife – brings violence and destruction into the sanctuary of the Boatwright house. He respects nothing and carries with him the threat of destroying all Lily has managed to gain. However, Lily is not the girl she was when she left Sylvan. She sees through T. Ray, and realises that Deborah's abandonment of him hurt him deeply and had caused him to sink "into bitterness." When T. Ray goes into a trance and attacks Lily, confusing her with Deborah, she calls on her new-found inner strength and manages to get through to him by calling him "Daddy." This is significant, and she told us in the first chapter that he did not deserve the name. Even though she is frightened, Lily sees T. Ray's pain and has developed some affection for him. Just as she forgave her mother for being a flawed person, so she can forgive T. Ray. T. Ray leaves without a kind word to Lily, but Lily recognises that by leaving her with the Boatwrights, he is doing something decent for her. He leaves her with August and Rosaleen and the Daughters of Mary. At the end of the novel, Lily feels that she has "more mothers than any eight girls off the street."

Character Studies – Key Points

Lily

- Lily is the narrator, so we only hear her side of the story and what she decides to tell us about herself.
- She longs for love, particularly maternal love. The lack of it is preventing her from growing into a well-rounded young woman.
- She possesses great strength of character. She leaves Sylvan and risks everything when she frees Rosaleen and takes her with her.
- Lily tells us about racism and life in the American South in the 1960s.
- Lily's need for love is so strong that she goes to Tiburon simply on the basis of a picture which used to belong to her mother.
- Through the people she meets, Lily learns valuable life lessons. August teaches her to examine her own nature and to find answers within herself. Zach encourages her to write and to explore her feelings about race issues. May shows her that people who suffer from depression are not necessarily in control of themselves and cannot always be held responsible for their actions. Even the bees teach Lily about the importance of community and working together.
- By the time she learns the truth about her mother, Lily has matured enough to deal with it. She is supported in this by August and the Daughters of Mary.
- The strength she has gained allows Lily to deal with her father and to see him for what he really is.
- This novel is a bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story. By the end of the book, Lily has grown into a confident young woman and has developed greatly as a person.

August

- She is an unconventional, successful, loving person who helps the traumatised Lily to gain confidence and helps her to view the world in a positive way.
- She has chosen not to marry, as she values her freedom too much.
- She is a warm, loving person and provides the maternal love for which Lily was searching.
- She has made her house a centre of spirituality and has created a community of strong women in Tiburon.
- She is powerful, but even she cannot stop bad things from happening. Racism rears its ugly head in Tiburon, and she is unable to do anything to stop it.
- She takes care of all those around her, not just the women. Her love for Zach is apparent when he is arrested and taken to jail. She talks to him about the beehives and makes it clear that she sees him coming back to help her with them.
- She is the guiding light in the novel.

T. Ray

- At the start of the novel, he is portrayed as a cruel, aloof man.
- He shows no fatherly love for his daughter.
- He is a violent, unpredictable man and punishes Lily physically.
- He is a coward in some ways and cares for the opinions of his neighbours more than he does the opinions of his daughter.
- He knows that the men who attacked Rosaleen are likely to kill her, but he does nothing about it.
- When Lily rings him from Tiburon, he is more concerned about spoiled peaches and the accusing stares of his townsfolk than he is about the fact that Lily left home.
- As the novel progresses, we learn that T. Ray is not as one-dimensional as he might have initially appeared. Deborah loved him once, and he loved her. He had been decorated in the war for his bravery.
- T. Ray was devastated when his wife left. Lily finally realises that he is as much a product of the things that happened to him as she is.
- He is incapable of change, it seems, and leaves Tiburon without expressing any love for Lily or without telling her he misses her.
- Our final impression of T. Ray is that of a lonely, bitter man.

Zach

- At first glance, Zach would seem to have many advantages.
- He is handsome, intelligent, charming and very good at sports.
- He is greatly loved and respected by the Boatwright sisters.
- He has a sympathetic mentor in Clayton Forrest.
- He knows what he wants out of life, and is determined to become a lawyer.
- However, he is a black man growing up in the South at a time of racial tension.
- He refuses to allow the colour of his skin to colour his choices in life. He falls for Lily despite the fact that she is white, and he is confident that he will become a lawyer some day.
- He is loyal, even willing to be jailed rather than betray a friend.
- He is a good role model for Lily, in that he is determined to overcome adversity and to be a better person than those who treat him badly.

Theme 1 - Racism

Before reading these notes, you should refer back to my "Introduction to The Secret Life of Bees", in which I outline the racial tensions that existed in the southern states of America at the time in which this book is set.

The Secret Life of Bees is about Lily's journey through life. Everyone she encounters, and everything she does, teaches her a lesson of one sort or another. One of the issues she must face and come to terms with is her own racial prejudice.

Lily is brought up to believe that black people are second class citizens. In her eyes, they are labourers or housekeepers, but never independent, cultured, educated people. Lily struggles with her feelings for Rosaleen, the black woman T. Ray employed to care for her after his wife's death. Lily loves Rosaleen, but wishes that they shared a skin colour, so that Rosaleen could be more to her than just an nurse or a nanny. She says in the first chapter: "I used to have daydreams in which she was white and married to T. Ray, and became my real mother. Other times I was a Negro orphan she found in a cornfield and adopted. Once in a while I had us living in a foreign country like New York, where she could adopt me and we could both stay our natural colour." Lily cannot envisage a situation in which Rosaleen, a black woman, could marry a white man or adopt a white child. She is aware that there are places where such behaviour might be normal, but to her those places are like a "foreign country", they are so far removed from the reality of her life in Sylvan. She knows that the people in her town would never accept that Rosaleen as an equal. They regard the battle for white supremacy as a "do-or-die contest".

When the Civil Rights Act is signed into law on the 2nd of July, 1964, Rosaleen is delighted, but Lily is worried. She fears for Rosaleen, and knows that the men of the town will be unlikely to accept the law and allow black people to vote, no matter what the president of the United States says. Rosaleen intends to go the the voters' rally at the coloured church (black and white people had separate churches) and Lily feels uneasy. The night before, a black man in Mississippi had been killed for registering to vote, and Lily has overheard the local men planning to do everything in their power to stop black people in Sylvan from registering.

Rosaleen's decision to register sets off a chain of motions that eventually leads her and Lily to the Boatwright's house. The local men attack Rosaleen, and the police do

nothing. In fact, they arrest Rosaleen, and Lily is sure she will be killed. She breaks Rosaleen out of the hospital and they run away together.

At the start of the novel, Lily is aware that there is racial prejudice, but she sees it as an unavoidable part of life. It is only in her dreams that black and white people can live side by side and be part of the same family. When Rosaleen is attacked, Lily is angry with the men who beat her, but she is also angry with Rosaleen. She wonders why Rosaleen couldn't just apologise and thereby escape with only a beating, instead of risking her life by standing up to the men. Although Lily may despise the men who call Rosaleen a "nigger" and threaten to kill her, she thinks such behaviour is just part of the fabric of society, and must be endured rather than opposed. It is not until she meets the Boatwrights that Lily begins to understand that there is an alternative to this violence and inequality.

When Lily meets the Boatwrights, she is forced to confront her own prejudices. The sisters live in a house that is far nicer than Lily's own home, and they are educated, cultured and financially independent. Immediately, Lily becomes aware of Rosaleen's lack of manners and education and is embarrassed when Rosaleen burps loudly after drinking orangeade, or splashes through puddles in the rain.

Lily learns a valuable lesson about racism when she eavesdrops on a conversation between August and June Boatwright one night. June is unhappy that the runaways are staying with them, and puts pressure on August to find out what their story really is. August counsels patience, and, exasperated, June says, "But she's *white*, August." Lily is indignant, astonished and resentful when she realises that June does not want her to stay because of the colour of her skin. She says, candidly, "I hadn't known this was possible – to reject people for being *white*." She calls this knowledge "a great revelation" and it allows her to see discrimination from the other side of the fence.

While the Boatwrights help Lily to understand that a person's character is more important than the colour of their skin, and that to be the victim of racial prejudice is a horrible feeling, the society in which she lives constantly reinforces the idea of segregation and racial tension. As well as seeing incidents of racially-motivated violence on the television, she encounters it in her own life. When Zach is arrested and August brings Lily to visit him in the jail, the policeman seems sceptical of August's claim that Lily is a friend of the family. He seems to doubt that a white girl could be friendly with black people. Miss Lacy, the receptionist in Mr. Forrest's office, is clearly shocked that Lily is staying in the Boatwright's house. The policeman who interviews Lily after May's death is equally uncomfortable to find a

white girl staying with a black family. He asks her, "Don't you have any white people back in Spartanburg you could stay with?" When he is leaving, he calls Lily out and his manner becomes conspiratorial. In what he clearly imagines is a kindly manner, he advises her to go to her aunt's as quickly as possible because he thinks that, by living with the Boatwrights, Lily is "lowering" herself. He doesn't think it's "natural" for white people to stay with black people.

Zach Taylor also plays an important role in teaching Lily about the stupidity of racial stereotypes. When they meet, she is shocked to find herself attracted to him. She says, "At my school they made fun of colored people's lips and noses. I myself had laughed at these jokes, hoping to fit in. Now I wished I could pen a letter to my school to be read at opening assembly that would tell them how wrong we'd all been. You should see Zachary Taylor, I'd say." Zach is not only handsome, he is also intelligent and ambitious. He wants to be a lawyer, which surprises Lily. She tells him that she has "never heard of a Negro lawyer, that's all. You've got to hear of these things before you can imagine them." Zach tells her that she has it the wrong way around, and that you have to "imagine what's never been." Again, Lily is forced to face her own issues surrounding racial discrimination. She may not like the status quo, but up to now she has never seen an alternative to it. The Boatwrights and Zach teach her that people do not have to accept the way things are, but can make changes in society. This knowledge helps Lily to grow as a person and she is inspired by Zach's drive and determination.

When Zach is arrested, Lily is once again faced with the horror of seeing someone she cares for imprisoned. This time, however, she is not left to deal with the situation alone. Unlike T. Ray, who abandons Rosaleen in a cowardly fashion, August and Mr. Forrest do what they can to help Zach. Zach is changed by his arrest, but Lily tells him that if he simply reacts with anger, he will be lessened. He agrees, and says that he will study harder and make sure that he becomes a lawyer. Lily feels that Zach will be instrumental in bringing freedom and equality to the black people of South Carolina.

Lily's feelings for Zach are strong, but even though he cares for her too, he realises that they cannot be together just yet. He promises her that when things change, he will seek her out.

Rosaleen's beating at the hands of racist thugs led to Lily's breaking her out of the hospital and beginning a journey which ended at the Boatwright's house. At the end of the book, Rosaleen again goes to register to vote, and Lily is concerned for her.

However, things go smoothly and Rosaleen registers successfully. This brings the events of the book full circle, as we see how different life is for Rosaleen now, and we sense the beginnings of the social change. Lily is delighted for Rosaleen, and regrets not going with her to town this time. The courage and resolve of Rosaleen, Zach, the Boatwright sisters and Mr. Forrest have helped Lily to realise that racism is not something which much be endured, but can be fought.

Lily is a much stronger person at the end of the book, and when the students in the school call her a "nigger lover" for associating with Zach, she does not care. This contrasts with her attitude when she was in school in Sylvan and simply went along with the other students when they laughed at black people and made jokes about their appearance. She chooses to be friendly with Zach despite their taunts, and she chooses to stay with the Boatwrights, realising that a loving and nurturing family is more important than the skin colours of the individual family members.



Theme 2 – Forgiveness

In the first chapter, we learn of Lily's enormous guilt for killing her mother, albeit accidentally. She dreams of dying, and in her dream she meets her mother in heaven and says, "Mother, forgive. Please forgive." She imagines that her mother will kiss her and tell her she is not to blame. She will forgive her for ten thousand years. Lily cannot get over the fact that she was responsible for her mother's death. In her own words: "She was all I ever wanted. And I took her away."

Lily is so consumed with guilt that she believes she is not worthy of love. August Boatwright helps and supports Lily in her journey to self-forgiveness and growth. She teaches Lily that "There is nothing perfect. ... There is only life," and she encourages Lily to forgive herself for killing Deborah, and to forgive Deborah for abandoning her. Lily finds it hard to move past what she sees as her mother's betrayal, but with August's help she sees that Deborah was so depressed when she left home and fled to Tiburon that she could not really be held responsible for her actions. August points out that Deborah went back to get Lily, which is why she was in the house, packing a case, the day she died.

August's telling Lily all about Deborah raises another issue which Lily must overcome. Deborah did not want to marry T. Ray, but did so because she was pregnant with Lily. It is difficult for Lily to get over the guilt of feeling that she was the reason her mother ended up in an unhappy marriage. In time, she comes to accept the complex truth. Her mother did love her, but was so unhappy that she had a nervous breakdown. This was not Lily's fault, and neither was it her fault that she picked up the dropped gun and accidentally killed her mother.

Part of the reason Lily finds it so hard to forgive herself is that her self-esteem is so low. Her father has never encouraged her and never made her feel loved. He has allowed her to grow up believing that nobody loves her and that she is worthless. When Lily tells him that she is sure her mother is in heaven, watching over her and protecting her, T. Ray cruelly says that Deborah never loved Lily or cared about her in the slightest, and that she abandoned both her husband and daughter without a second thought.

At the end of the novel, Lily understands T. Ray a little better, and she comes close to forgiving him. Thanks to August, she understands the dynamics of her parents' marriage now, and she realises that T. Ray was deeply hurt by his wife's departure.

She also sees what happens to somebody who does not learn to forgive and move on. T. Ray is a chilling reminder of how bitter and lonely such people become.

Theme 3– The Power of Books and Storytelling

Lily is an avid reader, and books are a way for her to escape her miserable life with T. Ray. However, T. Ray scorns reading and forbids Lily from reading while she is taking care of the peach stand. Lily believes he is against reading because "it would stir up ideas of college, which he thought a waste of money for girls". His ignorance of literature is linked to his boorish, violent ways. Whenever he sees Lily reading, he asks, "Who do you think you are, Julius Shakespeare?" Lily does not correct him, because she fears the punishment she will receive if she does. As she says: "if you think I should have corrected him, you are ignorant about the art of survival. So, she lets it go when he mocks her and when he calls her names like "Miss Brown-Nose-In-A-Book" and "Miss Emily-Big-Head-Diction".

Despite the lack of support she receives at home, Lily manages to maintain her love of literature, and she is encouraged in this by her teacher, Mrs Henry. Mrs Henry lends Lily books and tells her that she should aim to be a professor or a writer when she is older. This startles Lily, who says, "It took me a month to get over the shock of having life possibilities. You know how adults love to ask, 'So...what are you going to be when you grow up?' I can't tell you how much I'd hated that question, but suddenly I was going around volunteering to people, people who didn't even want to know, that I planned to be a professor and a writer of books." For the first time in her young life, Lily sees the possibility of a brighter future.

When Mrs Henry makes Lily's class read some of Thoreau's *Walden Pond*, it fuels Lily's fantasies, and allows her to imagine going to "a private garden where T. Ray would never find me." When Lily and Rosaleen run away from Sylvan, and spend the night sleeping out in the open, Lily is reminded of this book again. Her spirits lift and, instead of being stressed or depressed, she now regards their journey as an adventure and as the first day of the rest of her life. This shows us that even the memory of books she has read can offer Lily solace in times of difficulty.

August Boatwright shares Lily's love of books, and she uses storytelling as a way to gently teach Lily some life lessons. She tells her the story of Beatrix, the nun who ran away but was able to go home because Mary stood in for her. Lily is slightly confused by this story, thinking that August is trying to tell her that she should return home to T. Ray, but she nonetheless starts "asking Mary for her special help" after she hears the tale.

Knowing that Lily is not yet ready to talk about her own life, August uses books and stories as a way of discussing issues without confronting Lily directly. When Lily

sees her reading Jane Eyre one day, and asks what it is about, August tells her that it is about a young girl whose mother died when she was young. Lily asks how the story ends, and August tells her that she does not know yet, as she has only just started the book. She tells Lily that all she does know is that the girl is "feeling lost and sad." Through subtle references to other people's stories, August gives Lily the chance to open up and come clean about her life to date. Gradually, Lily gains in confidence and is able to do so.

Zach also encourages Lily in her love of literature. He gives her a notebook and supports her in her desire to become a writer when she grows up. Gradually, Lily moves from using stories as a way to escape from a life over which she feels she has no control to becoming confident enough to begin writing her own story. It is as if she is at last in charge of her own destiny in a way she would never have thought possible at the beginning of the book.

Sample 10 Mark Questions and Answers

Describe how Lily helps Rosaleen to escape from the hospital.

Comment: This is the sort of question that tests your knowledge of detail. If you don't know the text very well, your answer will be far too short.

Lily slips into Rosaleen's room while the policeman on guard is chatting to a nurse at the nurses' station. She unties Rosaleen, takes off the bandage around her head and tells her to get dressed. She tells Rosaleen to wait quietly for a few minutes and advises her to get back into the bed in case the policeman looks into the room. She, Lily, says she will try to get rid of him. When she steps into the hall, the policeman is surprised to see a white girl in the coloured wing of the hospital. Lily tells him that she wandered into the wrong section of the hospital when looking for her aunt. The policeman believes her and directs her towards the white side of the building. Once there, Lily finds a pay phone and rings the nurses' station in the coloured wing. She tells the nurse who answers that the policeman is needed at the police station immediately to sign some papers as Mr. Gaston is away. The nurse believes her and agrees to pass on the message. Lily is astonished that the *ruse has worked, and sneaks back to the coloured side of the hospital, waiting for the young policeman to leave. When he does, she gets Rosaleen and the two of them walk out, pretending to be visitors. The nurse at the desk seems too busy to notice them but as they approach, she stands up. Lily pulls Rosaleen into a patient's room and they wait there until the nurse vanishes into another room. She doesn't seem to be looking for them, but Lily and Rosaleen take no chances and run out of the hospital as fast as they can.

**ruse: A deceptive strategy or trick, particularly one used to avoid capture.*

What does Lily remember about the day her mother died?

Comment: This is a question on the plot. Lily's memories of the day her mother died are important, so it is the type of question which might easily come up in the Leaving Cert. Give as much detail as you can, without analysing the events.

SAMPLE ANSWER

Lily was four years old when her mother died. She remembers her mother, Deborah, hastily packing clothes into a suitcase while she, Lily, crawled under the hanging clothes in the closet and played with a pair of her mother's shoes.

Lily's father, T. Ray, came into the room and began to argue with her mother. Frightened by the fury, Lily retreated further into the closet. Her mother pulled her out, but T. Ray took her from her mother and told her to go to her room. Lily didn't want to go, but T. Ray shoved her violently when she tried to run back to her mother. She fell, and her mother rushed to help her, but T. Ray grabbed Deborah and began to shake her back and forth. Deborah got away and grabbed a gun from the high shelf in the closet. The rest of the memories are confused, but Lily recalls T. Ray snatching the gun from her mother and waving it around. Then the gun was on the floor, and Lily bent to pick it up. The last thing she remembers is an explosion of noise.

What happens when Rosaleen goes to town to register to vote?

Comment: This is a question on the plot. You are not asked to analyse the events, but simply to write down the events as they unfolded. There is no need to say what happens in the church, although you will not be penalised for doing so. Neither is there any need to say what happens once Lily and Rosaleen are taken to jail, as that is in the next chapter of the book.

SAMPLE ANSWER

Rosaleen and Lily enter Sylvan on the bad side of town. As they pass a filling station, they see three men sitting beside the garage, playing cards. One of the men notices the pair as they approach, and shouts insultingly at Rosaleen, calling her a "nigger"

and asking where she's going. Lily is anxious to move on quickly, but Rosaleen tells the man she's going to register to vote. The three men stand up and walk over to her, making racist remarks. They ask where she got the fan she is holding, and she tells them she stole it from a church.

To Lily's horror, Rosaleen takes her snuff jug, filled with black spit, and pours the liquid on the men's shoes. The men are surprised, then angry. They grab Rosaleen and begin to shake her, shouting at her to clean their shoes. One of the men tells someone inside the garage to call the police. By now, Rosaleen is on the ground, being held down by the men. She is beaten and bleeding.

The policeman arrives and arrests Rosaleen for theft, assault and for disturbing the peace. He takes Lily in the car as well, telling her that when they get to the station, he'll call T. Ray and let him deal with her.

Describe the events leading up to Zach's arrest.

Comment: In the film adaptation of the book, Zach and Lily go to the cinema together, and Zach is dragged away by a group of men. This does not happen in the book. It is vital to make a note of the differences between the film and the book. This Single Text is set as a novel in the exam, not a film. The film can be helpful, of course, but be sure to base your study on the book itself.

Zach needs to get a radiator hose in the auto-parts store, and he asks Lily to go with him. She is reluctant initially, as she wants to talk to August privately, but she agrees to go when she realises that August is too busy to talk to her.

As Zach pulls into a parking space in front of the auto-parts store, Lily sees a group of five or six white men standing outside the cinema two doors down. They are clearly waiting for someone or something, and although they are well-dressed, they are clearly up to no good. One of them is carrying a shovel handle, and they are all on edge. Lily realises that they are waiting for the film star, Jack Palance, who is rumoured to be intending to take a coloured woman into the cinema with him that afternoon.

The men notice three teenage coloured boys on the footpath on the opposite side of the road. One of the men yells at the boys and asks them what they are looking at. Zach recognises the boys as friends of his, and gets out of the honey wagon to talk to them just as they cross the street to meet him. The men continue to watch them, and one of the boys says that the men must be "dumb as dirt" if they think Jack Palance is

coming to town. All the boys laugh, and the man with the shovel handle approaches the boys, asking what they said. His sneering, aggressive attitude reminds Lily of T. Ray. One of the boys throws a glass Coca Cola bottle at the man, breaking his nose. The man walks away, dripping blood. The other men rush over and surround the boys, demanding to know which of them threw the bottle. They say that if the others tell, only the guilty boy will be in trouble. None of the boys will tell on the culprit, and when the police arrive, all four boys are taken to jail.

What kind of man is Lily's father, T. Ray?

Comment: This is a question on character. When you are asked a general question about a person's character, it is a good idea to trace the development (if any) of their character as the novel progresses. Use plenty of words to describe character, as the examiner will be looking for these. (I have underlined these words in my answer, but you should not do this in the exam, of course.) Give examples from the text to support any points you make.

SAMPLE ANSWER

At the start of the novel, T. Ray is portrayed as a cruel, aloof man who has no fatherly love for his daughter. He gives Lily the minimum of care and attention and punishes her physically by making her kneel on grits when she displeases him. He mocks her interest in reading, and seems ignorant and poorly educated. He appears violent and unpredictable, threatening to strike Lily when he brings her home from the jail after Rosaleen is arrested. He is a coward in some ways, though, in that he refuses to stand up to the men who attack Rosaleen, even though he clearly knows they were in the wrong and will probably kill Rosaleen. He also cares what his neighbours think more than he does about his daughter's happiness. When Lily rings him from Tiburon, he is more concerned about spoiled peaches and the accusing stares of his townsfolk than he is about the fact that Lily left home.

As the novel progresses, we learn that T. Ray is not as one-dimensional as he might have initially appeared. Deborah loved him once, and he loved her. He had been decorated in the war for his bravery, which tells us that he is not a complete coward. T. Ray was devastated when his wife left. Lily finally realises that he is as much a product of the things that happened to him as she is. Even though we may feel some sympathy for T. Ray at the end of the novel, we realise that he is incapable of change, and leaves Tiburon without expressing any love for Lily or without telling her he misses her. Our final impression of T. Ray is that he is a lonely, bitter man.

Sample 30 Mark Questions and Answers

Write the letter Lily might have written to T. Ray at the end of the novel.

Comment: This question is testing your knowledge of the way Lily feels about her father at the end of the novel. Has their relationship changed at all as a result of all she has been through? Does she have a better understanding of her father. Remember, she wanted to write him a letter earlier in the novel, telling him how much she hated him and what a despicable father he was. She tore the letter up and felt bad for even writing it. Since that time, do you think Lily's attitude towards her father has changed? If so, in what way?

The thirty mark questions can sometimes appear to give you great scope for an imaginative answer, but if you want a high grade, it is a good idea to base your answer closely on the text.

In this letter, you should try to show that you know:

- (a) How Lily feels about her father at the end of the novel.*
- (b) What has happened to make her feel this way.*
- (c) What she has learned about her own character.*

You could simply write a chatty letter, in which Lily tells T. Ray all about school and Zach, but would she be likely to do this? Is there anything in their past relationship that would lead you to think she'd share this sort of information with her father or that he'd be interested?

You could also write an angry, hate-filled letter, but that would be showing a lack of understanding of how much Lily has matured during the course of the novel.

SAMPLE ANSWER

Tiburón.

21st September, 1964

Dear T. Ray,

August said I should write to you to let you know that I've started in school and that everything is going fine. And, to tell you the truth, I wanted to write to you too. I nearly wrote to you a few months ago. I tore that letter up, and I'm glad now that I did. It was full of hate and anger, and I've learned a lot in my time here about the way those things can eat a person up inside. But there are still some things I need to say to you, so this letter can take the place of the one I never sent.

I often think of the day you turned up at this house, so pleased with yourself and so sure that you could just take me back to Sylvan with you. But more than that, I think of how lonely and sad you were, and how I saw, just for a moment, how vulnerable and heartbroken you were too. This is the sort of thing I could never say to your face, but somehow it seems alright in a letter. I wonder if you think about that day too? Possibly not. You've always been good at locking up your feelings, at bottling them all up inside. I used to be good at that too, but August taught me how to forgive others, and myself. You know, it's not something I'd ever have admitted before I came here, but we're alike, you and me. I know what it's like to feel abandoned, to feel so angry that you just want to lash out. When August told me the truth about my mother,

I was filled with rage, and I smashed jar after jar of honey against the walls of the honey house. But after a while I realised that if I carried on as angry and as resentful as I was, I was going to sink into a cold place of meanness, and that there was no coming back from there if I did. And that's what you did, isn't it? I saw it, that day you came to the house. I saw how you had been deeply hurt by mother's leaving. And I feel bad, now, because I never saw it before. We missed so many chances to make each other feel better, because neither of us could forgive ourselves, so we couldn't forgive anyone else either. I blamed my mother for leaving me, I blamed myself for her death, and I blamed you for being a bad father. I couldn't see past that, and I couldn't see that guilt and blame never solve anything, in the long run.

I hope that some day you will be lucky enough to meet someone who can teach you that, like August taught me, because then you might learn to be happy again. Despite all we've been through, I truly wish that for you, Daddy.

Your daughter,
Lily

Describe the role August plays in helping Lily to come to terms with her past.

Comment: Consider the way in which August prepared Lily to receive the news about her mother, and the honest but understanding way in which she finally told the young girl the truth about Deborah's actions.

Note the way I refer back to the question in each paragraph. Every time I say something about the way in which August interacts with Lily, I explain how this helps Lily to come to terms with her past.

SAMPLE ANSWER

When Lily arrives in Tiburon, she is desperate to find out the truth about her mother, but she is still so badly affected by guilt over the role she played in her mother's death that she is not ready to deal with the truth. August realises this, and patiently helps Lily to become a stronger, happier girl before finally telling her what she needs to know. It is in this way, by gently preparing Lily and by biding her time, that August ensures the girl is eventually able to come to terms with her past and move on with her life.

August uses a number of different methods to teach Lily about love and forgiveness and the strengths that people can gain through religion. Storytelling is one of the methods she employs to aid Lily's emotional and spiritual development. August tells Lily the tale of Beatrix, the nun who ran away from the convent. In the story, Mary took Beatrix's place and in doing so, allowed her to return to her convent – to her home. August is telling Lily to put her faith in Mary. Some time later, Lily notices August reading "Jane Eyre". Lily, who is feeling a little lost because Rosaleen is moving out of their room, asks August what the book is about. August answers that it is about a girl whose mother died when she was little. Lily asks how it ends, and August replies that she doesn't know as she has only just started reading. She says, however, that the girl is "feeling lost and sad." August sensitively uses the parallels between stories and Lily's own life to help Lily understand her actions and the actions of others, without having to confront them directly. August knows that Lily is lying about her past, but is willing to protect her nonetheless and to allow her to keep her secrets until she is ready to face the facts.

Through the bees on her farm, August helps Lily to understand the importance of a strong female community and the necessity for everyone in that community to work together for the greater good. This, combined with the affection August, her sisters and the Daughters of Mary show Lily, helps Lily to become a confident young

woman who is later better able to deal with the sadness of her past than she would have been when she first arrived at the Boatwright house.

The work of the bees is important in teaching Lily a life lesson, but so is the work August herself does on the farm and the lifestyle she has chosen. August did not follow the path that most women chose, and but instead decided to lead an independent life and not get married. Although Lily may not want this for herself, it does show her that people are in charge of their own lives and that their happiness and success need not be tied to other people. This is important, as it allows Lily to break free from the memories and guilt which have been haunting her and preventing her from moving on in her life.

Lily finally summons up the courage to talk to August about her mother. She feels confident of August's love for her, something which August keeps repeating, and the two exchange stories about Deborah. Lily is finally strong enough to hear the truth, and August does not lie to her. Lily is shocked to learn that her mother abandoned her, and tells August that she hates Deborah. August tries to explain that Deborah was suffering from depression, but all Lily can think about is the fact that she was an "unwanted" baby and clearly an unwanted child too. August again tries to get Lily to forgive her mother and points out that we all make mistakes, and that Deborah tried to fix hers. Lily doesn't respond to this, and as August is leaving the room she says, "There is nothing perfect. There is only life." It is a difficult pill for Lily to swallow, but August's love and support enable her to work through her grief and eventually accept that her mother did love her. Lily's journey is over at last and thanks to August's guidance and kindness she has come to terms with her troubled past.

Would you agree that Lily has to overcome her own prejudice against Black people in the course of the novel? Support the points you make with the aid of suitable references to the novel.

Comment: This is a question on theme. The best way to approach a question like this is to ask yourself a series of questions.

- (a) *How is the theme introduced?*
- (b) *How is it developed?*
- (c) *Is there a moment or moments of crisis when the theme becomes evident?*
- (d) *By the end of the novel, have we learned anything new about the theme?*
- (e) *What is the final effect on the character or characters?*

Remember to focus on the question at all times. We are asked to discuss Lily's inherent racism, not the racism of the people in the southern states at the time. If you went into detail about the men who attacked Rosaleen, for example, you would be missing the point. You would be better advised to concentrate on the fact that, although Lily despises the men's attitude, she sees it as the way things are, and she is angry with Rosaleen for refusing to apologise to them.

SAMPLE ANSWER

Yes, I agree that Lily has to overcome her own prejudice against black people over the course of the novel.

Lily is brought up to believe that black people are second class citizens. In her eyes, they are labourers or housekeepers, but never independent, cultured, educated people. For example, Lily loves Rosaleen, but wishes that they shared a skin colour, so that Rosaleen could be more to her than just an nurse or a nanny. Lily cannot envisage a situation in which Rosaleen, a black woman, could marry a white man or adopt a white child. She is aware that there are places where such behaviour might be normal, but to her those places are like a "foreign country", they are so far removed from the reality of her life in Sylvan.

At the start of the novel, Lily is aware that there is racial prejudice, but she sees it as a unavoidable part of life. When Rosaleen is attacked, Lily is angry with the men who beat her, but she is also angry with Rosaleen. She wonders why Rosaleen couldn't just apologise and thereby escape with only a beating, instead of risking her life by standing up to the men. Although Lily may despise the men who call Rosaleen a "nigger" and threaten to kill her, she thinks such behaviour is just part of the fabric of society, and must be endured rather than opposed. It is not until she meets the Boatwrights that Lily begins to understand that there is an alternative to this violence and inequality.

When Lily meets the Boatwrights, she is forced to confront her own prejudices. The sisters live in a house that is far nicer than Lily's own home, and they are educated,

cultured and financially independent. Lily admits, honestly, that although she might have believed before now that black women could be clever, she had never realised that they could be cleverer than she. The intelligent, sensitive August Boatwright is instrumental in helping Lily to move past her old, racist ideas.

Lily learns a valuable lesson about racism when she eavesdrops on a conversation between August and June Boatwright one night in which June says that she is unhappy to have Lily staying with them, because she is white. Lily is indignant, astonished and resentful when she realises that June does not want her to stay because of the colour of her skin. This is an important moment in the novel as it allows Lily to see discrimination from the other side of the fence.

Zach Taylor also plays an important role in teaching Lily about the stupidity of racial stereotypes. When they meet, she is shocked to find herself attracted to him. In her old school, she had joined in with those who considered coloured people ugly. Now Lily is forced to face her own issues surrounding racial discrimination. She sees that Zach is a driven, intelligent, attractive young man: something she had not thought a black person could be. The Boatwrights and Zach teach Lily that people do not have to accept the way things are, but can make changes in society. This knowledge helps Lily to grow as a person and she is inspired by Zach's drive and determination.

Lily is a much stronger person at the end of the book, and when the students in the school call her a "nigger lover" for associating with Zach, she does not care. She chooses to be friendly with Zach despite their taunts, and she chooses to stay with the Boatwrights, realising that a loving and nurturing family is more important than the skin colours of the individual family members. The courage and resolve of Rosaleen, Zach, the Boatwright sisters and Mr. Forrest help Lily to realise that racism is not something which must be endured, but can be fought. This is not something Lily would have been comfortable doing at the start of the novel but now she feels the winds of change, and is excited at the thought of a brighter future.