

***The Secret Life of Bees***

by Sue Monk Kidd

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

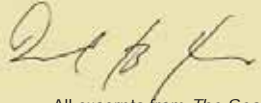
THE  
AMERICAN PLACE  
THEATRE  
LITERATURE  
TO LIFE<sup>®</sup>



LITERATURE TO LIFE® is a performance-based literacy program that presents professionally staged verbatim adaptations of significant American literary works. The program gives students a new form of access to literature by bringing to life the world of the book with performances that create an atmosphere of discovery and spark the imagination. *Literature to Life* encourages reading, writing, and critical thinking and provides a catalyst for learning and self-expression.

This *Literature To Life* Teacher's Resource Guide was written by professional teaching artists with vast experience implementing effective, hands-on strategies in the classroom. It is designed for educators to introduce drama-in-education to their students, as both a pre- and post-*Literature to Life* performance guide. The activities presented meet the Learning Standards for English and the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts. The exercises can be adapted (simplified or extended) according to the students' special needs, maturity, interests, and abilities.

Forging the connection between theatre, literature and education is no longer a privilege—it is our responsibility as educators to not only open these doors, but to charge through them with purpose and certitude.



David Kener, Executive Director  
The American Place Theatre

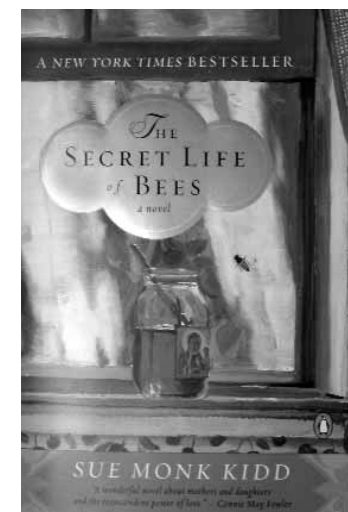
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## Theatre Etiquette

To make the theatre-going experience more enjoyable for everyone, a code of behavior has been established. When attending theatrical performances, remember these simple rules of conduct.

- Be on time for the performance.
- Do not eat, drink, or chew gum in the theatre.
- Turn off all cellular phones and pagers.
- Be sure to use the restroom BEFORE the pre-show discussion begins.
- Talk before and after the performance only. Remember that the people near you and on stage can hear you.
- Be an active participant in the pre- and post- show discussions in order to further deepen your experience with *Literature to Life*.
- Appropriate responses to the performances, such as laughing and applauding, are appreciated.
- Act with maturity during romantic, violent, and other challenging scenes.
- Do not leave after the performance, a post-show discussion will follow including a Q&A with the actor.
- Open your eyes, ears, and mind to the entire theatrical experience!



The following exercises are designed to be used BEFORE seeing the play!

## Section 1: Introduction

Overall Objective: The students will have an introduction to Sue Monk Kidd and *The Secret Life of Bees*.

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### Interviewing Sue Monk Kidd

Objectives:

- The students will learn about Ms. Kidd's life.
  - The students will write interview questions based on Ms. Kidd's life.
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I grew up in the 1950s and 60s in a tiny town tucked among the pine-lands and peanut fields of Southwest Georgia. A "beautiful nowhere," my urbane college roommate called it the first time she visited. For me, though, it was an "enduring somewhere," a long-suffering lap of Southern life. My great-grandparents settled there in 1828, building the rambling farm house where my parents live today. Our most plentiful resource, next to family roots, was stories. My desire to become a writer was born while listening to my father ply us with tales about mules who went through cafeteria lines and a petulant boy named Chewing Gum Bum. It seemed to me that, possibly, the only thing more magical than listening to stories, was creating them.

I filled Blue Horse notebooks with my writings. At thirteen, I fell in love with the Bronte Sisters and started a novel, predictably set on the English moors. At fifteen, completely enamored with Emerson and Thoreau, I wrote "My Philosophy of Life," (thinking I actually had one worth writing down). Around my sixteenth year, however, I stopped writing completely. I don't really know why. Perhaps I was finally sabotaged by the presumptuousness of it, by some lack of belief in myself. I only know when it came time to go to college, I did not choose writing. To compound the problem, this was before the women's movement had made much of a dent in the South, and I was under the impression that while there were a few unnatural exceptions to the rule (like the Bronte sisters), basically girls grew up to become one of four things: homemaker, secretary, teacher, nurse. Since I knew all about the glamour of hospitals by watching Dr. Kildare on television, I chose nurse.

I graduated with a B.S. degree from Texas Christian University (TCU) in Fort Worth in 1970 with a major in nursing. The only time I really doubted my career choice was when my English professor said to me, and I quote, "For the love of God, why are you a nursing major? You are a born writer."

Writing did not pop up again until a few months before my thirtieth birthday. I was married, living in a brick house in a small town in South Carolina with two small children, a dog, a station wagon, a part time nursing position, and a restlessness I could barely contain. I would tell you the story of how I finally seized my long lost desire to become a writer, but it happened while I was dumping my daughter's diapers into the washing machine, which is not especially how I want people to remember my defining moment. Still, I left the washer that day with an unshakable determination to write.

I enrolled in writing classes with the earnest desire to write fiction, but fate intervened, and I was diverted almost immediately to personal experience articles and essays—mostly inspirational and art of living pieces. For years I was a Contributing Editor at *Guideposts*, a monthly inspirational magazine with a formidable readership in the millions. It was there I cut my writing teeth, learning to create stories, studying the craft of fiction and using its techniques—character, scene, dialogue, conflict, denouement, etc.—to write simple non-fiction pieces about the ways my ordinary life intersected with the sacred.

My first book, *God's Joyful Surprise*, was a spiritual memoir which chronicled my early experiences with contemplative Christian spirituality. My second book, *When the Heart Waits*, also rooted in contemplative spirituality, recounted a psychological and spiritual transformation I experienced in early mid life. When I turned forty, my explorations and study took an unexpected turn into feminist theology and I underwent a profound redefinition. In 1996, Harper San Francisco published *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, my memoir of that passage.

My writing career, which had begun way back there in my childhood world of stories, was going well. But at 42, my original desire to write fiction returned, and with surprising intensity. Success seemed implausible. Nevertheless, I took a deep breath...and began. I took a graduate course in fiction at Emory University, and studied at Sewanee, Bread Loaf and other writers' conferences. I wrote and published a series of short stories in small literary journals. After I began to get the hang of it, I taught Creative Writing as an adjunct at the local college. I'm sure that I learned a lot more than my students did.

In 1997, I began writing my first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, set in South Carolina in 1964. It was sold to Viking Press in 2000 and was published January 28, 2002.

Today, I live beside a salt marsh near Charleston, South Carolina with my husband, Sandy, a marriage and individual counselor in private practice, and our black lab, Lily. I write in a book-lined, upstairs study where I can gaze out at the marsh birds and the tides. When not writing, I spend my time reading, playing with my friends, walking the beach, paddling around in my kayak, or sitting on the dock with my husband, simply letting things be.

Adapted from [www.suemonkkidd.com](http://www.suemonkkidd.com)

## Exercise:

Provide each student with a copy of the above autobiography of Sue Monk Kidd. After everyone has read it, discuss what aspects of her life the students think contributed to her ultimate career as a writer.

Author Garry Wills wrote, "The most important part of an interview, so far as the questioner is concerned, takes place before the interview." Ask each student to look, again, at the autobiography of Ms. Kidd. Have them individually devise a list of 8-10 interview questions that they might ask her about her life. As an extension, have a volunteer play Sue Monk Kidd and, with the help of the class, answer some of the questions on the other student's lists.



## Discussion: Judging a Book by its Cover

**Objective:** The students will discuss their expectations of *The Secret Life of Bees* from looking at the words and images on the book's cover. The students will discuss the choices made by publishers and executives to put the images and words on the cover.

### Exercise:

Bring in a copy of Sue Monk Kidd's book *The Secret Life of Bees*. Ask the students to look at the cover of the book.

- Is there a picture or image? What function do those images have? Note too the colors on the cover. What do the colors mean and why were they chosen? Do these images help sell this edition?
- What words did the publishers choose to put on the cover? In what font is the title of the book? What other words or phrases are on the cover? Do these words and phrases help sell this edition? Are you more likely to buy a book or magazine based on images or words? Are there images and words on the back cover?
- Why did Ms. Kidd choose this title? Did she feel the title would help sell copies of the book? Is the book really about bees or are they a symbol?

Post Performance follow up: Ask the students to create a poster or book cover for *The Secret Life of Bees*. They can cut images out of magazines and newspapers or draw them. What words will they include and why?

## Relating to the Text

**Objective:** The students will express their expectations of *The Secret Life of Bees* through a short dramatization.

### Exercise:

The group forms a circle and a copy of *The Secret Life of Bees* is placed at the center. In turn, each student has the opportunity to dramatize how they think they will feel about the novel based on the exercise above. For example, a person who still feels they don't know anything about the book may stand at a distance from it and stare at it. A person who thinks he's going to love the book may cradle it in his arms. A person who thinks it's going to be boring may turn his back to the book.

Students should be encouraged to be completely honest about their responses. This exercise can be repeated after the performance, in order to compare the students' pre-show expectations to their post-show reactions.

## Still Images: "You Can Go"

### Objectives:

- The students will do a close reading of a passage from *The Secret Life of Bees*.
- The students will create tableaux based on images in the passage.
- The students will create a movement piece based on the passage.

### Exercise:

Provide each student with the following passage adapted from a section of the novel. Ask 14 students to each take one of the sections of the speech and divide the rest of the class among the 14 sections (ideally, each unit has two people but singles are OK). Introduce the idea of "tableau" to the class. Tableau are living sculptures or frozen images made up of living actors' bodies. Tell them that the poses they adopt in their tableau should be both easy to maintain for a few minutes (avoid one foot off the floor, for example) and easy to recreate.

Begin with one reader reciting the whole passage so the class can get a sense of the whole. Discuss or look up any unfamiliar words. Break the class into the 14 units by section. Each unit prepares a still image to illustrate the passage. Remind them that the images must not have any movement, even where the passage is about movement. Allow them about five minutes for this process. Give a warning to the group when they have a minute left and ask the groups to rehearse what they are going to present to the class.

Reconvene the class as a whole and place them in a circle with a playing space in the center. As the teacher, read the passages in order while the members of each unit present their tableau. Follow the presentation with a discussion. You may wish to show the whole piece a second time before discussing.

1. I looked at the jar of bees on my dresser.
2. The poor creatures perched on the bottom barely moving...
3. Obviously pining away for flight.
4. They'd slipped from the cracks in my walls...
5. Flown for the sheer joy of it.
6. I unscrewed the lid and set it aside.
7. "You can go," I said.
8. But the bees remained there...
9. Like planes on a runway not knowing they'd been cleared for takeoff.
10. They crawled on their stalk legs...
11. As if the world had shrunk to that jar.
12. I tapped the glass,
13. Laid the jar on its side...
14. Those crazy bees stayed put.

## Shake and Freeze

**Objective:** The students will be introduced to words, themes and feelings present in the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*.

### Exercise:

Ask the students to form a circle. Explain that they will be asked to shake their bodies all around when you say "shake," and stop moving when you say "freeze." "Shake" and "freeze" the group a few times, then inform the group that instead of "freeze," you will now say a word, and the group should freeze in a position suggested by the word. For example, if you say "shake" and then "happy," the group should freeze in a position that literally or abstractly represents the word "happy".

*Suggestions for words are: Secret, Bees, Mother, Father, Family, Love, Freedom, Faith, Violence, Death, Adventure, Discovery...*

After a couple of rounds of Shake and Freeze, ask everyone except one student to unfreeze. Ask the group, "If this frozen image were a character, what might be one line of dialogue that this character would say?" Solicit a few possible lines of dialogue. The exercise is repeated a few times.

For the next stage, unfreeze everyone except two students and ask the group to come up with a line of narrative or line of dialogue that describes the image created by both frozen people. Give the students who are frozen a "1-2-3 Action" and ask them to improvise a scene based on the suggestions of the class.

“THE WAY DENISE PORTRAYS THE CHARACTERS AND THE USE OF ONLY TWO PROPS ALLOWED ME TO SEE THE PLAY THE WAY I SAW THE BOOK, WITH IMAGINATION.”

~ TRICIA GRANDVILL, GRADE 9



The following exercises are designed to be used AFTER seeing the play!

## Section 2: The World of *The Secret Life of Bees*

**Overall Objective:** The students will reflect on the *Literature to Life* performance of *The Secret Life of Bees* through a collective brainstorming session.

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### Alphabet Race

**Objective:** The students will brainstorm words, ideas, and feelings from the novel/play of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

#### Exercise:

Participants are split into two groups. Each group lines up behind a poster board which lists the letters A through Z. The first individual on line is asked to write one word that starts with "A" that captures a theme, feeling, idea, adjective, verb, or any word that comes to mind regarding *The Secret Life of Bees*. (You can limit the categories based on the level of your students.) The participant then hands the marker to the person behind him/her, who does the same for the letter "B" and so on until "Z." Every participant should be involved and write a word in turn, but can also ask the group for help if he/she cannot think of a word. The first group to finish wins. When both groups complete the alphabet, they are asked to look at each other's words and circle the ones they disagree with. A debate could take place in which students have a minute each to explain why they agree/disagree with that word being listed. (You can repeat the Shake and Freeze exercise in Section 1 with these words.)

### Speakeasy

**Objective:** The students will speak in free association about brainstormed words from the Alphabet Race.

#### Exercise:

Each student picks a word from the Alphabet Race lists and speaks in free association form on that word for 30 seconds without stopping. They can say anything about that word that comes to mind—i.e. feelings about the word, a story that it reminds them.

### Create a Poem

**Objective:** The students will create a poem in free verse using quotes from the novel as inspiration.

#### Exercise:

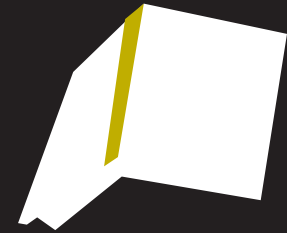
Provide each student with one of the quotations. Using the phrase as a base, the students will write a short poem in free verse. Each poem must contain words or phrases from the original quotation. Remind them of some of the literary devices they have studied (alliteration, repetition, metaphor, etc.) that you want them to use in their poem.

“ The way these bees flew, not even looking for a flower, just flying for the feel of the wind, split my heart down its seam.”

“ He has an orneriness year-round, but especially in the summer, when he works his peach orchards daylight to dusk.”

“ I went once in a raft down the Chattooga River and the same feeling comes over me now—of being lifted by currents, by a swirl of events I can't reverse.”

“ I throw every last jar on the table, until honey is spattered everywhere, flung like cake batter from electric beaters.”



*Pictured above: Members of the black community vote for the first time since 1876 on August 10, 1948. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blacks cannot be denied the right to vote in primary elections. AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS*

## Civil Rights Movement Timeline

### Objective:

The students will know basic facts about the American Civil Rights Movement.

### Exercise:

*The Secret Life of Bees* takes place during the turbulent times of the 1960's American Civil Rights Movement. A catalytic event in the story is the passage of Voting Rights Act. Please review the basics of that movement with your students or ask 9 students (or groups of students) to each present one event from the list below to the class.

### 1954 **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas**

In the 1950s, school segregation was widely accepted throughout the nation. In fact, it was required by law in most southern states. In 1952, the Supreme Court heard a number of school-segregation cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. It decided unanimously in 1954 that segregation was unconstitutional, overthrowing the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling that had set the "separate but equal" precedent.

*Pictured at top: Members of the black community vote in a South Carolina Democratic primary for the first time since 1876 on August 10, 1948. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blacks cannot be denied the right to vote in primary elections. AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS*

### 1955 **Montgomery Bus Boycott**

Rosa Parks, a 43 year old black seamstress, was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. The following night, fifty leaders of the Negro community met at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church to discuss the issue. Among them was the young minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The leaders organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which would deprive the bus company of 65% of its income, and cost Dr. King a \$500 fine or 386 days in jail. He paid the fine, and eight months later, the Supreme Court decided, based on the school segregation cases, that bus segregation violated the constitution.

### 1957 **Desegregation at Little Rock**

Little Rock Central High School was to begin the 1957 school year desegregated. On September 2, the night before the first day of school, Governor Faubus announced that he had ordered the Arkansas National Guard to monitor the school the next day. When a group of nine black students arrived at Central High on September 3, they were kept from entering by the National Guardsmen. On September 20, a judge granted an injunction against Governor Faubus and three days later the group of nine students returned to Central High School. Although the students were not physically injured, a mob of 1,000 townspeople prevented them from remaining at school. Finally, President Eisenhower ordered 1,000 paratroopers and 10,000 National Guardsmen to Little Rock, and on September 25, Central High School was desegregated.

### 1960 **Sit-in Campaign**

After having been refused service at the lunch counter of a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, Joseph McNeill, a Negro college student, returned the next day with three classmates to sit at the counter until they were served. They were not served. The four students returned to the lunch counter each day. When an article in the *New York Times* drew attention to the students' protest, they were joined by more students, both black and white, and students across the nation were inspired to launch similar protests.





...y vote in a South Carolina Democratic primary  
1948. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled  
...n primary elections. AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

### 1961 Freedom Rides

In 1961, bus loads of people waged a cross-country campaign to try to end the segregation of bus terminals. The nonviolent protest, however, was brutally received at many stops along the way.

### 1962 Mississippi Riot

President Kennedy ordered Federal Marshals to escort James Meredith, the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi, to campus. A riot broke out and before the National Guard could arrive to reinforce the marshals, two students were killed.

### 1963 Birmingham

Birmingham, Alabama was one of the most severely segregated cities in the 1960s. Black men and women held sit-ins at lunch counters where they were refused service, and “kneel-ins” on church steps where they were denied entrance. Hundreds of demonstrators were fined and imprisoned. In 1963, Dr. King, the Reverend Abernathy and the Reverend Shuttlesworth lead a protest march in Birmingham. The protestors were met with policemen and dogs. The three ministers were arrested and taken to Southside Jail.

### 1963 March on Washington

Despite worries that few people would attend and that violence could erupt, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin organized the historic event that would come to symbolize the civil rights movement. A reporter from the *Times* wrote, “no one could ever remember an invading army quite as gentle as the two hundred thousand civil rights marchers who occupied Washington.”

### 1965 Selma

Outraged over the killing of a demonstrator by a state trooper in Marion, Alabama, the black community of Marion decided to hold a march. Martin Luther King agreed to lead the marchers on Sunday, March 7, from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, where they would appeal directly to governor Wallace to stop police brutality and call attention to their struggle for voting rights. When Governor Wallace refused to allow the march, Dr. King went to Washington to speak with President Johnson, delaying the demonstration until March 8. However, the people of Selma could not wait and they began the march on Sunday. When the marchers reached the city line, they found a posse of state troopers waiting for them. As the demonstrators crossed the bridge leading out of Selma, they were ordered to disperse, but the troopers did not wait for their warning to be headed. They immediately attacked the crowd of people who had bowed their heads in prayer. Using tear gas and batons, the troopers chased the demonstrators to a black housing project, where they continued to beat the demonstrators as well as residents of the project who had not been at the march. Bloody Sunday received national attention, and numerous marches were organized in response. Martin Luther King lead a march to the Selma bridge that Tuesday, during which one protester was killed. Finally, with President Johnson’s permission, Dr. King led a successful march from Selma to Montgomery on March 25. President Johnson gave a rousing speech to congress concerning civil rights as a result of Bloody Sunday, and passed the Voting Rights Act within that same year.

*Adapted from Western Michigan University's Department of Political Science website: [www.wmu.edu](http://www.wmu.edu)*



The following exercises are designed to be used AFTER seeing the play!

## Section 3: The Theatre Production

**Overall Objective:** The students will have a stronger understanding of the art of the Theatre.

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### Adaptation from Novel to Play

**Objectives:**

- The students will identify the differences and similarities between two literary genres: novels and plays.
- The students will adapt a passage from a novel into a dramatic scene.

#### Facts:

*The Secret Life of Bees* is a novel. A novel is “a fictional prose narrative... typically having a plot that is unfolded by the actions, speech, and thoughts of the characters” (The American Heritage® Dictionary). In other words, the story is told in a combination of narration, dialogue, and inner thoughts of the characters. *The Secret Life of Bees* is narrated by the character of Lily and lets the reader into her thoughts only—what is called “first person point of view.” A play is not meant to be read but to be seen, performed by actors. There is not usually a narrator to describe people, places, and characters’ emotions. All of that must be conveyed to the audience through the acting, direction and technical aspects (costume, set design, lighting) of the performance.

#### Exercise:

After presenting the concepts above to the students, ask them to list the qualities of a good story. Are the qualities of a good novel the same as the qualities of a good play? How is the story told differently between the two genres? Ask the class what the steps are in transforming a novel into a play.

Present the students with the passage below from *The Secret Life of Bees*. Ask them to adapt it into a dramatic scene on their own. Remind them that they should avoid narration but should include any stage directions that they feel are important. How are they going to depict the split time frame of the passage? Are there two Lilys—one toddler and one older?

*My first and only memory of my mother was the day she died...*

*I raised my arms to her, and she picked me up, saying I was way too big a girl to hold like this, but holding me anyway. The moment she lifted me, I was wrapped in her smell.*

*The scent got laid down in me in a permanent way and had all the precision of cinnamon. I used to go regularly into the Sylvan Mercantile and smell every perfume bottle they had, trying to identify it. Every time I showed up, the perfume lady acted surprised, saying, “My goodness, look who’s here.” Like I hadn’t just been in there the week before and gone down the entire row of bottles. Shalimar, Chanel No. 5, White Shoulders.*

*I’d say, “You got anything new?”*

*She never did.*

*So it was a shock when I came upon the scent on my fifth-grade teacher, who said it was nothing but plain ordinary Ponds Cold Cream.*

The Secret Life of Bees, pp. 5-6

Allow them about 10-15 minutes to complete a draft of the scene. Ask for volunteers to have their scenes read aloud. Students other than the playwright should read each scene. Afterwards, debrief about how the different scenes captured the essence of the passage. What worked well? What was difficult about the process?

### Casting

**Objective:** The students will create a cast list for a movie of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

#### Exercise:

Ask the students, “If you were casting a movie of *The Secret Life of Bees*, what stars would you get to be in it?” Ask each to work independently and cast Lily, Rosaleen, the brutish T. Ray, and the magical sisters: August, May, and June Boatwright. Would it be important to cast the three sisters to look alike? Would it be important to cast Caucasian actors in the roles of White characters and African-American actors as the Black characters?



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- Sue Monk Kidd – [www.suemonkkidd.com](http://www.suemonkkidd.com)  
Interview with Sue Monk Kidd - [www.penguinputnam.com](http://www.penguinputnam.com)

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### **We Want to Hear from YOU and your STUDENTS!**

THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE

266 WEST 37<sup>TH</sup> STREET, FLOOR 22, NEW YORK, NY 10018

p 212.594.4482 • f 212.594.4208

EDU@AMERICANPLACETHEATRE.ORG

WWW.AMERICANPLACETHEATRE.ORG

WWW.LITERATURETOLIFE.ORG



## What to Do After You See the Performance

Please encourage your students to reflect on the play in some of the following ways. We would love to have copies of some of the writings or artwork your students create!

### Write

- Write a review of *The Secret Life of Bees* as if you were a journalist or news reporter.
- Write a letter to the actor, director, or teaching artist in response to the play.
- Write a letter to the author Sue Monk Kidd in response to the novel.
- Write a letter to Lily giving her advice about her new life with the bee-keeping sisters.
- Write a monologue as Deborah (Lily's mom), explaining to Lily what really happened the day she died.
- Write an epilogue. For example, what happens to Lily after the story ends? Does she ever see her father again?

### Draw

- Draw the world of one or more of the characters.
- Draw images from the production.
- Draw a poster for our production of *The Secret Life of Bees*.
- Create a collage of images from magazines in response to the play.

Wynn Handman, Artistic Director/Co-Founder  
David Kener, Executive Director  
Jennifer Barnette, Managing Director  
Jillian Mojica, Office Manager  
Adi Ortner, Arts Education Associate