

Single Text – The Secret Life of Bees – 60 Marks

Note: I have included comments before each sample answer, explaining what type of question each one is, and telling you what you should concentrate on in your answer. Obviously, there will be no such comments on your exam paper.

C THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES – Sue Monk Kidd

Answer **all** the questions.

1. (a) What does Lily remember about the day her mother died? (10)
 - (b) What happens when Rosaleen goes to town to register to vote? (10)
 - (c) What kind of man is Lily's father, T. Ray? (10)

2. Answer **ONE** of the following: [Each part carries 30 marks]
 - (i) Write the letter Lily might have written to T. Ray at the end of the novel.
 - (ii) Describe the role August plays in helping Lily to come to terms with her past.
 - (iii) 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.

1. (a) What does Lily remember about the day her mother died? (10)

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.

(b) What happens when Rosaleen goes to town to register to vote? (10)

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.

(c) What kind of man is Lily's father, T. Ray? (10)

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 of a lonely, bitter man.

Answer ONE of the following: [Each part carries 30 marks]

(i) 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

Tiburon.
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

(ii) 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.

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.

(iii) 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 much 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.

Unseen Poetry – 20 Marks

Read this poem at least twice and then respond to the questions that follow.

In this poem, Pat Boran speaks of his attitude to the car in the past, the present and the future.

DRIVING INTO HISTORY

Once in a while, morning sunshine
filtered through the peeling paint and rust
of that old black banger, perched
like a stylite* up on concrete blocks
in our back garden. The seats were torn,
the wooden dashboard was an altar to insect death,
and yet my first boyhood trips into the world
were in that wheel-less, if not quite lifeless wreck.
But since they took the garden to build a bypass
to our once congested, now double-bypassed town,
I dream little of either speed or novelty
and, truth to tell, I scarcely know the names

of all these cars out here. Now all I wish
is time enough for them to age and rust,
to end up up on blocks in some child's life,
twentieth century coins down behind their seats,
their vacant windscreens open to the light.

Pat Boran

**A stylite was a saint or monk in olden times who lived on top of a pillar.*

1. How, in your opinion, does the poet convey his attitude/feelings towards
“the old black banger”?

Explain your answer with reference to the first eight lines of the poem. (10)

2. In what ways has the poet's attitude to cars changed in the remainder of the poem?
Explain your answer. (10)

**1. How, in your opinion, does the poet convey his attitude/feelings towards
“the old black banger”?**

Explain your answer with reference to the first eight lines of the poem. (10)

Comment: This is a question on style. We can tell this because of the use of the word "How" in this question. You are not being asked what the poet's feelings are, but instead you are being asked to show how he uses language to convey these feelings. Take note also of the fact that this question is based on the first eight lines of the poem only. Make sure that you do not go outside these lines in your answer.

Be sure to use literary terms in your poetry answers. You are not required to use many of them at ordinary level, but even a mention of similes and metaphors will show the examiner that you are aware that you are answering a question on poetic style. Remember, whenever you point out a feature of style, you must use a verb to explain what that feature of style does in the context of the poem. "This suggests..." "This simile reinforces..." and so forth.

SAMPLE ANSWER

The poet clearly feels a certain fondness for the "old black banger". He describes its decrepit state honestly, calling it a "wreck", but still, he remembers the "morning

sunshine" filtering through the "peeling paint and rust". The mention of sunshine suggests warmth and happiness, and this affectionate tone is borne out when the poet tells us that he took imaginary trips in the car when he was a child.

There is something almost reverent about the descriptions in the first eight lines, which seems to indicate that, as a boy at least, the poet held the car in awe. This sense of reverence is conveyed by the use of words associated with religious worship: the car, up on blocks, is compared in an unusual simile to "a stylite up on concrete blocks". This impression is reinforced by the metaphor several lines later in which the poet compares the wooden dashboard to an altar. This is done humorously, because he says it was an "altar to insect death", but still, the feeling I am left with is that the poet wants us to know how much he loved, respected and admired the old car.

2. In what ways has the poet's attitude to cars changed in the remainder of the poem?

Explain your answer. (10)

In the remainder of the poem, the poet has become embittered towards cars. The garden where, as a child, he played in the old car has been taken away to make room for a bypass. Now the poet has lost all interest in cars and "scarcely knows the name" of the different types which speed past his town any more. There is no novelty left in cars, he suggests, and he wishes that they would all "age and rust" so that they could, like his old car, "end up on blocks" and maybe that way bring joy to another child's life.

There is a sense of wistfulness and nostalgia in the last two lines of the poem when the poet describes the way he would like the cars to end up, "twentieth century coins down behind their seats, / their vacant windscreens open to the light." This reflects back to the earlier section of the poem, in which the poet talked about the sun shining into his "old black banger". He implies that the only way cars can bring joy now is by becoming vehicles for the fantasy journeys of childhood, rather than simply machines built to take us as from one place to the other as quickly as possible.

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