***Secret Life of Bees*** discussion questions

1. How would you describe Lily's feelings about her mother? Did they change throughout the novel? How did hearing that her mother left her affect her perception of her mother?
2. Do you belive T-Ray's account of what happened when Lily's mother died?
3. Did your opinion of T-Ray change when August told Lily about how much he used to love her mother? Does Deborah's abandonment explain or excuse T-Ray?
4. Do you agree with Lily that people would rather die than forgive? Does she forgive her mother? T-Ray? Herself?
5. What do the bees mean to the story? What is "the secret life of bees?"
6. Do you think race was portrayed realistically in The Secret Life of Bees? What do you think Sue Monk Kidd was saying about race in this novel?
7. Why did Rosaleen spit on the men's shoes? What are the ways the characters in the novel confront injustice? How do you think we should deal with injustice? Do these kinds of prejudices still exist today?
8. What was your reaction to Lily's relationship with Zach? What do you think happened to them in the future?
9. Talk about the sisters. Who was your favorite? Do we all need a wailing wall, like May? Why do you think June was cold toward Lily? How would you describe August?
10. What role did the Black Madonna play in their community? What do you think about the legend of the Black Madonna?
11. Rate The Secret Life of Bees on a scale of 1 to 5.
12. Were you surprised to learn that T. Ray used to be different, that once he truly loved Deborah? How do you think Deborah's leaving affected him? Did it shed any light on why T. Ray was so cruel and abusive to Lily?
13. Had you ever heard of "kneeling on grits"? What qualities did Lily have that allowed her to survive, endure, and eventually thrive, despite T. Ray?
14. Who is the queen bee in this story?
15. Lily's relationship to her dead mother was complex, ranging from guilt to idealization, to hatred, to acceptance. What happens to a daughter when she discovers her mother once abandoned her? Is Lily right—would people generally rather die than forgive? Was it harder for Lily to forgive her mother or herself?
16. Lily grew up without her mother, but in the end she finds a house full of them. Have you ever had a mother figure in your life who wasn't your true mother? Have you ever had to leave home to find home?
17. What compelled Rosaleen to spit on the three men's shoes? What does it take for a person to stand up with conviction against brutalizing injustice? What did you like best about Rosaleen?
18. Had you ever heard of the Black Madonna? What do you think of the story surrounding the Black Madonna in the novel? How would the story be different if it had been a picture of a white Virgin Mary? Do you know women whose lives have been deepened or enriched by a connection to an empowering Divine Mother?
19. Why is it important that women come together? What did you think of the "Calendar Sisters" and the Daughters of Mary? How did being in the company of this circle of females transform Lily?
20. May built a wailing wall to help her come to terms with the pain she felt. Even though we don't have May's condition, do we also need "rituals," like wailing walls, to help us deal with our grief and suffering?
21. How would you describe Lily and Zach's relationship? What drew them together? Did you root for them to be together?
22. Project into the future. Does Lily ever see her father again? Does she become a beekeeper? A writer? What happens to Rosaleen? What happens to Lily and Zach? Who would Zach be today?