



Book Talk: The Hive The Story of the Honeybee and Us by Bee Wilson

2023 Geography Awareness Week



“For so work the honeybees, creatures that by a rule in nature teach the act of order to a peopled kingdom.”

~William Shakespeare

Wilson, B. (2004). *The Hive: the story of the honeybee and us*. Thomas Dunne Books.

This text is **ONLY** for the **teacher/educator** to provide an opportunity to build their own knowledge on the honeybee.

The resourceful honeybees, throughout history, have symbolized royalty, teamwork, communication, goal oriented, community, and hard work. This text provides information on humans and their relationship with honeybees by exploring how the work and politics of humans attempt to follow a similar order to that of the honeybees and their hive. In addition, author Bee Wilson takes the reader on a delicious journey of food and drink and the unique work of the beekeeper.

In addition to six chapters, there are two sections included before the chapters begin, the Introduction and Who's Who in the Beehive, as well as notes, bibliography, and picture credits, included after the chapters. We have selected quotes and notes from the chosen sections and chapters to share and discuss during a teacher/educator book talk. We encourage participants to continue to read chapters not selected that spark interest or relate to the topic of study.



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Included below: information and two brief videos on Florida and honey production.

The two videos included may be shown during the book talk as they have a direct connection to Florida.

- 1) **honey bee** : a honey-producing bee (genus *Apis* of the family Apidae); *especially* : a European bee (*A. mellifera*) introduced worldwide and kept in hives for the [honey](#) it produces.
[Honeybee Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#)
- 2) **honeybee**, (tribe Apini), also spelled **honeybee**, any of a group of insects in the family Apidae (order Hymenoptera) that in a broad sense includes all bees that make honey. In a stricter sense, *honeybee* applies to any one of seven members of the [genus](#) *Apis*—and usually only the single [species](#), *Apis mellifera*,



the [domestic honeybee](#). This species is also called the European honeybee or the western honeybee.

[Honeybee | Characteristics, Habitat, Life Cycle, & Facts | Britannica](#)

- 3) Apis mellifera is another name for the honeybee. Apis is an ancient term having Egyptian roots, but it is also linked to the Greek word for 'swarm.' Mellifera is a Latin word that means "honey-bearing."

[Honeybee Lifespan: How Long Do Honeybees Live? - AZ Animals \(a-z-animals.com\)](#)

- 4) Lifespan of a honeybee:

- a. Queen bees: several years, up to 6 years.
- b. Worker bees: up to 6 weeks in the summer and up to 5 months or more in the winter.
- c. Drone bees: around 8 weeks.

[Honeybee Lifespan: How Long Do Honeybees Live? - AZ Animals \(a-z-animals.com\)](#)

- 5) Beekeeper: as defined in The Hive (pg. 14)—a human being who attempts to control activities in the colony, contriving whenever possible to maximize honey production.

- 6) [Florida Citrus & Honey Industry Vintage Film - YouTube](#)

Florida Citrus & Honey Industry Vintage Film

This classic film shows how the honey and citrus industries rely on each other. The extraction of honey, removal of wax and packaging are shown. Then we see University of Florida researchers working with honey and citrus products. From the Florida Memory Library.

- 7) [Florida Memory • Beekeeper](#)

In this film, beekeeper George H. Strickland of Sopchoppy is interviewed. Among the things discussed are hotwiring to keep bears out of the hives, using smoke to control the bees and techniques used in harvesting honey. Shown working with Strickland is Bernie Kemp, also from Sopchoppy. Produced by WFSU-TV.



Modified Book Talk: Discussion Preparation Guide

Directions:

Read the selected chapters from *The Hive* and complete the Discussion Preparation Guide to use during the book talk.

Chapters: Title Introduction

Who's Who in the Hive

Chapter 4: Food and Drink

Chapter 6: The Beekeeper

- 1) What words were unfamiliar to you or seem to have been used in a special manner to create a particular impression? Define the word in the context of the phrase where you found it.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

- 2) What particular items seem especially significant or unique to you? Items can be anything- a statement, the setting, a name, the title, the situation, anything of interest. Prepare questions about these items to ask during the book talk. "How..."
"Why..." Questions are especially good.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

e.

3) How would you relate to others you have read/studied about nature or human society? Or to something you have observed or experienced?

4) What did you learn from the selected chapters?

5) What is your personal reaction to the material you read?

Source: Ellenbaum, Charles, O. (2000). Discussion preparation guides, In Patricia C. Rice & David W. McCurdy (Eds), *Strategies in teaching anthropology* (pp. 13-20). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.



Book Talk Facilitation: Notes and Quotes



The notes and quotes below are included to assist the book talk facilitator. Other notes and quotes may also be included.

Introduction pg. 1

“From the earliest times, bee colonies supplied humans not just with some of life’s luxuries, but also with food for the imagination.”

“Our ancestors decided that bees, despite their stings, were the ‘most mysterious and therefore magical creatures.’”

During research for *The Hive*, Bee Wilson found that the community of honeybees was used as a “model for human society.” Historical references to the honeybee include: Aristotle, Plato, Pliny the Elder, Virgil and Seneca, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Marx and Tolstoy.

This section includes a question for the reader to ponder as they read the book: are you a beekeeper?

Who’s Who in the Beehive pg. 9

“Workers do many different jobs...forty to fifty thousand workers, non-reproductive females, who keep the colony going in every possible way.”

In the summertime a bee colony contains the following:

- Queen bee: the only fully female bee; the rest of the colony is born from the queen bee.

- This queen bee lays two types of eggs:

 - Drone eggs: lays without mating.

 - Worker eggs: results from mating with male drone bees.

Wild bee colonies live inside a hollow log, hollow tree, or in a rock crevice, high off the ground for safety. Honeybees will swarm when in search of a new hive to occupy.

The beehive is man-made built for bees to collect and make honey for human consumption.

Man-made beehives have been in production for close to 10, 000 years as compared to wild bee colonies existence for close to 20 million years.

Beekeepers take the role of the guard bees: protect the hive from other insects, toads, and ants, clean the hive, and destroy diseased hives.

Harvesting honey occurs at least twice a year.

Chapter 4: Food and Drink pg. 140

“Honey has always been a way to make nice things nicer.”

“...magical tupelo gold honey from swampy Florida...”

This chapter poses an important question: What is Honey?

~is it animal or vegetable?

~in both Islamic and Jewish law, bees were regarded as unclean beasts, but honey is regarded as clean.

~Do bees make honey or just “collect” it?

Honey’s Heyday: the use of honey by historical people is well documented, however, other sweeteners were also developed to satisfy an ancient sweet tooth. The Romans, ancient Arabs, and the Chinese created types of syrups to add to a variety of foods and drinks. In ancient Egypt though, honey was still the “food of kings.”

Honey in the ancient world: Sicily and the island of Calymnos were known for their honey. Near Athens, Mount Hymettus, honey produced here was white and thin, different from today’s color and consistency, was known as the finest honey.

Honey preferences: some people prefer honey from far off places-most honey sold in Britain came from China until a scare in farming techniques shut down the trade. Texture, color, and consistency also influence honey preference. The “swampy honeys of Florida: deep burnished palmetto and especially the burnt-sugar-tasting tupelo, from the gum trees that grown alongside the Apalachicola, Choctawhatchee, and the Ochlocknee rivers.”

****Special Note:** for a special treat to enjoy during a book talk, pgs. 175-188 *Food and Drink: Recipes*, Bee Wilson offers recipes for the reader to enjoy. These tasty treats could be prepared and shared during a book talk. 😊

Chapter 6: The Beekeeper pg. 231

In regard to beekeepers: “they are weather-hardened farmers who have learned how to find happiness in modest circumstances.”

Ancient Egypt, 4,000-4,500 years ago: beehive keeping began.

Ancient people learned early on that offensive odors would most likely cause bee stings.

The use of smoke helps to keep the hive calm when working with bees and collecting honey.

Status and respect for the beekeeper has shifted throughout history. Beekeeping has been seen as both a science and an art form.

Beekeepers are seen as “belonging to an older, kindlier world, and can still read the weather through their bees.”

Bees have a way of communicating as Karl von Frisch discovered through his research: bees can talk to one another.

The Dance of the Bees-these “waggle” dances allow bees to communicate about food sources.

