

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## Bee Season by Myla Goldberg

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- How would you describe the family dynamics (e.g. Saul's relationship with Miriam)?
- Why does Miriam feel so negative about motherhood? How do her feelings about pregnancy and motherhood influence her behavior?
- How would you describe the relationship between Aaron and Eliza? Why didn't Eliza help her brother when he was being bullied at school? Why didn't Aaron fight back?
- How would you characterize Aaron's early experiences with religion?
- What is the significance of Miriam's sexual encounters with Saul?
- What is the significance of Miriam's kaleidoscope? Why does she steal these things rather than purchase them? Why does she steal from houses rather than stores? Why does she break into a house in a poor neighborhood after Saul and Eliza leave for Washington, D.C.?
- How do you interpret Miriam's reaction to her parents being run down?
- Why do you think Aaron accuses his father of making his mother leave them?
- Discuss Saul's belief that Eliza can reach "shefa" influx of divine by meditation with letters.
- Why does Aaron find Iskcon Temple more alluring than the Jewish temple, Beth Amicha?
- Why do you think Eliza goes down in the hotel after she's supposed to be in bed? The author says she is "empowered by the fact that she has broken away from her expected place in time to steer her own course" (p.112) Do you think this statement applies to any of the other characters as well?
- How would you characterize Miriam's relationship with her parents?
- What is the significance of the family photo taken at the spelling bee where Eliza wins?
- What did Miriam intend to accomplish with her gift of the kaleidoscope to her daughter?
- What do you think will become of the Naumann family?
- How do you interpret Eliza's final act in the novel?
- Besides a desire to please her father, what drives Eliza to do well at spelling?
- What are Eliza's experiences at school?
- How does she feel about the way her teachers and other students as well as her own family perceive her? (resentful, frustrated?)
- How does Goldberg describe the impact that judging a child has on the child?
- Why does Eliza slip the information about the district spelling bee under her father's door instead of giving it to him?
- How does Eliza feel about her newly discovered talent of spelling? What does the author mean when she says "When Eliza studies, it is like discovering her own anatomy" What about Eliza's characterizations of each letter? Which was her favorite letter?
- What is her father's study like? Why does he spend so much time behind a closed door? What effect does this have on his children?
- Does Dr. Morris give Saul good advice about Eliza?
- Is Saul a good father?



**Skokie Public Library**

5215 Oakton Street  
Skokie, Illinois 60077  
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax  
[www.skokielineary.info](http://www.skokielineary.info)

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- How does Saul's relationship with Miriam effect his image of himself as a father?
- Why does Saul spend time in his room, first with Aaron and then with Eliza?
- Do the dynamics of the Naumann family reflect the time in which they live?
- What is Saul's family background?
- How is it that Saul became interested in Judaism and then in mysticism?
- What effect does his childhood have on his approach to parenthood?
- What is Miriam's family background?
- How do the backgrounds of Miriam and Saul lead them to the life they are leading today? Are they free of the legacies of their parents? ("the two bond over their mutual lack of family ties")
- What did each of them see in each other that led to their marriage?
- How does the author describe the spelling bee?
- What is the relationship between Aaron and Eliza? Is it typical of sibling relationships? How does the incident with the dog affect each of them?
- Discuss Aaron's religious experiences. When does he first see God? What was his experience at his bar mitzvah?
- At the spelling bee, Miriam is struck with a sense of pain as "she realizes too late that she has made her daughter more like her than she ever had intended." Why does she think this? On the other hand, Saul feels gratitude and humility. "He would like to think that he has kept his distance in order to protect his daughter from his unfulfilled hopes." Is he deceiving himself?
- What effect does Eliza's failure to appreciate the kaleidoscope have on Miriam? What significance does Miriam attach to the kaleidoscope? Why is she searching for Perfectimondo? Why does she steal the ball when she's age 8 ½? How does she justify her theft?
- Each family member is searching for something. Are there similarities in their searches?
- What is the significance of "tikun olam" to Miriam? In what ways do each of their searches embody the principle of "tikun olam"?
- In what ways are Judaism and Hare Krishna similar?
- Why does Miriam suddenly become sexually aggressive?
- How does Saul react to the room Miriam has created?
- How does Miriam react when Saul brings the shoebox with the ball to the hospital?
- What does Eliza expect to happen when she reaches shefa?
- How do you interpret Eliza's final act (rebellion, defiance, resolution)? Why does she intentionally misspell the word?
- Is the end hopeful? Did you expect it?
- Does every family have secrets?
- The quotations are the beginning of the book-How are they relevant to Eliza? Are they relevant to other characters as well?
- One review states "Bee Season introduces one of the most appealing girls in fiction since Scout narrated "To Kill a Mockingbird". Do you agree?
- How did you like the author's writing style?
- How did you like the narrative structure with viewpoints of all the family members?
- What did you think of the book's cover?