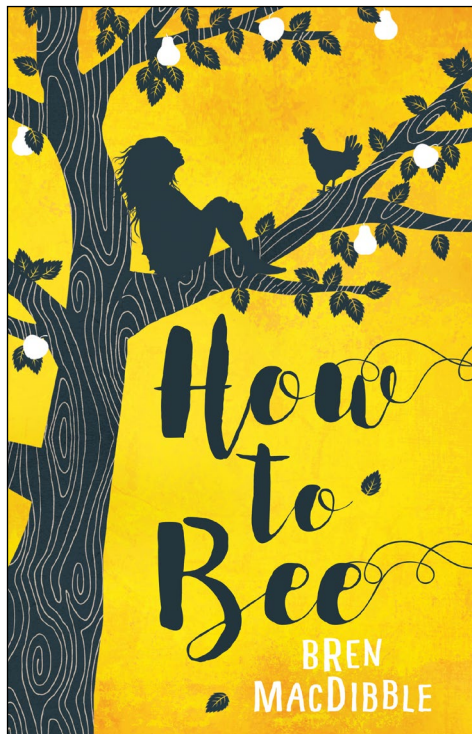




# GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

## How to Bee

*Written by* Bren MacDibble



*How to Bee* is a beautiful, fierce and ultimately hopeful dystopian novel, set against an all-too-possible future where bees are extinct and it is up to the quickest and bravest kids to pollinate the flowers by hand.

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

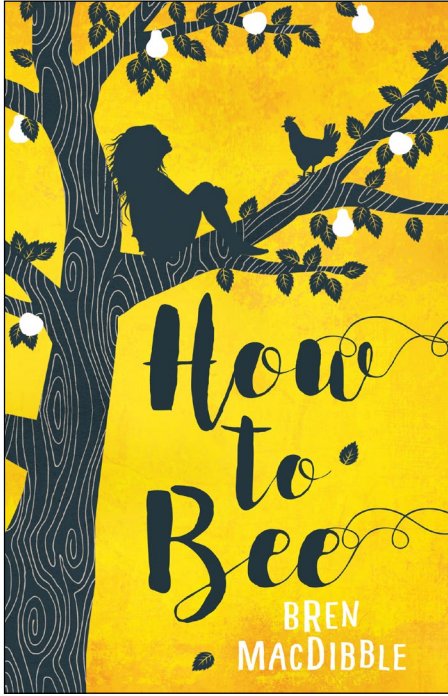
Ages 9 to 12 / Grades 4 to 7

JUVENILE FICTION / Science & Nature / Environment

5 x 7.75 / 224 pages

Trade paperback / \$12.95 / 978-1-77306-418-5 / ebook / \$9.95 / 978-1-77306-214-3

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## BOOK DESCRIPTION

**A story about family, loyalty, kindness and bravery, set against an all-too-possible future where climate change has forever changed the way we live.**

In a world where real bees are extinct, the quickest, bravest kids climb the fruit trees and pollinate the flowers by hand. Peony lives with her sister, Magnolia, and her grandfather on a fruit farm outside the city. All Peony really wants is to be a bee. Even though she is only nine — and bees must be ten — Peony already knows all there is to know about being a bee and she is determined to achieve her dream.

Life on the farm is a scrabble, but there is enough to eat and a place to sleep, and there is love. Then Peony's mother arrives to take her away from everything she has ever known. Peony is taken to the city to work for a wealthy family. Will Peony's grit and quick thinking be enough to keep her safe?

*How to Bee* is a beautiful and fierce novel for younger readers, and the voice of Peony will stay with you long after you read the last page.

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Students may wish to record their answers in writing to refer to after reading the book. If this discussion is taking place as a class, designate a student to act as secretary to take notes. If students are reading the book individually, recommend they write a journal entry using the below questions to record their expectations.

1. As a class, consider the title of this novel, *How to Bee*. What words stand out to you? What do you think this book will be about? What elements of the cover images make an impression on you and why?
2. The back cover synopsis begins with the words: “In a world where real bees are extinct ...” What does this tell you about the setting of this book? What would a world without bees be like? What kinds of themes do you expect to surface in a story that takes place in a world without bees?

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### 1. Re-examining Expectations

Before reading *How to Bee*, you were asked to predict what kinds of themes and setting would emerge from a book that takes place in a world without real bees. Refer back to your answers. Which elements of this book aligned with your expectations? What was the most surprising part about this book?

### 2. The Dating (or Babysitting) Game

As a group or a class, list the main characters in *How to Bee*. For each character, list their hopes, fears and motivations, as well as any identifying features. This list could include unique words they use or unusual things they do. Put all the characters’ names in a hat and stage a mock episode of *The Dating Game*.

How to play:

One student plays a bachelor/bachelorette who is looking for a date among three panelists on the show. Before the show starts, these three panelists will each choose a name from a hat. They must act as that character when asked questions by the bachelor/ette during the show. The bachelor/ette is not allowed to ask about panellists' names, occupations or where they live. After each panelist has been given the chance to respond to three to four questions, the bachelor/ette or the class must try to guess which character each panelist is impersonating. This could be played in one round as a fun activity, or as multiple rounds until all students have a chance to participate.

► For younger readers, instead of seeking a date, the bachelor/ette character could be replaced by a parent trying to find a suitable babysitter for their children.

### 3. Everything is a Circle

On page fourteen, Peony describes nature as a circle: “[t]he farm’s full of circles. Bees, flowers, fruit. Pests, chooks, eggs. People, bees, flowers, fruit, pests, chooks, eggs, people. . . All overlapping circles.” What does she mean by this? Can you think of other circles or cycles in nature? Pick one and draw a picture of its different stages.

### 4. Man Against ... ?

There are four basic categories of conflicts in stories: man against man (stories in which characters are against one another); man against nature (stories in which the protagonist struggles against a force of nature, like environmental change); man against self (stories in which the main struggle of the story is internal within the protagonist); and man against society (stories in which the protagonist struggles against an institution or social dynamic). There are elements of all four conflicts in *How to Bee* — make a list for each conflict and try to see how many different conflicts from the book you can name. In your opinion, which of these four is the central or prevailing conflict in the book?

## 5. Peony's Picnic

After you've finished reading *How to Bee*, celebrate by baking a passionfruit cake (just like the one that Peony bakes in the book) and have a picnic outside. If completing this activity as a class, bake the cake together if a kitchen is available, or combine the picnic with a book discussion.

Passionfruit can be found in most large grocery stores and there are many cake recipes online.

## 6. TED Talks

In this exercise, each student will adopt the persona of one of the characters from the book, and will then prepare a TED Talk–style speech on a topic or issue in *How to Bee*. Topics can include: the importance of bees; friendship; environmental stewardship; anxiety; agoraphobia (fear of being outside in open spaces); or child labour and working conditions. To prepare this speech, it may be useful as a class to view resources available online about what makes a good TED talk, and discuss creative ways to act out a persona.

## 7. “Bee” an Ambassador

Become a bee ambassador! Let's do our part to make sure bees never become extinct like they did in *How to Bee*. One way to do this is by visiting or volunteering with an apiary, charity, learning centre or beekeeper's association near you to learn more about how to help bees. Another way to be a bee ambassador is to create a poster or other project to explain specific things individuals can do to help save bees. Ask your teacher to display your poster in the classroom.

## 8. How to Pollinate

Can trees really be pollinated without real bees? Do all trees need bees to grow fruit? If bees did become extinct, would it be possible to continue pollinating fruit-bearing trees? As an individual or as a class, research these questions and come up with your own answers.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Bren MacDibble** was raised on farms all over New Zealand, so is an expert about being a kid on the land. After 20 years in Melbourne, Bren recently sold everything, and now lives and works on a bus travelling around Australia. In 2018, *How to Bee* — her first novel for younger readers — won the Children’s Book Council Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers and the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Award.