

The Queen Bee and Me



The Queen Bee and Me Reading Guide by Gillian McDunn

BLOOMSBURY

A NOTE FROM GILLIAN McDUNN



Hello Readers,

Thank you for downloading the reading guide for *The Queen Bee and Me*!

Almost everyone has had a best friend at one point or another. And almost everyone has been in the position with a best friend who's sometimes nice and sometimes not so nice. That's the situation Meg is in when the book starts. I hope you'll enjoy reading her story.

Besides being an author, I am an avid reader and book club participant. In fact, the only thing I love more than reading a great book is discussing that book with friends. I created this guide to help provide a jumping off point for discussions for classes and reading groups.

These questions are divided into sections that correspond with the book. You can read the questions as you go along or save them all for the end. Where possible, I have included page numbers for easy reference.

Important: This guide contains spoilers, so use caution if reading ahead!

Does your group love hands-on exploration? If so, be sure to check out the included extension activities!

Please remember that adults should supervise all activities, especially those involving food, crafting materials, or Internet research.



I love hearing from readers! Parents and teachers can post on social media using #TheQueenBeeAndMe and tagging @gillianmcdunn. You can also reach out to me through my website: www.gillianmcdunn.com

Happy reading!

Gillian

ABOUT THE BOOK



Meg has been friends with confident, self-assured Beatrix since kindergarten. She's always found comfort in Beatrix's shadow—even their families call them Beatrix-and-Meg. But middle school has brought some changes in Beatrix, especially when Meg tries to step outside her role as sidekick. Upsetting Beatrix means risking The Freeze—or worse.

Meg gets into a special science elective and wants to take the class, no matter what Beatrix thinks. But when quirky new girl Hazel becomes Meg's science partner, Beatrix sets her sights on Hazel. At first, Meg is taken aback at how mean Beatrix can be—and how difficult it is to stand up to her friend. But as Meg gets to know Hazel while working on their backyard beehive project, she starts to wonder: What's it really like to be the Queen Bee? And more importantly: Is being Beatrix's friend worth turning down the possibility of finding her own voice?

This heartfelt story explores the sweetness and stings of middle-school friendship.

Age range: 8-12

Grade level: 3-6

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A Junior Library Guild selection

★ *Booklist*, starred review

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Q: Why did you want to write a book about friendship?

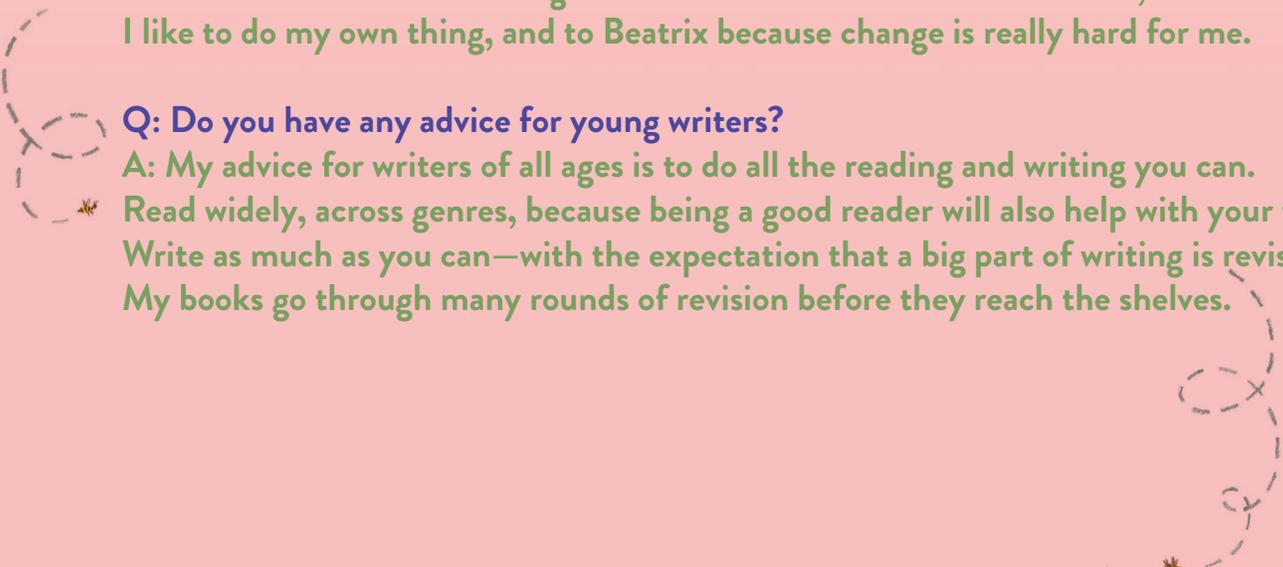
A: Friendships are so important! I would not be the person I am today without those relationships and experiences. But friendships are not always easy. I wanted to write about “tricky” friendships—what it’s like when there’s a friend who is sometimes nice and sometimes not so nice. Most people I know (kids and adults) have been in that situation before. It can be really tough.

Q: Did you know a lot about bees before you wrote this book?

A: When I was eight years old, my third-grade class did a research project on honey bees. Before the project, I found bees terrifying—but as I learned more about them, I had to admit that they were really interesting. That said, I didn’t learn much more about them until I started writing this novel. But once I started researching, I couldn’t stop! I read dozens of books and interviewed beekeepers so I could learn even more.

Q: How do you make characters feel real and relatable?

A: As an author, one of my secrets is to make sure I love every single one of my characters, even the “difficult” ones. One way to do this is to put a little bit of myself in each character. I relate to Meg because I’m so curious about the world, to Hazel because I like to do my own thing, and to Beatrix because change is really hard for me.



Q: Do you have any advice for young writers?

A: My advice for writers of all ages is to do all the reading and writing you can. Read widely, across genres, because being a good reader will also help with your writing. Write as much as you can—with the expectation that a big part of writing is revising. My books go through many rounds of revision before they reach the shelves.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN



You've probably heard that you should never judge a book by its cover—and that's true! But covers can also give us hints about what happens inside. Before you begin reading, take a look at the cover and see what you can infer about the story.

Whenever I talk to school groups, I like to talk about the idea of girl books and boy books. In my opinion, there is no such thing. I've read books from the point of view of a dog, a wizard, and even a mouse. I know that *Fenway and Hattie* wasn't written for dogs. I know that *Harry Potter* wasn't written for wizards. And I know that *The Tale of Despereaux* wasn't written for mice. So why do you think some people talk about books being “for girls” or “for boys”?

Look at the cover of *The Queen Bee and Me*. What is happening between the two characters on the front? Look closely to see details. Is there anything you're curious about? What do you know about the phrase “Queen Bee”?

Now look at the back cover to see one more girl. Can you make a prediction about what her role in the story will be?

Where do you think the book takes place? What time of year do you think it is? What do you think about the relationship between the two characters? Can you guess whether they may have some special interests?



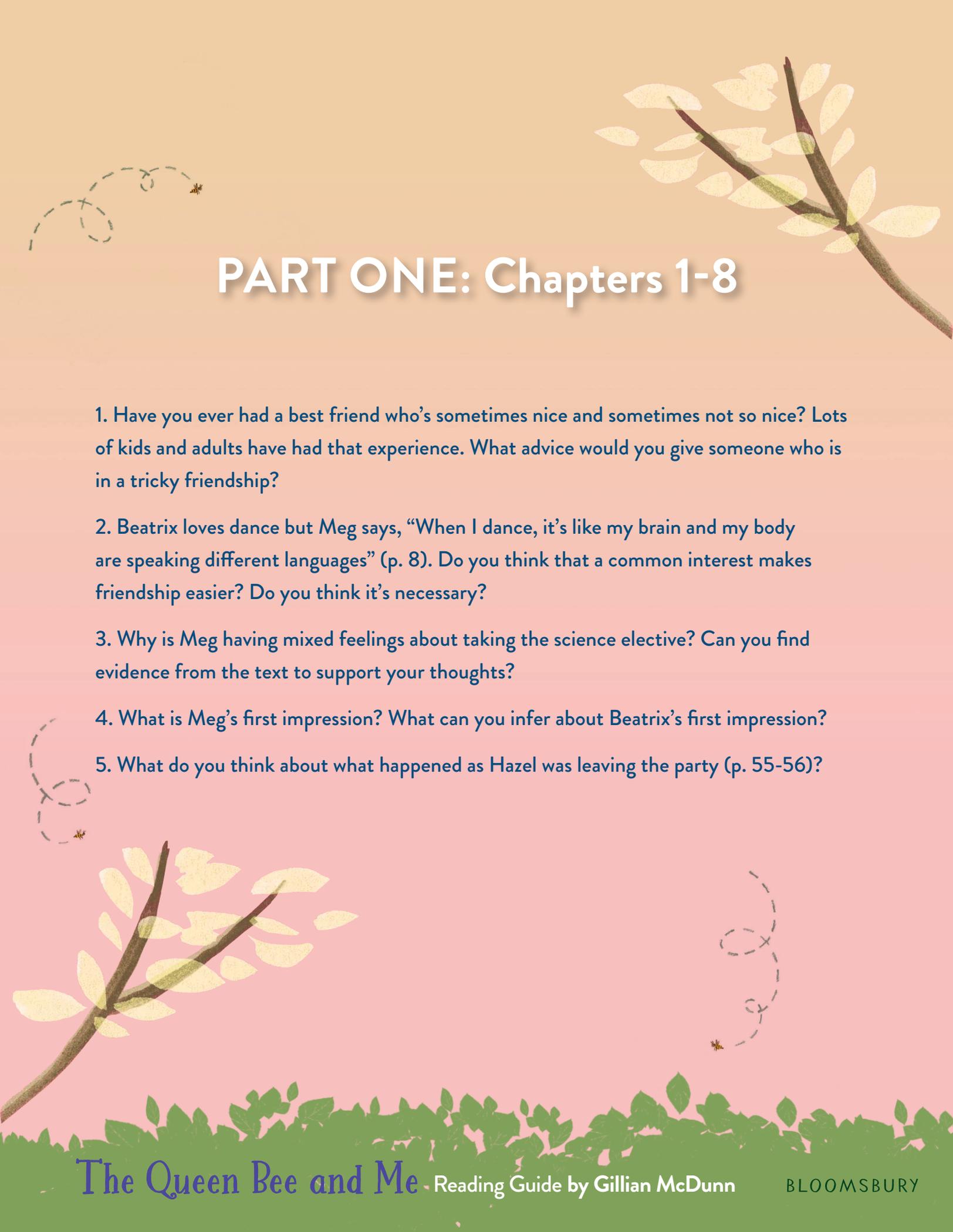
Read the copy inside the front flap. This is a story about friendships and about science. What other stories can you name that are about friendships? This book is fiction, but it is also about science and beekeeping. Have you read any books about science? Do you know anyone who is a beekeeper?

A Note on Structure

The Queen Bee and Me is divided into four sections.

Each part begins with a page from the school project on honey bees. Some of the bee facts correspond with what is happening with the characters. As you read, keep the bee facts in mind and see if you can make any connections to the events in the section.





PART ONE: Chapters 1-8

1. Have you ever had a best friend who's sometimes nice and sometimes not so nice? Lots of kids and adults have had that experience. What advice would you give someone who is in a tricky friendship?
2. Beatrix loves dance but Meg says, "When I dance, it's like my brain and my body are speaking different languages" (p. 8). Do you think that a common interest makes friendship easier? Do you think it's necessary?
3. Why is Meg having mixed feelings about taking the science elective? Can you find evidence from the text to support your thoughts?
4. What is Meg's first impression? What can you infer about Beatrix's first impression?
5. What do you think about what happened as Hazel was leaving the party (p. 55-56)?



Extension Activity: Two Kinds of People in the World

The first line of the book is “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who want to look inside to see how stuff works and those who couldn’t care less.” Here’s a fun game you can play as a group. Everyone starts in the middle of the room. The caller announces two categories, for example: cake or pie? Those who choose cake go to one side of the room and those who choose pie go to the other. Here are a few other ideas to get you started:

Beach or mountains?

Pancakes or waffles?

Pen or pencil?

Winter or summer?

Dog or cat?

Sneakers or flip-flops?

Library or bookstore?

Boat or plane?



When you finish, talk about the game. Do you believe that there are two kinds of people in the world? Once I heard someone say, “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who think you can sort people into two groups, and those who don’t”!



Extension Activity: Making Grape Jelly Meatballs

Meg loves her Mom’s grape jelly meatballs and her feelings are hurt when she realizes Mrs. Bailey didn’t put them out with the other food. Have you ever had grape jelly meatballs? **All you need are:**

2 lb. cooked meatballs (prepackaged frozen or use your own recipe... they must be cooked before you add to the slow cooker)

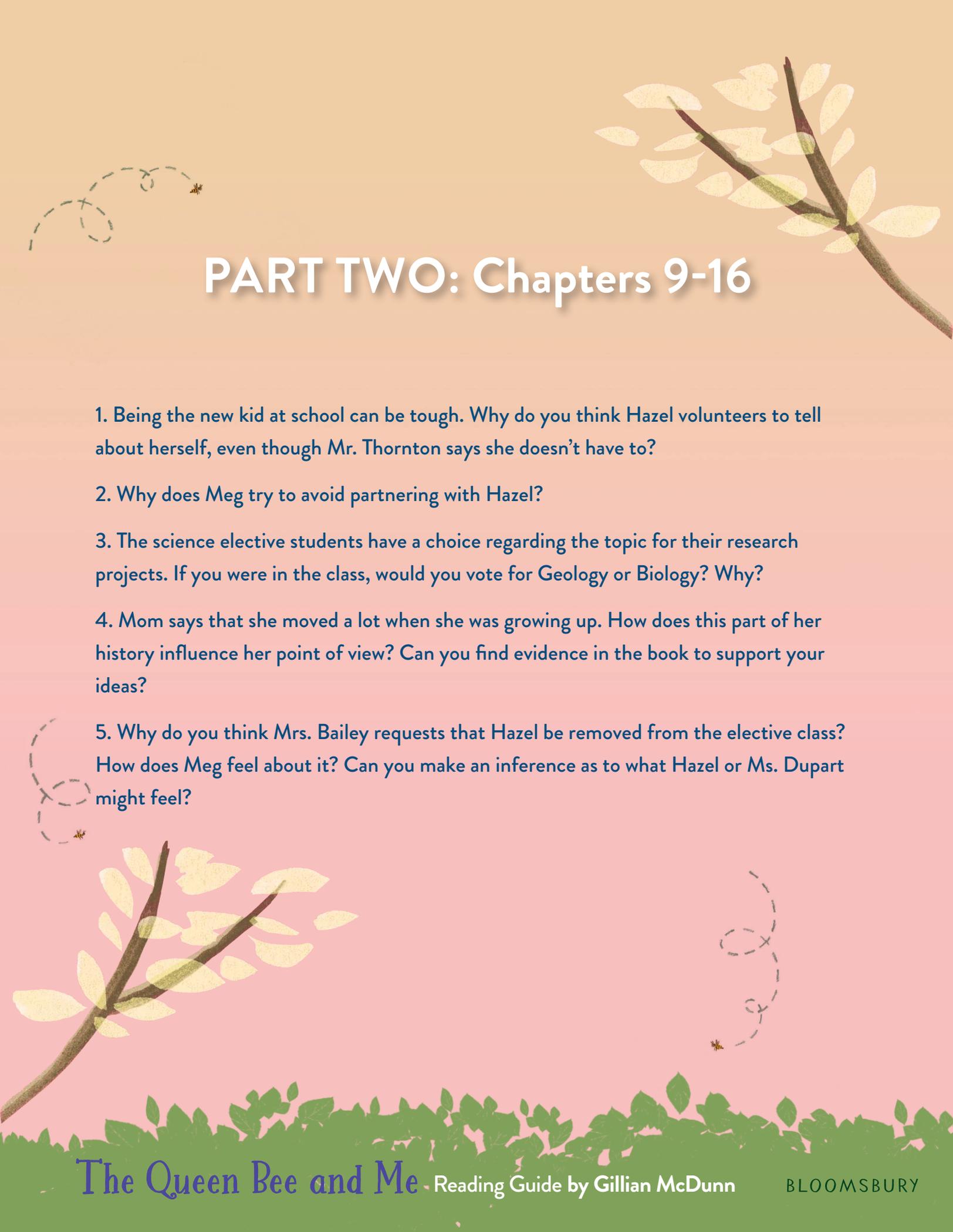
1.5 cups chili sauce

3/4 cup of grape jelly.

Combine the cooked meatballs, chili sauce, and grape jelly in a slow cooker.

Cook on low for 3-4 hours or until thoroughly heated.

(Note: if you can’t find chili sauce, you can substitute ketchup.)



PART TWO: Chapters 9-16

1. Being the new kid at school can be tough. Why do you think Hazel volunteers to tell about herself, even though Mr. Thornton says she doesn't have to?
2. Why does Meg try to avoid partnering with Hazel?
3. The science elective students have a choice regarding the topic for their research projects. If you were in the class, would you vote for Geology or Biology? Why?
4. Mom says that she moved a lot when she was growing up. How does this part of her history influence her point of view? Can you find evidence in the book to support your ideas?
5. Why do you think Mrs. Bailey requests that Hazel be removed from the elective class? How does Meg feel about it? Can you make an inference as to what Hazel or Ms. Dupart might feel?



Extension Activity: Salt Dough Cookie Crafting

Hazel and Meg have fun making cookies together. Here's a recipe for cookies using salt dough—they aren't for eating, but are perfect for painting! Ask your favorite adult for help with this project.

1. First make the dough: mix together 1.5 cups salt and 4 cups of flour.
2. You will add water gradually (no more than 1.5 cups).
3. When the dough forms around the spoon, remove the dough from the bowl.
4. Knead the dough until it is smooth and pliable. (If it gets crumbly just add a bit more water.)
5. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin and then cut out with cookie-cutter shapes.
6. Hint: to make chocolate chips, flatten small balls of dough and press onto the cookie surface.
7. When you've made all the cookies, it is time to bake them at 300 degrees for about 30 minutes or until hard.
8. After they cool, you can paint them.

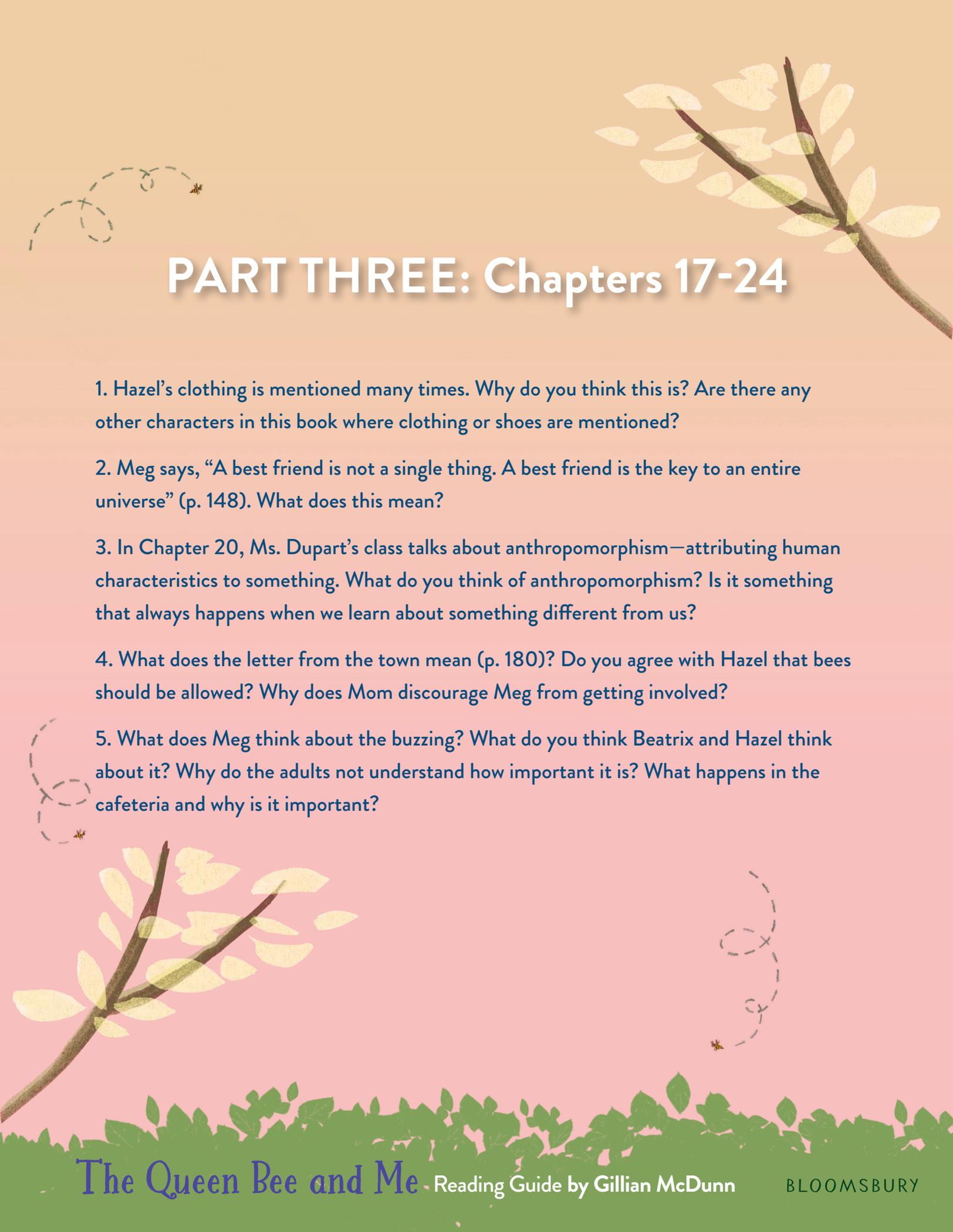
Extension Activity: Point of View

Meg's Dad designs games. He says that even bad people don't see themselves that way because "everyone is the hero of their own story" (p. 112). Do you agree or disagree? Write a letter (or social media post) from Beatrix or Hazel about an event in the first half of the book (example: party at Beatrix's, first day of school).

Draw a picture to illustrate their words.

Extension Activity: *The Haliphron Atlanticus*

Have you ever heard of the seven-armed octopus? I hadn't until one of my friends, who is a marine biologist, shared some of his research. With an adult to guide you, see what you can research about this rarely-seen creature.



PART THREE: Chapters 17-24

1. Hazel's clothing is mentioned many times. Why do you think this is? Are there any other characters in this book where clothing or shoes are mentioned?
2. Meg says, "A best friend is not a single thing. A best friend is the key to an entire universe" (p. 148). What does this mean?
3. In Chapter 20, Ms. Dupart's class talks about anthropomorphism—attributing human characteristics to something. What do you think of anthropomorphism? Is it something that always happens when we learn about something different from us?
4. What does the letter from the town mean (p. 180)? Do you agree with Hazel that bees should be allowed? Why does Mom discourage Meg from getting involved?
5. What does Meg think about the buzzing? What do you think Beatrix and Hazel think about it? Why do the adults not understand how important it is? What happens in the cafeteria and why is it important?



Extension Activity: Clothing Selfie

For this activity, you will make a self portrait without drawing your face or body. Instead, draw your favorite clothes. See if your friends can “recognize” you from your drawings of your clothes.

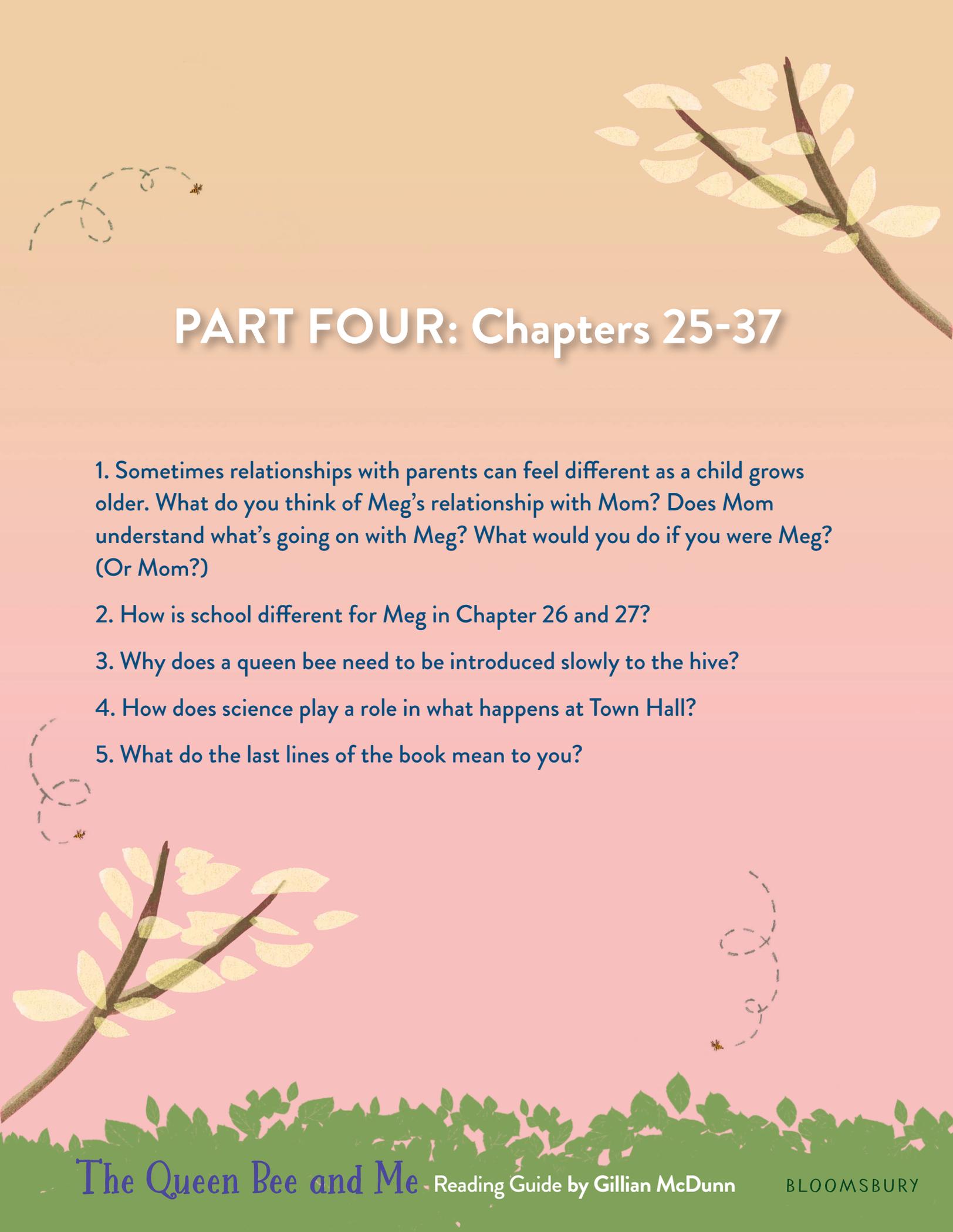
Why are these clothes your favorite?



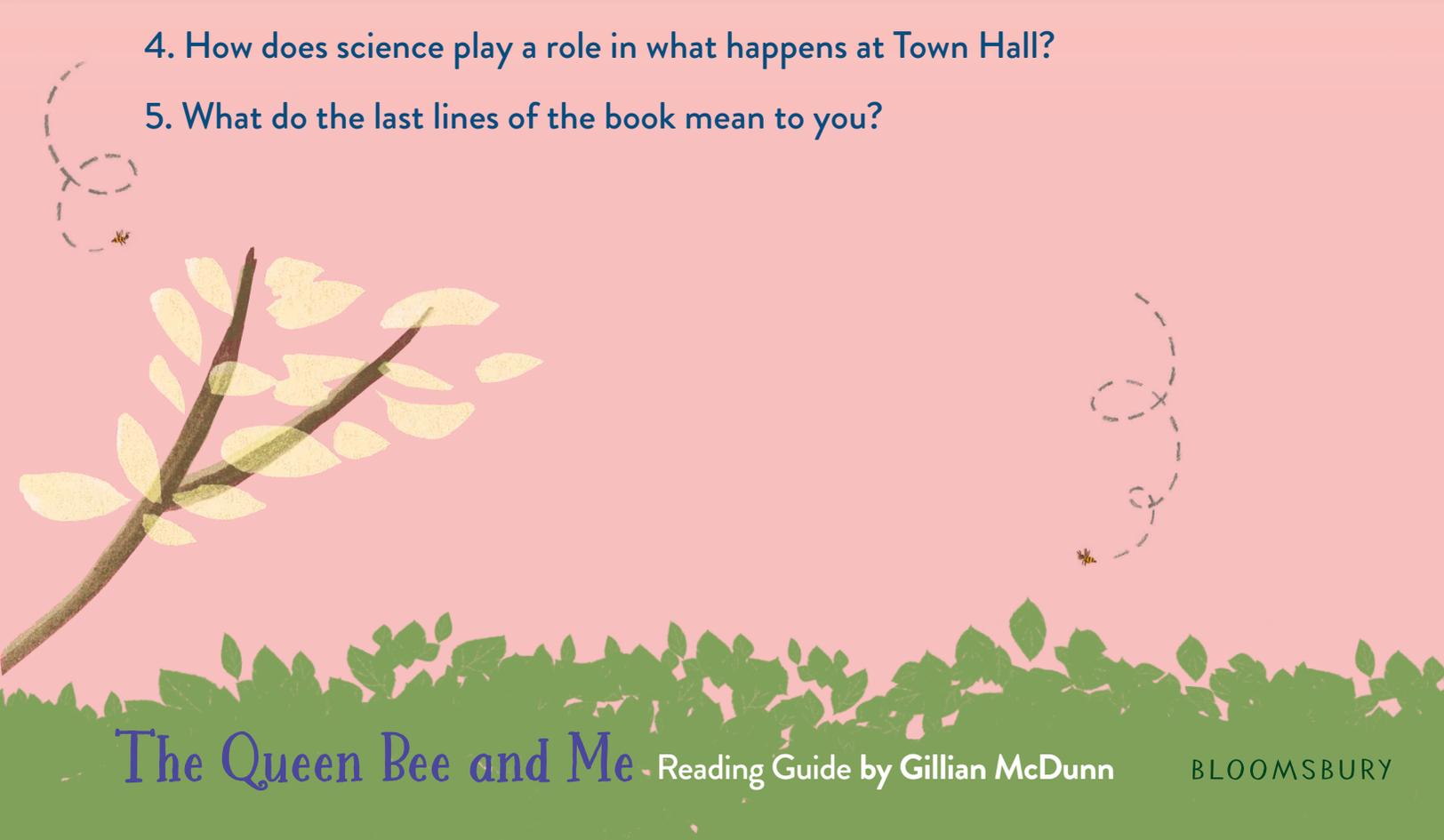
Extension Activity: Kindness Challenge

For this activity, you need a sheet of paper for each participant, with their name written at the top. Pass the papers so each member of the group may write down one or more positive things about their friend. Challenge yourself to be as specific, unique, and kind as possible. When the activity is over, everyone can keep the paper with their name.





PART FOUR: Chapters 25-37

1. Sometimes relationships with parents can feel different as a child grows older. What do you think of Meg's relationship with Mom? Does Mom understand what's going on with Meg? What would you do if you were Meg? (Or Mom?)
 2. How is school different for Meg in Chapter 26 and 27?
 3. Why does a queen bee need to be introduced slowly to the hive?
 4. How does science play a role in what happens at Town Hall?
 5. What do the last lines of the book mean to you?
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Extension Activity: Write a Play

Using the events in Chapters 31-35, write a play and act it out. How is a play different from a novel? Get creative with costumes and props. (A stuffed animal would make a great stand-in for Rocco!)

Extension Activity: Game Board

By yourself or in a group, create a game board to show important events in *The Queen Bee and Me*. Label squares with instructions, for example: *Make cookies with Hazel—go forward three spaces* or *Everyone in the cafeteria buzzes at you—go back two spaces*.

As you create the board, think about which events should be included and why.

