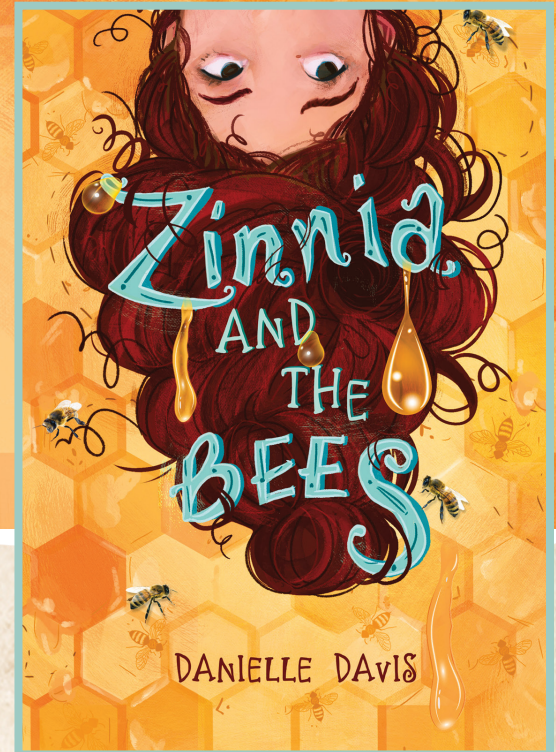


Zinnia THE AND BEES

Discussion Guide



ABOUT THE BOOK

A colony of honeybees mistakes seventh-grader Zinnia's hair for a hive — and that's the least of her problems. While Zinnia's classmates are celebrating the last day of seventh grade, she's in the vice principal's office, serving detention. Her offense? Harmlessly yarn-bombing a statue of the school mascot. When Zinnia rushes home to commiserate with her older brother and best friend, Adam, she's devastated to discover that he's gone — with no explanation. Zinnia's day surely can't get any worse . . . until a colony of honeybees inhabits her hive-like hair!

ZINNIA AND THE BEES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What do you know about yarn-bombing? Have you seen it? Where? What is something you think would be fun to yarn bomb?
2. Do you have a favorite secondary character in the book? Who is it? What do you like about them and/or how do you personally relate to them?
3. For Zinnia, knitting is what she does to tune out the world and make stuff going on in her life temporarily "disappear." What's an activity you do to make difficult things in your life feel smaller or fade away for a while? Does doing something creative help you when you're dealing with difficulty? How?
4. Adam leaves Zinnia their father's blue work boots to say goodbye. Is there an object of special significance in your family? What is its origin? What does it mean to you?
5. How would you describe Zinnia? What about Birch? How are Zinnia and Birch the same and different?
6. Zinnia changes a lot in the story—toward Birch, toward Milkshake, toward her friends (NML), and toward Adam (and how she views his departure). How does she change? What do you think allows her to change? What does Zinnia come to understand about herself and other people? About friendship?
7. Describe how the bees narrate their sections of the book. What are they like? What might they represent for Zinnia? Is there anything you think Zinnia has in common with the bees?
8. Dr. Flossdrop is one of Zinnia's antagonists, aside from the betrayal of NML, the misery of her brother leaving, and the bees who land on her head. What does Zinnia find out about Dr. Flossdrop that she didn't already know? How does her perspective of her mom change by the end? What do both Zinnia and her mom discover about usefulness?
9. Adam serves as an inspiration to Zinnia in terms of her own creative pursuits. (And Zinnia's yarn bomb inspires him, too.) Who inspires you? Who do you look up to?
10. Zinnia yarn bombs. Adam is a performer. Birch loves nature. Mildred shows care for others by cleaning their teeth and making them fabulous baked goods. Dr. Flossdrop helps her neighborhood. Lou is an ergonomic coach. What's something you care about that you want to share with the world?



ANSWERS FROM THE AUTHOR



1. I've seen a lot of parking meters yarn-bombed in my neighborhood over the years. The most interesting place I've seen a yarn bomb was when I visited Hong Kong (which is also where I went to middle school and high school). A railing was covered in yarn of different colors and one part was a cat wearing earmuffs. Personally, I think it would be fun to yarn bomb a bookstore window.
2. It's hard for me to pick a favorite secondary character—I'm attached to them all! I wish I'd had Mildred in my daily life when I was Zinnia's age. Nikki, Margot, and Lupita are all delightful in their own ways and as a group. I get a kick out of Lou. I just know I'd adore Milkshake if we met (and I really want a pet dog). But my favorite is probably sweet, loyal Birch. Everyone deserves a friend like him. (And he's not unlike my husband in certain ways, which makes me very lucky!)
3. Writing! Writing is the thing that helps everything else fade away for me. It's been such a big help to me when I'm processing something or going through a hard time. Or even if everything is going swimmingly, writing is how I can get lost in the best way.
4. I have a ring my dad wore for most of his life, and I treasure it because I miss him very much.
5. Zinnia is independent and quirky and someone who has a rich inner life. She's super creative. Like her brother Adam, she's an artist. She's also used to being a bit of a loner and is hesitant to trust people other than Adam and Mildred, who are her safety net. Birch, on the other hand, is incredibly open and ready to be a friend. He's curious and kind and has a mind for science and nature. He hasn't had as much difficulty and pain as Zinnia, but he has his own struggles as well. As for what they have in common, they both have something they're each passionate about—knitting and bird watching.
6. I think Zinnia begins to be comfortable with herself, which makes her feel more comfortable with others. In short, she learns to trust. She begins to trust that she can be okay without Adam there as her constant champion and support. She begins to trust that other people in her life, her friends NML, for example, are way more on her side than she suspected. She learns that she can reveal herself and that nothing will fall apart. With Birch, she learns to trust in friendship and the power of being honest with someone, despite how scary that can be. Over the course of the story, Zinnia travels a new path of learning to connect with others.
7. I find those bees hilarious and I so enjoyed tuning into their voice to write their story. They really crack me up with the way they're collective and communal and also full of grumbliness. I think the bees represent the anxieties and difficulties of Zinnia's life, all the stuff she can't control. And as for what she and the bees have in common—they both want to feel safe and at home. Plus, Zinnia and the bees get a chance to trust themselves, to conquer their fears, and to triumph.
8. Zinnia finds out that she and her mom have a few things in common. For one, a physical trait, which comes as a big surprise to Zinnia! But she also finds out that her mom's focus on the neighborhood and usefulness is covering up her fear, and that she actually cares deeply about Adam, and about Zinnia. I think there's a give and take between mother and daughter by the end. Dr. Flossdrop understands that connecting with her kids is the most important thing, and that art is valuable because it's key to who her kids are, and that it's useful in its own way. Zinnia discovers that being useful isn't always a bad thing either! Helping yourself and helping others can make you feel a huge sense of accomplishment and other good stuff. Being useful to someone (or sharing your art with them) can also be a way to connect.
9. My fourth grade teacher was inspiring to me because she read our class books by Roald Dahl that had a big impact on me. And my senior year English teacher had an influence on me as well. She was unconventional, smart, and kind, and believed in me in a way I felt no one ever had before. Other writers continue to inspire and teach me, as well as friends with their individual interests, energy, and unique talents.
10. Books and reading are kind of my favorite, and I delight in sharing them with others.



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12 COOL FACTS ABOUT HONEYBEES



Bees bake. They make bee bread by adding honey or nectar and they're own ingredients to pollen. They pack all that together into their honeycomb cells and pretty soon, voila! Dinnertime.



Bees build. They use bee glue (also called propolis) to seal, shore up, and protect the hive.



Bees dance. Honeybee foragers dance to communicate. It's called a waggle dance and the waggler's movements give other bees specific instructions about where to find food (aka flowers) or a potential hive.



Bees do math. They can calculate the shortest route possible between flowers. Plus, honeycomb is made up of hexagons.



Bees are busy. A honeybee might visit a couple thousand flowers in one day.



Bees are essential for human food. They pollinate a third of the crops we eat including most fruits and vegetables, like apples, pears, almonds, cherries, cucumbers, cabbages, blueberries, celery, papaya, and pumpkins.



Bees are a monarchy. They're led by a queen and worker bees secrete a substance called "royal jelly," which is fed to the young.



The queen wears perfume. She gives off chemical scents that let the other bees know information about the hive and how to behave.



Bees have super eyesight. Honeybees can see ultraviolet colors that humans can't, so they're able to detect patterns that create what look like landing pads on certain flower petals, directing them right to nectar.



Bees know who you are. In studies, bees can recognize human faces!



Bees have personalities. Some of them itch for the adventure of scouting while others would rather stay home.



Bees make great accessories. Some people will coax a whole colony of bees to land on their face (without harming the insects), creating a strange but stunning bee beard.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANIELLE DAVIS grew up in Singapore and Hong Kong and now lives in Los Angeles where she reads, writes, and roller skates. She's earned an M.A. in Literature and Creative Writing and her short stories have been published in literary magazines. She's had the privilege of teaching English to middle school and community college students and currently volunteers with literary organizations in L.A. *Zinnia and the Bees* is her first novel.



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