

## Teacher's notes

### ***Hello, Honey Bee*** **by** ***Felicity Marshall***



### **Introduction**

***Hello, Honey Bee*** is a whimsical tale of friendship and understanding that explores the importance of bees in our daily lives. An unusual but important friendship blossoms between the Queen Bee and the Big Queen when the bees lose their home and appeal to the Big Queen for assistance. With vivid imagery and gentle prose, this story inspires children to care about wildlife and understand the connection between the food that we eat and how bees pollinate flowers so that fruits, vegetables and nuts will grow, and flowers will form seeds.

These teacher's notes are a guide to further discussion about bees. The topic of unusual friendships is a secondary subject that may also be explored.

### **Bee Facts**

- There are many thousands species of bees in the world, but the most well known of all, and the best pollinator is the honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) which we see in our gardens. It is called honey bee because it builds wax honeycomb and fills it with honey.
- Each hive has only one Queen Bee and about 50,000 worker bees (female) and about 200 drones (male)
- Queen Bees only fly once or twice in their life – when they go on a mating flight, and when the bee colony swarms. Unlike worker bees that fly all day, queens are not used to flying and tire easily.
- Worker bees (that you see in the garden) only live for about 6 weeks at the height of summer. Drones die after mating or are kicked out of the hive at the end of summer as they do no work and eat honey all day!
- Queen Bees can live for 2 - 7 years and lay about 2,000 tiny eggs a day. They are bigger than the worker bees.

- Worker bees visit flowers all day long collecting pollen and nectar. They are devoted to their queen and their colony of bees.
- Worker bees feed pollen and nectar to the baby bees along with a substance called royal jelly that they excrete from their own bodies.
- Beeswax is also secreted from the bees' bodies and they use this to build wax cells that are hexagonal in shape. This is where the nectar and pollen are stored and where the queen lays her eggs. A hexagon is the most stable shape for a cell.
- During the lifetime of a worker bee (about 6 weeks) she will collect 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a teaspoon (.8 gram) of honey!
- Worker bees visit 2 million flowers to make 454 grams (1 pound) of honey.
- A worker bee likes to be left alone to do her work. Like all wild creatures, bees will defend their home (hive) if it is under threat. They only sting as a last resort because after a bee stings, they die. Always leave hives to be looked after by a beekeeper wearing protective clothing. Respect the bees in your garden. Watch them – it's fascinating! But don't try to pick them up.

### ***The Cover***

- Can you see the Queen Bee on the cover? She is almost camouflaged by the gold on the jewelled crown.
- The Big Queen is looking startled to see the Queen Bee and hear her talking.

### ***The Story***

- In the beginning of the story the bees live in a big hollow tree. This is often where a wild colony of bees will live. Bees that are looked after by a beekeeper live in a modern man-made beehive. It is easier for the beekeeper to take honey from this kind of hive without harming the bees, and to inspect them to make sure they are free of diseases and pests.
- Some large farms in parts of the world use crop duster planes to spray chemicals to kill pests or weeds. But these chemicals will kill not just bees, but lots of creatures – insects, frogs, birds, mice, butterflies, hedgehogs and more. The health of humans can also suffer. Fortunately there is a growing awareness among farmers that spraying poisons has terrible consequences.
- Of course the bees think the letterbox would make a good home! It is just like a modern beehive – a box with a slit in the front.
- The Big Queen's attendant ladies are grooming her when the bees fly in. They are understandably alarmed. The powder is reminiscent of the pollen that the bees gather.
- There are parallels in the lives of the Big Queen and the Queen Bee. They are both fed and protected by others. They live inside a special building. They are sheltered from the outside world. And they both love honey!

- The Big Queen and the Queen Bee have an instant understanding – because they live parallel lives.
- When the maid swats at the Queen Bee, the Big Queen is instantly protective of her new friend, even though she is tiny.
- It is ironic that the Big Queen offers to share the honey with the Queen Bee, when her own bees had probably made that honey!
- The Big Queen is amazed to hear how bees pollinate flowers to create fruits and vegetables and nuts. She hadn't really thought about it before. Lots of people don't realise this fact!
- The Queen Bee can freely talk to the Big Queen about her having 'some wildness in her heart'. It forms a bond between them. This bond is strengthened further when they agree about how hard it is being a queen sometimes.
- The Queen Bee suggests to the Big Queen that there is something she can do to help protect bees. This is the point in the story when the Big Queen starts to think she could do something really important to help bees.
- The Big Queen is inspired to make a speech at the Royal Flower Show to tell everyone how important bees are and she donates seeds to every person in the crowd, young and old, famous or not.

### ***The Illustrations***

- There are flowers on every page. Both the Big Queen and the bees love flowers. The Big Queen has flowers on her clothing and on her teapot and cups. They are in vases as well as in her garden. There are flower patterns on the floor tiles, furniture and on the front of the palace.
- There are hexagon shapes on the front of the palace to mirror the bees' own cells in their hives.
- In the illustration of the ladies grooming the queen, we can see that she has an informal life as well as her conservative, official life. There are two naughty little pet dogs, muddy boots and bright coloured socks. And she has painted toenails!
- As soon as all the bees go back into the garden and the ladies hurriedly leave, the two queens settle into an important conversation. The Big Queen is surprised to learn how important bees are.
- The Big Queen has framed pictures of lots of animals from tiny beetles to big horses. This shows that she is a lover of creatures no matter how tiny.
- The illustration of the Big Queen lying in the field outside the palace makes us realise that she is just as human as all of us, and that she is a nature lover with a free spirit.

- The Big Queen licking the honey off her fingers is not ‘the right thing’ to do. Even though she says that ‘queens must always do the right thing’. This is another small way she shows her humanity.
- The Big Queen’s son, the Prince is a dedicated farmer with a love of bees, flowers and all his animals. We can see in this peaceful illustration of him in his farm environment with his beehives in the background. Some of the fruits and vegetables pollinated by bees are in this illustration also – pumpkins, berries, peas and apples.
- The next two illustrations show the Big Queen becoming excited that she can help the Queen Bee and her bees find a new home in one of the Prince’s beehive. The Queen Bee lands on one of the many bottles of perfume. Without flowers, which are pollinated by bees, we would not have perfume.
- The tiny Queen Bee is camouflaged on the golden crown of the Big Queen as she is carried on top of her head to the golden carriage. Her bees follow her scent wherever she goes, and eventually into one of the Prince’s beehives.
- On the last page the illustration shows the Big Queen at the Royal Flower Show. Everything she wears has flowers on it, even her golden crown with its hexagon pattern (as found in honeycomb). She is now a bee ‘activist’. Instead of the crowd shouting ‘Long live the Queen!’ there is a role reversal and the Big Queen cries ‘Long live the bees!’

### **Questions**

- Can you name a vegetable or fruit pollinated by bees?
- How many queen bees are there in a beehive?
- Are worker bees male or female?
- Why do you think the Big Queen didn’t know much about bees?
- Why were the ladies-in-waiting scared?
- Why did the Queen Bee become tired?
- Do you think the Big Queen is braver than her ladies? Why?
- What are the important things that bees do?
- How do they do that?
- Why is it important not to use poisonous chemicals on crops and gardens?
- Where does beeswax come from?
- Can you see anything in the illustrations made from beeswax?

### **The Author**

Since becoming a beekeeper, Felicity has studied the evolutionary, agricultural, biological, and cultural aspects of bees, *“It is so important to educate our children on the importance of our natural environment and to begin to cultivate future ‘scientists’ who not only respect it but understand it.”* Learning about what honeybees do and why they are important gives children a new appreciation of these winged pollinators and celebrates their role in biodiversity.

Other books by Felicity Marshall: *The Star*, *Sage’s Ark*, *You and Me Murrabee* (illustrator)

Learn more about Felicity by visiting her website [www.felicitymarshall.com](http://www.felicitymarshall.com)