

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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HONEY AND ME

BY Meira Drazin

★ “Authentic, joyful, achingly real.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*,
STARRED REVIEW

MILLA AND HONEY have been best friends since forever.

Milla envies Honey’s confidence, her charisma, and her big, chaotic family—especially when they provide a welcome escape from Milla’s own small family and quiet house. In their close-knit Modern Orthodox Jewish community, the two girls do everything together, from delivering meals to an ill-tempered elderly neighbor, to shopping at a local thrift store, celebrating the holidays, and going to their first bat mitzvahs while studying for their own.

So when Honey joins Milla’s school for sixth grade, why is it not as great as Milla expects? Can their friendship survive all the ups and downs the year has in store for them? And will Milla ever find the courage to step out of Honey’s shadow and into her own spotlight?

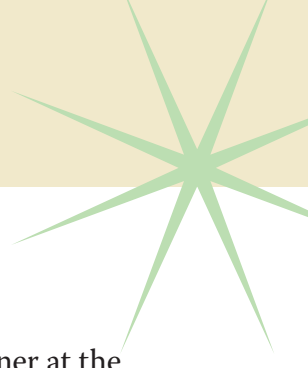
Charming, authentic, and wise, *Honey and Me* is a classic coming-of-age story filled with relatable middle school struggles, keen insight, and sparkling humor.

WINNER OF THE SYDNEY TAYLOR MANUSCRIPT AWARD

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- ✧ The story opens with a scene in the synagogue on a Saturday morning. What is revealed about the personalities of the two main characters, Honey and Milla, in this scene?
- ✧ What is the exciting news that Honey shares with Milla when Milla attends Shabbat dinner at the Wine's home? Why do you think that Milla's mother doesn't express the same excitement as her daughter when she hears the news about Honey?
- ✧ Describe the issues Honey faces with her name on her first day at Milla's school. Why do you think Honey's reaction to others questioning her name keeps changing?
- ✧ How does Milla feel about Honey becoming a student at her school? Cite examples from the text to support your description of Milla's feelings.
- ✧ Aunty Steph is an important person in Milla's life. She often offers advice and support to Milla as she negotiates life as an almost-teenager. Early in the story, Aunty Steph tells Milla that she needs to "own who you are." What do you think Aunty Steph means by this piece of advice?
- ✧ Honey and Milla are tasked with delivering food to Aginéni, an elderly woman who is described as "not a sweet, old grandma type." Why do you think that Aginéni is important in this story? How does Aginéni impact the lives of Honey and Milla?
- ✧ One connection between Milla and Aginéni is their shared interest in a series of books entitled *Most Likely To . . .*. How does this series of books influence Milla's understanding of her religious background and her place in the world?
- ✧ Why is Honey and Milla's shopping trip to *What Goes Around* so important to the two girls?
- ✧ Milla and her friends at school are each getting ready for their bat mitzvahs. Though each girl is celebrating in different ways, all of the girls are embarking on a mitzvah project. What charity projects do the girls select?
- ✧ Both Honey and Milla are eager to make choices of their own and to accept more responsibility. An opportunity arises for the two to watch Honey's little brother Aaron who is autistic. What aspects of looking after Aaron show the girls' ability to act responsibly?
- ✧ Both Milla's and Honey's mothers lose important objects from the past when a figurine and a goblet are broken. What do these sentimental objects that were broken symbolize in Honey and Milla's lives?
- ✧ When Mr. Sandler briefly resigns from his teaching position, Milla overhears her parents talking about his life as a successful lawyer before becoming a teacher. How does this topic echo the life path of Milla's mom?
- ✧ Milla notices that Honey has been especially crabby in the weeks leading up to Honey's bat mitzvah. What does Honey share with Milla about her upcoming plans? Why is Honey's choice considered such a unique one?
- ✧ How does the speech contest at school reflect the closeness and the competition inherent in Honey and Milla's friendship?

- * Milla is bothered by Honey's success and accuses Honey, "Why do you always feel like you have to win everything? . . . Why can't I win something for once?" Honey responds, "Milla, not everybody refuses to participate in things they think they might not be good at." How does this exchange between the friends in chapter 14 affect your opinion of Milla and Honey?
- * The unexpected death of Mr. Sandler brings many emotions to the surface for both Milla's and Honey's families. Amid the sorrow and grief, Milla experiences new feelings around friendship and family. Describe the shifts in Milla's relationship with her mother and with the Wine family during Passover.
- * A pivotal moment in the connection between Milla and Mr. Sandler occurs in class when she offers an insightful response to William Carlos Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow." Later, after Mr. Sandler's death, Milla realizes a truth from the poem that, "so much depends on everything else, and everything is connected." Cite examples from the story that support this theme of the importance of connection.
- * What do you think is the most important lesson each of the main characters learn over the course of the novel?

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Teacher Appreciation

Milla's favorite subject in school is English, and her favorite teacher is Mr. Sandler. Mr. Sandler recognizes Milla's insight into poetry and her strengths as a writer. Think of the teachers you have known in your life, in and outside the classroom. Who has positively impacted you? Write a letter to your favorite teacher/mentor/activity leader detailing your experiences with this special person and the reasons why you chose them as your favorite.

Fate vs Free Will

During a discussion about the reasons for Mr. Sandler resigning, Honey comments, "All we can do is control things we can control." Milla wonders if "choices make us who we are." What is your opinion of the role of choice in people's lives? Are people's lives shaped by fate and destiny, or do people have control through choice? Write an opinion piece outlining your thoughts on fate versus free will. Include examples and reasons to support your opinion.

Name Game

As part of Milla's speech at her bat mitzvah, she shares the importance of one's name saying, "Your name is the key to your soul." Research the origins of your own name. What is the history behind each part of your name? Write a personal narrative about why you were given your name and how your name has affected your perspective of yourself and your role in your family and the world.

Holiday History

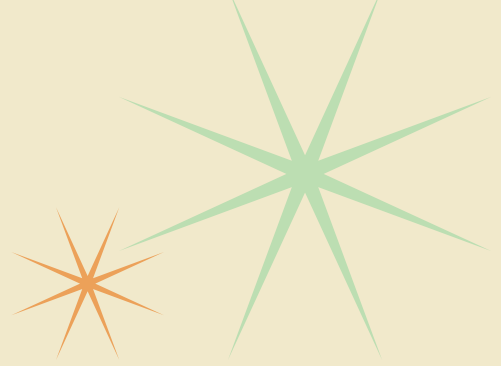
Many of Milla's and Honey's experiences in the story are centered around Jewish festivals and holidays including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succot, Chanukah, Purim, Pesach, and Shavuot. Brief descriptions of each festival or holiday are located at the back of the book. Select one holiday or festival to research further. Organize your research into an information report that can be shared with your class.

The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

Name: _____

YOU CAN QUOTE ME

Copy text from the story that matches the prompt in each box.
Reflect on each quote you select.



A QUOTATION THAT SEEMS IMPORTANT.

A large, rounded rectangular box with a blue outline and a small tail at the top left, intended for writing a quotation.

WHY DOES IT SEEM IMPORTANT?

A QUOTATION THAT YOU AGREE WITH.

A large, rounded rectangular box with a blue outline and a small tail at the top left, intended for writing a quotation.

WHY DO YOU AGREE?

A QUOTATION THAT MAKES YOU THINK.

A large, rounded rectangular box with a blue outline and a small tail at the top left, intended for writing a quotation.

WHAT DOES IT MAKE YOU THINK ABOUT?

A QUOTATION THAT STAYS WITH YOU
AFTER FINISHING THE NOVEL.

A large, rounded rectangular box with a blue outline and a small tail at the top left, intended for writing a quotation.

WHY DOES IT RESONATE WITH YOU?

Name: _____

WORD SCAVENGER HUNT

Go on a word hunt through the story to locate words to fit each prompt.
Include the page number where you find each word.

Find a word that . . .

describes Milla. PAGE _____

describes Honey. PAGE _____

is a new word for you. PAGE _____

relates to the main problem in the story. PAGE _____

is related to a lesson one of the main characters learns. PAGE _____

is something a main character says. PAGE _____

describes one of the settings of the story. PAGE _____

describes an emotion felt by Milla at the end of the story. PAGE _____

is a verb associated with Pesach. PAGE _____

is a noun associated with Shabbat. PAGE _____