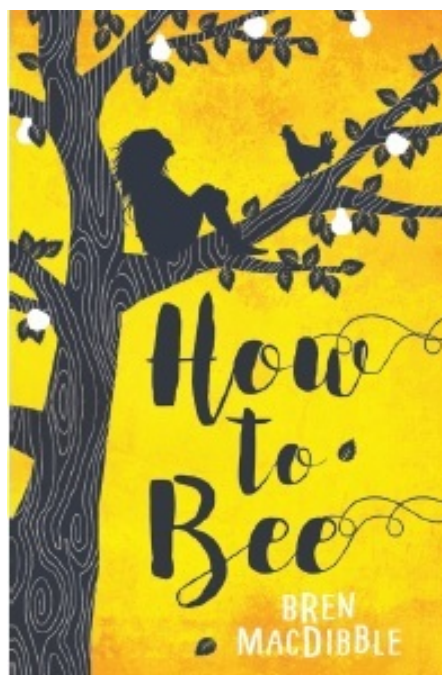




How to Bee

Bren MacDibble

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For 8-12 year olds - and all those who love middle grade fiction.

Peony lives with her sister and grandfather on a fruit farm outside the city. In a world where real bees are extinct, the quickest, bravest kids climb the fruit trees and pollinate the flowers by hand.

Will Peony's grit and quick thinking be enough to keep her safe?

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.

Winner of the NZ Book Prize for Junior Fiction 2018

Winner of the Children's Book Council of Australia 2018

Winner of the Patricia Wrightson Prize in the NSW Premiers Awards.

Shortlisted: Queensland Literary Prize

Shortlisted: South Australian Festival Literary Prize

Shortlisted: Aurealis Award

Shortlisted: Ditmar Award

How to Bee Details

Date : Published May 2017 by A & U Children

ISBN : 9781760294335

Author : Bren MacDibble

Format : Paperback 213 pages

Genre : Childrens, Middle Grade, Family, Young Adult

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From Reader Review How to Bee for online ebook

Rachel says

An exceptional example of the use of sophisticated language for the 8-12 age group. How to Bee is a compelling and immersive read with engaging characters. Set in a recognisable, plausible future world that is neither as unlikely nor terror-filled as one might expect from the cli-fi genre. I read it incredibly slowly to savour the poetry of the scene-setting and dialogue, my 13 year old powered through it at speed to find out what would happen to Peony and her aspirations of bee-hood. Very highly recommended.

Kirsti says

I didn't know what to expect when I picked up this book, but it was on the recommendation of one of my trusted booksellers. I liked the concept straight away, and although I didn't always understand the motivations of the characters, I liked the general lay of the story. There is a kind of wholesomeness about it that's nice to see, even when things like death and loss are brought up.

I won't go into too much detail since I feel like even snippets will spoil it. Safe to say I enjoyed it, four stars!

Lisa says

How this is not a nominated Children's Book Week book I'll never know. A world where bees are extinct and poor children aspire to the job of "bees" - running through orchards with a feather duster, pollinating the trees to sell fruit to the out of touch, wealthy city folk.

A lovely little story about a young bee who gets dragged to the city and does all she can to get back home.

Figgy says

LINK UPDATED

Since the bees died out, people have taken over their role, with kids climbing up among the branches to pollinate the flowers. Because without bees, everything else starts to fall apart. Without bees, there would be no fresh fruits and vegetables, and the whole circle of life would be in trouble.

The farm's full of circles. Bees, flowers, fruit. Pests, chooks, eggs. People, bees, flowers, fruit, pests, chooks, eggs, people...all overlapping circles. I don't understand how it went before the famine. Poison? That's like cutting the circles right through the middle. The circle can't go nowhere but a dead end. No wonder the little bees stopped working and left us to starve.

Peony is a pest (one who picks insects from the fruit and gives them to her chooks, which in turn give the family eggs), who longs so terribly much to "bee".

Chooks is born being chooks and that's all they'll ever be. Not like a dog, which could be a

sheep dog, or a cow dog, or a guard dog, or a dog that pulls a blind person around. Not like a girl that's born in a shed and crawls around in the dirt till she learns to be a pest, and then could be a bee or a bagger or picker, or even a foreman one day.

She loves her farm, and the circle of life she sees there. She loves her grandfather, her sister Mags (Magnolia), and her best friend Applejoy. She relishes the simple joys in her life.

The work lets up as the summer goes on, and Foreman puts a pig on a roasting spit to celebrate. I dunno what's higher than a king, but holding a hunk of fine oat bun with a pile of white baked meat, soft and falling apart in my mouth, juice running down my chin, I'm eating like that. Higher than a king.

The rest of this review can be found [HERE!](#)

Pre-Review

Review to come.

ADORED this one!

Fantastic command of the English language, and I was completely lost in Peony's story... Forgot I was reading a book.

Tehani says

I expected to like this book - Bren is a talented writer and Allen & Unwin consistently produce quality books for younger readers. However, I didn't know I was going to love this book so much. It really hits all the right beats and it made me sob more than once, and laugh out loud at times, and uses its setting - a near future Australia that verges on dystopic but doesn't quite tip over the edge - to excellent advantage.

Our protagonist, Peony, is not even 10 years old, and one of the best things about the book is the consistency of her world view. She behaves in a manner appropriate to her age and environment, and I loved that about her. She is feisty and determined, clever and kind, but strong-willed and stubborn as well. MacDibble surrounds her with characters of all shades of grey, not letting sentiment get in the way of story and allowing the reader to experience the full range of Peony's emotions.

Not only do we get a well-paced story, it is underpinned by some beautiful - and slightly frightening - worldbuilding, essential to the narrative and somewhat of a cautionary tale to the reader. This framework, supporting as it does a cracking yarn, will make *How to Bee* a fantastic text for readers to examine in schools, with depths to unpack and explore.

I really can't recommend this enough for readers of 9 and upwards, and if this isn't on a bunch of awards lists next year I'll be absolutely astonished (and cranky, too, because it deserves to be!).

Sharah McConville says

'How to Bee' is a clever little story set in Australia, in the near future, where bees no longer exist. Children, like 9 year old Peony, work as bees and pollinate flowers by hand. This story is aimed at 8-12 year olds but I think teenagers would enjoy this story too. I won this book through Goodreads Giveaways.

C.G. Drews says

If you're looking for a book about bees, with no actual bees in it: I FOUND IT FOR YOU!! It's set in a world where there are no bees. Which, okay *fine*...I get why bees are important for LIFE. But as someone who's allergic to (a) bees, and (b) honey, I wasn't super connecting to this book. Plus the narrator is 10 and I haven't been 10 for...a long time. Excuse me while I cough awkwardly. So I think this wasn't *quite* my thing. (And I do adore a lot of MG books, like Snicket and Riordan! But most fail to make my stone dead cold heart beat.)

L I K E S:

- it features powerful strong women
- Peony takes no nonsense from anyone
- it reminds us why family are important and a great way to be affectionate to your sister is to smack her in the head. #agreed
- cake
- cake cake cake
- the farm settings felt really authentic and nicely described
- the names are super cute! Applejoy is the cutest <3

D I S L I K E S:

- it actually felt like A Little Princess redone??? Like Peony is basically kidnapped by her mother to work in the city for the rich people, and yeah...the plot/vibe felt very much the 19th century.
- but it's more like a dystopian
- and the first 50-pages are, no joke, JUST descriptions of the farm. I would've been uninterested even as a 10yo reading this.
- it's written in slang so it's a little hard to follow all the dystopian phrases at first...you get used to them, but still no clue what "cha" means, unless they're all about to break out in the chacha and tango.
- I don't like bees
- some of the plot didn't make a *whole* lot of sense (view spoiler)
- world building flew away on the backs of the dead bees

ALL AND ALL: an interesting story about what the world might be like without bees. Unfortunately I didn't really understand the dynamics of the world and the farm descriptions didn't really enthrall me. And I would die if I ate honey. #awkward But I thought Peony was tough, sassy, admirable, and determined, and I loved how she encouraged the rich girl to manage her anxiety and also was determined to get home to her family she loved. Super sweet! <--- BECAUSE HONEY IS SWEET, GET IT?!??

Jason Nahrung says

Anchored in an Australian climate change future where humans must hand-pollinate orchards, the story comes alive through the eyes of would-be human bee Peony. We see life on the orchard for the workers, and then how the city folk survive. It's a delightful read, not without its sad moments, but always leavened with humour and Peony's energy and belief in the power of family (and friends, or community) to see one through. A quick, enjoyable read for those older than the target market.

Heather Gallagher says

This was a brilliantly refreshing take on a dystopian future. I loved the character of Peony who desperately wanted to be a bee - kids who pollinate flowers. There were lots of heavy duty topics in this story, including domestic violence and poverty, but it never felt heavy or preachy. I was really happy to go along for the ride with Peony - a ride that was surprisingly joyous!

Angela Sunde says

I grew up on a vast orchard with acres of fruit trees, changing seasons and of course bees. This book brought back memories of the hard work we did as children from the age of five, carrying boxes, picking up prunings, wrap packing fruit, making up boxes, labelling etc. Although How to Bee is set in a near cli-fi future, the setting is authentic in it's specificity, the characters real and the family dynamics genuine. The gentle unfolding of the story wraps the reader in a world where one small child finds a power within herself to follow her dream. Peony is a charming narrator with a unique and endearing voice. Her desire to become a bee is unwavering in the face of adversity, as she fights for her freedom, her goal and most of all...her family.

You really must read this book.

I give Bren MacDibble a standing ovation.

Dimity Powell says

Honestly, when the back cover blurb advises you of the way you will feel after reading the story within, reservations begin to pool but in this instance, every word is true. Peony, the young heroine - and she really is in every sense of the word - in MacDibble's gripping middle grade novel, radiates tenacity, kindness and sass so loudly, her voice really will be resounding long after you read the last page.

This is a brave story set in Australia in the not-too-distant future but has global implications that allow readers to feel as though they could be anywhere on the planet despite the odd geographical reference. Peony lives with her sister and aging grandfather on a fruit farm. Her chief aspiration is to be a Bee - the bravest, most nimble of farm workers who flit from tree to tree pollinating flowers by hand. If this sounds like a concept that is slightly askew, by the time you've experience MacDibble's palpably natural narrative, it'll be one you are thoroughly familiar if not comfortable with. Could this be the end of the world as we know it or, as I'd rather believe, just another notable chapter in the history of humans being humans - badly.

Whatever your take on climate change and the way we treat the planet, *How to Bee*, never wallows in despair or hindsight and neither does Peony. When she is taken from her home by a mother who aspires more than just the meager country existence the rest of her family and friends endure, her brassy drive and cast-iron determination draw her right back to the home she loves, like a bee to its hive. But not before she spreads a little hope and good sense in the big scary city.

This story will make you grin, cheer, cry just a bit and want to fly with Peony as she Bees. It's about being true to yourself, to those who love you, about living your dreams wildly and the profound power of friendship. It could also quite possibly change your whole outlook of and appreciation for fruit. More highly recommended than an apple a day.

Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says

Nine year old Peony aspires to become a Bee, a member of the team of children who hand pollinate the orchards at the Goulburn Valley plantation. Peony and sister Magnolia live with their ageing grandfather while their mother migrated to the city, supporting the family to purchase medicine and trade for the ferocious winter season. The Goulburn Valley community is responsible for producing fresh produce for wealthy, urban residents.

Peony is a perceptive and ambitious young lady, agile and slight, the perfect candidate to be awarded with the prestigious delegation of Bee. Peony and Magnolia share a wonderful relationship, their grandfather a tender and gentle man guiding two wonderful young ladies in the absence of their mother. The Goulburn Valley community is considerate, compassionate and although physically exhausting, the orchard is an invaluable resource.

Peony and Magnolia's mother is a woman who is effortlessly manipulated. Rosie relinquished her responsibilities and migrated to the urban district to provide for her family. Returning to Goulburn Valley, Rosie insists Peony accompany her, expected to serve a wealthy urban family. Peony is inconsolable. Rosie has embarked on a new relationship with a degenerate and violent man, examining domestic violence, child endangerment and parental neglect. The friendship between Peony and Esmeralda is endearing. Esmeralda is the daughter of Peony's new employer who experiences social agoraphobia. Through compassion, Peony and Esmeralda reach an understanding. Peony will encourage Esmeralda to alleviate her anxiety and sequentially, Peony will return to Goulburn Valley.

The honey bee is obsolete, famine resulted in the decimation of organic pollination and *How To Bee* introduces middle grade readers to the environmental impact human development, pesticides, disease and climate change have affected populations. Displaced families throughout the urban district are living below the poverty line, at Goulburn Valley, families reside in meagre dwellings and although the sense of community is wonderfully portrayed, the socioeconomic divide is prevalent. Displaced and forcibly removed from the Goulburn Valley environment, the narrative may also be perceived as a gentle reminder of Australia's colonisation.

How To Bee is enchanting and atmospheric. Captivating until the final page.

Bookrapt says

There are no more bees, and so children have taken over their role of pollinating the flowers. 9-year-old

Peony lives with her grandfather and sister on one of the fruit farms where she is employed as a 'pest', while their mother works and lives in the city, earning money to purchase medicine and other necessities. The duties of a 'pest' are to pick insects from the fruit, but Peony so longs to be a 'bee' and pollinate the flowers. Meanwhile, her mother has become pregnant to an abusive man, and insists the Peony go with her to the city to work for a wealthy family. The contrast between rich and poor is more startling there. Peony is a perceptive child and her journey is undertaken with determination and zest. A great read.

Reviewed by Debbie McCauley (Bookrapt).

Ashlee Green says

My heart! Precious lil Peony Bee!

UPDATE:

So after sitting and thinking for almost half a day about this book, I've realised my review doesn't encompass just how much I love this book. It's currently my second favourite book (which for me is a massive deal considering my top 5 hasn't changed for at least 5 years). This book is so sweet and innocent and pure and I love everything about it. I finished it just this morning and I already want to reread it.

Jayne Downes says

A great read for Intermediate age students. Thought provoking; set in Australia after a famine in a world without bees; Peony and other children climb the trees and do the work of the bees. The story also has a message about family relationships- Peony's Mother stays with a violent partner and the reader sees where this leads.
