

Beekeeper's Apprentice Discussion Questions

by Laurie R. King

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & LitLovers)

Laurie R. King earned a BA degree in comparative religion from the University of California, and then completed an MA in Old Testament Theology at Graduate Theological Union. She later received an honorary doctorate from the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. She has lived for many years in the hills above Monterey Bay near Santa Cruz, California. She was married to the historian, Noel Quinton King, and is the mother of two children, Zoe and Nathan.



Characters:

- **The Downs** – An area in the English countryside.
- **Mary Russell** – (15). An astute young woman who ends up meeting Sherlock Holmes after his “retirement” to the Downs. She becomes his apprentice/assistant/partner. Lives with her aunt as both parents were killed in an automobile accident in the States. Her father was American. Her mother, Judith Kline, was British Jewish.
- **Sherlock Holmes** – (He is in his 50’s). An observant private investigator and police consultant. Retired to the Downs in the English countryside. Loves bees and apiculture (beekeeping).
- **Ali & Mahmoud Hazr** – Agents who watch over Mary and Sherlock in Palestine.
- **Aunt** – Mary’s Aunt. She is the adult tasked with caring for Mary after her parents’ deaths. Stingy. Her mother’s sister.
- **Mrs. Barker** – Lady of the Manor House in the area where Mary and Holmes live. Gives Mary her first “case.”
- **Richard Barker** – Owner of the Manor House. A government advisor. Always becomes deathly ill after a clear night. Mary’s first case. (Household – Terrance Howell (butler), Sylvia Jacobs, Sally & Ronald Woods, Ron Athens.)
- **Billy** – Man Holmes paid to stay with his taxi in London.
- **John Dickson** – Bomber Sherlock put away years earlier.
- **Patricia Donleavy** – Mary’s Math tutor in Oxford. On a leave of absence for an illness.
- **Mycroft Holmes** – Sherlock’s brother. Works for British Intelligence.
- **Mrs. Hudson** – Holmes’ housekeeper. Mary comes to think of her as a second mother.
- **Captain Jones** – Boat operator who takes Mary and Sherlock to Jerusalem/Palestine.
- **Inspector Lestrade** – Police officer Holmes worked with in London before he retired.
- **Patrick Mason** – Farmhand that runs and keeps up Mary’s farm and land.
- **Jessie Simpson** – 6-year old daughter of an American senator who is kidnapped and held for ransom.
- **Johnathan Simpson** – American Senator whose 6-year old daughter, Jessie, is kidnapped.

- **Will Thompson** – Holmes' gardener.
- **John Watson** – Holmes' former assistant and biographer. A doctor. A sweet "bumbling" man. Mary comes to call him "Uncle John."
- **Tillie Whiteneck** – Owner of the Monk Ton Inn. Friend of Patrick. Someone steals money and hams from her inn. Mary's second case.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The subtitle of this book is "On the Segregation of the Queen." Why might the author have added a subtitle and what (or who) is the "Queen" referred to in the subtitle?
3. In an Editor's Preface, King playfully discloses the "true" origin of the story at hand – that what follows will be the actual memoirs of Mary Russell, which were mysteriously sent to her out of the blue, along with a trunk full of odds and ends. Why does King begin with this anecdote? What effect does this device have on the rest of the novel? Were you fooled?
4. Who was your favorite character and why? Who was your least liked character?
5. Do you think Holmes intended to make Mary his apprentice/helper/partner at first?
6. It is 1915, the Great War is raging through Europe and the men of England are in the trenches. How does this particular period in history allow a character like Mary Russell to take the stage in areas of post-Victorian society usually reserved for men?
7. In what other ways did growing up in the shadow of WWI affect Mary's relationship with Holmes?
8. Once Jessie Simpson has been rescued, Mary tells her that it is alright to be angry, but make sure to she is happy, as well. What do you think of this advice?
9. Why do you think the author spent so much time on the education and youth of Mary Russell. Was it successfully done?
10. Holmes uses the game of chess to sharpen Mary Russell's strategic thinking and intuition. How does chess—and, in particular, the Queen—serve as a metaphor throughout the story? In what ways does King herself use the game to comment upon the master/apprentice relationship?
11. In Sherlock's bolt hole, Mary asks herself what type of man would need "a place outfitted like that?" What type of man do you think Sherlock Holmes is?
12. Russell and Holmes don't disguises throughout The Beekeeper's Apprentice, and their work sometimes requires them to cross dress. Is gender reversal necessary in order to win the confidence of certain people? How does Mary Russell's world change when she dresses as a man?
13. Watson is eternally known as the great detective's sidekick. Who, in your opinion, is a more effective foil for Holmes, Watson or Russell? What different aspects of Holmes's personality emerge in the presence of each?

14. At Oxford, Mary Russell concludes that theology and detective work are one and the same. In your opinion, how are the two subjects related?
15. Do you think Mary caused/is guilty of her family's deaths? Why or why not?
16. At what point in the novel did you suspect that Russell's adversary was a woman? When you read a mystery, what assumptions do you typically make about the gender of the villain? In what ways does King toy with the reader's assumptions about gender throughout the novel?
17. Why were Sherlock's friends targeted by the last criminal (the mastermind)? Why didn't the person target Sherlock directly?
18. What are some crucial differences between the training Patricia Donleavy received from her father and the training Mary Russell received from Holmes? What mental and emotional strengths do both women have in common, and what separates them?
19. Is it fair for a writer to make use of another writer's creation? Does it make a difference if the later work is a straight pastiche (that is, a story with the same characters, setting, etc. as the original) or if it merely incorporates the earlier work in a different story (as with Beekeeper, whose main character is Mary Russell, not Holmes)? Do you think the author is justified in her claim that her book is not a pastiche?
20. Laurie R. King has written 14 books in the Mary Russell series and also a number of other books. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/k/laurie-r-king/>
- Goodreads – http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/91661.The_Beekeeper_s_Apprentice
- Laurie R King -- <http://laurierking.com/>
- LitLovers – <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/8603-beekeepers-apprentice-king>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=53dfd292-59b1-41e3-97e8-dfdb479d6b70%40sessionmgr101&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=004077&db=neh>
- Straight Talk - http://z6.invisionfree.com/Straight_Talk/ar/t2346.htm
- Usual Suspects - <https://robertarood.wordpress.com/2010/04/19/the-beekeepers-apprentice-by-laurie-r-king-a-book-discussion/>

Laurie R. King's Books

Kate Martinelli

1. A Grave Talent (1993)
2. To Play the Fool (1995)
3. With Child (1996)
4. Night Work (2000)
5. The Art of Detection (2006)

Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes

1. The Beekeeper's Apprentice (1994)
(aka Or On the Segregation of the Queen)
2. A Monstrous Regiment of Women (1995)
3. A Letter of Mary (1997)
4. The Moor (1998)
5. O Jerusalem (1999)
6. Justice Hall (2002)
7. The Game (2004)
8. Locked Rooms (2005)
9. The Language of Bees (2009)
10. The God of the Hive (2010)
11. Pirate King (2011)
12. Garment of Shadows (2012)
13. Dreaming Spies (2015)
14. The Murder of Mary Russell (2016)
 - (10.5.) Beekeeping for Beginners (2011)
 - The Mary Russell Companion (2014)
 - Mary's Christmas (2014)
 - The Marriage of Mary Russell (2016)
 - Mary Russell's War (2016)

Anne Waverly

- A Darker Place (1998)

Harris Stuyvesant

1. Touchstone (2007)
2. The Bones of Paris (2013)

Stand-alone Novels

- Folly (2001)
- Naked Came the Phoenix (2001)
- Keeping Watch (2003)
- Califia's Daughters (2004) (as by Leigh Richards)
- Lockdown (2017)

If you liked Beekeeper's Apprentice, try...

- Maisie Dobbs – Jacqueline Winspear
 - The Sweetness At The Bottom Of The Pie – Alan Bradley
 - Seneca Falls Inheritance – Miriam Grace Monfredo
 - Girl Waits With Gun – Amy Stewart
 - The Case Of The Missing Marquess – Nancy Springer
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The Downs, England



<https://www.britannica.com/place/Downs>



<http://blondietravelblog.com/top-4-countryside-spots-within-2-hours-of-london/>