

American Honey: A Field Guide to Resisting Temptation

Sarah M. Wells

Book Discussion Guide and Writing Prompts

General Questions

Why do you think the author chose to order the book the way she did?

Do you think the braiding together of the father-daughter narrative and the husband-wife narrative is effective?

Could you relate to the author?

What feelings did this book evoke in you?

If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?

What new thing(s) did you learn? About yourself?

“Field Guide to Resisting Temptation”

What do we learn about the author right away from this vignette?

Writing Prompt: If you could tell your younger self anything, what would it be? Write instructions to your younger self based on what you know now regarding how they'll get through a challenging situation.

“Rules of Engagement”

If you are married, share your engagement story. Did he propose, or did you? Were you ready? Were you surprised? What's the story behind your engagement ring?

What “war tactics” did you learn from your parents? How has that impacted your relationships?

Why do you think the author has such feelings about the ring?

Writing Prompt: Use tactical language from war to write about a domestic argument.

“Buck Owens Teaches Me about Listening”

What influence does the author’s father have on her throughout the book?

Why do you think she chose to tell both the father-daughter story and the husband-wife story?

The author’s desire to understand her father and for her father to understand her is a main theme in this essay. What core memories capture your relationship with your dad? Did you feel heard by him?

Writing Prompt: Choose an artist, author, movie genre, or musician you love to explore a relationship that is conflicted or complex.

“Building Fires”

What is the significance of the outdoor fire pit in this chapter?

Who was your first love? How did that person shape you?

Writing Prompt: Choose a natural process, like wood burning in this chapter, and research how it works. Write a scene that uses the details you’ve uncovered to enrich a memory related to that process.

“Bobby Pins”

What small moment from a meaningful event, like the bobby pins in the bathtub on the author’s wedding night, has stayed with you for years?

Writing Prompt: Identify a small object as part of a big day. Describe the details of that object, working outward from the object to the memory itself. Allow the process of writing the particular lead you into meaning.

“Uprooted”

What do you remember about your childhood home?

What do you miss from your childhood? What are you glad you were able to leave behind?

Writing Prompt: Choose a room from your childhood home. What objects are in the room? Who placed them there? Where did they come from? What do they mean to you?

“The Seeds You Sow”

What was one of your favorite television shows when you were a kid?

There are tradeoffs for every choice we make. When have you had to choose between two equally good but different paths, and what made you choose? What did you gain? What did you lose?

Writing Prompt: Write about a memorable episode of a television show. Why did this episode stick? What else was happening in your life at the time you watched the show? What details do you remember about the room where you watched the show? Were there other people watching?

“Somebody’s Daughter”

The author considers the passive influences of family and friends on her understanding of what makes a woman attractive in this chapter. What body image messages did you receive from your parents and family members? How do you feel these messages shaped your perception of yourself?

Writing Prompt: The first portion of this chapter is originally a poem. Write a poem in blank verse (no rhyme, iambic pentameter) about body image messaging you’ve heard that influenced you.

“Genotype”

Have traditional gender roles defined your life? How have you defied gender norms and how have you kept them?

What traits have you inherited from your parents?

Writing Prompt: Write a compare and contrast piece examining a relationship that’s important to you. Read “He and I” by Natalia Ginzburg as another example.

“Someone’s in the Kitchen”

Can you relate to the push-and-pull of the author’s relationship with her husband described in this chapter? What do you think of her response to the Bible verse she quotes at the beginning of the chapter?

Writing Prompt: Choose a common saying, Bible verse, or platitude that bothers you and write in response to that quote.

“The Worst Soccer Mom”

If you are married, what interests do you and your spouse share, and what is strictly theirs and strictly yours?

In what ways have you been pushed beyond your comfort zone and required to adapt? Can you relate to the need to feel like you have it all together, even when you’re out of your element?

Writing Prompt: Identify a phrase you often repeat and write a series of scenes in which you’ve repeated this phrase.

“Traveling with Donkey”

Share a time when you and your spouse have been able to get away. What’s your favorite part of being away from normal life?

Writing Prompt: Choose one memorable trip away. What happened that made it memorable? Did the trip mark a turning point in your life in some way? How did this particular trip define the era in your life?

“Natural Habitat”

We all have our failed vacation stories. Share one!

Writing Prompt: Write about a time your vacation did not live up to the hype. Use exaggeration, hyperbole, self-deprecation, repetition, and other devices to give your piece a humorous twist.

“Friends in Low Places”

Can you think of a defining moment where your relationship with a parent shifted?

Has the author’s relationship with her father evolved since the beginning of the book?

Writing Prompt: Write a scene from childhood in which you tried to emulate the behavior, speech, or actions of another person.

“I Take to Drinking”

How has your family’s relationship with alcohol influenced your decisions about drinking?

Writing Prompt: The author’s attitude toward alcohol evolved over time. Write about a subject about which you’ve changed your opinion. What conversations, moments, and events prompted you to reconsider your position?

“The Face of Mercy”

Do you believe in coincidences, serendipitous events, happy accidents, or divine intervention?

Writing Prompt: Write about your best friend. When did you meet? What drew you together? How have you influenced each other?

“The First Step Is Admitting You Have a Problem”

Why do you think the author chose to include these two blog posts in her book?

Writing Prompt: Choose a moment from the past when things spiraled out of control. Write a ten-step instruction guide for how to handle that season.

“Not-My-Husband”

The author chose not to name “not-my-husband.” Why do you think she left his name out? Do you think she should have named him? What is lost and what is gained?

Have you ever been in a similar situation? Can you relate to the author?

Writing Prompt: Write a scene in which you shift perspective, from first person to third person. How does that perspective shift change the lens through which the reader experiences the moment?

“From Above and Below”

What do you make of these two scenes together?

Writing Prompt: Choose a moment from your childhood, like stargazing in this essay, that repeated as an adult, and write both scenes.

“A Car to Drive”

What song lyrics do you always sing wrong?

Writing Prompt: Write about the first time you learned the real words to a song you’ve been singing wrong.

“He Thinks He’ll Keep Her”

It’s never just one thing when it comes to marriage issues, is it? What made the author’s interactions with “not-my-husband” more complicated than “just” sexual harassment?

Writing Prompt: Tense conversations can be carried by the seemingly mundane activity that is taking place during those conversations. Write a scene that includes argumentative dialogue, paying particular attention to the non-verbal activity in the scene.

“Brandon and Me” and “Home Field Advantage”

What commonplace activity do you and your partner engage in that brings you close?

How do these two vignettes serve the overarching story in the book?

Writing Prompt: Choose a routine task that captures the spirit of a relationship that matters to you and write about the particularities of that task, whether it's cooking together, watching TV, taking a walk, or something else.

“The Dance: Dad’s Lead”

The author shares details about their wedding day multiple times throughout the book. Did this work in her favor, or did it feel redundant?

Writing Prompt: We all have stories we've told over and over. Write a familiar story from a new angle. Who else was there? What else happened? What details have you overlooked? A whole book could be written about that one particular day (Sonya Huber did it, actually, in her *Supremely Tiny Acts: A Memoir of a Day*).

“Telling My Daughter Love Stories”

What have you always told yourself you would do differently with your children, if you have them, compared to how you were raised?

Did you believe that marriage would be your happily ever after? Does the idea that the wedding day is simply a “to be continued” resonate with you?

Writing Prompt: Choose a movie that influenced your view of reality. Write an essay in which you watch the movie. What scenes from the movie evoked an emotional response? What scenes shaped who you are? How did the movie compare with how things played out in real life?

“Careful Intimacies”

Did you find this last chapter to be satisfying? Were there any loose ends you wish the author would have tied up?

Writing Prompt: Write about a concert you attended. Who did you go with? What songs played? Who else was at the concert? Who was in the audience?