

Beekeeper, a BYKids film, directed by Keith Griffith III

Rationale: Bees, like humans, are fascinating creatures who live in community with one another to survive and thrive. Bees, also like humans, live with challenges introduced in their ecosystem that threatens their daily existence. Keith's film not only draws this vital comparison to the lives of bees and humans and our need to live together, but also shows us that his beekeeping hobby-turned-business has given him the strength to cope with personal struggles. Inspired by the social behavior and cooperation of bees, Keith tells us that by '[beeing2gether](#)' we can live in community with each other and thrive.

Beekeeper

Keith Griffith III, 15, shares the healing power and ecological importance of beekeeping.

In his film, *Beekeeper*, Keith explains the essential role of pollinators in the environment and in food production. He is on a mission to spread the word about the ecologically critical honeybee. Rising temperatures, habitat loss and pesticides have disrupted bees' ecosystem, threatening their very existence.

Keith explains what bees have taught him: cooperation, community and emotional well-being, lessons he shares in workshops and talks around his hometown, Louisville, Kentucky. Keith began keeping bees about four years ago, when both of his parents were incarcerated. Beekeeping helped him manage the stress of not having his parents at home.

What started as a hobby encouraged by his beekeeping uncle soon became a passion. The young entrepreneur also founded Beeing2gether, a company that sells bee-inscribed merch, raw honey and actual hives. He's even written a book about the benefits of bees, the aptly titled *Honey Bees & Beekeeping: A Mental Health Miracle*.

Featured Individuals

Keith Griffith III (director)

Bessa (Keith's Grandmother)

Shawn (Keith's Uncle)

Stephanie (Keith's Mom)

Griff (Keith's Dad)

Key Terms and Concepts

- **Ecosystem:** An ecosystem is a geographic area where plants, animals and other organisms, as well as weather and landscapes, work together to form a bubble of life. ([National Geographic](#))

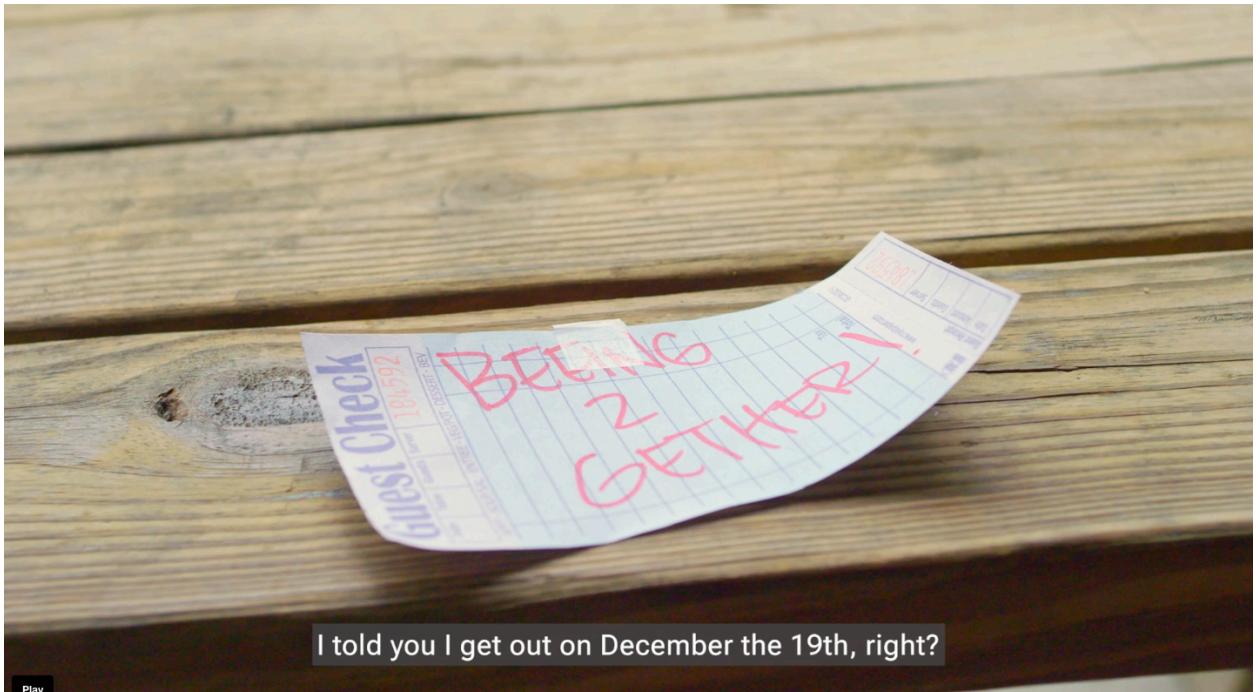
- **Incarcerated person:** An individual who is serving a criminal sentence in a Federal, State, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other similar correctional institution. (US Department of Education, [Federal Register](#))

Discussion Questions

1. *Beekeeper* begins with this camera shot of Keith slating, or using a film slate ([clapperboard](#)), which helps with the synchronization of picture and sound. What do you notice about this opening of the film? Why do you think this shot might have been composed/planned this way?



2. Keith's Grandmother explains some of Keith's family background as he was growing up. She tells a story about Keith's growing realization about the visits to see his Dad when he told her he wanted a "take-home Dad" like everyone else. What might Keith mean by "take-home Dad," and why would he describe his Dad's situation in this way?
3. What does this closeup on a [Beeing2Gether](#) receipt from the farmer's market suggest? How does the simultaneous dialogue (the phone call from Keith's Dad) add to the emotional weight of this shot?



4. What connections do you make between Keith and bees? Between bees and mental health? Between Keith's beekeeping and his life?
5. What are your thoughts about this shot of Keith slating the beginning of his interview with his Dad? Why do you think Keith is shown slating this particular interview at this time in the film?



6. How does this film comment upon the value of telling personal stories? Why is it important that Keith reveals who he is and where he comes from (as well as other people he introduces us to)?

Keith's Well-'bee'-ing

Jolanta Burke and Sean Corrigan, in their article, "Bee Well: a positive psychological impact of a pro-environmental intervention on beekeepers' and their families' wellbeing," examine the social-emotional and psychological benefits that are derived with the close connection between beekeepers and their bees.

In their study, Burke and Corrigan identify five ways that bees impact the humans that care for them. Bees give their keepers:

- A sense of pride in beekeeping for the good of the environment and community
- A sense of togetherness with nature, family, and community
- A sense of contributing significantly to the greater good
- The recognition of the value of beekeeping for psychological growth, flow, and relaxation
- Opportunities to show their character strengths

In the chart below, describe the moments from the film when you observe any of the five qualities above in Keith's behavior, words, and actions.

	Moments of Keith Showing Key Benefits of Beekeeping
Pride in beekeeping	
Sense of togetherness	

Sense of contribution to greater good	
Recognition of the value of beekeeping for wellbeing	
Opportunities for beekeepers to show their character strengths	

Burke J, Corrigan S. Bee Well: a positive psychological impact of a pro-environmental intervention on beekeepers' and their families' wellbeing. *Front Psychol.* 2024 Mar 27;15:1354408. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1354408. PMID: 38601827; PMCID: PMC11004476.

Pathways for Humanities

"Bees thrive together when they are together and I feel like that's what happens when family are together, too."
-Keith

The Metaphorical Hive: Bee and Human Societies

The natural world and [the animal kingdom](#) have always been used by thinkers, writers and artists as a metaphor for the human one, and bees are no exception. Bee society, with its cooperative and [eusocial](#) community, has long fascinated classic philosophers, like [Aristotle](#) and Seneca, and [artists throughout the ages](#), including Shakespeare.

In Hailey Swenson's [article](#), "The political insect: Bees as an early modern metaphor for human hierarchy," she details how bees were not only important to the economy and sustainability of the early modern world, but also how bees helped people understand the

structure of society and government. In *Henry V*, the Bishop of Canterbury reminds his King of the inner workings of the hive as being related to human order and hierarchy:

Therefore doth heaven divide
The state of man in divers functions,
Setting endeavor in continual motion,
To which is fixèd as an aim or butt
Obedience; for so work the honeybees,
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach
The act of order to a peopled kingdom.
They have a king and officers of sorts,
Where some like magistrates correct at home,
Others like merchants venture trade abroad,
Others like soldiers armèd in their stings
Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds,
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent royal of their emperor,
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
The singing masons building roofs of gold,
The civil citizens kneading up the honey,
The poor mechanic porters crowding in
Their heavy burdens at his narrow gate,
The sad-eyed justice with his surly hum
Delivering o'er to executors pale
The lazy yawning drone.

What is the bee society structure Shakespeare describes in this speech? What human roles correspond to bee roles? How far can we extend this bee metaphor today? Do we still have a sense of “order” in our “peopled kingdoms”? How are our human societies, governments, communities, and families structured in our world today?

The “secret lessons” of Audre Lorde’s “The Bees”

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was an influential American poet, essayist, and civil rights activist. Known for her powerful writings on issues of race, gender, and sexuality, Lorde was a self-described “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet.” Lorde's work continues to inspire and challenge readers to confront injustices and embrace their identities.

Listen to a reading of Lorde's “The Bees” by Grammy Award-winning jazz vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant and discuss the following questions below.

- What is the significance of the bees and their hive in the poem?

- How does the poet illustrate the concept of "destruction" throughout the poem?
- Discuss the differences in how the boys and girls respond to the bees. What might this say about gender roles or socialization?
- How does the poem address the theme of learning or education?
- What emotions are evoked in you as a reader when you read about the beating of the bees' hive?
- How do the final lines of the poem reflect on the broader theme of human understanding and interaction with nature?
- Can you find any symbolism in the "fresh honey" and "rain-stunned bees"?
- How does Lorde use sensory imagery to convey the atmosphere and action in the poem?
- What do you think the girl in the poem is trying to understand about "her own destruction"? How does this line tie back to the rest of the poem?

Convict, Felon, Criminal, Inmate, Prisoner, Offender—What's in a Name?

Using different names for an incarcerated person, such as "criminal," "prisoner," and "inmate," can present several challenges. These terms can dehumanize individuals, reducing their identity to their crime and ignoring their full humanity. Additionally, they can perpetuate stigma and stereotypes, making it harder for those who have been incarcerated to reintegrate into society and access opportunities for growth and rehabilitation.

[The Marshall Project](#), named in honor of Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization focused on criminal justice in the United States. Founded in 2014 by Neil Barsky and Bill Keller, it aims to create a sense of urgency about the system's inequities and drive impactful change through journalism. Read this [article](#) in which the Project discusses their own style guide for how they describe people who are incarcerated and consider the questions below.

- How does the use of terms like "inmate," "felon," and "offender" impact public perception of individuals within the criminal justice system?
- Why is the term "inmate" considered particularly dehumanizing by many people within the system?
- What does "people-first" language entail, and how does it aim to change perceptions of incarcerated individuals?
- How does the article address the issue of neutrality in the language used by journalists to describe incarcerated individuals?
- How can language in journalism perpetuate systemic racism and classism according to the article?

- What are some of the terms preferred by people directly affected by the criminal justice system, as mentioned in the article?
- Why is it important for journalism to maintain clarity and avoid euphemisms when discussing incarceration?
- How does the Marshall Project's policy reflect their engagement with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated readers?
- In what ways can changing the language around incarceration influence broader societal attitudes and policies?
- How might the language used to describe incarcerated individuals affect their reintegration into society post-release?

Incarceration Study: US vs. Norway

The United States has the [highest incarceration rate in the world](#), with over 2 million people behind bars. Do these sobering statistics indicate that the United States is an inherently violent place with many more criminal offenders than the rest of the world? Investigating the nature of the US criminal justice system, [the Sentencing Project](#) believes it is “like a bicycle stuck in one gear: the prison gear.” The Sentencing Project reports a 500% increase in prison populations in the last 40 years and believes that there are other factors at play: “Changes in sentencing law and policy, not changes in crime rates, explain most of this increase. These trends have resulted in prison overcrowding and fiscal burdens on states to accommodate a rapidly expanding penal system, despite increasing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not an effective means of achieving public safety.” How does any country, society, or community achieve true and lasting public safety?

Compare the [US prison system](#) with that of Norway's [Halden Prison](#), which has been called the [most humane prison in the world](#). After viewing two videos, [Norway's Halden Prison](#) and [Can Norway help US break the reoffending cycle?](#), discuss the differences between US prisons and Halden Prison. Is there anything to learn from Norway's approach to criminality and incarceration?

Pathways for STEM

“Not only was I a beekeeper, but I went around giving talks to people on how important bees are to our planet. A balanced ecosystem is where things work together. Bees depend on each other, and so do we.”

—Keith

Bees as “Climate Heroes”

Bees are vital to the planet because they pollinate approximately 75% of the world's flowering plants, including about [35% of the crops we eat](#). This pollination process is

crucial for the reproduction of many plants, which in turn supports entire ecosystems and contributes to [biodiversity](#). Additionally, bees help produce food sources for other animals, maintain genetic diversity in plants, and even support the production of crops like almonds, fruits, and vegetables, making them key players in both natural habitats and agriculture.

Read the article ["Why Bees are Climate Heroes."](#) by the [World Wildlife Fund](#), and consider the questions below:

- How do bees contribute to fighting climate change, and why might they be considered "unsung climate heroes"?
- What role do bees play in seed production and biodiversity within grassland ecosystems?
- How do changes in climate affect the relationship between bees and the plants they pollinate?
- Why are grasslands described as having a significant impact on carbon sequestration, and how do bees contribute to this process?
- How does the nesting behavior of solitary bees benefit soil health, particularly in temperate grasslands?
- Discuss the metaphor of bees following a "bat signal" in the context of their ecological role. How effective is this comparison?
- How does planting native blooming plants in our yards support bee populations and broader ecosystems?
- In what ways does the health of soil depend on the activities of bees and the plants they pollinate?
- How might the loss of bees impact both local and global ecosystems?
- What are some actions individuals can take to support bee populations and their role in combating climate change?

"Heaven-Instructed Mathematicians": The Math Minds of Bees

In 1852, William Kirby and William Spence described bees as "Heaven-Instructed Mathematicians" in their book, *An Introduction to Entomology*. In this work, Kirby and Spence marveled at the bees' ability to construct their hexagonal honeycombs with such precision and efficiency. In fact, the hexagonal honeycombs are not only popular in hives, but also is a [preferred shape in Nature](#) itself.

As you watch the video ["The Honeybee and the Hexagon,"](#) consider the geometry of the hexagon and the benefits this particular shape brings bees and their hives. For those who are curious, there is also the ["Honeycomb conjecture"](#) mathematical proof made by Thomas C. Hales that you can investigate!

[Pathways for SEL](#)

“Everybody goes through challenges, everybody has a story to tell [...] but we can only speak on our story.”
—Griff, Keith’s Dad

“Speak on your story”: Stories of Apology

A memorable moment of *Beekeeper* is when Keith’s Dad, during a phone call, apologizes to his son for his past mistakes. Apologies have the power to transform relationships and open doors to healing and understanding. They break down barriers and allow genuine human connections to form. [Apologies demonstrate strength and self-awareness](#), as it takes courage to admit when we’re wrong.

Sharing your personal story is a powerful way to connect with others and build relationships. It lets people see the real you, fostering understanding and empathy. Your story can also inspire and motivate others who might be going through similar experiences. Plus, reflecting on and sharing your story helps you understand your own journey better and provides a sense of clarity and purpose. It can be a healing and empowering process, helping you make sense of past experiences and how they’ve shaped you.

Tell or write a personal story about a time when you apologized to someone or received an apology from someone. What was the situation and what happened to you? How did you feel about the situation? What were the consequences of the situation? When the apology was given, what emotions did you have? What were the reactions of the people involved? How was the situation resolved? Looking back on the situation, what have you learned about yourself and others?

Who’s in Your Hive? Mapping Out Your Support System

A [social support system](#) is a network of friends, family, and peers who offer emotional and practical help. A support system is important for everyone because it helps you during difficult times, builds a sense of belonging and connection, and fosters growth and resilience. When people share resources, knowledge, and encouragement, challenges are easier to face. This interconnectedness can lead to better mental health and overall well-being, as you feel valued and supported.

Using the Hive Map, notate the people who surround you and support you. You can think of your family (your pets, too!), trusted adults at school, friends, neighbors, online/social communities, and faith communities. If you would like more brainstorming about the people who are in your hive, you can use this [Support System Superlative worksheet](#) to think about those around you who support you in various ways.

MY HIVE

