

## Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

### CITY LIBRARY BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

#### About the book

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After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she's been doing since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago.

Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn't dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors – until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova. Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late.

#### About the author

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When **Shelby Van Pelt** isn't writing, she's herding cats and wrangling children. Her debut novel, *Remarkably Bright Creatures*, was an Instant New York Times Bestseller and a Read With Jenna Today Show book club pick. In 2023, she was awarded the Heartland Prize for Fiction and the McLaughlin-Esstman-Stearns First Novel Prize from The Writer's Center. *Remarkably Bright Creatures* has sold over a million copies. It has spent, in aggregate, a year-plus on the NYT Hardcover Bestseller list. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she's now missing the mountains in the Chicago area with her family.

#### Interviews and articles

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- **NPR:** "[A widow's unlikely friendship with a giant Pacific octopus](#)" [May 2022; article & audio]
- **Los Angeles Public Library:** "[Interview with an Author: Shelby Van Pelt](#)" [June 2022; article]
- **New York Times:** "[How 'That Octopus Book' Won Over More Than a Million Readers](#)" [December 2023; article]
- **PBS Books:** "[LOC NBF – Shelby Van Pelt](#)" [July 2023; video, 59 mins]
- **National Geographic:** "[Octopuses 101](#)" [August 2017; 11 short videos]

### Discussion questions

1. What perspective does Marcellus bring to the story? What's the relevance of him being an octopus, rather than another animal (or a human)?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Tova and Marcellus? Why does she feel such a connection towards the octopus?
3. How about the relationship between Tova and Cameron? How do they influence one another? What similarities (if any) do they share?
4. How did your understanding of Cameron evolve throughout the novel? Do you think that he changes at all by the end?
5. What role does Ethan play in Sowell Bay? What relationship does he have with fellow residents? In particular, with Tova?
6. What is the importance of the book's setting, Sowell Bay? How does this small town in the Pacific Northwest influence the story?
7. The theme of grief runs throughout the novel. How do different characters cope with it?
8. Marcellus and Tova are both characters who grapple with the realities of getting older. How do they approach aging?
9. What is the role of friendship in the story? In particular, Tova has the Knit-Wits, and Cameron has Elizabeth and Brad back in California; how would you describe their relationship with those friend groups?
10. How about the role of family? At the start of the story, Tova, Cameron, and Ethan all for the most part have few (if any) close family connections. What is their relationship with 'family' – whether biological or chosen?
11. Did you like the way the book was written – with each chapter focused on a different character – and how the story's mysteries unraveled as the book progressed? Did you have any lingering questions or thoughts after you finished?
12. *Remarkably Bright Creatures* maintained a presence on the best-seller list well after its May 2022 release, and still has lengthy holds lists at libraries over 2 years later – which is particularly notable for a first-time author. What do you think it is about the book that has made it resonate with readers? Do you understand the hype?