

ESL Book Club 2024 – September Discussion Questions

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

Discussion Date: Sep 6, 2024, 10:30 am – 12 pm in Central Park Library – Sycamore Room

1. What qualities do Marcellus and Tova both share that make this friendship a success?
2. On page 9, Tova feels sorry for the sharks in the big aquarium tank because she “understands what it means to never be able to stop moving, lest you find yourself unable to breathe.” Why do you think she feels so compelled to keep busy? What would happen if she simply stopped?
3. In contrast to how Tova keeps busy, Cameron deals with grief by remaining stagnant, refusing to even try to reach his potential, much to the frustration of those who care about him. Why do you think he sabotages himself?
4. Marcellus is extremely smart. Have you had encounters with animals — octopuses or otherwise — who demonstrated surprising levels of intelligence?
5. Marcellus remarks on page 59 that “fingerprints are like keys, with their specific shape. I remember all keys, too.” From the house key Tova loses to the ring of keys Marcellus finds at the bottom of the sea, the novel is filled with various types of keys. What do you think keys symbolize in this novel?
6. Tova reflects on her experience caring for her husband through his illness and eventual passing. With no surviving family to do the same for her, she worries about being a burden on her friends as she ages. How did Tova’s views on this change throughout the book, and why do you think they did? How do you view the role of community and family in caring for older people?

7. In the middle of the novel, on page 177, Cameron says to Tova, “conscience does make cowards of us all.” What do you think he means by this statement? Do you agree with this?

8. Tova’s Swedish Dala horses are some of her most treasured possessions. Why do you think that is? Are there heirlooms in your family that carry a similar significance?



9. Several characters in this novel are faced with major choices. They can open themselves up to something new and take an unexpected, daring opportunity or they can continue on as they have been. Have you ever faced a moment in your life where a critical choice could change everything? Did you take the leap or not?

10. Marcellus’s life in captivity is much different than the life of an octopus in the wild. Marcellus was rescued from the sea after a life-threatening injury. Aquariums play an important role in education and conservation but some people view keeping animals, especially intelligent ones, in captivity with skepticism. What do you think?

11. In the last few pages of the novel, Tova and Cameron realize how they are truly connected. What do you imagine they are doing a year from the novel’s end?

12. How would you rate this book? (10 = fantastic.... 1 = hated it) Who would you recommend it to?