

Discussion questions – Remarkably Bright Creatures

1. What kind of person do you think Marcellus would be if he were human? What qualities do Marcellus and Tova both share that make this remarkable friendship a success?
2. Marcellus is extremely smart --- smarter than any human he encounters. Have you had encounters with animals --- octopuses or otherwise --- who demonstrated surprising levels of intelligence, emotional or otherwise? Have you felt “seen” by an animal or felt a relationship with an animal deepen upon earning their trust?
3. Out of the tank for more than 18 minutes and Marcellus begins to suffer The Consequences. What sort of time-based Consequences do you experience in your own life?
4. On page 9, Tova empathizes with the sharks in the big aquarium tank, musing that 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?
5. In contrast to how Tova keeps busy, Cameron emerges as a character who 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? Have you ever had someone like this in your life?
6. Tova’s son, husband and brother have all died, and all in very different circumstances. Individuals respond to her losses in different ways. Many of her closest friends are hesitant to say anything about children around Tova. How have you responded to grief that others have faced after a loved one dies? How did you navigate the pain that others were experiencing after a death? How did your comfort or discomfort influence your response? How have others reached out or responded to you in such situations? What words did you find most comforting? Were there times when you wanted to share stories or didn’t want to share? How did you navigate each situation?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. There are many intertwined threads with characters reaching out to offer help to one another. The Knit-Wits want to help Tova in her life transitions. Cameron needs financial help from Aunt Jeanne. Avery talked a stranger down from the ledge on the pier. Can you think of a time when someone offered you help that you were reluctant to accept? What fed that reluctance? In the end why did you accept or not accept the offer of assistance? How did it feel to accept or turn down the help?
10. Marcellus' life in captivity is much different than the life of an octopus in the wild --- and eventually, Terry reveals that 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. Which non-central (not Marcellus, Cameron, or Tova) did you relate to or find to be the most interesting?
12. At the end of the book, there is a collision of coincidences that tie up the relationship between Cameron and Tova. Was plausible? Is it the resolution that you were hoping for?
13. Some reviewers have suggested that this book is thematically similar to a romance novel, a mystery, or a fairy tale. What category of fiction would you place this book? What would be your spoiler-free elevator pitch in recommending this book?
14. By the close of the book, what understanding do you have of Erik's death? Does it matter if the reader knows exactly what happened? How would the story have been different if a character or several characters knew more about what happened that night?