



**NANCY:** A well-crafted novel and journey into the British society of the early 19th century. The author deals artfully with the issues of the church and fossils, the stratification of society and the feminist perspective. Through the lives of two women who were unlikely friends, with a difficult relationship, we hear a true story about fossil hunters. Their finds revised history in that time, although some moderns still don't get it. Chevalier does a great job crafting the characters and their voices. I loved the descriptions and the history lesson, too.



**KATHARINE:** Yes, I think this book is a great snapshot of the British society in the early 1800s. You can almost feel what it was like to be part of the various classes. The way she described the seasons and then those who failed to get a husband, the spinsters. The men who made fossils a hobby, and took advantage of women. Another great period piece for history classes.



**PRISCILLA:** Oh my! Now, at my church we say that God created the world about 6000 years ago. So, how do they really know that those fossils are millions of years old? Don't you think that God could have just put those in when He created everything? I can't take this book as truth. The Bible is the Word of God.



**JANE:** Now, Mary's family, and especially her mother? That's what I call serious entrepreneurship! Way to go, ladies. I liked the strong women in this book. Elizabeth and Mary stuck with their love of the fossils, even though it set them apart. And the way Elizabeth went to bat for Mary's finds and won! So awesome. It gives you hope that women can overcome, if they put their minds to it.



**MOLLY:** I liked the way she described the social classes. Mary, as part of the poor, working class, and Elizabeth, in between the upper class and the poor. And then the upper classes interacting with both. This British society was responsible for much of the colonization of Africa. It's a despicable way of organizing society. And here, we see the triumph of the underdog. Way to go, ladies!



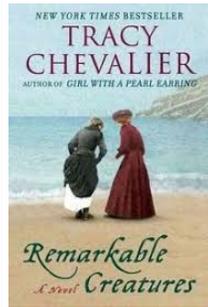
**ABIGAIL:** I found the early science fascinating as reported in this novel. I've never really studied where the fossils are found, so learning about the coastal finds on the British coast was new to me. I loved her depictions of the men and their society discussing all the new finds. An intriguing story uncovering the past!



**SALLIE:** Here you get to see the life of poor children in British society. Mary and her brother were out helping their father in harsh conditions on the coast, searching for fossils. The family eked out a living of sorts with child labor, in addition to the father's carpentry. And when the father died, it was on the children to support the family. That this was a true story and that Mary was able to turn this into a career and eventually good income. Amazing!



# Discussion Guide



## About the Book

Book Title: Remarkable Creatures

Authors: Tracy Chevalier

Published: Penguin Books, 2009

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## Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. How would you characterize Mary and Elizabeth's friendship? Do you think it is possible to have a true friendship across class lines? Would you be able to be friends with someone in the one percent? Someone below the poverty level?
3. Lightning hit Mary at a young age and is a continual theme for her in her life as described in the novel. What are some of the times Mary experienced the lightning-like feeling? Toward the end of the book Mary experiences the lightning that signaled her greatest happiness? What event triggered that and why do you think she called it her greatest happiness?
4. What other themes from nature are included in the book? How do rock, sea, sand, fossils interlock with the fate of humans? How is the cliff a source of both opportunity and danger? Of discovery and competition?
5. What are some of the sources of jealousy between Mary and Elizabeth? How do these tear their friendship apart?
6. What is the status of women in the novel? Did you read the article about women paleontologists today and what was your response?
7. Have you read other novels by Tracy Chevalier and if so, how does Remarkable Creatures compare?
8. How has Elizabeth changed at the end of the novel? What were some of the events that helped change her? How have the changes she has been through changed her friendship with Mary at the end of the novel?
9. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
9. In what ways, if any, will this change your life or perspective?