



Book Club Discussion Questions

The Shark Caller – Zillah Bethell

1. The friendship between Blue Wing and Maple is a central theme of the book, but it starts with them both fiercely angry and suspicious of the other. At what point do you think their relationship changed and why?
2. Both Blue Wing and Siringen use a form of Papuan Pidgin English. Pidgin English is the name given to a variety of languages that have evolved from English and other local languages, with many different forms across many countries. Pidgin languages evolve between different groups of people who are looking to find or develop a common tongue between their own, different languages. Pidgin languages are rarely written down, and often change as they are spoken and used. How did you find the reading experience of the book with some words in Papuan Pidgin English? Try saying them out loud to see how they sound when spoken!
3. Time is an important theme in the book, and Blue Wing uses the Papuan term “the long now” to describe “for ever”. The author, Zillah, wrote the story in the present tense to heighten this sense of “the long now”; that “for ever” is made up of every second, every minute as it passes. Talk about what you think “the long now” means to you, and how this phrase might make you look at the idea of “for ever” differently.
4. Zillah has described grief being like “a shark”, “a very dangerous animal that must be handled with awe and respect”. Think about a time when you have felt sad; do you think this description matches how you felt? What other descriptions or comparisons do you think might also convey this feeling?
5. Blue Wing and Maple both find themselves encountering different foods, such as Atlas’s split pea and ham soup, and the crab paste sandwiches that Maple makes. Can you remember when you tried a new food? What sensations do you remember having? How did it make you feel?
6. Maple’s charm bracelet is filled with charms that signify something special about her mom’s life, her own life, and their lives together. If you had to put together a charm bracelet, what five charms would you use and why?
7. A recent estimate suggested that at least 100 million sharks are killed by humans every year. This can be for their fins — which are considered a delicacy by some, for their skins, or for sport. Think about what you knew and thought about sharks before you read the book. Did this change after you’d finished? In particular, how did your opinion of Xok change after you read about what had been done to him?
8. Did the ending of the novel surprise you? Look back over the text, and see if you can spot any clues that Zillah included which suggest something might be different about Blue Wing, and discuss how you think the author handled Blue Wing’s character.

