

MARA PURL

When Otters Play

Reading Group Topics for Discussion

1. This novella differs from the novels in the series because it stands alone. How does it relate to the overall series? Do you prefer stories that have a traditional beginning, middle and end? Or do you prefer a serial story that continues through several books?
2. The story focuses on protagonist Miranda Jones, who lives in the world of art, and in the world of wildlife. Does she have a prior relationship with sea otters? Or is this a totally new species for her?
3. The Southern Sea Otter as a species was thought for a while to be extinct, because Russian fur hunters valued their pelts above all others. Surprisingly, a small colony was discovered along California's Central Coast. How does the threat of extinction impact our society in general? How did the return of the sea otter affect the economic situation in California?
4. Some of the characters in this story love sea otters, whose pups are among the most adorable in the ocean. Some characters compete with the otters. And some are afraid of, or actually hate them. How do you feel about them? Has reading this novella given you a perspective you didn't have previously?
5. Miranda is surprised when "Mrs. Lime" appears yet again, this time on an excursion boat trip to Anacapa. Since more is revealed about her, do you now have more sympathy for her woes? Do you get a laugh from reading about her? Or do you wish she would just disappear, once and for all?
6. This novella includes many minor characters who provide context and dramatic tension, but it also shows protagonist Miranda's artist-life in more detail. Did you enjoy knowing more about her and her work?
7. This novella includes some short segments told from the sea otters' perspectives. Did you find this plausible? Did you find it realistic? Do you think sea otters have the kind of intelligence portrayed in the story?
8. As a writer, Mara Purl enjoys research, and spent three years studying and interviewing experts in sea otter behavior. She became fascinated with these creatures who live within sight and sound of coastal human habitat, and they're also the only ocean animals with articulated paws similar to hands. Did you feel you learned some interesting facts about the otters?
10. Why is this book called *When Otters Play*? Did you enjoy the "play" on words, and the fact that the otters' cuteness makes it look like they're playing when they're actually working to groom and feed themselves and their young?

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