

Many Things Under a Rock Young Readers Edition: The Mysteries of Octopuses by David Scheel

Science Friday Book Club Discussion Guide

Welcome to the [SciFri Book Club](#), where science meets storytelling, and curiosity is a superpower. Each month, we explore a new title—nonfiction, sci-fi, biographies, poetry and more—and dive in deep with live events, expert chats, and intense nerdiness. All you need is an open mind... and maybe a good bookmark.

The SciFri Book Club is a program created by [Science Friday](#), a nonprofit media organization dedicated to making science and science news relatable and accessible to the public. The SciFri Book Club brings people together around all things science reading. Each month, we choose a book to read together, gather for events, host conversations with the author on our [YouTube](#) channel, [podcast](#), and [radio show](#), and lots more!

We're publishing this discussion guide, built on a previous book we've featured, so that you can host a SciFri Book Club locally—in your library, at your school, or in your home. It includes discussion questions for [Many Things Under a Rock Young Readers Edition: The Mysteries of Octopuses](#). We covered the adult version SciFri Book Club pick for [June 2025](#). This guide also includes additional content, such as interviews with author David Scheel. Here are some tips to get you started:

- We offer one discussion question a week over the course of the month, for a total of four questions for each book. This gives everyone time to read the book while offering regular opportunities to share their thoughts and ask questions.
- We share our discussion questions online in our [book club community](#) but you can host your club in whatever format makes sense for you.
- It helps to set expectations about book club behavior. We created a [Code of Conduct and Engagement Guidelines](#) (login required) to ensure everyone has the opportunity to connect. We suggest you create policies that make sense for your group.
- The SciFri Book Club has Captains who organize the group, direct discussion, and moderate the conversation. We suggest you have a clear host for your group, too.
- Want to stay up to date on what books the SciFri Book Club is reading? [Join our newsletter!](#)
- For further tips when planning a book club for middle school, we recommend the article "[How to Implement Book Clubs Into the Middle School ELA Classroom](#)."

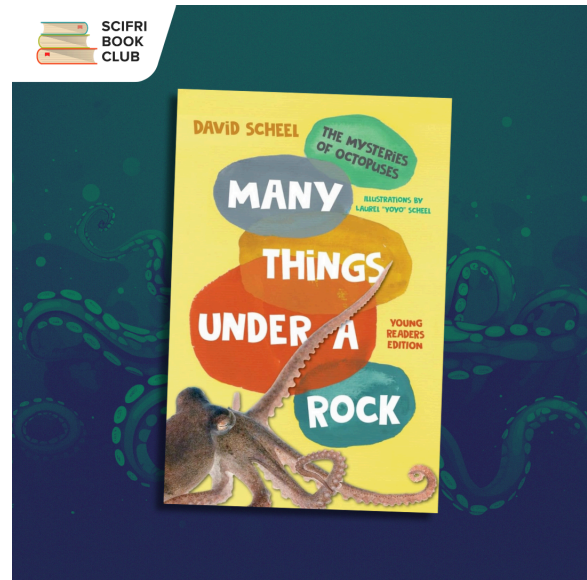
You are free to use any of these materials to foster discussion with your own book club or for educational programs. We ask that you attribute the work to Science Friday. If you would like to host a local SciFri Book Club, please [partner with us](#) to help spread the joy of science to your community.

About the Book

In *Many Things Under a Rock*, marine biologist David Scheel shares what it's like to search for one of the ocean's most mysterious animals, the octopus! His journey began in Alaska, where people usually focus on fish like salmon and herring, but Scheel wanted to know more about these strange cephalopods. So, he set out to learn from Alaska Native elders, fishermen, and divers about how to spot octopus dens under rocks.

Sometimes it was tricky, because octopuses are masters at hiding! Scheel and his team used scuba gear to catch, study, and then release the animals carefully, even though they could be large and strong. He also discovered how myths and stories about giant sea monsters, or "devilfish," combined with real science to shape people's beliefs.

Through his adventures, Scheel realized that studying octopuses is not impossible, just challenging. By combining science with traditional knowledge, he discovered new ways to understand these amazing animals. You can get your copy from your local bookstore or [on Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org).



About the Author

David Scheel is a scientist, a behavioral ecologist, who studies how animals behave. He teaches marine biology at Alaska Pacific University. He has been studying octopuses for more than 25 years. David appeared in a PBS show called "Octopus: Making Contact" with his daughter, Laurel, and an octopus named Heidi. David is a trained rescue diver and takes underwater photos of sea life. He lives in Anchorage, Alaska.



Discussion Questions

Chapters 1-7

At the start of the book, scientist David Scheel shows you that octopuses are not just animals in the ocean. They are mysterious, almost magical, creatures from traditional stories. Before scientists studied octopuses closely, much of what was known about them came from divers, Alaska Native storytellers, and traditions passed down through families.

- How did you feel about octopuses before reading this book?
- What are three things you knew about octopuses before reading this book?
- How did the first chapters change the way you think about octopuses?

Chapters 7-11

Octopuses are survival experts! They can hide in secret dens, change their skin to blend in, and even shoot ink to trick predators. Other animals in the ocean have their own clever tricks, too, like decorator crabs covering themselves in shells and seaweed for camouflage.

- In your opinion, what was the most impressive or surprising method described in the book that octopuses use to defend themselves or capture prey?
- What is something that these chapters taught you about octopuses' intelligence?

Chapters 12-16

Octopuses sense the world very differently from humans. They can see special kinds of light that people can't see. Plus, their skin can "see" light, too. Each arm can taste, touch, and even make decisions on its own! It's almost like having eight mini-brains working together.

- What unusual octopus sense do you wish you had? Why?
- Why might having senses so different from those of mammals make an octopus's behavior unlike that of humans?
- Did anything you read about octopus senses make you think differently about what it means to have a mind?

Question 4: Chapters 17-22

At the end of the book, Scheel shows that octopuses aren't always as solitary as people think. They can remember things, throw objects at each other, and even share space sometimes. These behaviors may make you wonder if they feel emotions, just in their own unique octopus way.

- How did these stories change the way you think about octopuses having feelings, memories, or friends?
- Now that you have read this book, what new ideas did you take away about how octopuses live and connect with the world?

Livestream and Q&A with David Scheel



Octopuses have long captured our imaginations, yet much about their lives remains unknown. Marine biologist David Scheel shares his discoveries in *Many Things Under a Rock*, weaving together the story of one unreachable octopus with deep insights into the biology, behavior, and changing ecosystems that shape these remarkable creatures.

[Watch the Recording](#)