



FILM: **MY OCTOPUS TEACHER**

FDG RATING: 4.6 😊😊😊😊😊
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Pippa Ehrlich, James Reed: *directors*
Craig Foster: *star, producer, narrator*
Roger Horrocks: *cinematographer*

DATE: June 20, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MY OCTOPUS TEACHER**

Winning the 2021 Oscar for best documentary, *My Octopus Teacher* is probably the escape film that we needed to get away from all the current national and international turmoil.

Producer-narrator, South African filmmaker and conservationist Craig Foster. swims off the coast of South Africa capturing a spectacular, almost magical, underwater world. The cinematography is breathtaking not only for its beauty but more significantly for showing us the emotional connections of underwater creatures, notably, Foster's surprising soul connection with a spirited octopus.

Experiencing professional burnout, Foster had a renewed urge to connect with the natural world. He states that freediving in the local sea forest near his Cape Town home provided the therapeutic balm he was looking for. A balm that he shares with us, visually soothing away our personal stresses, at least for 90 minutes.

While diving in the richly populated kelp forest of South Africa's Cape of Storms, Foster encounters a tightly clenched pile of iridescent and other colorful textured shells, that soon opens to reveal an octopus who had quickly camouflaged to escape a predator's notice, the darting, Beetlejuice-striped pyjama shark. This was a favorite image as the shells are almost magnetically flying together. But there were many eye dazzling images shot by ace underwater specialist Roger Horrocks who previously teamed with Foster on a sequence for BBC's *Blue Planet II*. *My Octopus Teacher* is clearly the outcome of painstaking study and exploration rather than lucky spontaneous shots. We marveled at the colorful diversity of the underwater life in front of us. It took ten years of footage beginning in 2010, before the story of the octopus emerged. Horrocks reveals "We amassed massive archive material because we were doing so much time in the water. It was out of that archive that we were able to make *Octopus Teacher*."

Foster continues to visit his new tentacled friend. Slowly, over time, through coaxing by Foster, the octopus allows this strange looking underwater creature to get close. We witness a connection grow that also allows Foster to see her natural behavior as she moves more comfortably despite his presence. We are thrilled to see her playful side, while also observing her crafty sneak-attacks on her own prey. Without a doubt, the most memorable scene is near the end when she reaches out for his hand with her tentacle. Several discussion participants said it brought them to tears. Truly they developed an emotional bond.

One resident critic said the film was compelling, beautiful and accessible. Others were amazed at the feat of creating the film from years of footage. Calming, meditative, were words some discussion participants used. Foster captured octopus behaviors no one else had seen that revealed an intelligence, gentleness. He says the effect of this mentorship-like relationship the octopus provided him, taught him a lesson on the fragility of life and humanity's connection with nature.

Completely enthralled by *My Octopus Teacher*, we showered it with waves of positive scores resulting in 4.6 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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