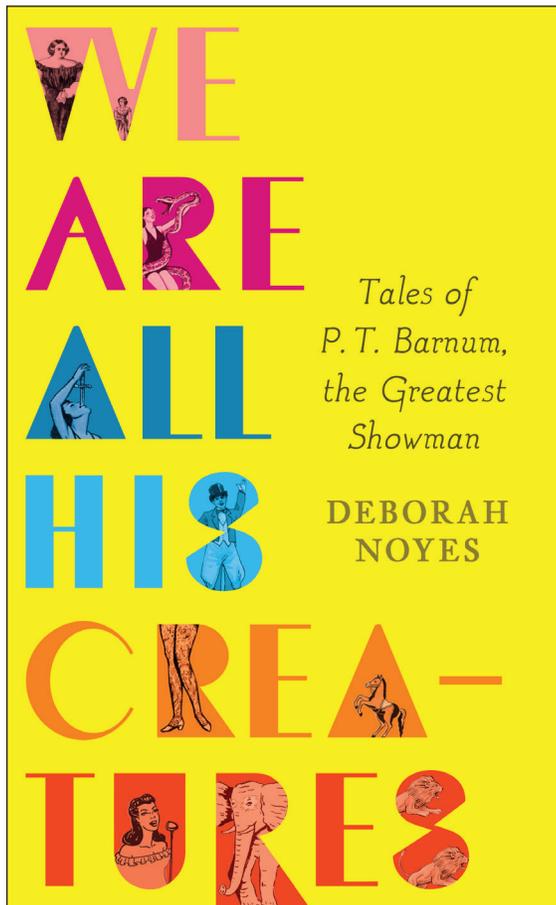


WE ARE ALL HIS CREATURES

DEBORAH
NOYES



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Also available as an e-book and in audio

About the Book

Much has been written about P. T. Barnum—legendary showman, entrepreneur, marketing genius, and one of the most famous nineteenth-century personalities. For those who lived in Barnum’s shadow, however, life was complex. P. T. Barnum’s two families—his family at home, including his two wives and his daughters, and his family at work, including Little People, a giantess, an opera singer, and many sideshow entertainers—suffered greatly from his cruelty and exploitation. Yet at the same time, some of his performers, such as General Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton), became wealthy celebrities who were admired and feted by presidents and royalty. In this collection of interlinked stories illustrated with archival photographs, Deborah Noyes digs deep into what is known about the people in Barnum’s orbit and imagines their personal lives, putting front and center the complicated joy and pain of what it meant to be one of Barnum’s “creatures.”

About the Author

Born in California, Deborah Noyes spent her early years as a military brat, living also in Maryland, Virginia, and Massachusetts. Over the years she’s worked all manner of day jobs to support her writing habit—from bartender and book reviewer to children’s book editor and zookeeper. She’s proud to report she’s the only person she knows who’s been bitten by a dwarf lemur. The author of numerous books for children and adults, including the young adult short story collection *The Ghosts of Kerfol* and the young adult novel *Plague in the Mirror*, Deborah Noyes lives in Portland, Maine.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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Discussion Questions

1. This is a book of linked short stories, and while some characters are in several stories, others appear in only one. Are there any characters you would like to know more about? Which ones? What do you think might have happened to them?
2. P. T. Barnum was a showman who featured Little People, giants, bearded ladies, and others, first in his museum and later in his circus. How do you feel about this? Was he exploiting these people or helping them?
3. The title of this book is *We Are All His Creatures*. What is meant by this?
4. In the first tale, we learn that despite living in the building that housed the museum, P. T. Barnum's own daughters had never visited it. Why did Barnum keep them out? And how did he react when they snuck in?
5. Barnum was repeatedly cruel to his first wife, Charity. Why do you think this was? Why was Caroline, the oldest daughter, also mean to her?
6. While Charity and Caroline sailed back to the United States from Europe, Charity considered going to her mother's house to have her fourth baby because she knew her husband wouldn't be there when she needed him. "Why should *she* wait there—indefinitely, interminably—for a husband who never arrived and never quite disappeared?" (page 60). What is meant by the last phrase, "and never quite disappeared"?
7. Opera singer Jenny Lind was a sensation in America before she even arrived, thanks to the hype that Barnum created. How do you think she felt about all the attention and commotion? Is there anyone today who causes as much excitement?
8. Helen purportedly saw the ghost of her sister Frances at Iranistan, the Barnums' gaudy mansion in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Do you believe she saw a ghost? If not, what might have been happening?
9. We learn conflicting things about the character of Caroline, the oldest sister. She was cruel to her mother, but Helen counted on her to be the politician in the family and to help Helen when she needed it. Are most people all good or all bad, or are they a mixture?
10. In the chapter about Tom Thumb's wedding, the author talks about Abraham Lincoln's character, saying, "He never seemed to judge or talk down to another human soul, though many despised him for it" (page 147). Why would anyone despise someone for being kind and nonjudgmental?
11. In Barnum's time it was perfectly acceptable to put people with differences on display so others could stare at them. How have societal attitudes changed since then?
12. Barnum's youngest daughter, Pauline, didn't see the difference between how Mr. Mumler, the spirit photographer, and her own father fooled people. Do you think there is a difference? Why?
13. Nancy, Barnum's second wife, identified with the huge elephant named Jumbo. What did they have in common?
14. We see P. T. Barnum obliquely in these tales, through the eyes and observations of others. How would you describe his personality based on these stories?
15. What do you find most fascinating about P. T. Barnum? What would you like to know more about?

These questions were prepared by Grace Worcester, former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. She has served on the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award*, and National Book Award committees.

