Small Great Things

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

With richly layered characters and a gripping moral dilemma that will lead readers to question everything they know about privilege, power and race, SMALL GREAT THINGS is the stunning new page-turner from #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Jodi Picoult.? ?

?[Picoult] offers a thought-provoking examination of racism in America today, both overt and subtle. Her many readers will find much to discuss in the pages of this topical, moving book.??*Booklist* (starred review)? ?

Ruth Jefferson is a labor and delivery nurse at a Connecticut hospital with more than twenty years? experience. During her shift, Ruth begins a routine checkup on a newborn, only to be told a few minutes later that she?s been reassigned to another patient. The parents are white supremacists and don?t want Ruth, who is African American, to touch their child. The hospital complies with their request, but the next day, the baby goes into cardiac distress while Ruth is alone in the nursery. Does she obey orders or does she intervene?? ?

Ruth hesitates before performing CPR and, as a result, is charged with a serious crime. Kennedy McQuarrie, a white public defender, takes her case but gives unexpected advice: Kennedy insists that mentioning race in the courtroom is not a winning strategy. Conflicted by Kennedy?s counsel, Ruth tries to keep life as normal as possible for her family --- especially her teenage son --- as the case becomes a media sensation. As the trial moves forward, Ruth and Kennedy must gain each other?s trust, and come to see that what they?ve been taught their whole lives about others --- and themselves --- might be wrong.? ?

With incredible empathy, intelligence and candor, Jodi Picoult tackles race, privilege, prejudice, justice and compassion --- and doesn?t offer easy answers. SMALL GREAT THINGS is a remarkable achievement from a writer at the top of her game.??

Discussion Guide

1. Which of the three main characters (Ruth, Turk or Kennedy) do you most relate to and why? Think about what you have in common with the other two characters as well --- how can you relate to them?

2. The title of the book comes from the Martin Luther King, Jr. quote that Ruth?s mother mentions on p. 173: ?If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.? What does this quote mean to you? What are some examples of small great things done by the characters in the novel?

3. Discuss Ruth?s relationship with her sister, Adisa. How does the relationship change over the course of the novel?

4. Kennedy seeks out a neighborhood in which she is the only white person to help her gain some perspective. Can you think of an example of a time when something about your identity made you an outsider? How were you affected by that experience?

5. All of the characters change over the course of the novel, but Turk?s transformation is perhaps the most extreme. What do you think contributed to that change?

6. Discuss the theme of parenthood in the novel. What does being a parent mean to Ruth, to Kennedy and to Turk? What does it mean to you?

7. Why do you think Ruth lies to Kennedy about touching Davis when he first starts seizing? What would you have done in her position?

8. Why do you think Kennedy decides to take Ruth?s case? What makes it so important to her?

9. Discuss the difference between ?equity? and ?equality? as Kennedy explains it on p. 427. Do you think Ruth gets equity from the trial?

10. Was your perspective on racism or privilege changed by reading this book? Is there anything you now see differently?

11. Did the ending of SMALL GREAT THINGS surprise you? If so, why? Did you envision a different ending?

12. Did the Author?s Note change your reading experience at all?

13. Have you changed anything in your daily life after reading SMALL GREAT THINGS?

14. Who would you recommend SMALL GREAT THINGS to? Why?

Author Bio

Jodi Picoult is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of over 30 novels, including HOLLOW BONES, BY ANY OTHER NAME, MAD HONEY (co-authored with Jennifer Finney Boylan), WISH YOU WERE HERE, THE BOOK

OF TWO WAYS, A SPARK OF LIGHT, SMALL GREAT THINGS, LEAVING TIME and MY SISTER'S KEEPER, and, with daughter Samantha van Leer, two young adult novels, BETWEEN THE LINES and OFF THE PAGE. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband.

Critical Praise

?I couldn?t put it down. Her best yet!?

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