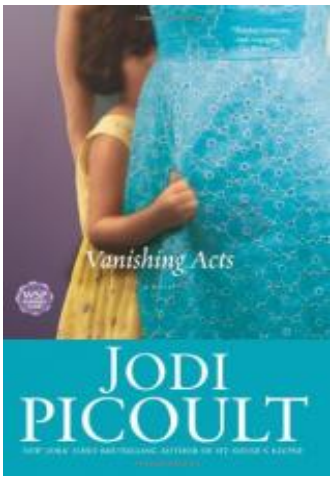
Vanishing Acts

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

Delia Hopkins has led a charmed life. Raised in rural NH by her widowed father Andrew, she now has a young daughter, a handsome fiancée, and her own Search and Rescue bloodhound -- which she uses to find missing persons. But as she plans her wedding, she is plagued by flashbacks of a life she can't recall. **Vanishing Acts** is a book about the very nature and power of memory. It explores what happens when the past we have been running from catches up to us, and questions who we trust to tell us the story of our lives before we are capable of remembering it ourselves.

Discussion Guide

1. A recurrent theme in **Vanishing Acts** is self-identity. Are we products of our pasts, or do we have more control over whom we become?

2. How important is it to be aware of our pasts, and in what ways?

3. Before we know why Andrew kidnapped Delia, he says, page 52: "By now you've already formed your own impression. You believe that an act committed a lifetime ago defines a man, or you believe that a person's past has nothing to do with his future. You think I am either a hero, or a monster." What was your feeling about him before knowing his reasons for what he did?

4. Did you change your opinion about Andrew's actions after his reasons were revealed?

5. Andrew says, "Believe what you want, but be prepared to answer this question: In my shoes, how do you know you wouldn't have done the same thing?" Would you have done the same thing? If you feel that what Andrew did was wrong, what would have been a more appropriate alternative to ensure Delia's best interests?

6. Delia says on page 151: "Sometimes knowing what's right isn't a rational decision, or even what works on paper. Sometimes leaving is the best course of action after all." Do you agree or disagree? Is doing the wrong thing EVER the right thing? Are there are ever circumstances that justify breaking the law?

7. In what way does Delia's romantic relationship with Fitz, while engaged to Eric, parallel Andrew's decision to kidnap Delia?

8. After Delia learns why Andrew kidnapped her, she suddenly recovers some important childhood memories which support Andrew's claims. Did you feel her memories were accurate, or did you think that these memories were created in her mind because she wanted to see her father acquitted? What evidence in the book supports your belief?

9. In what ways does Elise's alcoholism significantly impact both Delia and Eric, and the choices that they ultimately make? In what ways do the ways Delia and Andrew choose to deal with an alcoholic partner deal with that person's future success or failure? Had they acted differently, do you think Elise and Eric might have had different outcomes?

10. Through RuthAnn, Delia is introduced to the Hopi belief system that we are currently on our fourth world, about to enter our fifth - and that when a world no longer fits you can move into a new one. How does this apply to the other characters in the book?

11. Delia, page 279: "I wonder if the mother eagle will come back to the village now, and see that her offspring is missing. I think maybe she won't. I think maybe she knows to look for him in better places." Might Elise have had Delia's best interests at heart in not trying harder to find her?

12. Andrew, Eric and Fitz have all been keeping secrets from Delia in an attempt to spare her any pain. Were any of them justified in doing so? Are there circumstances when it's acceptable to withhold the truth from those we love, and how do we know where to draw the line?

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.

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