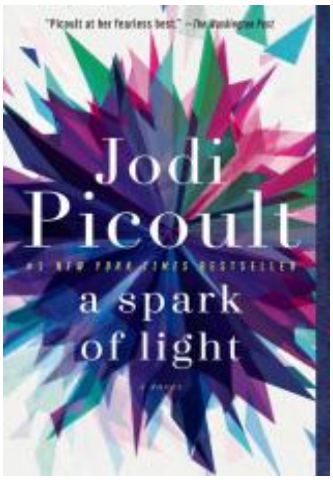
A Spark of Light

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

The warm fall day starts like any other at the Center --- a women?s reproductive health services clinic --- its staff offering care to anyone who passes through its doors. Then, in late morning, a desperate and distraught gunman bursts in and opens fire, taking all inside hostage.

After rushing to the scene, Hugh McElroy, a police hostage negotiator, sets up a perimeter and begins making a plan to communicate with the gunman. As his phone vibrates with incoming text messages, he glances at it and, to his horror, finds out that his 15-year-old daughter, Wren, is inside the clinic.

But Wren is not alone. She will share the next and tensest few hours of her young life with a cast of unforgettable characters: A nurse who calms her own panic in order to save the life of a wounded woman. A doctor who does his work not in spite of his faith but because of it, and who will find that faith tested as never before. A pro-life protester disguised as a patient, who now stands in the crosshairs of the same rage she herself has felt. A young woman who has come to terminate her pregnancy. And the disturbed individual himself, vowing to be heard.

Told in a daring and enthralling narrative structure that counts backward through the hours of the standoff, this is a story that traces its way back to what brought each of these very different individuals to the same place on this fateful day.

Jodi Picoult --- one of the most fearless writers of our time --- tackles a complicated issue in this gripping and nuanced novel. How do we balance the rights of pregnant women with the rights of the unborn they carry? What does it mean to be a good parent? A SPARK OF LIGHT is a story that will inspire debate, conversation?and, hopefully, understanding.

Discussion Guide

1. The story is narrated from the points of view of 10 different characters. Why do you think the author chose to include

so many different perspectives? Was there a voice that you connected to most strongly? Did you have difficulty connecting with any characters?

2. Regardless of their feelings on the issue of abortion, many characters are preoccupied with being a good parent. Why do *you* think it means to be a good parent?

3. Initially, Joy and Janine seem to stand on opposite sides of the pro-life/pro-choice debate. By the end, do you think they have found common ground? Do you understand where each one is coming from? Is it possible to form a connection with someone with opposing viewpoints and still maintain a commitment to one?s own beliefs?

4. At one point, Rachel, the employee who escaped from the Center, accuses Allen and his fellow protestors of being responsible for the hostage crisis situation: ?If people like you didn?t spout the bullshit you do, people like *him* wouldn?t exist.? Is this a fair accusation? Is there a point at which one does *not* have the right to voice one?s beliefs? If so, where should that line be drawn?

5. Did your feelings about the issue of abortion evolve during the reading of this novel, and, if so, how?

6. By the end of the book, we discover that these characters? lives are interwoven in more ways than one and that each individual has a deeper story than we expected. Were you surprised by any of the interconnections? Which twist struck you the most strongly?

7. Did anything about Jodi?s research surprise you? What did you learn?

8. Did Jodi?s Author Note change your reading experience at all?

9. A SPARK OF LIGHT is different than the traditional novel structure. How did you feel about the events of the story unfolding backwards? Did this structure affect your reading experience?

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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