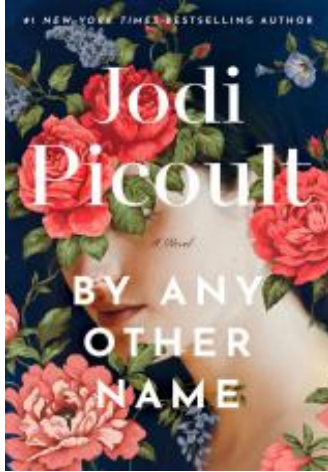


# By Any Other Name

by Jodi Picoult

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## About the Book

**From the *New York Times* bestselling co-author of MAD HONEY comes an ?inspiring? (*Elle*) novel about two women, centuries apart --- one of whom is the real author of Shakespeare?s plays --- who are both forced to hide behind another name.**

Young playwright Melina Green has just written a new work inspired by the life of her Elizabethan ancestor Emilia Bassano. But seeing it performed is unlikely, in a theater world where the playing field isn?t level for women. As Melina wonders if she dares risk failure again, her best friend takes the decision out of her hands and submits the play to a festival under a male pseudonym.

In 1581, young Emilia Bassano is a ward of English aristocrats. Her lessons on languages, history and writing have endowed her with a sharp wit and a gift for storytelling. But like most women of her day, she is allowed no voice of her own. Forced to become a mistress to the Lord Chamberlain, who oversees all theater productions in England, Emilia sees firsthand how the words of playwrights can move an audience. She begins to form a plan to secretly bring a play of her own to the stage --- by paying an actor named William Shakespeare to front her work.

Told in intertwining timelines, BY ANY OTHER NAME, a sweeping tale of ambition, courage and desire, centers on two women who are determined to create something beautiful despite the prejudices they face. Should a writer do whatever it takes to see her story live on, no matter the cost? This remarkable novel, rooted in primary historical sources, ensures the name Emilia Bassano will no longer be forgotten.

## Discussion Guide

- 1.** What was your biggest takeaway from BY ANY OTHER NAME? You may wish to talk about the thematic significance --- literal and symbolic --- of the title, for starters.
- 2.** Take an opportunity to talk about Shakespeare and how his historic significance informed your reading experience. Were you surprised to learn that people question the true identity of The Bard? Do you believe Emilia is the true playwright now? Why or why not?
- 3.** Gender swapping, mistaken identity and missed communication are amongst the many tropes found in Shakespeare's plays. Did you notice these tropes also exist within Melina's timeline in BY ANY OTHER NAME? Why might the author choose to incorporate these themes into the modern timeline, rather than the historical timeline with Emilia? What message is related to the reader with this choice?
- 4.** Talk about the use of a framed narrative --- the story behind the story --- in BY ANY OTHER NAME. Did you enjoy the alternating chapters between Emilia and Melina's individual points of view? Did you prefer one to the other, and why? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way?
- 5.** Emilia Bassano is a real-life historical figure who lived during Shakespeare's time. Did Emilia feel real to you in the world of this novel? And if so, in what ways? What narrative devices did the author use to bring her to life on the page? How is she similar to, or representative of, women in our day and age?
- 6.** "There was a reason you could not create history," Emilia says, "without writing the word story." Talk about the power and permanence of putting lived experience into words. What does the act of storytelling mean to Emilia, Melina and other characters in the novel? What does it mean to you?
- 7.** Could you catch the various references to Shakespeare plays and sonnets in BY ANY OTHER NAME? Which ones were your favorites? Did you check the back of the book --- and discover any surprises?
- 8.** "Being a woman," says Melina, "means being told to speak up for yourself in one breath and to shut up in the next." Do you agree? Cite examples from the book and popular culture that support this.
- 9.** Melina struggles in being an ally for Andre as she advocates for herself as a woman. Do you think Melina is to blame for their fallout, or is Andre? How do we advocate for inclusion and diversity for others when we're a member of one marginalized group, without losing our "place in the line," so to speak? Discuss.
- 10.** What does BY ANY OTHER NAME have to say about the nature of art and artifice, truth and deception? In what ways might you reconsider a woman's place in the history of letters now that you've read this book?
- 11.** Imagine Emilia's time, when women were forbidden to write for a public audience. And now think of our very world today, one in which female voices across the globe continue to be suppressed, and books (especially about sex and gender) are banned. How does it make you feel to acknowledge the state of literature in the current moment?

**12.** We are taught that there is a moral to every story --- something that we are supposed to learn about the world and ourselves from having read it. Do you believe that a work of fiction can 'speak' to our own humanity? And, if so, what do you think *BY ANY OTHER NAME* has to say?

**13.** If you had the chance to ask the author one question about *BY ANY OTHER NAME* --- about the inspiration for her story, the writing process or her personal background --- what might it be?

**14.** If *BY ANY OTHER NAME* was being adapted into a television show or movie, who would you cast in each role?

## Author Bio

Jodi Picoult is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of 30 novels, including *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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