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Handle With Care

by Jodi Picoult



About the Book

n/a

Discussion Guide

1. Charlotte and Sean are faced with a very difficult decision when presented with the option of suing for ?wrongful birth.? How did you feel about the lawsuit? The matter is complicated in many aspects, but especially because of Charlotte?s close friendship with Piper, her ob-gyn. How might the O?Keefes have considered and entered into the lawsuit if they had not had a personal relationship with Piper? Would your own reaction to it have changed?

2. (38) Charlotte says ?I would never have wished for an able-bodied child, because that child would have been someone that wasn?t you.? Do you agree? Discuss.

3. (46) Sean is angry and wants to get payback for the way he and his family were treated by the authorities in Florida. What is your initial reaction: to do so or forget it? (98) Charlotte asks Sean the perfect question, ?How come you were perfectly willing to sue Disney World and half of the public service system in Florida for cash? What?s the difference?? Is there a difference? Discuss the irony of Sean?s feelings initially and then how he changes with the wrongful birth lawsuit. Being played the fool was worth it but getting help for forever wasn?t?

4. During the filming of a day in Willow?s life, Charlotte purposely asks Willow?s physical therapist to try some exercises that she knows Willow isn?t ready for yet, and Willow begins to cry in pain. Charlotte rushes to her daughter?s side, blaming the physical therapist, and

when she asks if they got that on film, Marin feels hatred towards Charlotte for exploiting her daughter. Do you agree with Marin? Charlotte believes she is doing everything out of love for Willow, to win the case that will get her the care she needs, but does this take it too far? Where can we draw the line?

5. How does Amelia deal with her position in the family?being a preteen, having low self-esteem, being, and the healthy sibling of a very ill child?

6. All the characters in the book are telling their stories to Willow. Willow doesn?t have a voice until the end of the book. How is that effective to the entire story? Does it seem that the characters can be more honest in their feelings when they?re directed to Willow?

7. The author inserts recipes throughout the book that highlight certain baking techniques such as tempering, blind baking, and weeping. How do these recipes provide further insight into the story and into Charlotte?s character in particular?

8. Throughout the story, the question is raised of what it means to be a mother. For Charlotte, it means doing anything in her power to provide the best life for Willow, but at the same time, her other daughter?s suffering goes unnoticed as she develops bulimia and begins cutting herself. For Marin, the question of what it means to be a mother addresses the issues of her adoption. Is a mother someone who gives birth and gives you away, or the woman who raises you? Discuss the different ideas about mothering that the author presents in this book. At what moments do certain characters fail or succeed at being a mother?

9. The term ?wrongful birth? suggests that some people should have never been born. If abortion had been legal when Marin was conceived, she likely would not have been born. Willow?s severe disability could have been cause for abortion. How do we determine what kind of life is worth living? Who has the right say whether or not a pregnancy should be brought to term?

10. Discuss the roles that honesty and deception play in this novel. How do the characters lie to themselves? To each other? Is it sometimes better not to know the truth?

11. Charlotte is confident that the potential end of her lawsuit will justify the means, but Sean can?t handle the idea that the ?means? may leave Willow thinking she is unloved or unwanted. Clearly they both love their daughter, but express it in drastically different ways. What do each of their approaches say about love? Do Charlotte?s actions speak louder than Sean?s words?

12. Sean goes to the ?other side? of the lawsuit. Do you blame him?

13. Amelia, understandably, has conflicting emotions concerning Willow. How does Amelia show her compassion? How does she show a lack of such? What are your feelings toward Willow? Toward Amelia? How do you think Amelia?s testimony affects the outcome of the case?

14. If you choose to stop a loved one?s suffering?either before it began or during the process?was that murder or mercy? (357)

15. We follow Marin through the search for her birth mother, and what she eventually finds out about the circumstances surrounding her conception are truly devastating. Why do you think she thanks her birth mother for this information? Discuss Marin?s reaction to what she learns.

16. Why do you think the O?Keefes never cash their $8 million check? How do you feel about what they end up doing with it?

17. How do you feel about the ending? Why do you think the author chose to write it this way?

18. Does anyone have the right to decide what kind of life is too limited to be worth living?

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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