



## ***Small Great Things***

by Jodi Picoult

White supremacist parents don't want Ruth, an African American nurse to touch their newborn boy. When the baby goes into cardiac distress and Ruth is the only nurse in the hospital nursery, she makes a decision that will change her life and the lives of others as well. What would you do? As with

most of her novels, Picoult challenges readers' assumptions in a compelling story that isn't necessarily black and white.

1. The book's title comes from a Martin Luther King, Jr. quote (page 173). "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way." Ruth's mom quotes this to Ruth before she starts nursing school. Which characters accomplish small things in great ways?
2. The book is divided into stages associated with labor and delivery, with quotes for each. How did these prepare you for the coming section?
3. How was Ruth's approach to nursing influenced by her mother's approach to work as a maid?
4. On page 11, Ruth teaches her nursing student that "love has nothing to do with what you're looking at, and everything to do with who's looking." Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not? How does this frame the entire novel?
5. What was your first impression of Turk? How did your impression of him change as the story progressed?
6. Did you find Picoult's description of Turk's white supremacist lifestyle believable?
7. What was your first impression of Brit? Did your impression or level of sympathy change for her as the story progressed?
8. While Turk and Brit's racism permeate the story, Ruth and Edison face more subtle reactions from others in their lives. Which form of prejudice is worse – the one in plain sight, or the one hidden just below the surface?
9. Talk about the relationship between Ruth and her sister. How are they similar? Different?
10. Ruth believes (page 67) that "had I not hesitated, that baby might still be alive." Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you think Ruth's hesitation was believable, based on what you know of her character to this point? Do you think she ultimately made the right decision?
11. Why do you think it's important to the author that we get a clear picture of Kennedy's family and career well before she meets Ruth? How does this build a foundation for her approach to Ruth and her case?
12. How would you describe Ruth's friendship with Christina? How does their relationship influence the story?
13. How did the scene of Ruth's arrest affect you? Did you find her reaction and that of Edison's realistic?

14. On page 153, Kennedy says, “In fact, they looked just like us. It’s pretty terrifying. I mean, what if your next-door neighbor was a white supremacist and you didn’t even know it?” How can you relate to this sentiment?
15. What do you think of the characters’ names in this book and how they might or might not be descriptive? Ruth. Edison. Turk. Adisa. Davis. Kennedy. How intentional do you think the author was in naming her characters and building their histories for this story?
16. How does Edison change throughout the story? Do you find him to be a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
17. What did you think of Reverend Wallace Mercy? How would the story have been different without him?
18. How did this novel change your understanding of or attitude toward race relations?
19. Did you find the story’s resolution satisfactory? Which characters’ stories, if any, would you like to know more about?

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