



Jodi Picoult

Book club discussion questions

Title

1. Alex and Lacy's friendship comes to an end when they discover Peter and Josie playing with guns in the Houghton house. Why does Alex decide that it's in Josie's best interest to keep her daughter away from Peter? What significance is there to the fact that Alex is the first one to prevent Josie from being friends with Peter?
2. Alex often has trouble separating her roles as a judge and a mother. How does this affect her relationship with Josie? Discuss whether or not Alex's job is more important to her than being a mother.
3. A theme throughout the novel is the idea of masks and personas, and pretending to be someone you're not. To which characters does this apply, and why?
4. At one point defense attorney Jordan McAfee refers to himself as a "spin doctor," and he believes that at the end of Peter's trial he "will be either reviled or canonized" (250). What is your view of Jordan? As you were reading the book, did you find it difficult or not to remain objective about

the judicial system's standing that every defendant (no matter how heinous his or her crime) has the right to a fair trial?

5. Peter was a victim of bullying for twelve years at the hands of certain classmates, many of whom repeatedly tormented him. But he also shot and killed students he had never met or who had never done anything wrong to him. What empathy, if any, did you have for Peter both before and after the shooting?
6. Josie and Peter were friends until the sixth grade. Is it understandable that Josie decided not to hang out with Peter in favor of the popular crowd? Why or why not? How accurate and believable did you find the author's depiction of high school peer pressure and the quest for popularity? Do you believe, as Picoult suggests, that even the popular kids are afraid that their own friends will turn on them?
7. Josie admits she often witnessed Matt's cruelty toward other students. Why then does it come as such a surprise to Josie when Matt abuses her verbally and physically? How much did you empathize with Josie?
8. Regarding Lacy, Patrick notes that "in a different way, this woman was a victim of her son's actions, too" (53). How much responsibility do Lewis and Lacy bear for Peter's actions? How about Lewis in particular, who taught his son how to handle guns and hunt?
9. At one point during Peter's bullying, Lacy is encouraged by an elementary school teacher to force Peter to stand up for himself. She threatens to cancel his playdates with Josie if he doesn't fight back. How did you feel, when you read that scene? Do you blame Lacy for Peter's future actions because of it? Do you agree or disagree with the idea that it a parent's job to teach a child the skills necessary to defend himself?

10. Discuss the novel's structure. In what ways do the alternating narratives between past and present enhance the story? How do the scenes in the past give you further insight into the characters and their actions, particularly Peter and Josie?
11. When Patrick arrives at Sterling High after the shooting, "his entire body began to shake, knowing that for so many students and parents and citizens today, he had once again been too late" (24). Why does Patrick blame himself for not preventing an incident he had no way of knowing was going to happen?
12. Dr. King, an expert witness for the defense, states that Peter was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of chronic victimization. "But a big part of it, too," he adds, "is the society that created both Peter and those bullies" (409). What reasons does Dr. King give to support his assertion that society is partly to blame for Peter's actions as well as those of the bullies? Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
13. Why does Josie choose to shoot Matt instead of shooting Peter? Why does Peter remain silent about Josie's role in the shooting? In the end, has justice been satisfactorily dealt to Peter and to Josie?
14. Discuss the very ending of the novel, which concludes on the one-year anniversary of the Sterling High shooting. Why do you suppose the author chose to leave readers with an image of Patrick and Alex, who is pregnant? In what way does the final image of the book predict the future?
15. Shootings have occurred at a number of high schools across the country over the last several years. Did *Nineteen Minutes* make you think about

these incidents in a more immediate way than reading about them in the newspaper or seeing coverage on television? How so? In what ways did the novel impact your opinion of the parties generally involved in school shootings—perpetrators, victims, fellow students, teachers, parents, attorneys, and law enforcement officials?

16. What do you think the author is proposing as the root of the problem of school violence? What have you heard, in the media and in political forums, as solutions? Do you think they will work? Why or why not?