



Ramapo Catskill Library System Book Discussion Leader's Guide

My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Picoult (Atria, 2004)

Target Audience: “*My Sister's Keeper*” will appeal to adults and older teens who enjoy thought provoking novels that frame complex issues in human context.

Synopsis: Anna is not sick but she might as well be. By age thirteen, she has undergone countless surgeries, transfusions and shots so that her older sister Kate can somehow fight the leukemia that has plagued her since childhood. Anna was conceived as a bone marrow match for Kate—a life and a role that she has never questioned, until now.

Author Biography: Jodi Picoult was born on May 19, 1966. She studied creative writing at Princeton and worked as a technical writer, a copywriter and an eighth grade English teacher. She won the New England Book Award in 2003. She and her husband Tim and their three children live in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Reviews:

Booklist

“Expect to be kept up all night by Picoult’s latest novel, but its much more than a page turner, it’s a fascinating character study framed by a complex, gripping story. Told in alternating perspectives by the engaging cast of characters, Picoult’s novel grabs the reader from the first page and never lets go. This is a beautiful, heartbreaking, controversial and honest book.”

Publishers Weekly

“The difficult choices a family must make when a child is diagnosed with a serious disease are explored with pathos and understanding...Picoult ably explores a complex subject with bravado and clarity and comes up with a heart wrenching, unexpected plot twist at the book’s conclusion.”

People

“This beautifully crafted novel will grab readers with its stunning topic. The tightly woven tale seamlessly bounces from past to present. Picoult’s style borders on the poetic.”

Good Housekeeping

“This astonishing novel is beautifully and thoughtfully written and focuses on difficult moral choices.”

Kirkus Reviews

“The author vividly evokes the physical and psychic toll a desperately sick child imposes on a family, even a close and loving one like the Fitzgeralds.”

Questions for Discussion:

1. Reread the prologue to *My Sister's Keeper*. Who is the speaker? Is it the same person you thought it was the first time you read it?
2. *My Sister's Keeper* is told from many different viewpoints. Why do you think that Jodi Picoult wrote it that way? How did hearing from each character change your opinions of them and of the situation?
3. Do you think that Sara is a good mother? Do you sympathize with her? How does her martyrdom affect the rest of the family?
4. Why does Jesse burn things? Is Jesse the opposite of his firefighter father or are they similar? In what ways?]
5. Discuss the ways each family member copes with their situation.
6. What do you think of the story's representation of the justice system? What is your opinion of the final outcome of the trial?
7. Why do you think that Campbell feels he needs to hide his illness? Is it significant that Anna is the first to break down his barriers and hear the truth? Why does he flippantly dismiss all questions regarding Judge with sarcastic remarks?
8. It is interesting that Campbell suffers seizures that only his dog can foresee. How might this unique relationship mirror some of the relationships between humans in the novel? In what ways does Judge introduce important ideas about loyalty and instinct?
9. Near the end of the novel, Anna describes if speak-the language that all children know but abandon as they grow older-remarking that "kids think with their brains cracked wide open, becoming an adult, I've decided, is only a slow sewing shut." Do you believe this to be true? What might children teach adults in this novel? Which adults need the lessons the most?
10. *My Sister's Keeper* explores the moral, practical and emotional implications of putting one human being in pain or in danger for the well-being of another. Discuss the different kinds of ethical problems that Anna as the "designer baby" presents in this story. Did your view change as the story progressed?

**Compiled by Laurie Angle, Albert Wisner Public Library - January 2009
Ramapo Catskill Library System Adult Services Advisory Council**