



The Storyteller by Jodi Picoult

About the author:

Jodi Picoult, 47, is the bestselling author of twenty-one novels. Her last seven novels, including *The Storyteller*, her most recent, have debuted at number one on the New York Times bestseller list.

Picoult studied creative writing with Mary Morris at Princeton, and had two short stories published in *Seventeen* magazine while still a student. Realism - and a profound desire to be able to pay the rent - led Picoult to a series of different jobs following her graduation: as a technical writer for a Wall Street brokerage firm, as a copywriter at an ad agency, as an editor at a textbook publisher, and as an 8th grade English teacher - before entering Harvard to pursue a master's in education. She married Tim Van Leer, whom she had known at Princeton, and it was while she was pregnant with her first child that she wrote her first novel, *Songs of the Humpback Whale*.

In 2003 she was awarded the New England Bookseller Award for Fiction. She has also been the recipient an Alex Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association, sponsored by the Margaret Alexander Edwards Trust and Booklist, one of ten books written for adults that have special appeal for young adults; the Book Browse Diamond Award for novel of the year; a lifetime achievement award for mainstream fiction from the Romance Writers of America; *Cosmopolitan* magazine's 'Fearless Fiction' Award 2007; Waterstone's Author of the Year in the UK, a Vermont Green Mountain Book Award, a NH Granite State Book Award, a Virginia Reader's Choice Award, the Abraham Lincoln Illinois High School Book Award, and a Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Award. She wrote five issues of the Wonder Woman comic book series for DC Comics. Her books are translated into thirty four languages in thirty five countries. Four – *The Pact*, *Plain Truth*, *The Tenth Circle*, and *Salem Falls* - have been made into television movies. *My Sister's Keeper* was a big-screen released from New Line Cinema, with Nick Cassavetes directing and Cameron Diaz starring, which is now available in DVD. She received an honorary

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Doctor of Letters degree from Dartmouth College in 2010 and another from the University of New Haven in 2012.

Jodi is part of the Writer's Council for the National Writing Project, which recognizes the universality of writing as a communicative tool and helps teachers enhance student writing. She is a spokesperson for Positive Tracks/Children's Hospital at Dartmouth, which supports youth-led charity fundraising through athletics; and is on the advisory committee of the New Hampshire Coalition Against the Death Penalty. She is also the founder and executive producer of the Trumbull Hall Troupe, a New Hampshire-based teen theater group that performs original musicals to raise money for local charities; to date their contributions have exceeded \$80K. She and her husband Tim and their three children live in Hanover, New Hampshire with two Springer spaniels, two rescue puppies, two donkeys, two geese, eight chickens, and the occasional Holstein.

Source: Author's website (<http://jodipicoult.com/>)

About this book:

Sage Singer is a baker, a loner, until she befriends an old man who's particularly beloved in her community. Josef Weber is everyone's favorite retired teacher and Little League coach. One day he asks Sage for a favor: to kill him. Shocked, Sage refuses—and then he confesses his darkest secret – he deserves to die because he had been a Nazi SS guard. And Sage's grandmother is a Holocaust survivor. How do you react to evil living next door? Can someone who's committed truly heinous acts ever atone with subsequent good behavior? Should you offer forgiveness to someone if you aren't the party who was wronged? And, if Sage even considers the request, is it revenge...or justice?

Source: Author's website (<http://jodipicoult.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Sage has been a part of the grief group for three years. Why has she stayed?



2. The paradox of loss: How can something that's gone weigh us down so much? (p.11) Discuss.
3. When Sage's father died, Sage "dropped out" of college. What dramatic action did her mother take to ensure that Sage finished school?
4. How do Rocco's and Mary's characters tell you more about Sage?
5. Obviously baking is more than a job to Sage (p.19) Do you have a job that transforms you as baking does for Sage?
6. How does Mary describe Josef Weber? (p.20-21)
7. How did Sage and Adam meet? Why was Sage so willing to take up with a married man?
8. How "religious" is Sage's family? Does this matter, given what happens to her?
9. "Sharing a memory with someone is different from reliving it when you are alone." (p.41) Discuss.
10. How do Mary, Sage, Rocco, and Josef react to the image of God in the loaf of bread? How do you think you would react?
11. What request does Josef make of Sage? What do you think you would do?
12. The periodic pages in italics are a continuing story—a Gothic fairy tale. In what ways does it parallel the present day story? The one in Minka's narrative? In what way does this frame story-within-a-story add to the moral dilemma Sage faces?
13. Why does Sage go to the police station? Would you do the same? Why or why not?
14. When Jews were being taken by the Nazis, many Germans turned a blind eye. How easy would that be to do?



15. Grandma Minka and her father were also bakers. How important are the family recipes? The baking of special breads? Is baking a metaphor for something else in this book?
16. "If my grandmother could reinvent herself, why not Joseph Weber?" (p. 67) Have you ever had the opportunity/desire to reinvent yourself? Did it work/help?
17. What is Leo Stein's job at the Justice Department? Why is Sage's phone call to him so unusual?
18. Leo has a passion for his job as a Nazi hunter. Why does he think it's important?
19. "If you hide long enough, a ghost among men, you might disappear forever without anyone noticing. It's human nature to ensure that someone has seen the mark left behind." (p. 98) Discuss.
20. Does Josef have the right to ask Sage to forgive him? Why or why not?
21. Josef tells his background of growing up in Germany as Hitler was rising to power. His explanation makes it easy to see and understand how a person could be influenced by the propaganda. (p.114) Discuss.
22. Joseph explains how you can develop brutality. (P. 120) Discuss his explanation in terms of bullying today.
23. Sage wonders "my grandmother, had she been one of those who walk toward the gun? Was it a mark of weakness, or of courage?" (p.124) Discuss.
24. Josef compares the Nazi beliefs to organized religion. How is it the same? How is it different? (p. 139) Discuss.
25. Josef/Reiner's brother, Franz, says "Power isn't doing something terrible to someone who's weaker than you. It's having the strength to do something terrible and choosing not to." (p. 146) In what ways does this reflect upon the actions of Reiner? Franz? Sage?
26. What does the meeting of Leo and Sage tell us about Leo's personality?



27. "So everyone from the guards to the bean counters at Auschwitz is culpable for what happened there, simply because they were aware of what was going on inside it's fences, and performed their duties." (p. 178) Do you agree? Disagree? Discuss.
28. "Morality has nothing to do with religion" she says. "You can do the right thing and not believe in God at all." (p. 187) Do you agree?
29. Who is the author of the fairy tale? What purpose has it served for her?
30. What kind of home life did Minka have as a girl? How was it changing? (p. 199)
31. What happens while Minka and Josek are having coffee at the Astoria Café? How does that change Minka's life forever?
32. What is the importance of having Christian papers? If you were Minka, would you have used them?
33. What does Rubin do to save his son? What does Basia do to save Rubin? How have their circumstances changed their actions?
34. What is Herr Fassbinder's intention in demanding more workers, especially mothers and children? Do you believe that he should be lauded for his actions, or condemned for not doing more?
35. Minka and her family learn the fate of her mother. Why is it so unbelievable to them?
36. What happens to Majer when he and Basia are hiding in the cellar? What does Basia do?
37. Why does Minka want to be with Aron?
38. If you had to pack your whole life in one suitcase, what would you take?
39. While working in Kanada, going through luggage, Minka comes across her father's suitcase. What does she do with her father's sweater? Why is this a pivotal moment?



40. Why does Minka start stealing photographs? What does she end up using them for?
41. What happens when the officer realizes Minka is fluent in German and has written a fairy tale?
42. What purpose does the fairy tale serve for the Hauptscharfuhrur? How has the fairy tale evolved from when Minka first wrote it until the time she is writing for the Hauptscharfuhrur?
43. "There was no black and white. Someone who had been good her entire life could, in fact, do something evil. Ania was just as capable of committing murder, under the right circumstances, as any monster." Discuss.
44. When Minka and Darija see the bride, dressed in white, it gave them hope. Why?
45. Minka helps the Hauptscharfuhrur by telling him about his brother fighting. Why does she risk doing this?
46. The Hauptscharfuhrur reads Minka's fairy tale and notes "Fascinating, to think of violence being just as intimate as love." Discuss.
47. How does the Hauptscharfuhrur save Minke's life? (p. 334) Why do you think he does that?
48. "If you knew you were going to die, wasn't it better to choose the time and place, instead of waiting for fate to drop on you like an anvil? (p. 335) Discuss.
49. "Sometimes all it takes to become human again is someone who can see you that way, no matter how you present on the surface." (p. 352) Discuss.
50. "So you see, this is why I never told my story. If you lived through it, you already know there are no words that will ever come close to describing it. And if you didn't, you will never understand." (359) Discuss.
51. When Leo and Sage are in the temple, Leo watches the crowd and says, "This is why I do what I do." What does Leo mean? (p. 376)



52. "Forgiving isn't something you do for someone else. It's something you do for yourself." (p. 453) Discuss.
53. What do you think Josef really wants to be forgiven for?
54. Would you have forgiven Josef? Why do you think Josef lied?
55. As she often does, the author has a double meaning for the title. The storyteller could be several people and mean different things. Discuss.
56. There are groups that say the Holocaust never happened. As we get farther and farther away from World War II, fewer people are alive who would remember. Why is this story still relevant?

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