

Leaving Time by Jodi Picoult

About the author:

Jodi Picoult is the bestselling author of twenty-three novels. Her last eight novels 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*. 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, ten chickens, a smattering of ducks, and the occasional Holstein.

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

About this book:

For more than a decade, Jenna Metcalf has never stopped thinking about her mother, Alice, who mysteriously disappeared in the wake of a tragic accident. Refusing to believe she was abandoned, Jenna searches for her mother regularly online and pores over the pages of Alice's old journals. Desperate to find the truth, Jenna enlists two unlikely allies in her quest: Serenity Jones, a psychic, and Virgil Stanhope, the jaded private detective who'd originally investigated Alice's



case along with the strange, possibly linked death of one of her colleagues. As the three work together to uncover what happened to Alice, they realize that in asking hard questions, they'll have to face even harder answers.

Source: Penguin Random House (<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Despite their different backgrounds, Jenna, Serenity, and Virgil form a sort of unconventional family together. What do you think brings them together? Have you ever had a similar experience of finding support from an unlikely source?
2. Alice says that 98 percent of science is quantifiable, leaving 2 percent "that can't be measured or explained. And yet that does not mean it doesn't exist." Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of examples from the book or from your own experience of something that fits into that 2 percent?
3. Virgil grapples with helping Jenna when he suspects discovering the truth might be more painful to her than never knowing. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew a truth that it might hurt someone to hear? What did you do?
4. Serenity's fake psychic readings are successful, she says, because people look for sense in the nonsensical. Do you agree or disagree? If a psychic reading brings someone comfort or helps them grieve, do you think it matters if the message is faked?
5. Jenna meets up with another character at the very end of the book. Were you surprised to see who that was? Why or why not?



6. Alice describes some amazing examples of elephants appearing to exhibit grief and empathy, which are drawn from real-life research. Discuss some of the ways elephant grief is depicted. How is it the same as human mourning? How is it different?
7. One of the major themes of *Leaving Time* is loss and how to cope with it. Discuss some of the ways the characters in this novel deal with their losses. Do you identify with any of these coping mechanisms more than others? How do you approach loss?
8. Do you think Thomas's erratic and upsetting behavior justifies Alice's affair with Gideon? What would you have done in Alice's place?
9. Jenna compares her search for her mother to Captain Ahab's search for the whale in *Moby-Dick*, or Javert hunting Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*, saying they are all three defined by their search. Do you agree with this assessment? Have you ever felt defined in this way by something you wanted?
10. Why do you think Serenity loses her gift? And why do you think Jenna is able to help bring it back?
11. Do you believe in ghosts? If you could communicate with anyone who has passed away, who would it be?
12. Discuss the significance of the title *Leaving Time*. What is the literal meaning that Jenna ascribes to the phrase as a baby? What are some other ways the title could be interpreted?



13. "Negative moments get remembered. Traumatic ones get forgotten." What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree? Have you ever experienced something and discovered later that someone else remembers it completely differently?

Source: Penguin Random House (<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/>)

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