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Small Great Things: A Novel



Synopsis

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER With richly layered characters and a gripping moral dilemma that will lead readers to question everything they know about privilege, power, and race, *Small Great Things* is the stunning new page-turner from Jodi Picoult. SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE “[Picoult] offers a thought-provoking examination of racism in America today, both overt and subtle. Her many readers will find much to discuss in the pages of this topical, moving book.”

- Booklist (starred review) Ruth Jefferson is a labor and delivery nurse at a Connecticut hospital with more than twenty years’ experience. During her shift, Ruth begins a routine checkup on a newborn, only to be told a few minutes later that she’s been reassigned to another patient. The parents are white supremacists and don’t want Ruth, who is African American, to touch their child. The hospital complies with their request, but the next day, the baby goes into cardiac distress while Ruth is alone in the nursery. Does she obey orders or does she intervene? Ruth hesitates before performing CPR and, as a result, is charged with a serious crime. Kennedy McQuarrie, a white public defender, takes her case but gives unexpected advice: Kennedy insists that mentioning race in the courtroom is not a winning strategy. Conflicted by Kennedy’s counsel, Ruth tries to keep life as normal as possible for her family—especially her teenage son—as the case becomes a media sensation. As the trial moves forward, Ruth and Kennedy must gain each other’s trust, and come to see that what they’ve been taught their whole lives about others—and themselves—might be wrong. With incredible empathy, intelligence, and candor, Jodi Picoult tackles race, privilege, prejudice, justice, and compassion—and doesn’t offer easy answers. *Small Great Things* is a remarkable achievement from a writer at the top of her game.

Praise for *Small Great Things*

- “Small Great Things is the most important novel Jodi Picoult has ever written. . . . It will challenge her readers . . . [and] expand our cultural conversation about race and prejudice.”
- The Washington Post “A novel that puts its finger on the very pulse of the nation that we live in today . . . a fantastic read from beginning to end, as can always be expected from Picoult, this novel maintains a steady, page-turning pace that makes it hard for readers to put down.”
- San Francisco Book Review “A gripping courtroom drama . . . Given the current political climate it is quite prescient and worthwhile. . . . This is a writer who understands her characters inside and out.”
- Roxane Gay, The New York Times Book Review “I couldn’t put it down. Her best yet!”
- New York Times bestselling author Alice Hoffman “A compelling, can’t-put-it-down drama with a trademark [Jodi] Picoult twist.”
- Good

Housekeeping” —It’s Jodi Picoult, the prime provider of literary soul food. This riveting drama is sure to be supremely satisfying and a bravely thought-provoking tale on the dangers of prejudice. —Redbook “Jodi Picoult is never afraid to take on hot topics, and in *Small Great Things*, she tackles race and discrimination in a way that will grab hold of you and refuse to let you go. . . . This page-turner is perfect for book clubs. —Popsugar

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a "successful middle-class" African-American woman I was truly stunned to recognize so many aspects of my own life in Ruth. I have read every Picoult book - some twice - but never have I had my own experiences articulated so effectively by someone who isn't a person of color. I finished it yesterday morning and was rattled all day by the insights and depth of honesty revealed here. I still am, but had to take a moment to post everywhere and say THANK YOU!! Jodi, I read your acknowledgments of how you created this book, and I wish I could meet you. I am awed and will

recommend this book to anyone I know: starting with my husband. Blessings to you for your courage, research and determination to see beyond what you knew, what was comfortable - and take this risk.

Gripping. Powerful. A story that needs to be told. From two different perspectives. One that is almost unbearable to read. Actually, both are very difficult to read, but in different ways. One character's life makes you think not only of her outlook but forces you to truly take an introspective look. From another's viewpoint as well as how you look at the world. While you are reading it, it is hard to imagine that it was written by a white, female author. Jodi Picoult's *SMALL GREAT THINGS*. This book is so riveting as it strikes a chord. Given the state of race relations in our country, the story is all the more haunting. To say that the issue of racial inequality has actually taken a turn for the worse, would be an understatement. The disparity in everyday life. I found myself doubting things that I have said, whom I may have inadvertently hurt or offended with no malicious intent. Reading this book made me sick to my stomach. But, I read on. It is important. Picoult is trying to get a message across. Please don't misunderstand, I was enthralled by the book. The story is passionate, intense, and portrays a deep struggle, which you want to read. I imagine some people will be doubters. How could the author possibly understand this situation, even if she is writing fiction. I have read interviews about the depth of research that she put into this book. She is not claiming to be an expert. She based it on a true story. The title comes from a line in a famous speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way." The story is about a nurse, no ordinary nurse, but one who is dedicated and well regarded, with a twenty-year career at the hospital where the incident occurs. A husband and wife have just had their first baby. When the nurse comes into their room, to take over the shift of another labor and delivery nurse, upon seeing her, the parents, who are white supremacists, see that she is black and immediately request to see her supervisor, whom they tell, in no uncertain terms, that this woman is not to touch their baby. What unfolds next is a devastating. Both of their lives take a turn neither could have predicted. The story is told from both sides. Heartbreak from the nurse and mistrust of everyone she encounters. She has noticed this before or rather, has worked hard to rise above it, but now it is all surfacing and cannot be ignored. The extremely racist man is angered to the point of revenge and his wife is shattered and taken to bed and depression. Some books make you think. Some books turn you to a fantasy world. Some books make you step outside of yourself and think how others feel. *SMALL GREAT THINGS* makes you think, step outside of yourself, take

another's perspective, and re-think your beliefs, and step outside of the fantasy world you have been living in, where all people are treated equally. It is both disturbing, heartbreaking and enlightening. I commend Picoult for taking on the writing of a potentially controversial subject and for tackling it with a story that has great depth and feeling.

Since I have read every single one of Jodi Picoult's books, I knew that I had to read this one when it was up for review on the Vine program. Some would say that they find Picoult predictable especially after reading so many of her books. I have learned to stop second-guessing what Picoult is going to put to paper because she will always surprise you. Was I surprised in this book? Not really, because I knew she would have a twist or three up her sleeves. It just wasn't surprising to me but it may be to other readers. (I read a lot and I read a wide variety of books, so it takes a lot to surprise me.) This book is about Ruth, a widowed African-American nurse, who is also a single mom. She loves her job as a labor-delivery nurse in a small hospital. She worked there for 20 years and never had a problem until one day, when someone requested that she doesn't take care of their baby because of her race. This request eventually led to a series of events where Ruth finds herself questioning the system she has lived in all of her life, worked in and everything she believed in. Kennedy is Ruth's lawyer, a public assistance lawyer who took on the case, determined to win the case for Ruth. As the case winds on, Kennedy finds herself questioning the status quo and realizes that not everything is as black and white as it may seem in the real world. Turk, the white supremacist father, who was so aggrieved at the loss of his baby son needed a scapegoat for his rage and sorrow. He chose to file against Ruth, whom he thought murdered his baby. He shares his backstory; raised by a grandfather who was angry at the world; taught him self-defense. Turk then gets involved with different skinhead groups and met his wife at one of those rallies. This novel is filled with backstories of each of the main characters. Sometimes, some of the stuff being said is uncomfortable, but it is definitely thought-provoking. If there is a time to be discussing race, now is the time to start. This book is a start for those who want to learn a little bit more about what it is like on both ends of the spectrum. Most people would consider themselves to be in the middle, until something happens and they find themselves on opposite ends of the issue. It is an eye-opener, even for the reader. Picoult weaves her way through this story delicately as well as making her points without beating someone on the head with the truth. Out of all of her books, this one is my favorite. There is no unlikable character in this book. Just unpleasant truths that reveal the decades-long apathy with history and with the truth of how things really are in this country. I hope this book will start conversations among friends and in book clubs. It is definitely a thought-provoking book.

The actors reading this book are spot on perfect. I have only heard Audra McDonald sing and never knew how much I would enjoy listening to her reading her part as Ruth. Sometimes Jodi's books have surprise endings which are not the happiest - I remember reading *My Sister's Keeper* and sitting bolt upright in bed at the surprise (bad) at the end - I don't want this to be a spoiler for those who haven't read the book. There was a surprise at the end here too - all along I was afraid that something might happen, like that Ruth would be acquitted but then Turk would murder her - but the surprise was a pleasant one. I'm very proud of Jodi for writing this honest book about race. I highly recommend the book or the audiobook.

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