

Further Reading

Midwives

Chris Bohjalian (1997)

OPRAH BOHJALIAN

A seasoned midwife in rural Vermont faces the antagonism of the law, the hostility of traditional doctors, and the accusations of her own conscience.

Run

Ann Patchett (2007)

PATCHETT

Bernadette and Bernard Doyle share a great love for family. Already blessed with a son, they adopt two black children, Teddy and Tip. Even after Bernadette dies, she continues to exert a profound influence over the family. Tip is pushed out of a car's path in a sudden act of heroism, and lives are bound by this selfless act.

Family Tree

Barbara Delinsky (2006)

ROM DELINSKY

Dana Clarke has finally achieved the stability she has craved in her marriage to a man from an old New England family, but when her daughter is born with African-American traits in her appearance, her family life is thrown into turmoil.

Book Discussion Guide



About the Book

A woman and her husband admitted to a hospital to have a baby requests that their nurse be reassigned - they are white supremacists and don't want Ruth, who is black, to touch their baby. The hospital complies, but the baby later goes into cardiac distress when Ruth is on duty. She hesitates before rushing in to perform CPR. When her indecision ends in tragedy, Ruth finds herself on trial, represented by a white public defender who warns against bringing race into a courtroom. As the two come to develop a truer understanding of each other's lives, they begin to doubt the beliefs they each hold most dear

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the three main characters (Ruth, Turk, or Kennedy) do you most relate to, and why? Think about what you have in common with the other two characters as well. How can you relate to them?
2. The title of the book comes from the Martin Luther King Jr. quote that Ruth's mother mentions on p. 173: "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way." What does this quote mean to you? What are some examples of small great things done by the characters in the novel?
3. Discuss Ruth's relationship with her sister, Adisa. How does the relationship change over the course of the novel?

4. Kennedy seeks out a neighborhood in which she is the only white person to help her gain some perspective. Can you think of an example of a time when something about your identity made you an outsider? How were you affected by that experience?
5. All of the characters change over the course of the novel, but Turk's transformation is perhaps the most extreme. What do you think contributed to that change?
6. Discuss the theme of parenthood in the novel. What does being a parent mean to Ruth, to Kennedy, and to Turk? What does it mean to you?
7. Why do you think Ruth lies to Kennedy about touching Davis when he first starts seizing? What would you have done in her position?
8. Why do you think Kennedy decides to take Ruth's case? What makes it so important to her?
9. Discuss the difference between "equity" and "equality" as Kennedy explains it on p. 427. Do you think Ruth gets equity from the trial?
10. Was your perspective on racism or privilege changed by reading this book? Is there anything you now see differently?
11. Did the ending of *Small Great Things* surprise you? If so, why? Did you envision a different ending?

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