



Jodi Picoult
NINETEEN MINUTES
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Nineteen Minutes asks what it means to be different in our society, who has the right to judge someone else, and whether anyone is ever really who they seem to be.

Nineteen Minutes is New York Times bestselling author Jodi Picoult's most raw, honest, and important novel yet. Told with the straightforward style for which she has become known, it asks simple questions that have no easy answers: Do we ever really know the people closest to us? How do we know what is authentic and who wears a mask hiding their motivations? Can your own child become a mystery to you? What does it mean to be different in our society? Should we expect the world to accept us as we are, and if not, is it ever okay to strike back? And who -- if anyone -- has the right to judge someone else?

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THE GREAT UNKNOWN

The Guardian, 15 April 2007



She's the queen of the book club, Britain's biggest-selling female author, who also tops the New York Times bestseller list. But who is Jodi Picoult? And why is she ignored by the literary establishment? Louise France travels to New Hampshire to meet the writer who guarantees that if you read her first page you'll read the last.

Britain's bestselling female novelist works from a cramped office in the attic of a house in a remote part of New Hampshire, America. This is where she sits from 7.30am until 3.30pm, surrounded by huge posters promoting her books and a bin-bag full of props for her youngest son's school play. Should she look up from the keyboard for a moment, she would see a forest of silver birches and, in the distance, the top of Moose Mountain. Not that she stops very often. She's about to go on a publicity tour for her 14th novel. Behind her, in boxes, are the early proofs of her 15th book. The research notes for her 16th are piled up on her desk.

Even if you haven't read a Jodi Picoult novel, the likelihood is that you'll know someone who has. Her worldwide sales are more than 12m, and every train platform seems to boast a billboard advertising her lengthy backlist. It is impossible to sit in a tube carriage without seeing someone engrossed in one of her books. Last year only the likes of Dan Brown and

James Patterson shifted more paperbacks in the adult market than she did.

In the pre-Amazon era her British fans, often described as 'evangelical', travelled as far as the US to buy the latest title. However, the irony is that it's unlikely that even her ardent devotees know much about her, despite the fact that she was nominated Author of the Year in the 2007 British Book Awards. In the curious cultural apartheid that exists on the books pages of the British broadsheets, she rarely gets a mention (unless you count top billing on the weekly bestseller lists). She's too commercial to be discussed on *Newsnight Review*. But when her novel *My Sister's Keeper* was voted Best Read by the Richard & Judy Book Club in 2005, her reputation was sealed - Jodi Picoult is one of those authors of whom literary editors have never heard, and readers can't get enough.

So who is she? And is she actually any good? The first 'Jodi' I read was *My Sister's Keeper*, the breakthrough novel that brought her to the attention of the mass market in Britain. Unpromisingly, it's about two sisters - one with leukaemia and the other born to be a bone-marrow match. I followed this with *The Pact*, about two teenagers who agree to kill themselves at the same moment. One succeeds, the other doesn't. It swiftly became clear that Jodi doesn't do jokes. What she does do with great relish is inhabit her characters' feelings, revelling in the bits that are difficult and contradictory.

The result is a narrative which might not be elegant or literary; prose which can be clumsy and sentimental. Yet these stories are impossible to put down, and stayed in my mind long after I'd finished them. I was reminded of what Nick Hornby, another commercial author, says is the mark of a really good book: it makes you walk into lampposts because you can't stop reading it when you're walking down the street.

What's really strange about the Picoult phenomenon is that these are bestselling novels which are neither ditsy chick lit nor doughty police procedurals. Instead they're heavily researched stories centred on subjects one might have presumed few would choose to read about, and even fewer would choose to read about over 500 pages of dense type.

Picoult has a formula: choose a subject which is soon to become controversial and tell the story through a rotating cast of characters. Stem cell research, date rape, domestic violence, sexual abuse, teenage suicide - here are some of the knottiest moral issues of our times sandwiched between the soft-focus covers of what is commonly dismissed as an airport novel.

Carolyn Mays is the fiction editor at Hodder & Stoughton who signed Jodi Picoult in Britain four years ago for, she says, 'not very much money'. At first she wondered if she'd made a mistake. 'I loved her stories but I thought I'd have to hand-sell every copy,' she remembers. 'I used to say to the book trade: "I know you don't think you want to read a book about a child dying of leukaemia ... but believe me, you do."'

My first impression of Jodi Picoult (pronounced 'Pee-koe', like the tea) is of a cosy, affluent American mom. Sensible woolly jumper and jeans, not much make-up, her eldest son's ice-hockey kit in the hallway, school pictures stuck to the fridge, two English springer spaniels flopped on the settee. There are even a couple of pet miniature donkeys in the barn outside. She lives with her husband Tim, an antiques dealer, and their three teenagers in a comfy colonial-style house, surrounded by 11 acres of land.

It swiftly becomes clear that beneath this homely fug there is a woman with stubborn ambition and enviable focus (at least when the kids are at school). The moment she finishes one book, she starts the next. She has written a novel a year for most of her adult life.

This morning began like every other - the alarm rings at 5.30, just in time for a three-mile hike. 'Writing,' she says, offering me a slice of home-baked lemon and buttermilk sponge cake, 'is total grunt work. A lot of people think it's all about sitting and waiting for the muse. I don't buy that. It's a job. There are days when I really want to write, days when I don't. Every day I sit down and write. You can always edit something bad. You can't edit something blank. That

has always been my mantra.'

Breezily outspoken, she is far removed from the image of the doubting, insecure writer. Hers is the kind of uncomplicated confidence that comes with sales in the millions. She takes pride in the fact that, going on her book-jacket blurb alone, a freezer manual sounds like more fun. 'I love getting letters from people saying: "I never thought I wanted to read a book about this but I couldn't put it down,'" she says. 'And that's my job. If you read the first page of one of my novels, I can guarantee that you will read the last one. This isn't just social commentary. This is also about writing good page-turners. I want people to keep reading. When I think about writers who use fiction as social commentary and to raise social awareness but who are also very popular, I think of Dickens.'

On an average day she receives 70 emails from fans. Around the time of a new title, that figure rises to 150. She's had hundreds of letters from teenagers who have a history of depression, from women who have suffered domestic abuse. One woman wrote to tell her she'd banked her baby's stem cells after reading *My Sister's Keeper*. 'There are moments as an author when you realise that it isn't just about fiction - you can change someone's life. You don't expect to do that, but you never get over the amazing luck if you can.' She answers every email.

The catalyst for her latest novel *Nineteen Minutes* (currently top of the New York Times fiction bestseller list) is a high school shooting. While some teachers who read it have told her every parent in America should buy it, she's just heard that the principal of the local school, where her eldest son goes, thinks it should be banned.

At the end of last year, 18 months after she wrote the book, it was rumoured that a teenager had taken a gun on to the school premises. 'They feel that at any minute there are pupils who may commit an act of violence and reading *Nineteen Minutes* is a bad idea,' she says indignantly. 'But this is a topic we need to start talking about. We can go on not talking about it, but a lot of kids are going to die. People want to believe that school shootings happen in big cities like New York, but they also happen in small towns like this, where there is a high socio-economic bracket.'

To research the novel she tracked down survivors of school shootings as well as police chiefs, grief counsellors and bereaved parents. Barely a year goes by without another violent death in an American school, but one day still stands out in the country's collective memory. 'You can't really write a school-shooting book in America without going to Columbine,' she says. 'It is a community that is still very raw. You sense that they are never going to get through it.'

When she visited the police department in Littleton, Colorado, the sheriff revealed to her a disturbingly intimate picture of what happened in Columbine High School on 20 April 1999. The air vents prised open so that children could crawl inside them. The kids who literally ran out of their shoes. The abandoned sandwiches left in the cafeteria. All these details appear in the novel. She was even shown never-seen-before tapes of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the boys who fired the guns, killing 12 students and one teacher. 'The two boys were target-shooting in the woods and every time they pulled the trigger they called out names of the kids in the school.'

In his book *On Writing*, Stephen King (another popular novelist ignored, until recently, by critics) compares an idea for a story to a fossil that he must painstakingly dust off. Picoult's technique is to take a 'What if?' question and push it to its limits. 'When something like a school shooting happens, we immediately think it has to do with the shooter's upbringing,' she says. 'But what if it's more complex? What if it's not just his own parents who failed him but his own community? What if, as a parent, you do everything right, but something horrible still happens? How do you go on loving your child?'

Little about the book is neat or easy or comfortable. As *Nineteen Minutes* unfolds, the reader

learns that Peter Houghton, the 18-year-old gunman, was humiliated and bullied throughout his childhood. After murdering 10 classmates in a 19-minute rampage he offers a terse explanation: 'They started it.' She is on controversial territory but she has a skill - what Carolyn Mays calls 'a gift' - for portraying recognisable characters who don't conform to easy stereotypes. Everyone in her fictional town is a victim, but each one is culpable, too.

All three of her children have, she says, at some point been bullied. She's just finished a publicity tour of schools, talking to children about bullying and discrimination. 'In this country we are looking at school violence in totally the wrong way. The root of the problem is discrimination in school and a lack of tolerance. The problem starts with parents and the people they elect into positions of power. We are in a position right now where half of the country's lobbyists are trying to make gay marriage illegal. If that is happening on a national scale, how can a gay kid be tolerated in school?'

Relishing the controversy this latest novel may cause, she's preparing for a fight. 'Like all my books, this is a hard sell. But it is a subject people are fascinated by. Even if they don't want to admit it. This is every American parent's greatest fear. But I think they will be surprised by how much they have in common with the characters. Including the shooter.'

For someone who writes about families brought to breaking point by a personal trauma, Picoult's own story is surprisingly conventional. So much so that when she took a creative-writing course at Princeton she rang up her mother to find out if there were any dark secrets she had not told her about. Surely famous writers were supposed to be more tormented than this?

Her mother was a nursery school director; her father worked on Wall Street. She was born 40 years ago on Long Island and grew up on a cookie-cutter estate where every house looked the same. It was, she says, 'a ludicrously happy childhood'. At school she was eager to learn. 'I am very "Type A" - organised, overachieving, fiercely motivated.' But when she told a friend when she was 14 that she wanted to be a writer, she didn't really believe that it could happen.

At college she dated and married her husband, whom she met on the rowing team, and after they graduated she published textbooks, wrote advertising copy, worked as a teacher, all the while writing stories in her spare time. 'But still I wasn't thinking: "I am going to make a real career out of this."'

Laura Gross has been her agent for more than 19 years, back when both were starting out. Laura remembers a 21-year-old who was 'driven, smart, lots of high energy, down to earth, very impressive'. These days, Jodi sends her each chapter as soon as she's happy with it. But the earliest piece of writing she showed her was her college thesis about a student who kept dropping out of school. 'Even then it was not based on personal experience,' remembers Gross, 'but on thorough research used honestly, without sensationalising. That's what she's so good at. Portraying her characters without judging them.'

Her first novel, *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, was written when she was a young mother stuck at home with three children under the age of three. 'If they went to sleep for just 15 minutes, I'd be writing,' she says. 'I'd take my laptop in the car and type in the nursery parking lot. I'd type at swimming classes. When my husband came home from work I would throw the children at him and start working. From 5.30 to 10. And that's how I did it. It seems very impressive, when I look back on it.' Gross sold the book for \$3,000 and Jodi spent most of the sum on a piano for her husband.

To begin with, the novels were by no means an overnight success. 'Marketing departments struggled with them,' says Gross. 'They said they were too clever for the commercial market but weren't literary fiction either.' Jodi agrees. 'Most people in America want an easy read. I call it McFiction - books which pass right through you without you even digesting them. I don't mean a book that has two-syllable words. I mean chapters you can read in a toilet break. Happy endings. We are more of a TV culture, and that is a hard thing to go up against for any

writer.'

Did she think about giving up? 'Oh God, yes!' she exclaims. 'I was applying for jobs at Home Depot stores because I was convinced I wasn't going to make it. I don't think anyone even knew I was writing until I'd written a good five or six books. And it wasn't until the ninth or 10th book that I hit the bestseller list.'

Picoult's sales figures aren't just about the time-honoured ability to tell a bloody good story. They're also about business and the revolutionary changes the publishing industry has undergone in the past decade: the end of the Net Book Agreement, the sale of novels in supermarkets and the emergence of book clubs.

The tipping point in Britain came when she was selected by Amanda Ross, a managing director of Cactus TV and the mastermind behind the Richard & Judy Book Club. Every year Ross has 700 books to read which must be whittled down to 10 for inclusion on the Channel 4 show. 'The only way I can get through them all is to get up early,' she tells me. 'If I like something, I put it on a reserve pile to go back to later.' She remembers one Saturday when she started at 5 am. Her husband came down the stairs at 10 am and asked, 'How many have you got through?' 'Just the one,' I told him. It was *My Sister's Keeper*. I couldn't put it down. I broke all my rules and read it from cover to cover. The ending made me scream.' She'd never heard of Jodi Picoult before.

After the book was featured, sales in Britain began to soar and Picoult has become one of the few Richard & Judy choices who have gone on to match that success with subsequent books. Along with the likes of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* and Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*, Jodi's books have come to dominate club lit. 'Book clubs need books they can talk about,' she says simply. 'Not just books that are fluffy, with happy endings.' Joel Rickett, deputy editor of *The Bookseller*, agrees. 'Women in book clubs relate to her characters. They can ask themselves: what would I do in the same situation?'

He also points to the fact that British publisher Hodder & Stoughton has been able to market her much like Procter & Gamble would flog toothpaste - Picoult spends three months a year on publicity tours. Big publishers can afford lucrative space at the front of the bookshop and include her in three-for-two deals. They can also offer discounts to supermarkets. By plundering her backlist, they've published a new book every four months, each one with a huge ad campaign. 'They've created a brand,' says Rickett, 'which is the Holy Grail in book publishing. It's all about continuity. Who can they sell who will last? If you can find an author who represents a set of values and expectations and can deliver every time, you've taken all the uncertainty out of publishing. Jodi Picoult has done just that.'

She's still ignored by the literary press. Or worse, slated. But she has developed, she says, a thick skin. 'I set out wanting to be a commercial fiction author, which means you don't get any literary clout. I will never be thought of in the same way as someone like Joyce Carol Oates, though I'm more prolific and probably read by more people,' she says. 'I tell my publicist not to send me the New York Times, which if they do write about me only do so in order to be snide. But the best revenge is when I end up top of their bestseller list. Which happens all the time.'

Her next book is about a man on death row who wants to donate his heart to the sister of his victim. The one after that is about a mother who sues her handicapped child for wrongful birth. No one ever said it was a breeze being inside a Jodi Picoult novel. As for the author, she's happiest when she's typing at the top of the house. She's already rubbed the letters off two sets of keyboards. It doesn't look like she's about to stop any time soon.

SOURCE: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/apr/15/fiction.features>

TOPICS

Nineteen Minutes deals with a plethora of issues. Have a look at the pictures below, describe them and say what topics they represent!



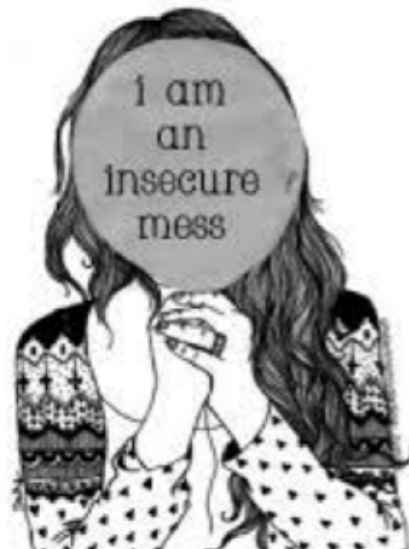
Blushing

Nervous



Insecure

Fearful





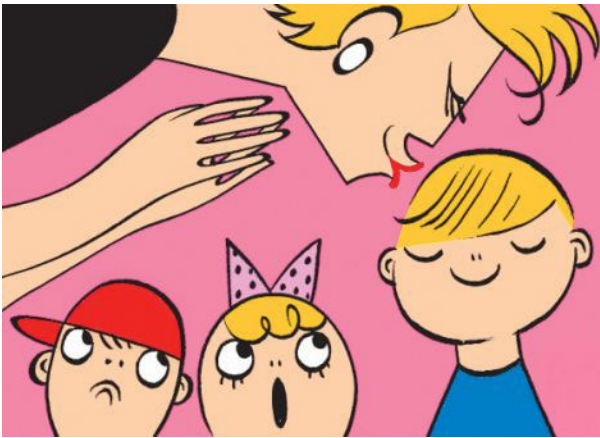
Teen Dating and Domestic Violence

YOU ARE
NOT HIS
PROPERTY.

If it doesn't feel right,
it probably isn't.









I AM GAY
I AM STRAIGHT
I AM LESBIAN
I AM BISEXUAL
I AM TRANSGENDERED
I AM HUMAN
{GSA}



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

www.dresscode.org



I going to F███ kill you all in a couple
of hours. I'm anxious, I hate you all so much &
you are pathetic pieces of s███ who deserve to
die. worthless you are all F███ worthless.

Everything seems fake. I think that I may
already be dead.







STYLE AND STRUCTURE

In this story, Picoult attempts to explain the unexplainable, by gradually uncovering the past. This is why the story is written in a non-linear style, flipping back and forth in time, describing how friendships unravelled, love grew and anger boiled over.

The presentation of this novel is unique (though, traditional for Picoult): manipulation of time and perspective. Although each section is third-person limited, the reader is able to piece together sections in order to understand multiple characters' perspectives.

The changing point of view and the plethora of flashbacks make the reader relate to various characters, which creates tension. An example of this is when the reader witnesses how Peter gets bullied in kindergarten, and consequently feels sorry for him. In the next scene, the reader is taken back to the present day, when Peter is in jail for shooting nine students and one teacher. This forces the reader to reconsider, and they go from sympathizing with Peter to wanting him behind bars in seconds.

OVER TO YOU

How would the story be different if Picoult only followed Peter or Josie? Are there too many followed characters? How do the minor characters' perspectives affect the reader?

The ping-pong effect of present and past events is another discussion point. Why does Picoult begin with the shooting? Would the story be as effective if it was told in chronological order? How does the manipulation of time affect the reader's experience?

PLOT SUMMARY

Nineteen Minutes, published on March 9, 2007, is a novel by Jodi Picoult. It was her first book to debut at #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list. This book is about a school shooting, and focuses on the events leading up to and following the incident.

The story begins on March 6, 2007 in the small town of Sterling, New Hampshire, tracking the lives of a number of characters on an "ordinary day." The characters include Alex Cormier, a superior court judge; her daughter Josie, a junior in high school; Lacy, Lewis, and Peter Houghton; Detective Patrick Ducharme; and several victims-to-be.

At the local high school, Sterling High, the story follows a routine day of students in classes, at the gym, and in the cafeteria. Suddenly, a loud bang is heard from the parking lot, which turns out to be a bomb set off in Matt Royston's car. As the students are distracted by the noise, gunshots are fired. When Patrick, the only detective on the Sterling police force, arrives at Sterling High, he searches the school to seek out the gunman, who is alleged to be a student. After passing several dead and wounded victims, Patrick traps and arrests the shooter, Peter Houghton, in the locker room, where he finds two students, Josie Cormier and Matt Royston, lying on the floor surrounded in blood. While Matt is dead, having been the only victim shot twice, Josie is not seriously injured, but only shocked: she cannot remember what happened.

The shooting kills ten people (nine students and one teacher) and wounds many other people.

Throughout the book, time flashes back and forth between events before and after the shooting. In the past, the reader learns that Peter and Josie were once close friends. Peter was frequently the target of severe bullying at school, and Josie often stuck up for him. The

friends slowly drifted apart as they got older: Josie joined the popular crowd in order to protect her own interests, seeing her relationship to Peter as embarrassing. The story pictures Peter as an outcast at home as well; Peter believes his older brother Joey is favored by their parents. Joey is a popular straight-A student and athlete, but feels it necessary to ridicule Peter to protect his reputation, even fabricating a story that Peter was adopted. When Joey is killed in a car accident in 2006, Lacy and Lewis Houghton are too upset to pay attention to their remaining son, causing a bigger rift between Peter and his parents.

In their sophomore year, Josie begins dating Matt, a popular jock who leads his friends Drew Girard and John Eberhard in bullying Peter. Matt often calls Peter "homo" and "fag," leading Peter to question his sexual orientation. The bullying intensifies once Matt begins dating Josie, in his possessive efforts to keep her away from other boys. On one occasion, Peter approaches Josie after school to try talking to her. Matt beats him up, leaving Peter humiliated in front of the school.

The flashbacks also reveal several subplots: the difficult relationship between Josie and her single mother Alex, Alex's dilemma of being a judge and a mother, Peter's escape from bullying into the world of video games, Josie's fear of falling out of the popular crowd and her suicide back-up plan when she does, Matt's abusive behavior toward Josie, Josie's pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage, as well as Lewis Houghton's hunting lessons with his son Peter.

One month before the shooting, Peter realizes that he has feelings for Josie, and sends her an email expressing his love. Courtney Ignatio reads this email before Josie and has Drew forward it to the entire student body. Courtney then convinces Peter that Josie likes him. Peter invites Josie to sit with him at lunch, only to suffer public humiliation as Matt pulls down Peter's pants and exposes his genitals to a cafeteria full of students. Peter's psychotic break is triggered on the morning of the shooting when he turns on his computer and accidentally opens the email he wrote to Josie.

After the shooting, Peter is sent to jail while the trial proceeds. The probable cause hearing is waived as Peter admits to killing ten people and wounding nineteen others. Jordan, Peter's defense attorney, uses battered person syndrome caused by severe bullying and abuse as a basis to convince the jury that Peter's actions were justified as a result of his suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Jordan argues that he was in a dissociative state at the time of the shooting. In the final stage of the trial, Josie reveals that she was the one who shot Matt the first time after grabbing a gun that fell out of Peter's bag. He was abusive. Peter later fired the fatal second shot. Peter promised her he wouldn't tell anyone what she had done, and he kept this promise, happy to have Josie as his friend again.

Peter is convicted of eight counts of first-degree murder and two counts of second-degree murder and is sentenced to life in prison. A month later, Peter commits suicide by stuffing a sock into his throat.

At the end of the book, one year from the date of the massacre, Josie has received a five-year sentence for accessory to manslaughter and is regularly visited in jail by her mother. Throughout the book, Josie never told the whole story, instead repeating, "I can't remember." When Josie admits to shooting Matt, Peter's sentence is reduced. Alex and Patrick, who are expecting their first child, walk the halls of the high school. Sterling High has been extensively remodeled after the shooting. The cafeteria, the gym and locker room where the massacre took place have been replaced by a large glass atrium with a memorial to the dead in the center, a row of ten white chairs bolted to the floor. A plaque declares the building "A Safe Harbor."

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Minutes

CHARACTER LIST

Peter Houghton

Peter, an odd and alienated teen who has been mercilessly picked on for years by the popular crowd, brings weapons to his high school in Sterling, NH, one day and opens fire, killing 10 and wounding 19 people. Flashbacks reveal how bullying caused Peter to retreat into a world of violent computer games. He has an avid interest in computers and video games and wears glasses, making him a frequent target of teasing. He maintained a friendship with Josie Cormier until middle school until she ultimately chose popularity over her one true friend. After Josie's departure, he befriends Derek, often creating video games with him. His home life was equally upsetting; he never seemed to relate to his parents, despite his mother's best efforts. His older brother Joey teased Peter and even egged on the bullying, making up lies about him. During his high school years, 17-year-old Peter realizes he is in love with Josie, sparking a drastic chain of events. A love email he sends to her and the popular students' interception of it is the catalyst in Peter's actions. After a lengthy trial and a conviction, Peter commits suicide by stuffing a sock down his throat.

Josie Cormier

Once Peter's loyal, sweet best friend, she stops hanging out with him in middle school for the popular crowd. Josie (17) has great difficulty maintaining her image over the years, torn between what she is expected to be and how she wants to be. She straddles the social strata between the "cool" kids and the "outcasts" and even though she realizes the shallowness of her clique, she is too afraid to leave, fearing social obscurity at best. She hates her friends' and Matt's nasty behavior toward the less popular students, but never stands up for them. Josie's home life isn't too good either; she has a very weak connection with her mother and never knew her father. She clings to Matt for emotional support and comfort. He becomes physically abusive towards her and she never leaves him, possibly leading her to shoot him in the stomach the day of Peter's rampage. At the end of the novel, she is sentenced to five years in prison.

Alex Cormier

Josie's mother (40) and the newly appointed superior court judge of Grafton County. Throughout the novel, she has a great deal of trouble connecting to Josie. Being the judge assigned to Peter's case, she tries to maintain her objectivity as she struggles to understand her daughter, Josie, one of the surviving witnesses of the shooting.

Patrick Ducharme

He is the head detective on the Sterling High School case and Alex's love interest. At the end of the book, he and Alex are romantically involved and expecting their first child.

Lacy Houghton

Peter's mother used to be Alex's good friend. She is devastated to discover it is her son who has committed such a terrible crime. She is a midwife, and struggles to understand her son's actions. Also, when she discovers Joey was a heroin addict, she disposes of the evidence, as she cannot bring herself to accept her deceased son was anything other than perfect.

Lewis Houghton

Peter's father, a college lecturer, who hides behind math equations in his attempt to discover

the formula for happiness. He stores many guns in his house and frequently goes hunting. Lewis tried to introduce Peter to hunting, but Peter never liked the sport. When Peter was in jail, he never visited him, but went to the graves of the victims instead. It is revealed that he favoured Joey over Peter, but he only acknowledges it at the end.

Matt Royston

Josie's boyfriend. He is an aggressive hockey player and the most popular boy in school. Matt and his friend Drew bully Peter from kindergarten, shoving, elbowing and hitting him, pulling his pants down and calling him names. He is very abusive to Josie, causing her to break her leg one time. He is the final victim in the shooting, and the only victim who was shot twice.

Jordan McAfee

Peter's defense attorney. He has a baby son and an adult son and is married to a stunning Afro-American woman, Selena. He takes on Peter's case because he believes that Peter deserves a fair trial.

Selena McAfee

Jordan's wife who assists with her husband's case. She is one of the few people who is sympathetic towards Peter.

Diana Leven

She is the prosecuting attorney in Peter's case.

Drew Girard

One of the popular kids and Matt's best friend. He, along with Matt, constantly bullied Peter. He was shot in the shoulder while he was running towards the locker room with Matt and Josie.

John Eberhard

One of the popular kids who was wounded in the head during the shooting. He is left with severe brain damage, and is now mentally handicapped.

Brady Pryce

Another popular kid who dated Haley Weaver. He and Haley were considered "The Brangelina of Sterling High". He was injured protecting Haley in the shooting.

Haley Weaver

Brady Pryce's girlfriend. Prior to the shooting, she was elected homecoming queen (the female student in the high school senior class who is most well liked by the entire high school, from freshmen to seniors). She was badly injured in the shooting, resulting in many plastic surgery operations on her face.

Derek Markowitz

Peter's only friend after Josie leaves him for the popular crowd. He and Peter met when their mothers forced them to play soccer.

Mr McCabe

A gay math teacher who ends up shot in the rampage. He offered support to Peter when he was confused about his sexual orientation.

Courtney Ignatio

Popular girl who hangs out with Josie. Courtney dies after being shot in the chest. She badly bullied Peter, convincing him that Josie had feelings for him and then publicly humiliating him.

Joey Houghton

Peter's dead brother. Joey was seen as the "all American son" as he had good grades and was great athlete. However, this is contradicted by his actions later in the story (such as when he bullied Peter or when he used heroine.) Joey is killed by a drunk driver.

Logan Rourke

Josie's biological father. He is married and has therefore ignored Josie all her life. He tries to bribe Josie with money to leave him alone.

Victims (in order of death)

Maddie Shaw, Josie's friend and a popular student. She is the first to die.

Courtney Ignatio, Josie's friend and a popular student, she and Matt Royston were the catalysts that caused the shooting.

Whit Obermeyer, a student shot in the hallways.

Topher McPhee, the school's pot dealer.

Grace Murtaugh, daughter of the town's minister.

Kaitlyn Harvey, a freshman with Down's syndrome.

Edward McCabe, Peter's former math teacher and the only teacher killed.

Noah James, senior and a jock.

Justin Friedman, fluent in Elvish and unathletic, Jewish.

Matt Royston, a popular jock, Josie's boyfriend. He was the only victim who was shot twice.

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Minutes

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

PART ONE

Epigraph (p. 1)



Explain this epigraph!

Handwritten Note (p. 3)

1. What do we get to learn about the author of these lines?
2. What do the questions “But will you miss me? More importantly – will I miss you?” imply about the relationship between the author of these lines and the people he / she addresses?

Pages 1-24: March 6, 2007



1. Why makes the introductory paragraph a good hook?
2. What can you say about the relationship between Alex Cormier and her daughter, Josie?
3. What are Josie's secrets?
4. Based on the information we get about Lacy on page 15, what kind of mother does she seem to be?
5. What are the “different species” (p. 16) that Josie observes in the cafeteria?
6. What do we get to know about Josie's posse?
7. What do the girls in Josie's posse like doing? – What about the boys?

Pages 25 -42: Seventeen Years Before

1. Where did Lacy meet Alex the first time, and why did she say, “I’m going to have to watch this one” (p. 26)?
2. How did Peter compare to Joey as a baby?
3. What do we get to know about the father of Alex’s unborn child?
4. What does Alex want Lacy to promise her when she is giving birth?

Handwritten Note (p. 43)

Why do bad things happen? – What is your opinion?

Pages 45 -64: Hours After

1. “There must be some mistake, please let there be a mistake.” (p. 52)? – Explain!
2. When Alex says, “Excuse me” the second time, the words are “a plea for absolution” (p. 53). – Explain!
3. What is the only answer Peter gives Patrick? – How does this intrigue the reader?
4. What interesting discovery does Dr. Guenther Frankenstein make about victim number 10?
5. What are Alex’s thoughts as she is watching her unconscious daughter in the dark hospital room?
6. “Lacy combed through her memories for some red flag” (p. 59). – Explain!
7. What does Josie think has happened? Why hasn’t Alex told her the truth?

Pages 65 -89: Twelve Years Before



1. What happened to Peter on his very first day of kindergarten?
2. **READ:** “Peter,’ his mother sighed [...] *We know.*” (p. 69) and say why this short excerpt is revealing across several levels?
3. Why was Josie sent to the principal’s office? – Is Alex mad at her?
4. Although Lacy disapproves of Peter’s teacher’s belief that the only way to stop being bullied is to stand up for himself, she counsels her son to do just that. Worse yet, what does she threaten him with? – How does Lacy feel about it? What is your opinion concerning this issue?
5. Why is Lacy’s final sentence, “One day, Peter, everyone’s going to know your name” (p. 74) a perfect example of dramatic irony?
6. Prior to being appointed superior judge, Alex is questioned by the Executive Council of New Hampshire whether she is pro-firearms, and her answer is “yes” (p. 80). However, when she finds her daughter and Peter holding a gun, she is absolutely outraged. – Explain! [“Did that make her a hypocrite? Or was she only being a good mother?” (p. 82)]
7. What has Peter been promised, and why is he so thrilled about this?

Handwritten Note (p. 91)

1. Is there anything such as fate? – Who do you blame when something goes wrong?
2. Why can Josie be said to have been "in the wrong place at the wrong time"?

Pages 93-136: The Day After

1. What is on Lacy's and Peter's mind when the police are searching their house to gather evidence for the court?
2. Why was Jordan McAfee surprised when he first saw Peter?
3. What, according to Dr. Ervin Peabody, a psychologist, are the typical warning signals of a potential school shooter? Does he believe that there is a general profile of a school shooter?
4. How does Josie feel about her mother when she is picked up from hospital? Why?
5. Why will Alex not recuse herself from Peter Houghton's case? And why does she think of herself as the best judge for the job?
6. Show how, despite her attempts at being a good mother, Alex fails miserably!
7. What results does Selma Abernathy, the expert ballistics technician, present Patrick with?
8. The news is quick to point out the connection between Peter Houghton's having been an ardent fan of a hard-core punk band called Death Wish and the bloodbath he caused at Sterling High. – What is your opinion on the matter?
9. What does the correctional officer bring Peter on the day of his arraignment? – Why?
10. What is the most striking item on the list of items removed from Peter's bedroom? – Why?
11. Why doesn't Josie recognize her mother anymore?
12. What does Josie answer when Patrick asks her whether she and Peter had been friends? – Why, do you think, does she do that?
13. When Lacy visits Peter the first time in jail, he tells her, "I haven't been able to make you understand me in seventeen years, Mom. Why should it be any different now." (p. 125) – How fair a criticism is that?
14. READ the excerpt from an FBI investigatory report examining school shootings around the globe (pp. 127-128) and say to what extent Peter fits the description of the average school shooter!
15. What does Orestes, a tech guy working at, what Patrick affectionately referred to as, the Geek Squad, show him to prove that Peter "knew his shit" (i.e. that he excelled at programming computers) (p. 131)?
16. Why doesn't Peter feel any remorse for what he's done?

Handwritten Note (p. 137)

Explain Josie's thoughts!

Pages 139-160: Six Years Before

1. How does Lacy, unconsciously and despite best intentions, doom Peter on his first day of sixth grade?
2. How does Peter react? Why doesn't he tell his mother that such binders were the cool thing to have three years ago?
3. Why doesn't Mrs. McDonald, the teacher on lunch duty, stop Drew from further bullying Peter? What **does** she do?
4. How does Josie side with Peter in the cafeteria?
5. Why don't Josie and Peter fit in with the popular crowd?
6. Why does Josie hang out with Peter?

7. How does Alex change as a mother after the terrorist attacks of 9/11?
8. Why is Peter on the middle school soccer team even though he hates the sport?
9. Why is Peter unsure about his sexual orientation?
10. When Alex takes Josie out to a posh restaurant to celebrate her twelfth birthday, we get a closer insight into their relationship. – What do we find out?
11. What do we find out about Josie's circle of friends when she was twelve?
12. How did Josie feel about not being popular?
13. To what extent can the coach be said to bully Peter as well?
14. Why doesn't Peter confide to his parents that he doesn't get to play in matches?
15. What does Peter's mother do to inadvertently aggravate Peter's ordeal?
16. How does Joey, Peter's older brother, compare to Peter?
17. Why is Peter so upset after the hunting expedition?
18. Relate the story about Dolores Keating! How does Peter behave towards Dolores the morning she comes back to school? What about Josie? Why do they behave the way they do?
19. Why is Josie hanging out with Courtney & Co., girls that had always seemed so fake to her that "if she poked one of them with a sharp pencil they'd burst like a balloon" (p. 152)?



Handwritten Note (p. 161)

Explain Josie's thoughts!

Pages 163-194: Ten Days After

1. How successful is Lacy at clearing herself for what Peter has done?
2. How does Alex fail to raise Josie's spirits when she takes her out for a ride?
3. What do we find out about Joey that we didn't know before?
4. According to Lacy, what kind of relationship did Peter have with Joey?
5. What role did Peter play for his parents after Joey's death?
6. What does Lacy mean when she says that she lost Peter a long time ago?
7. How do the police react when Jordan calls them to report that his four tyres have been slashed? – Why?
8. Why is Jordan thrilled about the results of Selena's investigation?
9. Describe Josie's ambivalent feelings towards her mother!
10. What does Alex feel like when she calls a one-hour recess?
11. When the principal suggests a moment of silence to honour the dead, Josie is afraid of doing so. Why?
12. In order to induce Peter to confide to him what his brother was really like, he plays the devil's advocate and tells him, "Well, your brother is the perfect kid, right? That's tough enough right there, but then he dies and turns into a saint" (p. 185). – What surprising information does Peter give Jordan?

13. How can Jordan use the battered woman syndrome to defend Peter?
14. Who are the heroes in the video game Peter has created? Who are the villains? Where is it set?
15. Why is Peter Houghton's casualty count still indirectly rising?
16. Why does Jordan want to give up Peter's case?

Pages 195-240: One Year Before

1. How does Peter compare to Joey when they have their Golden Retriever, Dozer, put down?
2. What does Peter worry about most of all when he fails a test?
3. What can you say about Alex and Lacy's relationship?
4. Why is the job at QuikCopy a haven for Peter?
5. Peter's last major conversation with Josie was five years ago. What has Peter been certain of ever since?
6. How does Josie behave when she is alone with Peter? How does this change the minute Matt enters the shop?
7. What makes Josie exclaim, "You are good" (p. 207) when she and Peter are in Mr. Cargrew's office?
8. What is Josie terrified of when Peter explains to the class that she "hangs out with different kinds of people" (p. 211), i.e. the popular kids as well as the outcasts?
9. What is Matt's utterly unexpected reaction to Peter's presentation on popularity?
10. Why does Peter set fire to the Dumpster of Mr. Cargrew's copy shop?
11. Why does Josie report Peter to Mr. Cargrew for having intentionally set the Dumpster on fire?
12. **READ** pp. 216-219 and say why Josie, despite briefly empathizing with Peter, ultimately lacks the courage to stick up for him?
13. Put an "x" in a position that best represents how you feel about Josie at this stage of the novel. If you think she is totally despicable, the "x" will go very close to the left side but if you are unsure how you feel about her, the "x" might go somewhere around the middle.

utterly despicable

absolutely adorable

14. What significant event had Peter chosen to write about in his essay?
15. What is utterly ironic about his English teacher's concluding assessment of Peter?
16. Why does Peter throw his essay away before showing it to his parents?
17. Why does Peter circle Drew Girard's, Matt Royston's, John Eberhard's and Josie Cormier's faces in his eighth-grade yearbook?
18. What new side to Matt do we witness when Josie doesn't instantly obey him at Maddie's house? (pp. 226-227)



19. Why does Alex's reaching for Josie's hand beneath the covers seem perfectly normal now, in the dark, while it would have seemed too emotional otherwise?
20. What potentially dangerous situation does Peter find himself in at the Front Runner? Who saves him, and how?
21. **READ** p. 234: What makes this brief scene so chilling?
22. How does Josie react when Maddie tells her how lucky she is to be dating a guy like Matt?
23. When Peter asks Josie why she acts like she does, she says, "I have to act the way people expect me to act. It's part of the whole ... thing. If I don't ..." (p. 239). Finish her sentence!
24. What secret does Josie confide to Peter?
25. What does Peter decide to do the moment he gets home?
26. What does Peter mistake his parents' frantic state of mind for when he gets home that night? – Why is this another huge disappointment for Peter?

Handwritten Note (p. 241)

Do you agree with the statement, "if [a kid] was in a desert dying of thirst and had the choice between a glass of water and instant popularity, she's probably choose the latter"?

Pages 243-308: One Month After



1. What is Lacy's state of mind after she has overheard Mrs. Isinghoff say that she doesn't want her baby delivered by a woman whose son is a murderer?
2. Why does Peter refer to the ten casualties of his shooting as "the ten kids who **died**" (p. 252 & emphasis added)?
3. What does Josie mean when she tells Drew, "I don't think I can do this" (p. 254), and how does Drew misinterpret it?
4. **READ** pp. 255-256: What can you say about the relationship between mother and son?
5. Peter seems to become less hostile towards his mother when he finds out that she has brought him a nice jacket for the arraignment. How is that hopeful moment instantly shattered?
6. What is Lacy's answer to Peter's question, "Do you ever wish it was me who died instead of Joey?" (p. 257) – Is she being truthful?
7. What makes Josie think, "*Oh my God [...] Nothing's changed at all*" (p. 261)?
8. How is Alex coping at Peter Houghton's arraignment?
9. What changes can we notice in Alex, the judge and in Alex, the mother after Peter's arraignment?

10. Why does Josie's statement concerning Peter, "I used to be his friend" (p. 267) come as a surprise to both his mother and the reader?
11. What do you make of the principal's statement that "if the administration intervenes, it makes it worse for the kid who's being bullied" (p. 271)? – Is this just an excuse so that the staff won't have to intervene or does he have a point?
12. Who's Dr. King Wah?
13. Finish Alex's sentence, "I wish it had been me" (p. 277)!
14. What important information does Derek Markowitz give Selena?
15. Explain, "[Jordan's] case had just grown immeasurably more difficult, but maybe that was offset by the fact that his relationship with his client had gotten easier" (p. 282).
16. Where does Lewis go when he tells Lacy he's going to visit Peter? Why can't he go to see Peter?
17. Why does Lewis think he is to blame for his son's crime?
18. Dr. King Wah tells Jordan that out of 10 people 5 will remember "an incredibly painful or embarrassing moment" (p. 288) from their high school days. Luckily, most people "realize that in the grand scheme of life, these incidents are a tiny part of the puzzle" (p. 288). – What about those who don't see it that way?
19. What does Alex realize when Jordan voices his intention to call Josie as a witness?
20. What does Alex confide to Patrick when they have coffee at the Golden Dragon Chinese restaurant? – What piece of advice does he give her?
21. How does Alex persuade Jordan to think twice about putting Josie on the stand?
22. What subtle change in Alex and Josie's relationship can you discern when they are seen cooking together?

Pages 309-330: The Month Before

1. What advice does Lacy give Peter when he tells her that the girl he fancies barely registers his existence?
2. **READ** p. 313 and Appendices 5-7. Discuss the controversy!
3. Why does Peter decide to send "his heart across the Ethernet to Josie" (p. 315)?
4. What does Courtney do while Josie is having a shower?
5. How does Josie find out about Peter's email, and how does she react? – Why?
6. What does Courtney do, and how do you feel about her at this moment? Put an "x" in a position that best represents how you feel about Courtney at this stage of the novel. If you think she is totally despicable, the "x" will go very close to the left side but if you are unsure how you feel about her, the "x" might go somewhere around the middle.

utterly despicable

absolutely adorable

7. **READ** pp. 320-321 and say how you feel about the following characters at this very moment:
 - a. Peter
 - b. Josie
 - c. Courtney, Matt and Drew
8. Why does Josie play hooky?
9. What does Peter find in Mr. Weatherall's (their neighbor & a retired cop) kitchen, and how does he feel once he has got it in his bedroom?
10. How does Matt behave when he spots Josie in front of the team's locker room?

PART TWO

Epigraph (p. 331)



What does this proverb mean?

Handwritten Note (p. 333)

1. After virtually every school shooting, be this Columbine or Sandyhook, people always ask, "How could this happen here?" – What is the general assumption?
2. Do you agree that, "All it takes is a troubled kid with access to guns"?

Pages 335-388: Five Months After

1. Why has Alex been so reticent about telling Josie she sleeps with Patrick?
2. After analyzing gender stereotypes for a while, Selena concludes, "Maybe it was our damn fault that men turned out the way they did" (p. 343). Does this apply to Peter, too? And if so, to what extent is his mother to blame for the person he turned out to be?
3. What does Josie lie to Alex about? – Why?
4. Why does Josie burst into tears when Patrick is talking to her in front of the cemetery?
5. When Lewis apologizes to Peter for having failed him all his life, Peter spits out, "Fuck you. [...] Fuck you for coming here. You don't give a shit about me. You don't want to tell me you're sorry. You just want to hear yourself say it. You're here for yourself, not me" (p. 348). – How fair is Peter's accusation?
6. **READ** pp. 352-353] Why would Drew have lied about bullying Peter?
7. Why have Lacy and Lewis hardly spoken since the day she followed him to the cemetery? And why, do you think, has he taken to sleeping in Joey's bedroom?
8. Why has Lacy left the price tags on the clothes she's bought Peter for his trial?
9. Why does Peter consider himself lucky for the first time in his life when he realizes that he hasn't been given a bulletproof vest? – What does this tell you about his state of mind?
10. Why is Michael Bleach a good witness for the prosecution?
11. When did Lacy realize "she could hate her own child" (p. 369)? – In retrospect, how could this situation have been prevented from escalating?
12. What does Josie tell Peter's mother why she's in the room of the witnesses for the defence? – Does this come as a surprise to you? Why (not)?
13. Why does Diana Leven ask Drew Girard whether other kids have been as cruelly bullied as Peter Houghton?
14. Why is Derek Markowitz, an outsider and Peter's only friend, a good witness for the prosecution?
15. How does State's Exhibit 303 prove that Peter's crime was meticulously planned?
16. Why does Lacy thank Alex when they meet in the courthouse bathroom?
17. When Peter is back in his cell, he realizes with amazement "how little had changed" (p. 388). Explain!

Pages 389-390: 6:30 A.M., The Day Of



How does this short chapter relate to the epigraph of the novel?

Handwritten Note (p. 391)



Why, according to Josie, do some people enjoy watching someone else suffer? – Do you agree with his explanation?

Pages 393-437: Five Months After

1. What does Patrick Ducharme testify concerning the guns that Peter was carrying when he went on his rampage?
2. How does Jordan abate Dr. Uppergate's testimony that Peter was "a rational, angry [...] certainly not delusional young man [who had been] planning his attack [...] rationally and methodically" (p. 400)?
3. Why is Dr. Wah an invaluable expert witness for the defence? (Who is he, and what does he say in Peter's defence?)
4. According to Dr. Wah, what proof is there that Peter was dissociating when he went on his killing spree?
5. Why did Josie break up with Matt, only to become reconciled with him a couple of hours later?
6. Why does Peter read Angela Phlug's letter all night long?
7. In retrospect, how had Lacy failed her son? (In other words, how could she have been a better mother for him?)
8. What is Alex referring to when she affirms, "Everyone thinks you make mistakes when you're young. [...] But I don't think we make any fewer when we're grown up" (p. 423)? – What does she really want to tell Lacy?
9. How does Peter unwittingly dig his own grave when he testifies?
10. Who does Jordan want to call to testify after Peter's appearance on the stand? – Why?
11. What exactly does Josie remember when the diaper bag falls off Selena's shoulder and lands in front of her?

Pages 439-441: 10:16 A.M., The Day Of

What surprise twist does the story take in this short chapter?

Pages 445-451: Five Months After

1. Where did Patrick ultimately find the bullet that had been fired from Gun B?
2. Why didn't Peter tell Jordan that Josie was the one who had shot Matt first?
3. **READ** pp. 446-447! – Explain what Josie means when she says, "I loved Matt. And I hated him. I hated *myself* for loving him, but if I wasn't with him, I wasn't anyone anymore" (p. 446). – Do you agree with Josie when she says, "What's the difference between spending your life trying to be invisible, or pretending to be the person you think everyone wants you to be? Either way, you're faking" (p. 447)?
4. Why can Alex's admission to herself, "I'm *not* perfect" (p. 447) be seen as "the first step toward becoming that way" (p. 447)?
5. What sentence does Peter get?
6. When speaking with one of his students called Peter, Lewis says, "You remind me of someone I **used to** know." (p. 449 & emphasis added) – Why "used to", an expression used to say what was true in the past and is not true anymore?
7. How is Lacy diametrically opposed to her husband when it comes to remembering Peter?



Pages 453-455: March 6, 2008

1. What was Josie's indictment and sentence?
2. What do we find out about Alex's change of career and her personal life?

DISCUSSION POINTS / THEMATIC IDEAS



1. **Bullying and school violence:** One of my in-class essay prompts asks students to analyze Peter's tipping point and/or what single event most affected his decision. Naturally, students struggle to select just one moment. During discussions we analyze how the school system (teachers, parents, students, administrators) failed to stop the bullying. This opens the door for us to talk about our school community and what can be done to change the culture. We talk about how tragedy alters a community. This topic encourages informational text (Columbine, psychology, statistics).
 2. **Appearance vs Reality:** Before the shooting (within the first 10 pages), readers are introduced to Josie and her self-appearance conflict. She constantly struggles to hide who she is from her friends in favor of appearing to be who they want her to be. Most students resonate with Josie; they are constantly afraid of their peers outing them for being a phony. We talk about what Josie could have done differently to change outcomes. Students tend to have a love-hate relationship with Josie.
 3. **Moral Ambiguity:** As for Peter, we discuss how he appears to be an antagonist in the beginning, but after further reading, he is presented as a protagonist. One of my in-class essay prompts asks students to decide if Peter is a victim or a monster. Every student argues that he is a victim. However, at the beginning of the novel (after the first 25 pages), students label him as a monster, and most claim that nothing can excuse his actions. This creates an argument: Is Peter guilty? As we read the court case sections, we journal and discuss our thoughts. Before the verdict, we become the jury and decide Peter's fate.
 4. **Relationships:** Picoult analyzes various relationships (parent-child, boyfriend-girlfriend, peers, sibling rivalry, etc.). We discuss the characteristics of true friendships and "fake friendships." Even though Josie and Peter don't interact after the shooting, we spend several class periods discussing their relationship. We talk about how to best communicate with parents by analyzing conversations in the book. Most of our time is focused on Josie and the popular crowd. Students connect the characters' interactions to those of *The Great Gatsby* (friends or alliances?). We rewrite the book by altering specific relationships for Peter.
- SOURCE: <http://theeducatorsroom.com/2016/07/reading-outside-canon-jodi-picoults-nineteen-minutes/>
5. **Authority Roles:** Before the shooting, Alex is a loving but distant parent who prioritizes her job above her daughter. While she makes a brief effort to spend more time with Josie, she quickly returns to her normal routine. Josie feels pressured by Alex to be perfect in every area of her life. While Alex enforces a strict midnight curfew and tells Josie to use a condom every time she has sex, she also tacitly condones Josie's sexual relationship with Matt and is unaware of Matt's abuse and Josie's miscarriage. After the shooting, Alex's relationship with Josie is fraught with tension. Alex tries to show Josie that she is more important than her job, but their relationship doesn't begin to improve until Alex removes herself from the case. The two spend time talking and cooking together. Alex continues to show her support for Josie after her confession.

Lacy is the kind of mother who leaves an encouraging note for Peter beside his cereal bowl every morning and packs him a lunch every day. But she doesn't know that Joey bullies him, and she punishes Peter for not standing up for himself at school. Her attempts to be loving and supportive often backfire. She buys Peter a Superman binder that prompts classmates to tease him, and her advice to tell Josie about his feelings ends in Peter's humiliation. After finding a packet of heroin while cleaning Joey's room, Lacy is afraid to look too hard in Peter's room.

Lewis is not as close to Peter as Lacy, although he teaches him how to hunt. Lacy and Lewis don't monitor Peter's computer use and miss several clues that he might be planning something violent. After the shooting, Lacy finds bomb-making materials in Peter's closet, and she and Lewis admit to trusting Peter too much. They blame themselves for their son's actions and question which of their parenting decisions caused Peter to lash out so violently. Both Lacy and Lewis apologize to Peter in jail.

Alex's mother died of breast cancer when she was 5, and she was raised by her father. He wasn't affectionate, and she used academics to get his attention. Like her father, Alex is more at home in a courtroom than in her own home with her child.

Josie's father was a married man who forced Alex to choose between losing him or terminating the pregnancy. When Josie contacts him, he is in the process of running in an election. He assumes that she is blackmailing him and tries to buy her silence when all she wants to do is talk to him.

A teacher favors cheerleaders, giving them good grades even if they don't deserve them. Throughout Peter's school career, teachers infrequently intervene to stop bullying, but their involvement often intensifies the abuse. The Sterling High gym teacher admits to being aware of the locker room violence but believes that it's all part of growing up.

6. **Violence:** The crime scene, described by Patrick Ducharme, is gruesome. Peter wounds and kills students and one teacher. He shoots people in the leg, in the face and in the torso. People bleed while their friends apply pressure to gaping wounds so large that their intestines are spilling out. Josie shoots Matt in the stomach, and blood comes out of his mouth before Peter shoots him in the head. Patrick slips in pools of blood, and blood spatters are on the walls. A wounded teen falls out of a second story window.

Peter sets off a bomb in Matt's car. Patrick and Alex recall other violent cases. In one, a man tied himself to the train tracks. His head and limbs were severed. In others, battered women kill their sleeping husbands. One woman stabs her husband 46 times. Another woman slices off her husband's penis.

Peter and other students at Sterling are the victims of daily bullying that begins in elementary school and continues through high school. In kindergarten, Peter's lunchbox is repeatedly stolen and thrown out the bus window. Students throw spitballs at sleeping kids, shooting the wads of soggy paper into their hair and sometimes into their mouths. Students are hung on hooks from their underwear and given wedgies. Chairs are pulled out from beneath them, they're tripped on the stairs, and their heads are shoved into toilets. Once, Peter is beaten up so badly on the way home that he needs stitches. He is the victim of online harassment. He is pushed, teased and called names. Peter's brother, Joey, says Peter is adopted and that his mom was a crack whore. Peter creates a video game where players move through a school killing athletes and popular kids.

The mother of a slain child uses a gun to commit suicide. When Drew lies about bullying Peter, Patrick grabs his throat. Matt hits Josie, pins her against a wall, briefly cuts off her airway and grabs her so hard he leaves bruises. He knocks out a boy who puts his hand on Josie's shoulder at a party. Josie imagines Matt decomposing.

A man in the cell next to Peter calls himself Carnivore and says he is accused of raping and stabbing a waitress. A maimed chick is pecked to death while the class watches. Josie beats up a student who bullies Peter.

7. **Kissing / Sex / Homosexuality:** Matt and Josie are sexually active, and the book gives several detailed accounts of their sessions, which include caressing, groping and manual stimulation before intercourse. After the first painful experience, Josie finds their routine pleasant, although it leaves her feeling empty. Matt is careful to use a condom. As their relationship progresses, Matt becomes increasingly possessive, manipulative and abusive. When Josie wants to stay at a party but Matt wants to leave, he grabs her so hard he leaves bruises. He remarks that it would be easy for him to kill her and puts pressure on her windpipe so that she can't breathe.

When Josie acts friendly with a boy at a party, Matt calls Josie a slut and a whore; he drives recklessly with her in the vehicle. He threatens to commit suicide when Josie tries to break up with him. He hits her, causing her to lose her balance and injure her ankle. Matt blames his behavior on Josie's beauty and claims that he loves her and doesn't want to share her. Matt also pressures Josie to have sex without a condom. At first, he respects her wishes, but one night, he refuses to use a condom. Josie tries to get away but is unable to escape, and his movements are so violent that Josie gets carpet burns. Josie becomes pregnant from this union, but miscarries.

Peter worries that he might be gay. Even when he finally makes a friend, he keeps him at a distance because he worries that he might like him. He also worries that he might have an erection while showering with the guys in the locker room. He makes a one-time visit to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Club. He also goes to a gay bar, where he is almost picked up by an unscrupulous man named Kurt. Mr. McCabe, Peter's math teacher (who is gay), comes to his rescue and drives him home. Male characters' pubic regions are described in detail.

A character wonders what it would be like to kiss a boy with braces. Names of girls who perform oral sex are written on the bathroom walls. Peter hacks into his boss's computer and finds pornographic images that include bestiality. Alex turns down a man she is on a blind date with, when he starts making lewd comments about her. Teens make sexually explicit jokes and insults. High school students engage in casual sexual encounters. Josie and her friends watch unrated teen sex movies. Teen boys find older women attractive. Girls mock a classmate's breasts. They also wear belly shirts and create dances to provocative songs.

Josie recalls peeing on the lawn in second grade with her classmate Natalie Zlenko, who now openly identifies as a lesbian. Jordan remembers getting an erection while climbing a rope in gym class.

Peter imagines the guards laughing at him every time he has to use the bathroom. Peter's cellmate draws a picture of the (male) corrections officers having sex.

Patrick Ducharme and Alex start dating and quickly begin a sexual relationship. Alex becomes pregnant with his baby.

Drew makes a joke about his body being intelligently designed.

8. **Eating Disorders:** Josie and her girlfriends eat very little because of the peer pressure to stay thin, often limiting themselves to a banana and water for lunch. Anyone who eats more is labeled either a whale or bulimic (p. 320). Matt actively pressures Josie not to eat. He eats her food himself or gives it to his friends. When Josie orders unhealthy food, her friends make rude comments about her choice. She lies to Alex about eating breakfast.

9. **Suicide:** The novel begins with a suicide note. Josie keeps a bag of pilfered pills hidden in her room. She has no clear plan for using them. After the shooting, Josie attempts to commit suicide, but flushes the pills down the toilet. After Josie breaks up with Matt, he threatens to commit suicide to convince her to come back. The mother of a slain student commits suicide using a gun. In jail, Peter is considered a suicide risk. A month after the trial, he commits suicide by suffocating himself.
10. **Abortion:** At first, Alex plans to abort her baby because the father, Logan Rourke (her law professor), wants nothing to do with the child. Although Alex is ultimately unwilling to choose abortion, both she and Lacy are pro-abortion. Lacy meets Lewis at a pro-abortion rally. When Josie suspects she is pregnant, she researches different abortifacients online, but miscarries before using any of them.
11. **Drug and Alcohol Abuse:** A student gets drunk and urinates in the open window of the principal's car. Students use and deal drugs. After Joey's death, Lacy finds a package of heroin in his room. Teens get drunk at parties. The leader of the Bible-study club is also a cocaine dealer.
12. **Lying:** A grief counselor tells each of the families of the slain that their child died first. Peter lies to his parents about his athletic feats. Josie lies to Alex about getting a job when she is really going to visit Matt's grave. She also lies to her biological father about her real name. Peter tells Lewis that he's doing an extra-credit science project when he is isolating ingredients for a bomb. Lewis lies to Lacy when he tells her he is headed to the jail. Peter catches his mother lying when she tells him that without him, it wouldn't be a happy ending. When buying clothes for Peter's trial, Lacy tells the saleswoman that he's going to Harvard.
13. **Stealing:** Peter steals handguns from a neighbor. Josie steals pills from her mother. This review is brought to you by Focus on the Family, a donor-based ministry. Book reviews cover the content, themes and worldviews of fiction books, not their literary merit, and equip parents to decide whether a book is appropriate for their children. A book's inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by Focus on the Family.

SOURCE: <http://www.pluggedin.com/book-reviews/nineteen-minutes/>

INFLUENTIAL QUOTES

- "A mathematical formula for happiness: R/E, or, Reality divided by Expectations. There were two ways to be happy: improve your reality, or lower your expectations." (p. 28)
- "'Ms Cormier, who has the right to judge someone else?' – 'Well,' she said. 'That depends on whether you're judging in a moral sense or a legal sense. Morally, no one has the right to judge anyone else. But legally, it's not a right – it's responsibility.'" (p. 80)
- "If you spent your life concentrating on what everyone else thought of you, would you forget who you really were? What if the face you showed the world turned out to be the mask ... with nothing beneath it?" (p. 83)
- "If you gave someone your heart and they died, did they take it with them? Did you spend the rest of forever with a hole inside you that couldn't be filled?" (p. 102)
- "We live in a country where American kids are dying because we're sending them overseas to kill for oil. But when one sad, distraught child who doesn't see the beauty in

life goes and wrongly acts on his rage by shooting up a school, people start pointing a finger at heavy metal music. The problem isn't with rock lyrics, it's with the fabric of this society itself." – Raven Napalm, lead singer for Death Wish (p. 110)

WATCH: Interview with Marilyn Manson – *Bowling for Columbine*
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrHFB2KP8fc>)

- "I sometimes think it's easier to be the one who's been hurt than the one who couldn't stop it from happening." (p. 122)
- "It was easy to be proud of the kid who got straight A's and who made the winning basket – a kid the world already adored. But true character showed when you could find something to love in a child everyone hated." (p. 126)
- "There was the finest line between unique and odd," Jordan muses, "between what made a child grow up to be as well-adjusted as Thomas versus unstable, like Peter. Did every teenager have the capacity to fall on one side or the other of that tightrope, and could you identify a single moment that tipped the balance?" (p. 136)
- "You are the thing that used to be normal, but that was so long ago, you can't even remember what it was like." (p. 137)
- "He had never really understood what it meant to love someone and hate them at the same time, but now he was starting to get it." (p. 154)
- "Sometimes he [...] watched her the way you'd stare at a butterfly that you'd only known as a caterpillar, wondering how the hell change could be that dramatic." (p. 160)
- "There was a point where the events of your life became a tsunami [...] The only [...] choice you had was to move to higher ground while you still could." (p. 165)
- "sometimes, when it came to grief, you could take one step forward and then three steps back." (p. 171)
- "The thing about death [...] was that it robbed you of your vocabulary for comfort." (p. 196)
- "Just because you don't want to hang out with losers doesn't mean you have to torture them, does it?" (p. 218)
- "Yeah, it does," Matt said. "Because if there isn't a *them*, there can't be an *us*. [...] You should know that better than anyone." (p. 219)
- "You did what you had to do, to cement your place in the pecking order. And the best way to stay on top was to step on someone else to get there." (p. 219)
- "Life was what happened when all the 'what-ifs' didn't, when what you dreamed or hoped or -- in this case -- feared might come to pass passed by instead." (p. 245)
- "If you lost your child, could you still even call yourself a parent?" (p. 265)

- “Ask a random kid today if she wants to be popular and she’ll tell you no, even if the truth is that if she was in a desert dying of thirst and had the choice between a glass of water and instant popularity, she’d probably choose the latter.” (p. 299)



(p. 355)

- “Something still exists as long as there’s someone around to remember it.” (p. 386)
- "Could you hate your son for what he had done, but still love him for who he had been?" (p. 428)
- "Everyone would remember Peter for nineteen minutes of his life, but what about the other nine million?" (p. 450)

EXCERPTS AND QUESTIONS – BY JODI PICOULT

She expected the teacher to talk about a time-out chair, or some retributive punishment that would be handed out if Peter was again taunted by the in crowd. But instead, the young woman said, “I’m showing Peter how to stand up for himself. If someone cuts him in the lunch line, or if he’s teased, to say something in return instead of just accepting it.”

Lacy blinked at her. “I...I can’t believe I’m hearing this. So if he gets shoved, he’s supposed to shove back? When his food gets knocked on the floor, he should reciprocate?”

“Of course not—”

“You’re telling me that for Peter to feel safe in school, he’s going to have to start acting like the boys who do this to him?”

No, I’m telling you about the reality of grade school,” the teacher corrected. “Look, Mrs. Houghton. I can tell you what you want to hear. I can say that Peter is a wonderful child, which he is. I can tell you that the school will teach tolerance and will discipline the boys who’ve been making Peter’s life miserable, and that this will be enough to stop it. But the sad fact is that if Peter wants it to end, he’s going to have to be part of the solution.” (pp. 72 – 73)

Questions

- What does SAFETY IN SCHOOL mean?
- Is it fair to ask everyone to advocate for him/herself?
- Where does the responsibility lie for ending peer cruelty?

"We live in a country where American kids are dying because we're sending them overseas to kill people for oil. But when one sad, distraught child who doesn't see the beauty in life goes and wrongly acts on his rage by shooting up a school, people start pointing a finger at heavy metal music. The problem isn't with rock lyrics, it's with the fabric of this society itself." (p. 110)

Questions

- What is the FABRIC OF SOCIETY?
- What can YOU as individuals do to change the fabric of your SCHOOLS?

He was staring in a way that cut her to the quick. Josie shivered. "I'm not," she said quickly, and she took a deep breath. "I just...I don't like the way you treat kids who aren't like us, all right? Just because you don't want to hang out with losers doesn't mean you have to torture them, does it??"

"Yeah, it does," Matt said. "Because if there isn't a them, thee can't be an us." His eyes narrowed. "You should know that better than anyone." (pp. 218 – 219)

Questions

- What is your role to step in when you see others being treated inappropriately?
- In a high school setting...talk about the "them" vs. "us."
- Can high school ever break down the barriers so that each and every student feels a part of the school?

"Derek," Drew picked.

"All right," Matt said, "I'll take the homo."

Peter shuffled toward the back of Matt's team. "You ought to be good at this game, Peter," Matt said, loud enough so that everyone else could hear. "Just keep your hands on the balls." Peter leaned against a floor mat that had been strung on the wall, like the inside of an insane asylum. A rubber room, where all hell could break loose.

He sort of wished he was as sure of who he was as everyone else seemed to be.

"All right," Coach Spears said. "Let's play." (p. 228)

Questions

What are the adults' roles in helping diminish peer cruelty?

Discuss the pervasiveness of homophobic language.

What can you do to intervene when others are cruel?

Ask a random kid today if she wants to be popular and she'll tell you no, even if the truth is that if she was in a desert dying of thirst and had the choice between a glass of water and instant popularity, she'd probably choose the latter. See, you can't admit to wanting it, because that makes you less cool. To be truly popular, it has to look like it's something you are, when in reality, it's what you make yourself.

I wonder if anyone works any harder at anything than kids do at being popular. I mean, even air-traffic controllers and the president of the United States take vacations, but look at your average high school student, and you'll see someone who's putting in time twenty-four hours a day, for the entire length of the school year.

So how do you crack that inner sanctum? Well, here's the catch: it's not up to you. What's important is what everyone else thinks of how you dress, what you eat for lunch, what shows you TiVo, what music is on your iPod.

I've always sort of wondered, though: If everyone else's opinion is what matters, then do you ever really have one of your own? (p. 241)

Questions

- Is popularity more important than anything else...dying of thirst?
- What is the difference between being popular and belonging to the group?
- Can everyone be popular?

Selena sat down with the principal of Sterling High in his modified elementary school office. Arthur McAllister had a sandy beard and a round belly and teeth that he didn't show when he smiled. He reminded Selena of one of those freaky talking bears that had come onto the market when she was a kid – Teddy Ruxpin – which made it all the more strange when he started answering her questions about anti-bullying policies at the high school. "It's not tolerated," McAllister said, although Selena had expected that party line. "We're completely on top of it."

"So, if a kid comes to you to complain about being picked on, what are the repercussions for the bully?"

"One of the things we've found, Selena – can I call you Selena? – is that if the administration intervenes, it makes it worse for the kid who's being bullied." He hesitated. "I know what people are saying about the shooting. How they're comparing it to Columbine and Paducah and the ones that came before them. But I truly believe that it wasn't bullying, per se, that led Peter to do what he did."

"What he allegedly did," Selena automatically corrected. "Do you keep records of bullying incidents?"

"If it escalates, and the kids are brought in to me, then yes."

"Was anyone ever brought to you for bullying Peter Houghton?"

McAllister stood up and pulled a file out of a cabinet. He began to leaf through it, and then stopped at a page. "Actually, Peter was brought in to see me twice this year. He was put into detention for fighting in the halls."

"Fighting?" Selena said. "Or fighting back?" (p. 271)

Questions

- If somebody strikes someone else...does it matter if they were provoked?
- Should anyone care if a student who strikes another was teased and taunted?
- Do any of you have a responsibility to intervene when peers are hurt emotionally?

Josie already knew the answer. This group of kids – they weren't her friends. Popular kids didn't really have friends; they had alliances. You were safe only as long as you hid your trust – at any moment someone might make you the laughingstock, because then they knew no one was laughing at them. (p. 318)

Questions

- Is Josie right? Are alliances different from friends? Are they more important?
- What is more important? Alliances? Or friends?
- Do popular kids not have friends? Is this important?

"Did you every bully him?"

"No, Ma'am," he said.

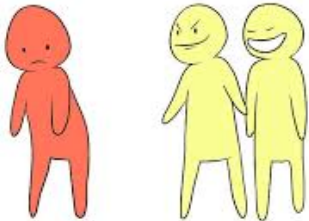
Patrick felt his hands curl into fists. He knew, from interviewing hundreds of kids, that Drew Girard had stuffed Peter Houghton into lockers; had tripped him while he was walking down the stairs; had thrown spitballs into his hair. None of that condoned what Peter had done...but still. There was a kid rotting in jail; there were ten people decomposing in graves; there were dozens in rehab and corrective surgery; there were hundreds – like Josie – who still could not get through the day without bursting into tears; there were parents – like Alex – who trusted Diana to get justices done on their behalf. And this little asshole was lying through his teeth.

Diana looked up from her notes and stared at Drew. "So if you get asked under oath whether you've ever picked on Peter, what's your answer going to be?"

"Let me ask you again, Drew," she said smoothly. "Did you ever bully Peter Houghton?"

Drew glanced at Patrick and swallowed. Then he opened his mouth and started to speak. (pp. 352 – 353)

Questions



- Is it a badge of honor to "bully" another?
- Have any of you "bullied" another person? How do you feel afterward?
- Why would Drew have lied about bullying Peter?

"Derek," the lawyer said, "you've been friends with Peter since sixth grade, right?"

"Yes."

"You spent a lot of time with him both in and outside school."

"Yeah."

"Did you ever see Peter getting picked on by other kids?"

"All the time," Derek said. "They'd call us fags and homos. They'd give us wedgies. When we walked down the hall, they'd trip us or slam us into lockers. Things. Like that."

"Did you ever talk to a teacher about this?"

"I used to, but that just made it worse. I got creamed for being a tattletale." (p. 383)

Questions

- Telling a teacher. What are the ramifications?
- What has happened when you've tried to tell a teacher that someone is doing something to hurt another person?
- Have you thought about telling a teacher but decided it wasn't worth the effort?

She [Lacy, Peter's mother] did not know quite what to feel when confronted with Josie Cormier. They'd spent the day playing hangman – the irony of which, given her son's fate, wasn't lost on her. Lacy had known Josie as a newborn, but also as a little girl and as a playmate for Peter. Because of this, there had been a point where she had viscerally hated Josie in a way that even Peter never seemed to, for being cruel enough to leave her son behind. Josie may not have initiated the teasing that Peter suffered over his middle and high school years, but she didn't intervene either, and in Lacy's book, that had made her equally responsible. (p. 385)

Questions

- Talk about any time you have been a witness to the teasing of others. How did you feel? What did you do?
- Is it OK to witness, but not participate in hurtful behaviours?
- Is there any responsibility for students to step in and attempt to stop peer cruelty?

Being unpopular was a communicable disease. Josie could remember Peter in elementary school, fashioning the tinfoil from his lunch sandwich into a beanie with antennae, and wearing it around the playground to try to pick up radio transmissions from aliens. He hadn't realized that people were making fun of him. He never had.

She had a sudden flash of him standing in the cafeteria, a statue with his hands trying to cover his groin, his pants pooled around his ankles. She remembered Matt's comment afterward: Objects in mirror are way smaller than they appear. Maybe Peter had finally understood what people thought of him. "I didn't want to be treated like him," Josie said, answering her mother, when what she really meant was, I wasn't brave enough. (p. 387)

Questions

- Talk about what is needed to stand up to peers who hurt others.
- Have you ever thought to yourself: I'm not responsible for stepping in and helping a peer?
- What responsibility do you have to a student who has difficulty being integrated into the social fabric of the school? Does that student have a responsibility to try to fit in?

Jail wasn't all that different from public school, really. The correctional officers were just like the teachers – their job was to keep everyone in place, to feed them, and to make sure nobody got seriously hurt. Beyond that, you were left to your own devices. And like school, jail was an artificial society, with its own hierarchy and rules. If you did any work, it was pointless – cleaning the toilets every morning or pushing a library cart around minimum security wasn't really that different from writing an essay on the definition of civitas or memorizing prime numbers – you weren't going to be using them daily in your real life. And as with high school, the only way to get through jail was to stick it out and do your time. (p. 388)

Questions

- School and jail...are there similarities? Differences?
- Students are free to make choices in school. What choices do you have to help peers who struggle?

When I was little I used to pour salt on slugs. I like watching them dissolve before my eyes. Cruelty is always sort of fun until you realize that something's getting hurt. It would be one thing to be a loser if it meant no one paid attention to you, but in school, it means you're actively sought out. You're the slug, and they're holding all the salt. And they haven't developed a conscience. (p. 391)

Questions

- Is cruelty fun?
- Are certain students "fair game" to hurt?

If just one teacher had stopped a kid, once, from tormenting Peter in the hall. (p. 395)

Questions

- Should teachers intervene when they witness peer cruelty? To what extent?
- What role should adults in school have to diminish peer cruelty?
- Do you think teachers "get it"? Why or why not?

*"I didn't ask him any more questions," Ducharme said evenly. "I have no idea what kind of shape he was in."
"So you took a kid – a seventeen-year-old kid, who was crying for his mother – back to your holding cell?"
"Yes. But I told him I wanted to help him"*

Jordan glanced at the jury and let that statement sink in for a moment. "What was Peter's response?"

"He looked at me," the detective answered, "and he said, 'They started it.'" (p. 399)

Questions

- Is it important who "started it?"
- When in the cycle of peer cruelty should you step in, if ever, and help another peer?

"When he first reached the school and saw a friend in the parking lot, he tried to warn him off, for safety. He lit a pipe bomb in a car before going into the school, to serve as a diversion so that he could enter unimpeded with his guns. He concealed weapons that were preloaded. He targeted areas in the school where he himself had been victimized. These are not the acts of someone who doesn't know what he's doing – they're the hallmarks of a rational, angry – perhaps suffering, but certainly not delusional – young man." (p. 400)

Questions

- Are there areas of your school that are more unsafe than others? What should be done?
- Does being "victimized" give anyone license for revenge? What should be done?
- How do you feel and think when you hear that there was planning for an attack of this sort?

"Most of Peter's childhood memories involved situations where he was victimized either by other children or by adults whom he'd perceived as being able to help him, yet didn't. He described everything from physical threats – Get out of my way or I'm going to punch your lights out; to physical actions – doing nothing more than walking down a hallway and being slammed up against the wall because he happened to get too close to someone walking past him; to emotional taunts – like being called homo or queer." [...]

"Yes. Peter loved his parents, but didn't feel he could rely on them for protection." (p. 405)

Questions

- Do you think parents can help students in school-related social problems?
- What is parents' role in helping?
- When parents help their children, does it work? Or does it make things worse?

"A child who suffers from PTSD has made unsuccessful attempts to get help, and as the victimization continues, he stops asking for it. He withdraws socially, because he's never quite sure when interaction is going to lead to another incident of bullying. He probably thinks of killing himself. He escapes into a fantasy world, where he can call the shots. However, he starts retreating there so often that it gets harder and harder to separate that from reality. During the actual incidents of bullying, a child with PTSD might retreat into an altered state of consciousness – a dissociation from reality to keep him from feeling pain or humiliation while the incident occurs." (pp. 407 – 408)

Questions

- How does it feel to be hurt socially at school? Rejected, made fun of, laughed at or pushed around?
- Whose responsibility is it to stop peer cruelty?
- Have any of you witnessed the kind of cruelty Peter experienced? What goes on in your head?

“In Peter’s case, I saw an extreme emotional vulnerability, which, in fact, was the reason he was teased. Peter didn’t play by the codes of boys. He wasn’t a big athlete. He wasn’t tough. He was sensitive. And difference is not always respected – particularly when you’re a teenager. Adolescence is about fitting in, not standing out.”

“How does a child who is emotionally vulnerable wind up one day carrying four guns into a school and shooting twenty-nine people?”

“Part of it is the PTSD – Peter’s response to chronic victimization. But a big part of it, too, is the society that created both Peter and those bullies.” (pp. 408 – 409)

Questions

- Is adolescence really about fitting in and not standing out?
- Is there a CODE OF BOYS at your school? And, is there a CODE OF GIRLS? What do these codes allow you to do?
- Your peers who do not fit in socially and stand out...Do you have any responsibility to them?

“There were instances in the school records where bullying was mentioned – although there was no response from the administration. The police package I received supported Peter’s statement about his email being sent out to several hundred members of the school community.” (p. 414)

Questions

- How does cyber-bullying impact your school? Is there a lot of it? What is done about it?
- Is being mean or cruel the same thing as bullying? What difference does it make what it is called?
- Do administrators respond to “bullying” in your school? How often and what do they do to manage it?

“I tried,” Lacy admitted, “to toughen him up.” As she spoke she directed her words at Peter, and hoped he could read it as an apology. “What does any mother do when she sees her child being teased by someone else? I told Peter I loved him; that kids like that didn’t know anything. I told him that he was amazing and compassionate and kind and smart, all the things we want adults to be. I knew that all the attributes he was teased for at age five, were going to work in his favor by the time he was thirty-five...but I couldn’t get him there overnight. You can’t fast-forward your child’s life, no matter how much you want to.” (p. 418)

Questions

- Is it enough for parents to tell their children to ignore the hurt and rejection? Does it make a difference?
- Should children/students who are shy and don’t easily integrate socially become tougher?
- Do parents and teachers have any responsibility to intervene when a child/student is hurt socially? Do peers?

“I [Peter] tried out for soccer, but never got any time on the field. Once, I helped some kids play a practical joke on a teacher by moving his car from the parking lot into the gym....I got detention, but the other kids didn’t, because they were on the basketball team and had a game on Saturday.” (p. 425)

Questions

- Is discipline fairly administered at your schools?
- Do some students get preferential treatment when it comes to discipline?
- How “fair” are your schools in general?

She stared at Peter, and she realized that in that one moment, when she hadn't been thinking, she knew exactly what he'd felt as he moved through the school with his backpack and his guns. Every kid in this school played a role: jock, brain, beauty, freak.” (p. 440)

Questions

- Are your schools as easy to describe as the roles suggested here?
- If there are “freaks” in your schools, how are they a part of the school?
- Are some groups in school safer (physically, emotionally and intellectually) than others?

“I loved Matt. And I hated him. I hated myself for loving him, but if I wasn't with him, I wasn't anyone anymore.”

“I don't understand...”

“How could you? You're perfect.” Josie shook her head. “The rest of us, we're all like Peter. Some of us just do a better job of hiding it. What's the difference between spending your life trying to be invisible, or pretending to be the person you think everyone wants you to be? Either way, you're faking.” (pp. 446 – 447)

Questions

- Do kids “fake” who they are at school? Should they? What happens if they do?
- Is your identity determined by whom you hang with? What impact is there socially for choosing to be with some peers over others?
- Do all students see themselves as different and not truly a part of the school?

SOURCE: <http://www.jodipicoult.com/nineteen-minutes.html#bullying>

INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

1. Reviewers applauded Picoult's ability to make readers sympathize as much with the shooter as with his targets, blending the lines of aggressor and victim with ease. Is this so?
2. Matt's relationship with Josie could be viewed as a “typical” high school relationship”. However, over the course of the novel, it is revealed that the couple's relationship was not everything that it appeared to be on the surface. Explain!
3. Do you think that Peter's actions were justified in shooting those who had made him suffer?
4. Which character did you sympathize with most in the novel? Why did you relate closely to this character? Explain your choice.
5. If you were Josie, would you have waited to expose the truth about what really happened in the locker room during the shooting, or spoken up right away? Why?
6. Why does Jordan McAfee decide to defend Peter? Describe the relationship between Peter and Jordan throughout the course of the novel.

7. Jodi Picoult uses flashbacks to tell many characters' backstories throughout the novel. Do you think the use of flashbacks is effective to tell the story? Did you like this method of storytelling? Why or why not?
8. Describe the relationship between Peter and his brother, Joey, supporting your observations with information from the text.
9. Who do you think wrote the journal entries? Defend your choice.
10. Do you think that Alex should feel sympathy for Lacy? Why or why not?

How would you counter the following criticisms?

1. Josie's abusive relationship with Matt has nothing whatsoever to do with the main topic of the book!
2. The surprise twist at the end is too far-fetched to be believable.
3. Bullying on this extreme level (e.g. throwing someone's lunch box out of the bus, stuffing kids into lockers, pulling down children's pants, spamming out personal emails to the entire study body, etc.) cannot go unnoticed by parents / teachers.
4. *Nineteen Minutes* is a disappointing novel because it offers nothing new to the discussion of school shootings, what causes them, or how they can be prevented.
5. Rather than developing the characters of some of the bullies in the story to give insight into why some people derive such great pleasure from humiliating those physically weaker than themselves, Picoult deals in stereotypical characters and spends too much time developing subplots.
6. *Nineteen Minutes* is tediously stereotypical - jocks versus nerds, parents versus children, teachers versus students.
7. With Peter being a killer, Josie a liar and a disloyal friend, Alex a lousy mother, Matt an abusive boyfriend, the Houghtons totally unaware and uninvolved, would it be fair to say that Picoult is focusing exclusively on the worst of humanity?

APPENDIX 1
NEW HAMPSHIRE SCHOOL DEFENDS SEXUALLY GRAPHIC NOVEL
By Todd Starnes
Fox News, 6 May 2014

WATCH: <http://www.wmur.com/article/gilford-parents-upset-over-book/4897981>

WATCH: <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3542649891001/>

“She could feel his erection, hot against her stomach.”

It’s not exactly Nancy Drew¹ but that’s the kind of sexually graphic content freshmen boys and girls are being exposed to at New Hampshire’s Gilford High School – without their parents’ knowledge.

“‘Yeah,’ he groaned, and he pushed her thighs apart. And then suddenly Matt was inside her, pumping her so hard that she scooted backward on the carpet, burning the backs of her legs.”

That’s an excerpt from *Nineteen Minutes*, a novel that 14-year-old English students have been assigned to read at the local high school. It’s a story that was first reported by EAGnews.org, the website of the Education Action Group Foundation.

Sweet Mercy, America, that’s enough to make even Hugh Hefner² blush.

The novel is based on a school shooting and deals with a variety of issues ranging from bullying to sexual violence. In previous years, parents have received some sort of notification about the nature of the novel.

But this year – somebody forgot to let mom and dad know their youngsters were going to parse a literary classic that includes this unforgettable line: “Semen, sticky and hot, pooled on the carpet beneath her.”

Dickens it is not.

William Baer became furious when he learned that his daughter had been assigned the book. He said the school not only failed to notify parents, but they also failed to offer parents a chance to opt their kids out of reading the book.

“I was shocked when I read the passage, and not much shocks me anymore,” Baer told EAGNews.org. “My wife was stunned by the increasingly graphic nature of the sexual content of the scene and the imagery it evoked.”

Baer, who is an attorney, put it in perspective. He said if someone had been handing those passages to students off campus, they might have been arrested.

Ironically, it was Baer who got arrested – at a school board meeting to address the controversy.

Baer went beyond his allotted two minutes and then got into an argument with a parent who

¹ Nancy Drew is a fictional American character in a mystery fiction series created by publisher Edward Stratemeyer as the female counterpart to his Hardy Boys series.

² Hugh Marston Hefner (born April 9, 1926) is the founder of *Playboy* magazine.

supported the book.

Baer was charged with disorderly conduct.³

But he wasn't the only parent to express outrage.

"I am utterly appalled that this book was in my son's hands," parent Sarah Carrigan told *The Union-Leader* newspaper.

The school board issued an apology "for the discomfort of those impacted and for the failure of the school district to send home prior notice of assignment of the novel."

Superintendent Kent Hemingway told me in a telephone interview that the district had been using the novel since 2007 – and to his knowledge – there have not been any complaints.

He also said the principal contacted every family in the affected classes and polled them on whether or not they supported the racy novel.

"More than 80 percent consented with their students continuing with the book," he said. "Ten percent said no."

He said 10 percent were still undecided on whether or not they wanted their youngsters to read about lovers grinding their loins.

I asked the superintendent if he would agree that the novel was a bit smutty. He declined to comment.

"I'm not going to make a decision on pornographic material," he said.

Heaven forbid the superintendent of schools be the arbiter of decency. So who, pray tell, is responsible for deciding whether children are exposed to pornographic literature?

"It's a decision of the local community," he told me.

I was especially intrigued by the school board's official statement. Read carefully:

"The School District policies IGE, IJ, IJA, KEC (available on the school district website) refer to the procedures for the use of novels containing controversial material. The district will take immediate action to revise these policies to include notification that requires parents to accept controversial materials rather than to opt out. Furthermore, the notification will detail more specifically the controversial material."

Did you catch the part about forcing parents to accept racy, bawdy novels rather than opt out?

This school district may very well be the poster child for why you should home school your children.

Author Jodi Picoult told *The Union-Leader* that she was aware of the controversy in Gilford. Her solution was to make the novel a family affair.

³ School board meetings have a time limit, 2 minutes to give your thoughts. The man had his two minutes earlier, then disagreed with another parent's comments and continued to speak, after being told nine times to be quiet by the chair of the school board. A police officer approached and the man said, "You will have to arrest me then!" That's what happened. What was not shown on the news were the 4 HS students who spoke in favour of the book and did so eloquently.

“Read the book with your kids, by all means use it as a springboard for discussion with your kids,” she told the newspaper.

And afterwards, why not take the whole family down to the local strip club for dinner and a show?

Baer told EAGNews.org that he believes the incident is proof that public schools are trying to indoctrinate children with moral relativism.

“Many people in education and government truly believe our children are theirs,” he told the group. “These school incidents are a byproduct of this ‘we know best’ philosophy.” So let’s review. An English teacher provided a sexually graphic novel to 14-year-old children. A parent complained. And when he complained too much, he was tossed in jail. Sounds to me like the wrong person got arrested.

SOURCE: <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2014/05/06/new-hampshire-school-defends-sexually-graphic-novel.html>

APPENDIX 2

NINETEEN MINUTES BY JODI PICOULT BOOK REVIEW

By Rebecca Skane
The Portsmouth Review, 2 December 2015

As a parent, I understand knee-jerk reactions when it comes to my kids, but much less so when it comes to book banning. Last year, *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult came under fire in Gilford, NH when some high school parents objected to the contents of this assigned book. At the time, I knew little about the book, only that it involved a school shooting much like Columbine. I assumed the violence to be at the heart of the matter. I finally got around to reading it and then looked back upon the arguments in old newspaper articles. Nope – it wasn’t the violence. It was the depiction of nonconsensual sex, a one-page incident which wasn’t very graphic but fit the narrative perfectly.

I should re-title this article “The Ignorance of Gilford, NH Parents”, subtitle: “Those who clearly did not bother to read the book nor understand its content, meaning, relevance, or why it had been assigned.”

In the small fictional town of Sterling, NH – not unlike Gilford (oh, sweet irony!) – student Peter Houghton plants a homemade bomb inside a car in the school parking lot and uses the explosion as a diversion to enter the school while heavily armed. For nineteen minutes, Peter goes on a shooting spree while screaming students and teachers scramble to get out of his way. At the end, ten people are killed and several more wounded.

“In nineteen minutes, you can mow the front lawn, color your hair, watch a third of a hockey game. You can bake scones or get a tooth filled by a dentist. You can fold laundry for a family of five. Or, as Peter Houghton knows ... in nineteen minutes, you can bring the world to a screeching halt.”

As only Jodi Picoult can, a difficult subject matter is unveiled and then brilliantly dissected through character analysis rather than making it plot-oriented, always leaving room for a character-enhanced plot twist at the end. She has a way of getting the reader to see and feel empathy for both sides, even when the reader doesn’t want to.

In this story there is Peter Houghton who has been horribly bullied since day one in public school. His parents are successful and normal people – his mother, a midwife, his father, a professor of economics. After the event, it was easy for the people to turn on the parents as a collective and judge them to be monsters, for who else could have raised such a person? But Picoult shines light on the parents' fear, guilt, and grief surrounding their otherwise normal existence, allowing the reader to explore a kinder side of humanity.

The more interesting facet to this story is with Josie Cormier, daughter of the local judge and former best friend to Peter. Josie was also a “nobody” until they were a bit older. Suddenly, Josie was in the limelight and surrounded by the popular crowd. She clung to her boyfriend Matt, a popular jock, and used him as a shield to stay popular. But he was manipulative. While she outwardly pretended to hate Peter, she hated herself but was too afraid to go against the popular crowd and do anything that would reveal her “nerdiness”.

Cue the revolt in Gilford. Josie's boyfriend Matt is abusive and controlling. He tells her that he'll kill himself if she ever leaves him. And when she resists his sexual advances, he rapes her. This is the scene that had parents in an uproar. It isn't very graphic, nor very long, but the word “semen” is mentioned. Yes, a biological product of the human body is mentioned. Gasp!

Some people didn't think this was relevant to the story line when it absolutely was. Both Peter and Josie fall victim to the pressure and pain of being outcasts in school and they deal with it in very different ways. When becoming the victim of bullies and date rape are extremely high possibilities for young adults, these are issues that they SHOULD read about and have the chance to discuss in a safe environment. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women will be raped. One in five. Getting upset over your daughter reading about sexual abuse when there's a good chance she'll become a victim at one point in her life is asinine. And to be more upset about a sex scene over the jaw-dropping violence – wow – priorities.

Knowledge is power. The more information you provide your children with, the better equipped they'll be to handle certain situations.

There are plenty of benefits for young adults when they read about real world issues and dangers. First of all, reading literary fiction (fiction that revolves around character interaction and growth) creates empathy – a proven fact. Young women might be able to relate to Josie, understand her position and angst, and even learn from it, thereby preventing another statistic. And most everyone can identify with the horrors of being bullied, and more easily so within a narrative.

As far as *Nineteen Minutes* goes, the bullying seemed a little bit disproportionate for such a small town where everyone knows everyone. Perhaps I have more faith than others (*cough* Gilford *cough*) that educators will do the right thing; someone should have stepped forward in this case, if not many – the bullying was that severe. We have good reason to trust our public educators with our precious growing minds, and they've proven that time and time again. We've seen teachers die for their students while trying to protect them at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and we've seen them put their lives at risk while jumping on top of students during the Moore tornado. Just recently, they've continued to brave small-town minds of ignorance and fear by assigning this book.

SOURCE: <http://portsmouthreview.com/nineteen-minutes-by-jodi-picoult-book-review/>

APPENDIX 3

NINETEEN MINUTES: MY TAKE ON THE RECENT CONTROVERSY

By Angie Miller

The Contrarian Librarian, 10 May 2014

I was fourteen years old when I stood in front of our town's public librarian and signed out *Wanderlust* by Danielle Steele. I had read all of VC Andrew's books and this was my fifth Danielle Steele book. My young, idealistic teenage heart could not devour enough smutty romance headed by strong female protagonists who overcame struggle to live glamorous lives. I remember the green cover with the sweeping white letters on it as I handed the paperback to the librarian, and I remember her purple-wire-rimmed glasses as she looked up at me and with her nose a little wrinkled (I remember humiliation washing over me as I stood there in my dirty clothes and unwashed hair. It is amazing how adults can make kids from poverty feel so very small with just a wrinkle of a nose). And then her voice, dripping in judgment, cut the space between us. "Does your mother know you're reading this?" she asked, indicating that either I was sneaking around or my mother was one of loose morals—and at fourteen, I wasn't sure which was worse. But I also remember feeling appalled that she thought she could decide for me what I should be reading.

Twenty years later I stood in front of a group of fourteen-year-old eighth graders and collected 38 copies of Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* after a terribly-executed, yet successful censorship attempt in which (& I am paraphrasing the longest week of my life here) a parent photocopied eight passages from the book and distributed them to class parents, citing that it was pornographic and blasphemous. I saw the same expression on the kids' faces as they processed some of those same emotions: *How can somebody tell us that we shouldn't be reading this?*

And ten years later, I am now standing behind a circulation desk as high school students come in and sign out our last copies of Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*. Last week, in a neighboring town, a parent was arrested and removed from a school board meeting while protesting the inclusion of this book in his 14-year-old daughter's English curriculum. Students bring me newspaper articles or tell me how it has made national news—it was even on *The View* last week. They tell me that their friends who go to this school are up in arms. They voice their own disgust and anger at the situation.

And then a friend sent me a message: *Can you comment on this, please?*

It's taken me all week to try to articulate how I feel about adults determining what students should and should not read. I've read all kinds of commentary, and here's what I ultimately have to say:

First of all, I am a huge proponent for student choice in reading—across the board, even in English class. I think there are very few instances in which a book should be a whole-class read, and that instead of focusing on strict curriculum choices and going for a one-size-fits-all approach that only disenfranchises students who either do not understand or enjoy the reading, we should be focusing on teaching reading and critical thinking skills while students self-select materials, guided by the teacher. It is a researched method that increases engagement, raises student achievement, and avoids controversies like this, but is largely ignored in schools.

That being said and my reading pedagogy set aside, if we focus on this particular incident, I believe it's all hogwash—everything from the protest to the arrest.

Page 313 from *Nineteen Minutes*, out of context, may feel like "pornography" if that's all you have read from the book. But if you have taken time to read the first 312 pages, and continue to read the other 151 pages, you will recognize that the female character is being

overpowered by her boyfriend and while it is not technically rape, as she never outright says no, his aggression makes her feel violated and afraid. It is a turning point in their relationship that is critical to the plot and speaks volumes about their characters, and sadly, it is what many teenage girls experience as they fall into serious relationships and struggle with the question: once you have sex with a boy, are you allowed to change your mind?

Authors write novels—they don't write excerpts. And readers read novels, not passages (although, thanks to this parent, page 313 is totally being read in isolation in my library, as students come in, grab our last copy and open it to that page). And English teachers teach issues and theme and voice and character development, not pornography. And anybody who has read this book *in its entirety* will recognize that it is not about sex. It is about everyday high school issues. In fact, this book so resonated with teens from NH, they awarded it with the distinguished 2009 Flume Award. And I guarantee that they did this because of the literary value of it, not because of page 313.

This book, like *The Chocolate War*, addresses issues that teenagers today (and 40 years ago—*The Chocolate War* was written in 1974) wrestle with: violence and bullying. It is irresponsible for educators not to give students materials that allow for discussion and reflection on modern-day, real-world concerns. If we want our youth to grow up and be strong, assertive, proactive, and healthy in every way, we must talk about difficult issues with them and not pretend that they don't exist. Because any adult who denies that their 14-year-old is thinking about troublesome issues, is closing him or herself off to ever helping that student. Teens will always turn to adults who are open and who accept reality, because they need to have someone who is honest and nonjudgmental.

Finally, any adult who tries to pull reading material from a child's hand, fails to understand the act of reading in so many ways. And this is where the Gilford parent, the parents I dealt with ten years ago, and the town librarian who once wrinkled her nose at me have gotten it all wrong. When reading a book, we bring our own meaning to the text.

Reading comprehension is intrinsically tied up with our own experiences. It is why as an eighth grader I deplored *The Red Badge of Courage*, yet as a college student fell in love with it. It is why as a parent, I and my students who have younger siblings, sobbed through *See You at Harry's*, while those who did not have younger family members sat alongside us, dry-eyed. It is why I, as a teacher who has spent a great deal of time teaching mythology, fell madly in love with *The Song of Achilles*, yet those who have little mythology background don't see it as being as exquisitely beautiful. It is why every time I read *Gatsby*, it is a new book to me. As adults, we read text through a very different lens than our 14-year-old students. And even within that age category, a 14-year-old girl who has had a sexual encounter will read page 313 very differently than one who has not.

Should the parent have been arrested? I wasn't there, but I do wish that this was not the focus of the controversy. I also wish that that father had had the decency to sit and have a civil, face to face conversation with the teacher prior to arriving at a public school board meeting. The fact that it catapulted so quickly into national news without the parent and teacher ever having had the chance to problem solve and come to a compromise as a team, speaks volumes as to how too many adults model conflict resolution for their children. A simple, honest conversation may have eliminated all of this (ironically, another message from the reading of *Nineteen Minutes*).

Read the book for yourself before you make any judgment. At this time, eighty percent of Gilford parents have supported the reading of *Nineteen Minutes*, and ten percent of them are unsure, leaving only ten percent saying no. In my own classroom, every parent who read *The Chocolate War*, ultimately put it back in his or her child's hands—and of my 38 8th graders, 36

of them brought in notes saying they wanted their child to continue reading it. And if you are deciding to read only page 313, or the quotes that Fox News has decided to sensationalize, you should realize there are other passages from the book to consider like:

“But then again, maybe bad things happen because it’s the only way we can keep remembering what good is supposed to look like.”

or

“In nineteen minutes, you can mow the front lawn; color your hair; watch a third of a hockey game. In nineteen minutes, you can bake scones or get a tooth filled by a dentist; you can fold laundry for a family of five. In nineteen minutes, you can stop the world; or you can just jump off it.

or

“When you begin a journey of revenge, start by digging two graves: one for your enemy, and one for yourself.”

SOURCE:

<https://thecontrarianlibrarian.com/2014/05/10/nineteen-minutes-my-take-on-the-recent-controversy/>

OVER TO YOU

1. Do you understand the controversy regarding the excerpt from page 313?
2. Does an excerpt from a book with vivid details of hard sex, make that pornographic material?

APPENDIX 4

THE KID IN THE BACK OF THE CLASS

The kids pointed and the kids laughed
At the young man that sat in the back of the class.

The one with his head down
To conceal his lost frown,
The one whose face of confusion
Led to all the student's intrusion.

Him feeling miserable was the children's desire
They most enjoyed teasing him of his attire.
From the clothing he would wear
To the weird styles of his hair.

As the children ridiculed him and called him names
The young man hid his face in great shame.
What was he to do when it was one vs. all?
Cause he knew what they'd do when they found him in the hall.

The bruises on his skin
Were not punishments from his own sins.
But they were the cruelty for his differences,

And the consequence of his existence.

It was midday the next day when the school went under attack
The students inside had no time to react.
Everything was happening all so fast
And it all started right after that first blast.

Loud gunshots filled every hall
And blood was splattered all over every wall.
For thirty long minutes the rampage went on
Until it finally ended with the death of the con.

When it was all over, reporters flooded the scene,
And asked everyone around what they had seen.
Students said they never saw the man
They said as soon as they heard the guns, they all just ran.

Days later the school was still full of broken glass
But that didn't stop students from returning to class.
When class had started the students placed, under their desks, their feet.
And they all turned around to notice in the back that there was one empty seat...

Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/the-kid-in-the-back-of-the-class>

OVER TO YOU

How does this poem, written by a high school student, relate directly to the plot of *Nineteen Minutes*?

WRITING AN EXAMINATION PAPER

Take the following to heart

- *Carefully study each of the questions set on a particular text.* Make sure you understand what they are asking for, so that you select the one you know most about.
- *Answer the question!* – Obvious, isn't it? However, bitter experience shows that many students fail because they do not actually answer the question that has been set.
- *Answer each point of question!* – Again, obvious, but so many students spend all their time answering just part of a question and ignoring the rest. This prevents you gaining marks for the parts left out.

The question

- Read and understand every word of it. If it asks you to compare (the similarities) and / or contrast (the differences) between characters or events, then that is what you must do.
- Underline all the key words and phrases that mention characters, events and themes, and all instructions as to what to do, e.g. *compare, contrast, outline, comment, write about, show how / what / where.*
- Now write a short list of the things you have to do, one item under the other. A typical question will only have between two and five items at most for you to cope with.

Planning your answer

- Look at each of the points you have identified from the question. Think about what you are going to say about each. Much of it will be pretty obvious, but if you think of any good ideas, jot them down before you forget them.
- Decide in what order you are going to deal with the question's major points. Number them in sequence.
- So far you have done some concentrated, thoughtful reading and written down maybe fifteen to twenty words. You know roughly what you are going to say in response to the question and in what order – if you do not, you have time to give serious thought to trying one of the other questions.

Putting pen to paper

The first sentences are important. Try to summarize your response to the question so that the examiner has some idea of how you are going to approach it. Jump straight into the essay; do not nibble at its extremities for a page and a half. High marks will be gained by the candidate who can show he or she has a mind engaged with the text. Your personal response is rewarded – provided you are answering the question!

As you write your essay, *constantly refer back to the question and your list of points* and make sure you are actually responding to them.

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