

The Storyteller by Jodi Picoult

Discussion Questions

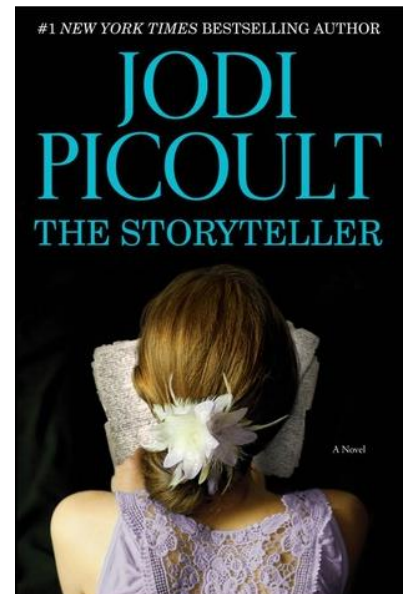
1. *The Storyteller* opens with a story within a story: the gripping narrative that Minka Singer composes: first as a young student in Lodz, then from the ghetto where her family finds itself exiled, and finally, during her imprisonment at Auschwitz. How does the tale of Ania and Aleksander and Casmir Lubov intersect with the plot of the larger novel? In what ways does this fantastical tale of two brothers and the myth of the upior connect with the brutality of the Holocaust and the ongoing hunt for Nazi war criminals?

2. “Josef Weber is as close as you can get to being canonized while you’re still alive. Everyone in Westerbrook knows him...[h]e’s everyone’s adoptive cuddly grandfather.” (p. 22) How does Mary’s estimation of Josef Weber square with what Sage learns of him? How is Josef Weber’s public persona incompatible with the truths that he reveals to Sage? To what extent is it possible for someone who hides a terrible secret to be so seemingly good?

3. By way of explaining her self-imposed solitude, Sage reveals her dramatic facial scar to Josef Weber, in spite of her general embarrassment about her disfigurement. What is it about Josef Weber that Sage finds herself drawn to? To what extent does the genesis of their friendship seem entirely coincidental? At what point in the novel does Sage start being his friend and at what point does she stop?

4. “One of the first things Adam told me was that I was pretty, which should have been my first clue that he was a liar.” (p. 25) Is Sage’s extramarital relationship with Adam consistent with her character’s values? What does their affair offer her? To what extent does Adam’s love for Sage seem genuine? How does he seem to embody the qualities of the “liar” that Sage calls him?

5. “The reason that we go to meet the people who bring us tips about potential Nazis is so that we can make sure they aren’t nuts.” (p. 213) How does Leo Stein’s personality come across in the chapters in the book that he narrates? Why does Leo Stein find Sage Singer irresistible when he first meets her? How does Sage’s on



again/off again relationship with Adam complicate her feelings for Leo?

6. “And why does it make me sick to hear him label me; to think that, after all this time, Josef would still feel that one Jew is interchangeable for another?” (p. 61) How do you interpret Josef’s interest in Sage’s Jewish heritage? Given that Sage does not self-identify as a Jew, and does not even believe in God, is she any less qualified to help Josef carry out his death? To what degree does the logic of Josef’s plan hinge on Sage’s being a Jew?

7. “I knew that what the Hauptscharführer saw in my book was...an allegory, a way to understand the complicated relationship between himself and his brother...[i]f one brother was a monster, did it follow that the other had to be one too?” (p. 382) What do Franz and Reiner Hartmann’s gestures toward Minka reveal about their true characters as individuals? Why does Josef Weber choose to lie about his identity (twice) to Sage? To what extent does Josef’s decision mirror that of Aleks Lubov, who chooses to protect the identity of his brother, Casmir, as the monster who terrorizes the village in Minka’s upior story?

8. How do Josef Weber’s recollections of life during the war compare to the memories of Sage’s grandmother, Minka? How did their witnessing so much death up close impact them, respectively, as perpetrator and survivor of the Holocaust? Why did both of them choose to keep details of this period of their life a secret from those closest to them for so long? How did their stories impact you as a reader?

9. “I started to pull the hem of the sweater, so that the weave unraveled. I rolled the yarn up around my arm like a bandage, a tourniquet for a soul that was bleeding out.” (p. 339) How does Minka react when she discovers her father’s bag among the cast-off belongings of Jews condemned to the gas chambers? What does this moment mark in her young life? How does her knowledge of German save her from a worse punishment for wanton destruction of property?

10. As she sorts and separates the belongings of the murdered victims of Auschwitz, Minka secretly collects the cast-off photographs of people who have been condemned to die. What does her risking severe punishment and the possibility of death in order to keep other people’s memories intact, reveal about her need to salvage and preserve something from destruction? Were you surprised when these photographs reappeared in the novel at the book’s conclusion?

11. Why does Sage decide to take justice into her own hands and grant Josef

Weber his dying wish? How did you feel upon discovering that Sage was misled by Weber about his true identity? To what extent does Sage seem to forgive Weber for his actions? Why does Sage conceal her behavior from Leo Stein, and to what extent does her behavior seem rational and understandable, given all that she has endured—and lost—herself?

12. There are many storytellers complicit in the creation of this novel—the author, Jodi Picoult; Sage’s grandmother, Minka; Josef Weber, a.k.a. Franz Hartmann; Sage Singer, the protagonist who shapes the narrative through her actions; the many nameless victims of the Holocaust; even the reader, who constructs his or her own interpretation of these multiple narratives. Why do you think Jodi Picoult chose this title for her novel? How does the novel’s conclusion allow the reader to participate actively in the process of storytelling?

(Questions issued by publisher.)