

HANDLE WITH CARE- Jodi Picoult
Meeting date: July 14, 2009

Questions for Discussion

1. Charlotte and Sean are faced with a very difficult decision when presented with the option of suing for wrongful birth. How did you feel about the lawsuit? The matter is complicated in many aspects, but especially because of Charlotte's close friendship with Piper, her ob-gyn. How might the O'Keefes have considered and entered into the lawsuit if they had not had a personal relationship with Piper? Would your own reaction to it have changed?
2. During the filming of a day in Willow's life, Charlotte purposely asks Willow's physical therapist to try some exercises that she knows Willow isn't ready for yet, and Willow begins to cry in pain. Charlotte rushes to her daughter's side, blaming the physical therapist, and when she asks if they got that on film, Marin -- Charlotte's lawyer -- is angry at Charlotte for exploiting her daughter. Do you agree with Marin that Charlotte exploits Willow? Charlotte believes she is doing everything out of love for Willow, to win the case that will get her the care she needs, but does this take it too far? Where can we draw the line?
3. Breaking is a theme in Handle with Care: bones break, hearts break, friendships break, families break. Consider examples from the book and discuss why you think certain breaks can or cannot be mended. Is there anything in the book that represents the unbreakable?
4. The author inserts recipes throughout the book that highlight certain baking techniques, such as tempering, blind baking, and weeping. How do these recipes provide further insight into the story and into Charlotte's character in particular?
5. Throughout the story, the question is raised of what it means to be a mother. For Charlotte, it means doing anything in her power to provide the best life for Willow, but at the same time, her other daughter's suffering goes unnoticed as she develops bulimia and begins cutting herself. For Marin, the question of what it means to be a mother addresses the issues of her adoption. Is a mother someone who gives birth to you and gives you away, or the woman who raises you? Discuss the different ideas about mothering that the author presents in this book. At what moments do certain characters fail or succeed at being a mother?
6. The term wrongful birth suggests that some people never should have been born. If abortion had been legal when Marin was conceived, she likely would not have been born. Willow's severe disability, had Charlotte known about it early enough, could have been cause for abortion. How do we determine what kind of life is worth living? Who has the right to say whether a pregnancy should be brought to term?
7. Discuss the roles that honesty and deception play in this novel. How do the characters lie to themselves? To each other? Is it sometimes better not to know the truth?
8. Charlotte is confident that the potential end of her lawsuit will justify the means, but Sean can't handle the idea that the means may leave Willow thinking she is unloved or unwanted. Clearly, they both love their daughter, but express it in drastically different ways. What do each of their approaches say about love? Do Charlotte's actions speak louder than Sean's words?
9. What message does the trial verdict send? Do you agree with the jury's decision?

10. How do you think Amelia's testimony affects the outcome of the case?
11. We follow Marin through the search for her birth mother, and what she eventually finds out about the circumstances surrounding her conception are truly devastating to her. Why do you think she thanks her birth mother for this information? Discuss Marin's reaction to what she learns.
12. Why do you think the O'Keefes never cash their \$8 million check? How do you feel about what they end up doing with it?
13. How do you feel about the ending? Why do you think the author chose to write it this way?