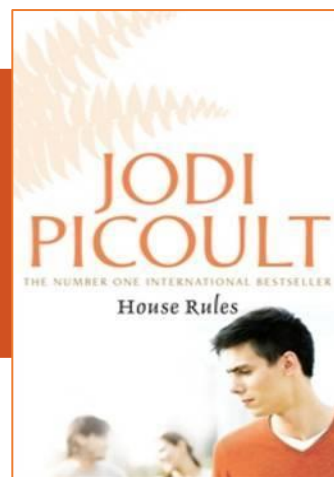




House Rules

Jodi Picoult



Author Background

Jodi Picoult is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of twenty-eight novels. Her books have been translated into thirty-four languages in thirty-five countries.

Picoult writes popular fiction which can be characterised as family saga. She frequently centres storylines around a moral dilemma or a procedural drama which pits family members against one another. Although she is often characterised as an author of chick-lit, over her career, Picoult has covered a wide range of controversial or moral issues, including abortion, assisted suicide, race relations, eugenics, LGBT rights, and school shootings. She has been described as, "a paradox, a hugely popular, at times controversial writer, ignored by academia, who questions notions of what constitutes literature simply by doing what she does best."

Picoult is the recipient of many awards, including the New England Bookseller Award for Fiction, the Alex Awards from the YALSA, a lifetime achievement award for mainstream fiction from the Romance Writers of America, the NH Literary Award for Outstanding Literary Merit, and the Sarah Josepha Hale Award. She holds honorary doctor of letters degrees from Dartmouth College and the University of New Haven. She is also a member of the advisory board for VIDA: Women in Literary Arts.

Jodi Picoult lives in New Hampshire with her husband. They have three children.

Book Summary

Life in the Hunt family is not exactly easy. Emma's eldest son, Jacob, has Asperger's Syndrome and lives a life driven by routine. Certain meals must be prepared on certain days, certain television shows must be watched at certain times, and all change must be planned for weeks in advance. Any unannounced break from the routine could send Jacob into a panic.

Like many other kids with AS, Jacob has a fixation on a particular subject, in his case, forensic science. Jacob keeps a police scanner in his room and likes to show up at crime scenes, providing analysis of the situation to stunned police officers and, Jacob's analysis is usually correct. But when his social skills tutor is found dead, the police turn their attention to Jacob. He is ultimately arrested and charged with murder, and he must stand trial to prove his innocence.

Due to AS, Jacob has trouble making eye contact and has constant tics and twitches, which seem suspicious to law officers and a jury. Jacob knows he is innocent, but he can't seem to make anyone around him understand.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ *House Rules* is narrated by five characters: Emma, Jacob and Theo Hunt, lawyer Oliver Bond, and Detective Rich Matson. How do each of these characters bring a different perspective to the novel? How would the reading experience have been different if one of the narrators' perspectives was removed from the novel?
- ❖ "I don't get into trouble because rules are what keep me sane. . . . I do what I'm told; I just wish everyone else would do it, too." Discuss what an ideal world for Jacob would be like. Other than a strict adherence to the rules, what values do you think Jacob would like for others to hold as strongly as he does?
- ❖ Emma maintains that she loves both of her sons equally, although she acknowledges that most of her time and attention is taken up by Jacob. What are your feelings regarding the way Emma treats Theo? Do you hold her or Jacob accountable for letting Theo go unnoticed and friendless? Why or why not?
- ❖ How does Theo's interaction with his father in San Francisco change his attitude toward Henry? Why does he erupt into laughter when Henry offers him a few twenty-dollar bills? Is the short trip also a turning point for Emma? If so, how?
- ❖ Henry plays a significant role in the novel, even if he didn't play a significant role in Jacob and Theo's lives prior to the trial. Yet despite his importance, the author does not grant him the opportunity to narrate a single chapter from his point of view. Why do you think this is?
- ❖ The delicate balance between right and wrong is a balance Jodi Picoult often explores in her novels. Detective Matson may be the perfect example. Take a look at some of his actions throughout the novel. Can any of them be considered absolutely right or absolutely wrong? Or do they all fall into the grey area in between? Ultimately, what is your group's verdict on him? Is he a "good cop" or a "bad cop"?
- ❖ Discuss how the balance of honesty versus deception is played out in the novel. Which characters are willing to compromise honesty to get what they want? Are any of the characters not willing to compromise honesty, no matter what the cost?

References and further reading

- ❖ Jodi Picoult Australian website: <http://jodipicoult.com.au/>
- ❖ Jody Picoult US website: <https://www.jodipicoult.com/>
- ❖ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jodi_Picoult
- ❖ Simon and Schuster: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/House-Rules/Jodi-Picoult/9780743296441>