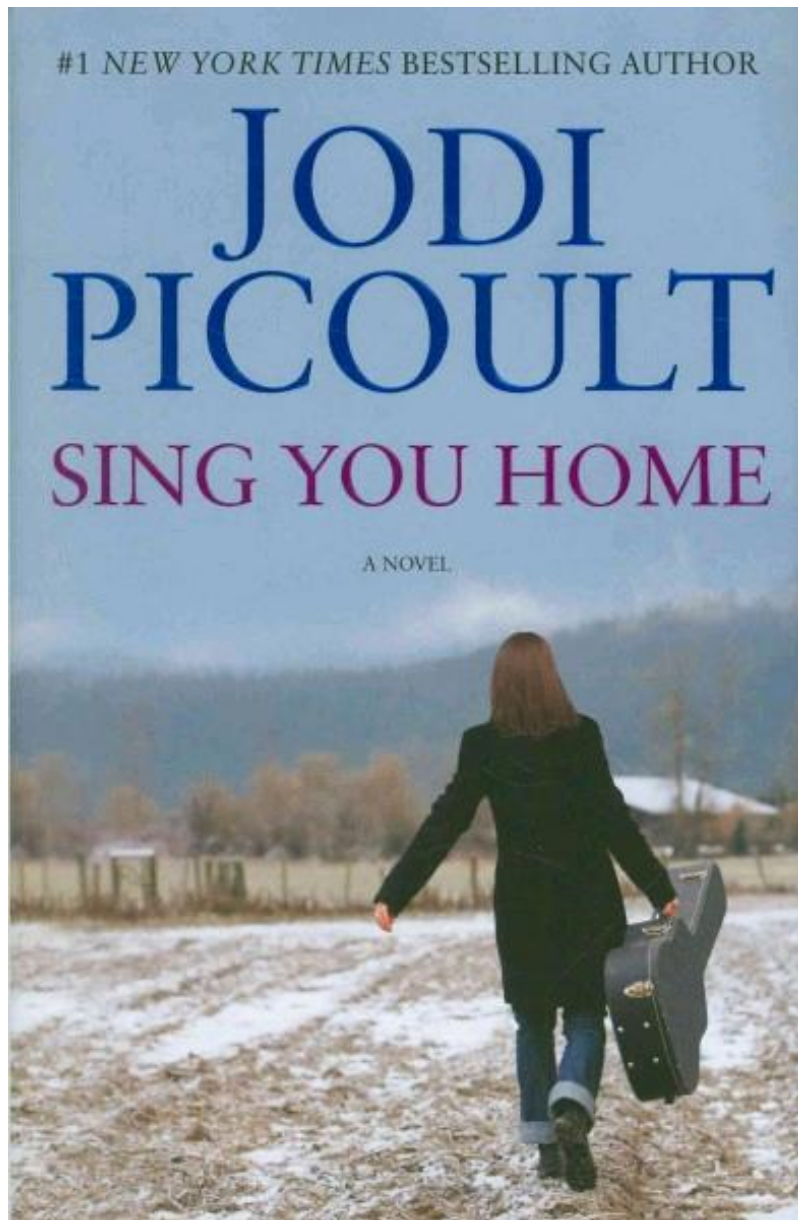


About the book...



Sing You Home follows the story of Zoe, Vanessa, and Max. After almost a decade of marriage and unsuccessful attempts to conceive with the aid of fertility treatments, Zoe and Max Baxter divorce and begin building their own separate lives. Max finds himself staring at the bottom of a bottle, until he finds salvation in the conservative Eternal Glory Church after a near-fatal, alcohol-induced car accident.

Meanwhile, Zoe, a music therapist, befriends Vanessa and their friendship ultimately blossoms into love. Soon after marrying, the two decide to try for a baby using the three remaining embryos from Zoe and Max's fertility treatments—a decision that brings Max and his new Christian community crashing into their lives. An emotionally draining court trial for custody of the embryos ensues, testing the limits of faith, love, and the definition of family.

About the author...



Jodi Lynn Picoult was born on May 19, 1966, in Nesconset on Long Island in New York. Her family moved to New Hampshire when she was 13. Although she left New Hampshire for college and her early jobs, she settled there again as a married woman. She currently lives in Hanover, New Hampshire with her husband, Tim Van Leer, and their three children, Sammy, Kyle and Jake.

Picoult studied writing at Princeton University, where she earned her bachelor's degree. She also earned a master's degree in education from Harvard University.

Picoult wrote her first story, "The Lobster which Misunderstood," when she was five. While at Princeton, she published two stories in *Seventeen* magazine. She wrote her first novel, [*Songs of the Humpback Whale*](#), while she was pregnant with her first child, and published it in 1992.

Picoult's novels usually deal with ethical issues and are told from a variety of viewpoints, with each chapter written in a different character's voice. Picoult uses this technique to show multiple sides of a situation and underscore areas of moral ambiguity.

Reviews

Booklist

Popular author Picoult tackles the controversial topic of gay rights in her latest powerful tale. When music therapist Zoe Baxter's latest pregnancy ends in a stillbirth, her husband Max decides he can't handle any more heartbreak and leaves her. As she picks up the pieces of her life, Zoe is surprised to find herself falling for a school counselor who happens to be a woman. While Zoe is finding happiness with Vanessa, Max falls off the wagon and is helped by a pastor from his brother's evangelical church. Vanessa and Zoe wed in Massachusetts, and Vanessa offers to carry one of the fertilized embryos Zoe and Max stored. Excited by the prospect of being a mother, Zoe goes to Max to get him to release the embryos to her and is shocked when he instead sues her for custody of them, backed by his church. Told from the perspectives of all three major characters, Picoult's gripping novel explores all sides of the hot-button issue and offers a CD of folk songs that reflect Zoe's feelings throughout the novel. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: The always topical Picoult plans a multimedia tour to more than two dozen cities with Ellen Wilber, who will perform the songs she and Picoult wrote together.

Library Journal

After years of infertility, it looks as if Zoe and Max Baxter are finally going to have the baby they've longed for. But when their hopes are dashed by a miscarriage and their

marriage collapses, Max escapes, first into alcoholism then into religion, while Zoe concentrates on her career as a music therapist. While working with a troubled teen at a local high school, Zoe begins a friendship with Vanessa, the school guidance counselor, which unexpectedly blossoms into love. Zoe again begins thinking of starting a family, specifically with the three embryos she and Max have in cold storage at the fertility clinic. VERDICT Never one to shy away from controversial issues, this time Picoult ([House Rules](#)) tackles gay rights, reproductive science, and the Christian right. She forces us to consider both sides of these hot topics with her trademark impeccable research, family dynamics, and courtroom drama. Sure to be a hit with her myriad fans and keep the book clubs buzzing; includes a CD of original songs by Picoult and musician Ellen Wilber, which correspond to the chapters in the book.

Publishers Weekly

Picoult's overstuffed latest (after [House Rules](#)) is stretched just to the breaking point. Max and Zoe's marriage, stressed by infertility problems and miscarriages, is finally destroyed by a stillborn baby. After their divorce, Max moves in with his brother and sister-in-law, Reid and Liddy, and backslides into self-destructive drinking, while Zoe devotes herself to music therapy (the book is accompanied by a CD in Zoe's voice, with awkward lyrics by Picoult) and develops a friendship with guidance counselor Vanessa that eventually turns into love and marriage. Max, meanwhile, converts to an evangelical brand of Christianity that pits him against Zoe when she

asks Max for permission to use their frozen embryos. Max's discomfort with Zoe's same-sex relationship and his desire to repay Reid and Liddy, who have their own fertility problems, mean a legal battle looms. Picoult abandons her usual efforts to present an equal view of both sides of an issue—Max is a pitiful right-wing puppet; Zoe, Vanessa, and their attorney are saintly—but her devoted fans will nevertheless find everything they expect: big emotion, diligent research, legal conflict, and a few twists at the end.

Discussion questions

(<http://books.simonandschuster.com>)

1. An original, accompanying soundtrack is available for *Sing You Home*. Listen to the soundtrack with your book club members and discuss how the song choices reinforce or affect your reading. In what way did having a soundtrack enhance your understanding of Zoe's "voice"? If you had to create a soundtrack for this book, what songs would you include? Explain your choices.

2. Zoe also claims that "music is the language of memory" and has the power to reach through even the darkest corners of dementia and awaken long-forgotten memories. Are there any songs or albums that remind you of a certain time or place in your life? Do you think it's a blessing or a

curse to be reminded of such memories through music?

3. *Sing You Home* is narrated by three different protagonists, each with their own unique voice and personality. Did this narrative device work for you as a reader? Do you think Zoe's story would've been portrayed differently if there had only been one narrator? Why or why not?

4. Change and metamorphosis are reoccurring ideas in *Sing You Home*. In your opinion, which characters changed the most? Which characters remained the same?

5. On page 75, Max reflects on the nature of change: "Actually, when you turn into someone you don't recognize, you feel nothing at all." Do you think this is true in all instances? How would you describe periods of self-discovery and metamorphosis like those Zoe experiences?

6. How do Zoe's struggles as a music therapist to Lucy give you insight into her character?

7. Whether it's an expert witness discussing the scientific proof of physiological differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals or Vanessa talking about experiences unique to the gay dating world, great attention is paid to the differences between gay and straight relationships

throughout the novel. Do you think the story features any universal dating realities and relationship experiences that transcend different sexual orientations? Explain your answer.

8. Vanessa's mother and Zoe's mother have very different reactions when her daughter says, "I'm gay." Are both mothers justified in their reactions? Discuss.

9. During the trial, Max's attorney brings in expert psychologist Dr. Newkirk to discuss the detriment of same-sex parent households on children. Dr. Newkirk's argument is that a child needs the influence of both genders to ensure healthy development. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Do you think the family structure ultimately created by Zoe, Vanessa, and Max is a healthy one?

10. When Zoe has doubts about being able to raise a son, her mom tells her, "It's not gender that makes a family; it's love. You don't need a mother and a father; you don't necessarily even need two parents. You just need someone who's got your back.'" (p. 374) Do you agree with her? Explain your answer.

11. During his sermon, Pastor Clive argues against homosexuality by saying, "After all, I like swimming . . . but that doesn't make me a fish." (p. 399) Do you think

his fish analogy is relevant? Do you find his interpretation of sexuality more or less accurate than Vanessa's assertion that "we're all just wired differently." (p. 111)

12. When Max says to Zoe, "God forgives you," she replies, "God should know there's nothing to forgive." (p. 406) Their statements are diametrically opposite, and they spend almost the entire novel arguing their beliefs to each other. Do you think both sides' arguments were equally represented in the novel? Which points from either side did you find most compelling or convincing? Which points did you find most difficult to hear?

13. When Max seeks guidance from Pastor Clive as to how he should react to Zoe's new relationship with Vanessa, Pastor Clive tells him a story about Pastor Wallace, who allowed homosexuals into his congregation. Pastor Clive believes that Pastor Wallace is a model for tolerance and that, while homosexuality shouldn't be accepted, gay members of the church should be tolerated. Do you believe Pastor Clive practices what he preaches in the novel? What about when he says that the Eternal Glory Church isn't "anti-gay" but rather "pro-Christ"? (p. 219) Is tolerance even possible without acceptance? Explain.

14. Despite being about a very specific relationship and a unique court case, *Sing You Home* addresses universal

themes and ideas regarding family, love, and acceptance. Do you think this story reaches a wide audience, despite its unique specificities? Did you connect with the characters? Why or why not?

15. Several different story lines are left unresolved, such as Lucy's story and why she made allegations against Zoe, and how Max and Liddy eventually get married. Are there any subplots you wish the author had resolved or delved into more thoroughly? Are there any that you would've resolved differently?

Readalikes (*Books & Authors*)

[*The First Gardener*](#) by Denise Hildreth Jones (2011)

The First Gardener tells the story of Jeremiah Williams, a mild-mannered gardener who cares for the grounds of the Tennessee governor's mansion. He watches as the governor and his wife, Mackenzie, first struggle to have a child, only to be overjoyed at the eventual birth of their daughter. But then tragedy hits the family, and Mackenzie is left floating in a sea of loss. Jeremiah is greatly affected by Mackenzie's situation, and he gingerly makes his way into her life, helping her come to terms with her grief and urging her to give life a second chance.

[*Rescue*](#) by Anita Shreve (2010)

In *Rescue*, bestselling author Anita Shreve crafts an

emotional family drama centering on paramedic Peter Webster, his estranged wife Sheila, and their troubled daughter Rowan. After Peter rescued Sheila from a drunk-driving accident she caused, the two fell in love, married, and had Rowan. But years have passed, and Sheila, who has never confronted her drinking, has now disappeared from Peter and Rowan's life. Rowan, however, has developed serious issues of her own, and in order to combat them, Peter reaches out to the one person he hopes can help her: her mother.

[Evening News](#) by Marly Swick (1999)

This novel's opening scene shows nine-year-old Teddy accidentally shooting Trina, his two-year-old half sister. Giselle, their mother, realizes that the ideal and happy life her family has been living will never be the same. Dan, Trina's father and Teddy's stepfather, cannot forgive his stepson and Teddy is left wondering if anyone will ever love him again. His salvation seems to come from his father who is living in Nebraska where Teddy, and eventually his mother, go to heal their wounded hearts.

[The Good Mother](#) by Sue Miller (1986)

Recent divorcee Anna Dunlap's life is dominated by her powerful love for her daughter Molly, but she's not sure that she's really a good mother. Soon she meets Leo, a passionate artist who awakens her, for the first time, to all the possibilities of adult love. She loves Leo and wonders whether she's letting her daughter take a back seat to her new relationship. When her two loves come into

unexpected and brutal conflict, Anna must make a devastating choice.

[The Secret between Us](#) by Barbara Delinsky (2008)

Deborah Monroe is a respected family doctor, and her daughter Grace is a star student and athlete. While they are traveling home on a rainy night, they have a rare fight, and they are involved in an accident in which a pedestrian is badly injured. Deborah sends her teenaged daughter home and pretends she was the driver. The victim turns out to be Grace's history teacher, and when he eventually dies, his family sues Deborah. Grace's feelings of guilt are greatly amplified both by their secret and by the fact that she had two beers prior to the accident. The situation is complicated by the actions of family members.

[To Be Sung Underwater](#) by Tom McNeal (2011)

Judith Whitman is a middle-aged woman who appears to be living the good life. A movie editor, she lives with her husband and teenage daughter in Los Angeles. Yet her marriage and career feel stale and stagnant, and Judith longs for more. When her husband comes home with a new bedroom suite for her daughter, Judith's life begins to take a bizarre turn. She rents a storage unit and decorates it with her daughter's former bedroom set, which was hers as a teen. As she sits inside the unit, she is mentally transported to her own teenage-hood, when life was simpler and her heart belonged to a boy named Willy. Judith wonders what it might be like to reconnect with the

lover of her past, and whether or not the grass is always greener on the other side.

Readalikes : *(NoveList)*

[*Faith*](#) by Jennifer Haigh (2011)

When her older brother Art--the popular, dynamic pastor of a large suburban parish--finds himself at the center of the scandal, Sheila McGann, estranged from her family for years, returns to Boston, ready to fight for him and his reputation--until she discovers the truth.

[*The Art of Mending*](#) by Elizabeth Berg (2004)

Returning home for a family reunion, Laura Bartone and her brother, Steve, are stunned by their sister's allegations of shocking behavior on the part of their mother, and must come to terms with the truth and lies within their family.



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