

Mad Honey Discussion Questions

by Jodi Picoult, & Jennifer Finney Boylan

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Authors Website)

Jodi Picoult received a degree in creative writing from Princeton and a Master's degree in Education from Harvard. Jodi lives in New Hampshire with her husband and three children.

Picoult's books have been translated into thirty-four languages in thirty-five countries. Four novels – *The Pact*, *Plain Truth*, *The Tenth Circle*, and *Salem Falls* - have been made into television movies. *Mad Honey* is currently in development for a series/film.



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Jennifer Finney Boylan (born James Richard Boylan, Jr, in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania) is an American author and professor at Colby College in Maine. She has openly discussed being a trans woman.

She lives in New York City, and in Belgrade Lakes, Maine, with her wife, Deedie. They have a son, Sean and a daughter, Zai.

Characters:

- **Liv (Olivia) McAfee** – Beekeeper. Lives on a farm. Zoologist. Older brother, Jordan is a lawyer. Her ex-husband is Braden Fields. Moved back to Adams, NH after her divorce. Has a son, Asher.
- **Lily Campanello** – Asher's girlfriend. Senior in high school. Only been in town for a year. Lives with her mother, Ava, and their dog Boris. Likes to read and enjoys facts and information. Plays cello. Has scars on her arms.
- **Maya Banerjee** – Lily's best friend. Plays oboe. Has 2 moms. Has known Asher since kindergarten.
- **Honorable Rhonda Byers** – Judge in the trial.
- **Ava Campanello** – Lily's mother. Forest ranger. Divorced. Recently moved to the area.
- **Dirk** – Co-captain of the hockey team. Asher's friend.
- **Asher Fields** – (18) – Liv McAfee's son. Senior in high school. Plays hockey. Co-captain.
- **Braden Fields** – Cardiac Surgeon. Liv's ex-husband and Asher's father. Remarried (Margot) with two kids, Shane and Shawn.
- **Edgar / Elizabeth** – Owner of the Edgar's Music shop. Transgender woman. Used to be Edgar. Is now Elizabeth/Lizzy.
- **Gina Jewett** – Prosecutor.
- **Jordan McAfee** – Liv's older brother. Attorney. His second wife, Selena, is his investigator. They have a son, Sam.

- **Lieutenant Mike Newcomb** – Detective for the Adams, New Hampshire Police Department. Knew Liv when she was in high school in Adams.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The story is told from both Liv and Lily's viewpoints and switches between Liv's present day and Lily's past. Did you like the way the story was set up? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the title, ***Mad Honey***, was chosen? What does it represent to the story as a whole?
4. What surprised you about ***Mad Honey***? Did you have any emotional reactions? Discuss.
5. Both Olivia and Lily share a love for fun facts, especially about bees. What is the significance of having these bee facts in the book; is there one that particularly stood out to you?
6. In many ways, Asher and Lily are two sides of the same coin. How does Asher's relationship with Braden (or lack thereof) mirror Lily's relationship with her own father and how does this contrast with the relationships they have with their mothers?
7. Olivia left behind an abusive marriage to raise her son, Asher, in her hometown in New Hampshire. She decided to keep Asher in the dark about his father's true nature. Why did Olivia want to keep that a secret?
8. Do you believe that love between a parent and child can be unconditional? Are some actions, taken by either the parent or child, beyond redemption and deemed unforgiveable? Discuss.
9. Was the volatility of Lily's relationship with Asher a red flag (a sign that a person will turn out to be - or is - a bad or problematic partner), or something that could be chalked up to a teenage relationship?
10. At one point, Jordan snaps at Asher and says, "The truth has no place in a court of law, goddammit... And since the prosecution's already painted you as an abuser and a liar, how good do you actually think your word is?" In what ways do the procedures of this trial - and the larger justice system - affect Asher and the other witnesses?
11. The court of public opinion impacts all the characters involved in the case, something we've seen continuously play out in contemporary society, especially with the popularity of social media and instant access to the news cycle. Do you think it's fair for casual observers to take sides and make assumptions about events they see and hear, and why do you think we, as a society, are so drawn to doing this?
12. As the trial is underway, a key fact is revealed: Lily was transgender. What were your thoughts as you read this? Were you surprised or did you already know? How did this reveal change everything for not just the trial but all the characters?

13. We read about Lily's past - her father's abuse when he finds out the truth about her identity and the cruelty of her classmates. Let's discuss Lily's journey.
14. For those not familiar with the transgender community, what did you learn from this novel?
15. During Elizabeth's conversation with Olivia, she says, "You know what they say: if you've met one trans person, you've...met one trans person. What's true for Lily might not be true for someone else." What do you think of that statement? Why?
16. One of Olivia's beehives is attacked by a bear, and she springs into action to save the bees, even as she knows it's a lost cause. What does this symbolize within the larger story?
17. Did you know who the killer was before it was revealed? What clues were given?
18. What do you think about the prosecutor's decision not to charge the actual killer? Do you think Mike is correct in assuming that Ava prefers this as well? Why or why not?
19. What happens next for Olivia, Asher, and Ava (Lily's mom)?
20. The authors said that Jodi wrote most of Olivia's perspective while Jennifer, who is transgender, wrote Lily's. Let's talk about the importance of representation in this story. What are your thoughts overall on the writing?
21. ***Mad Honey*** was written by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylan. Will you read anything else by one or both of them?

References:

- Jennifer Finney Boylan – <https://jenniferboylan.net/>
- Book Club Chat – <https://bookclubchat.com/books/book-club-questions-for-mad-honey-by-jodi-picoult-and-jennifer-finney-boylan/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/b/jennifer-finney-boylan/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/p/jodi-picoult/>
- Novelist – <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=3642371d-874b-419a-ad79-2cb879d690c1%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#Ul=11079723&db=neh>
- Jodi Picoult Website – <https://www.jodipicoult.com/pdfs/Mad-Honey-Book-Club-Kit.pdf>
- Reading Group Guides – <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/mad-honey/guide>

Jodi Picoult's Books

Series

Between the Lines (with Samantha van Leer)

1. Between the Lines (2012)
2. Off the Page (2015)

Leaving Time Stories

1. Where There's Smoke (2014)
2. Larger Than Life (2014)

Ruth Jefferson

- 0.5. Shine (2016)
1. Small Great Things (2015)

Stand Alone Books

- Songs of the Humpback Whale (1992)
- Harvesting the Heart (1993)
- Picture Perfect (1995)
- Mercy (1996)
- The Pact (1998)
- Keeping Faith (1999)
- Plain Truth (2000)
- Salem Falls (2001)
- Perfect Match (2002)
- Second Glance (2003)
- My Sister's Keeper (2004)
- Vanishing Acts (2005)
- The Tenth Circle (2006)
- Nineteen Minutes (2006)
- Change of Heart (2008)
- Handle with Care (2009)
- House Rules (2010)
- Sing You Home (2011)
- Lone Wolf (2012)
- The Storyteller (2013)
- Leaving Time (2014)
- A Spark of Light (2018)
- The Book of Two Ways (2020)
- Wish You Were Here (2021)
- Mad Honey (2022) (with Jennifer Finney Boylan)
- By Any Other Name (2024)

Jennifer Finney Boylan's Adult Books

- Long Black Veil (2017)
- Mad Honey (2022) (with Jodi Picoult)

If you liked Mad Honey, try...

- Miracle Creek – Angie Kim
- A Time for Mercy – John Grisham
- A Nearly Normal Family – MT Edvardsson
- When We Were Bright and Beautiful – Jillian Medoff
- No One Can Know – Kate Alice Marshall