

*Every now and then, a book strikes a chord with you. In the midst of a memoir binge mid-pandemic, I read Jodi Picoult's 25th novel, Small Great Things. Cloaked in nuance, this racially-charged tale has more twists and turns than the morality of the antagonist. Rich in tension, and uncomfortably challenging, this novel accurately depicts experiences of what it really feels like to be black and serves as a pertinent reminder that none of us are as progressive as we think we are.*

*In the labour ward, African-American widowed nurse (Ruth Jefferson) meets Neo-Nazi, Aryan brotherhood member, Turk Bauer, and his wife Brit. When Turk's son, Davis, is born, Turk takes pains to ensure that no black personnel touch him. After a routine procedure, Davis remains under constant monitoring, but another crisis in the ICU ensues and Ruth is left with Davis unsupervised. When the newborn turns blue and Ruth hesitates, unsure whether to or not to administer life-saving care, Davis dies. Ruth's licence is suspended and she finds herself in court represented by public defender, Kennedy McQuarrie.*

*Even as a lawyer, I was not put off by courtroom kerfuffles. The Bauer's representative is also an African-American woman (Odette), adamant that the murder charge against Ruth has not been invoked because of race. The insight into jury selection shows the US system is a far cry from the goings on of the Royal Courts of Justice. The tussle throughout between Ruth and Kennedy is marvellous – a positive example being informed by another's perspective. The dialogue is lightened intermittently by humorous tidbits from Kennedy's daughter, Violet, and husband, Micah.*

*At first, Kennedy claims not to see race at all; by the end of the book she's unable to see anything but race. Whereas Ruth goes from feeling like her peers to realising she was "tolerated not welcomed", and "was, and will always be, different [...] because of the colour of [her] skin".*

*As a female black professional, I have felt like Ruth at times, reminded that in a world of inequality, we must strive for equity. Reductionist conversations about such things being "woke" are thankfully absent from Picoult's erudite narrative. I found the need for all of the characters to go through their own process of unlearning incredibly satisfying.*

*Readers of this novel should expect to be scrutinised and exposed; Small Great Things is a timely call to action.*