

Leaving Time by Jodi Picoult

Discussion Questions

1. Despite their different backgrounds, Jenna, Serenity, and Virgil form a sort of unconventional family together. What do you think brings them together? Have you ever had a similar experience of finding support from an unlikely source?
2. Alice says that 98 percent of science is quantifiable, leaving 2 percent "that can't be measured or explained. And yet that does not mean it doesn't exist." (p. 392) Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of examples from the book or from your own experience of something that fits into that 2 percent?
3. Virgil grapples with helping Jenna when he suspects discovering the truth might be more painful to her than never knowing. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew a truth that it might hurt someone to hear? What did you do?
4. Serenity's fake psychic readings are successful, she says, because people look for sense in the nonsensical. Do you agree or disagree? If a psychic reading brings someone comfort or helps them grieve, do you think it matters if the message is faked?
5. Jenna meets up with another character at the very end of the book. (pp. 394-395) Were you surprised to see who that was? Why or why not?
6. Alice describes some amazing examples of elephants appearing to exhibit grief and empathy, which are drawn from real-life research. Discuss some of the ways elephant grief is depicted. How is it the same as human mourning? How is it different?
7. One of the major themes of *Leaving Time* is loss and how to cope with it. Discuss some of the ways the characters in this novel deal with their losses. Do you identify with any of these coping mechanisms more than others? How do you approach loss?
8. Do you think Thomas's erratic and upsetting behavior justifies Alice's affair with Gideon? What would you have done in Alice's place?
9. Jenna compares her search for her mother to Captain Ahab's search for the whale in *Moby-Dick*, or Javert hunting Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*, saying they are all three defined by their search. Do you agree with this assessment? Have you ever felt defined in this way by something you wanted?

10. Why do you think Serenity loses her gift? And why do you think Jenna is able to help bring it back?
11. Do you believe in ghosts? If you could communicate with anyone who has passed away, who would it be?
12. Discuss the significance of the title Leaving Time. What is the literal meaning that Jenna ascribes to the phrase as a baby? What are some other ways the title could be interpreted?
13. "Negative moments get remembered. Traumatic ones get forgotten." (p. 12) What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree? Have you ever experienced something and discovered later that someone else remembers it completely differently?