

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF 'THE NOTEBOOK'

cameron diaz

abigail breslin

my sister's keeper

alec baldwin jason patric sofia vassilieva and joan cusack

NEW LINE CINEMA PRESENTS A MARK JOHNSON/CURMUDGEON/SCOTT L. GOLDMAN PRODUCTION A NICK CASSAVETES FILM CAMERON DIAZ ABIGAIL BRESLIN

"MY SISTER'S KEEPER" ALEC BALDWIN JASON PATRIC SOFIA VASSILIEVA AND JOAN CUSACK

CASTING BY MATTHEW BARRY AND NANCY GREEN-KEYS COSTUME DESIGNER SHAY CUNLIFFE

MUSIC BY AARON ZIGMAN PRODUCERS CO-PRODUCERS HILLARY SHERMAN STEVEN POSEN

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DIANA POKORNY STEPHEN FURST MENDEL TROPPER TOBY EMMERICH

MERIDETH FINN MARK KAUFMAN BASED ON THE NOVEL BY JODI PICCOLI SCREENPLAY BY JEREMY LEVEN AND NICK CASSAVETES

PRODUCED BY MARK JOHNSON CHUCK PACHECO SCOTT L. GOLDMAN DIRECTED BY NICK CASSAVETES

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13
MATURE THEMATIC CONTENT, SOME DISTURBING IMAGES,
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www.mysisterskeepermovie.com

based on the best-selling novel

june 26

My Sister's Keeper Discussion Guide

A discussion guide for teen educators and families to accompany the movie and book, *My Sister's Keeper*, for ages 13 and up.

www.mysisterskeepermovie.com

www.youthFILMproject.org



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INTRODUCTION

Sara and Brian Fitzgerald's life with their young son and their two-year-old daughter, Kate, is forever altered when they learn that Kate has leukemia. The parents' only hope is to conceive another child, specifically intended to save Kate's life. For some, such genetic engineering would raise both moral and ethical questions; for the Fitzgeralds, Sara in particular, there is no choice but to do whatever it takes to keep Kate alive. And what it takes is Anna.

Kate (Sofia Vassilieva) and Anna (Abigail Breslin) share a bond closer than most sisters: though Kate is older, she relies on her little sister—in fact, her life depends on Anna.

Throughout their young lives, the sisters endure various medical procedures and hospital stays—just another part of their close-knit family's otherwise normal life. Sara (Cameron Diaz), a loving wife and mother who left her career as an attorney to care for her daughter, is sometimes lost inside the single-minded caregiver she has become in her efforts to save Kate. Her strong, supportive husband, Brian (Jason Patric), is often rendered powerless and passive by his wife's strength and determination. And their only son, Jesse (Evan Ellingson), drifts, at times all but forgotten as Kate and Anna take center stage.

Until Anna, now 11, says no. Seeking medical emancipation, she hires her own lawyer (Alec Baldwin), initiating a court case that divides the family...and that could leave Kate's rapidly failing body in the hands of fate.

Based on the bestselling book from Jodi Picoult, *My Sister's Keeper* reveals surprising truths that challenge one's perceptions of family love and loyalty and give new meaning to the definition of healing.

This F.I.L.M. discussion guide is structured for use after reading the book and viewing the movie. It offers discussion topics based on the central themes in the story.



"My Sister's Keeper" PG-13 Rating – 12 / 19 / 08

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An Affinity Group of the
National Human Services Assembly

F.I.L.M.
Finding Inspiration in Literature & Movies



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Steps to Take with *My Sister's Keeper* Discussion Guide

Step 1) Read the book and see the movie

The Book: *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, published in 2003 became a bestseller gaining numerous honors and awards. Learn more about the book at www.jodipicoult.com/my-sisters-keeper.html

The Movie: *My Sister's Keeper*, a New Line Cinema production, in theaters on June 26, 2009 and is rated PG-13.

Step 2) Discuss and explore central themes and key issues

Take part in meaningful discussions about:

- Different roles in a family
- The struggle of loyalty and independence
- The impact of terminal illness on a family
- Medical ethics and rights

Step 3) Take the Lead to Help Others

There are a variety of activities and projects that can help raise awareness and offer support to those affected by terminal illness. From one-on-one support to community-wide events, find tips and information on how to execute service projects in the free, downloadable service-learning supplement available online at www.youthFILMproject.org.



(L-r) Anna (ABIGAIL BRESLIN), Kate (SOFIA VASSILIEVA) and Jesse (EVAN ELLINGSON) pose inside a photo booth in New Line Cinema's drama "My Sister's Keeper," a Warner Bros. Pictures release. Photo Courtesy of New Line Cinema

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the questions that follow to spark meaningful conversation across these various themes in the story:

- Different roles in a family
- The struggle of loyalty and independence
- The impact of terminal illness on a family
- Medical ethics and rights

As you read through the discussion guide, if a particular theme or question especially resonates with your group, spend more time discussing it. It is not necessary to cover every theme or question in the sections that follow. You might find that discussion about one theme naturally leads to questions related to a different theme. Allow the group to guide the nature and pace of the discussion.

The questions will also explore some of the differences between the book and movie, and provide opportunity for discussion about the impact of those differences in the story.



(L-r) SOFIA VASSILIEVA as Kate, CAMERON DIAZ as Sara and ABIGAIL BRESLIN as Anna in New Line Cinema's drama "My Sister's Keeper," a Warner Bros. Pictures release.
Photo by Sidney Baldwin

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Different Roles in a Family

The members of the Fitzgerald family each exemplify a role or “place” in their family structure. For example, it’s easy to see that Jesse is troubled, Anna is a martyr and Brian, the Dad, a peacekeeper. Roles exist in every family unit. Explore the reasons and depths of these roles in the following questions, as well the impact of these roles on others.

- What role does Kate play in the family? How do you think she handles her “place” in the family?
- Anna feels her only role is to be a donor for Kate. Do other members of the family feel Anna fulfills any other roles? If so, describe them.
- In the book, Jesse’s character is expanded upon in greater depth and detail than in the movie. He engages in destructive behavior towards himself and his environment, including smoking, drinking and setting fires. He also physically lives a separate life from the rest of the family in a room over the garage. Despite all of this, he demonstrates a clear love and loyalty for both of his sisters. Why do you think this is so?
- Why do you think Jesse is troubled, and what factors contribute to his behavior?
- Describe Sara. Other than being the mother, what role(s) does she play in the family and situation?
- Discuss the subjectivity of Sara as a mother in contrast to being the attorney in court defending one daughter against the other.
- Brian works to hold the family together and be understanding of the needs and desires of the children, more so than his own. Compare and contrast his profession as a firefighter with his peacekeeping role in the family.
- Do you think people have a choice in what their role or “place” is in a family? Why or why not? Do you play a role in your family? If so, what is it?



CAMERON DIAZ as Sara and JASON PATRIC as Brian in New Line Cinema’s drama “My Sister’s Keeper,” a Warner Bros. Pictures release. The film also stars Abigail Breslin.
Photo Courtesy of New Line Cinema

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The Struggle of Loyalty and Independence

Several characters in the story experience a deep struggle between their sense of loyalty to each other and their desire for independence and freedom. This struggle is a prominent theme displayed in a variety of different ways, however the bond of the family remains amidst the toll these various struggles take.

- The most obvious struggle is Anna's in her decision to pursue legal action. How does this decision affect her relationship with the other members of her family?
- Why did Anna take such extreme measures? Do you think she was brave to do so, or naïve? Discuss both of these aspects.
- Since Kate is too weak to fight for her own independence, she turns to Anna for help. Discuss the depth of loyalty the sisters have for one another, and their ultimate sacrifice for one another.
- How does Jesse struggle with being a part of the family yet separate from them? Why do you think Jesse feels so conflicted?
- Brian, in his way, supports Anna in her struggle and legal stand the only way he can. What conflict does he feel, and how does he express it?
- Campbell is a savvy attorney appearing to not have a lot of heart. Why do you think he took Anna's case? Do you believe his reasons changed from the beginning to the end, and if so, how?
- Do you think Campbell struggles with independence and loyalty? If so, in what ways, and to whom?
- Are there internal struggles that you face each day? What are they and how do you deal with them?



(L-r) Campbell Alexander (ALEC BALDWIN) and Sara (CAMERON DIAZ) speak with Judge DeSalvo (JOAN CUSACK) in New Line Cinema's drama "My Sister's Keeper," a Warner Bros. Pictures release. The film also stars Abigail Breslin. Photo Courtesy of New Line Cinema

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The Impact of Terminal Illness on a Family

The severity of Kate's diagnosis at such a young age ultimately shapes the dynamic of the Fitzgerald family. Instead of a typical life full of friends, school activities, sports, hobbies and vacations, they spend life revolving in and out of hospitals and doctors' offices treating or anticipating Kate's next medical emergency.

- Discuss how Kate's illness affects Jesse, being the older brother who got to experience a time with his family when things were "normal." Is it surprising to you that Jesse goes down the path that he does?
- In the book, why do you think Jesse chooses pyromania as his escape from all the pain? Discuss the symbolism and irony of that. Do you think he wants someone to stop or save him from the family "fire", and could he ultimately want it to be his dad?
- Brian's personality in the family environment is not as aggressive as Sara's. Do you think Jesse or the other children may want or need their dad to stop their mother from being so obsessive about Kate's survival?
- What are the emotional consequences of Sara's intensity in regards to Kate on the other members of the family?
- With Sara being an aggressive and intense personality to begin with, how do you think Kate's diagnosis and condition affects Sara?
- Discuss the different extremes that every member of the family went to because of Kate's illness.
- What do you think it's like to be Kate, the one with the terminal illness? Discuss the differences between the ending of the book and the movie in this context.
- If Kate were a healthy child, how different do you think the Fitzgerald's life would be? Describe how you envision the family roles and personalities of each family member in this alternate scenario.
- Have you ever experienced a change in your family dynamic? If so, how did you respond to it?

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Medical Ethics and Rights

This story brings about the ethical dilemma of genetically engineering people to exist for a specific purpose that is not their own. Genetic engineering is a fascinating topic full of debate, and the story provides a good basis and starting point for discussion around the topics of medical ethics and rights.

- Do you think it was right for Brian and Sara to conceive Anna the way they did? Why or why not? What do you think you would do if you were in their position?
- The book and the movie don't end in the exact same way. The book has an added twist that the movie does not include, yet both include the same decision made by the judge. Why do you think the judge ultimately makes the decision that is made in the case?
- Think about what had happened to the judge's own child as well. How does that add to the complexity and subjectivity of the situation? Do you think that affected the decision?
- If you read the book or know how it ends, discuss what you think about what happened at the end that is different than the movie. Were you surprised at the outcome? Do you believe that the alternate endings make certain statements about Anna's existence and the fact that she was genetically engineered? Why?
- What do you think in terms of what's medically possible versus what's ethically and/or morally right? Just because something is medically possible, do you think it makes it right to do it? Why or why not?
- Stem cell research is a term you may be familiar with. It is a source of heated debate in today's society and medical community. While this term is not used specifically in the story, it is the medical basis by which Anna could be "genetically engineered" as a donor match for Kate. Learn more about stem cell research here:
 - stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics/basics1.asp
 - www.stemcellresearch.org
- Discuss scenarios where you think these advancements and capabilities can be helpful or harmful to people and society.

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Taking the Lead

You can help people with terminal illnesses and their families by learning more about them and contributing to their cause. Help raise awareness about an illness and contribute to finding treatments and cures by participating in races, charity drives and/or volunteering your time with any of the following well-known organizations dedicated to research and finding cures for different diseases. Find out what's happening in your community and get involved!

St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital

www.stjude.org

Children's Cancer Research Fund

www.childrenscancer.org

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

www.leukemia.org

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure

ww5.komen.org

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

www.cff.org

The Desi Geestman Foundation

www.desigeestmanfoundation.org

Organize your own community effort with the help of the service-learning supplement available at **www.youthFILMproject.org**. This supplement, created in conjunction with Youth Service America, provides all the information you will need to organize and execute a community service project.

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My Sister's Keeper Post Program Evaluation

Please take a few moments to answer the questions in the evaluation for *My Sister's Keeper Discussion Guide* at www.youthFILMproject.org/evaluations.

We value your feedback; your comments and stories can help inspire others and keep the F.I.L.M. Project alive.

Please visit www.youthFILMproject.org/evaluations at the completion of this curriculum and tell us what you think. You can also send your stories to FILMinfo@trulymovingpictures.org

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely yours,

The FILM team

The F.I.L.M. Team
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The F.I.L.M. Project is made possible through the partnership of Heartland Truly Moving Pictures and the National Collaboration for Youth. Heartland is a nonprofit organization that seeks to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey.

The National Collaboration for Youth is a nonprofit organization providing a unified voice for its coalition of more than 50 national, nonprofit, youth development organizations, and concentrates on improving the conditions of youth in the United States and enabling youth to realize their full capabilities.

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