

**THE RIGHT WRONG THING**  
READER'S GUIDE

1. “The trouble with women in policing is men,” says Jacqueline Reagon, the new Kenilworth police chief in THE RIGHT WRONG THING. When the novel opens, we learn the department is under pressure to add female officers. What are some of the difficulties that a woman faces in a male-dominated world like policing? What conflicts does rookie officer Randy Spelling face that make her job more complicated to navigate?
2. When we first meet rookie officer Randy Spelling, she’s described as an excellent police candidate: “Psychologically stable, good impulse control, no problems with anger, not excessively vulnerable to stress or substance abuse, extraverted, and optimistic.” Why do you think these qualities make for a good police officer?
3. The job of police officers frequently brings them into contact – and conflict – with civilians suffering from mental illness, drug addiction and homelessness. What are the downsides to having these larger social problems dealt with by law enforcement? How do you think police could interact with more effectively with troubled civilians?
4. In THE RIGHT WRONG THING, rookie Randy Spelling shoots and kills an unarmed and pregnant African American teenager. Was this an accident? Implicit bias?
5. Central to THE RIGHT WRONG THING is the concept of moral injury, “the damage done to one’s conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one’s own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct.” (<http://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/about-moral-injury/>) Moral injury is most frequently associated with soldiers because of the extreme situations faced in war zones, but police officers also suffer from this. How does Randy Spelling, the young cop at the center of the book, deal with her “moral injury”? How is her dilemma affected by her being a woman in a male-dominated profession?
6. Along with moral injury, THE RIGHT WRONG THING deals extensively with PTSD -- post-traumatic stress disorder. What are some of the similarities between moral injury and PTSD? What are some of the differences? Were you surprised to learn how PTSD can affect memory and behavior?
7. THE RIGHT WRONG THING features a therapist who refers to herself as a “Christian psychologist” who says that “police officers are ministers of God’s authority on this earth, as it says in Romans, and as such are in a spiritual war against the forces of evil.” How might having this view of one’s profession help some police officers? How might it be problematic?

8. "Cops love to Monday morning quarterback," Dot Meyerhoff muses. "They want to believe that they're invincible. Blame someone for making a mistake, convince yourself that you'd have done something different, and presto, you banish random violence and your own human limitations." Does this belief support police officers in their jobs? Is it realistic? How might it create problems for officers?
9. After she mistakenly shoots and kills Lakeisha Gibbs, Randy despairingly says, "I'm one of the boys now because I killed someone." She also remarks, "Everyone wants me to man up and keep my mouth shut. I want to own up and admit it" by apologizing to Lakeisha's family. What does this say about concepts of masculinity associated with police work?
10. Do you think apologizing to Lakeisha's family would have been the right thing for Randy to do? Why or why not?
11. How does Chief Reagon's past tragedy affect her present decisions? What do you think she was trying to accomplish by making an appearance at Lakeisha's funeral?
12. "Cops have a long list of reasons not to talk," Dot reflects. "They think only other cops can understand what they go through at work. They want their homes to be sanctuaries, uncontaminated by the tragedy and cruelty they see every day. And they have secrets." Is this fallacy of uniqueness true? What should cops tell their families, what should they keep to themselves and why? How is Dot like a cop in her personal behavior?