
Martin County Library System Book Discussion Kit:

Tom Lake by Ann Patchett

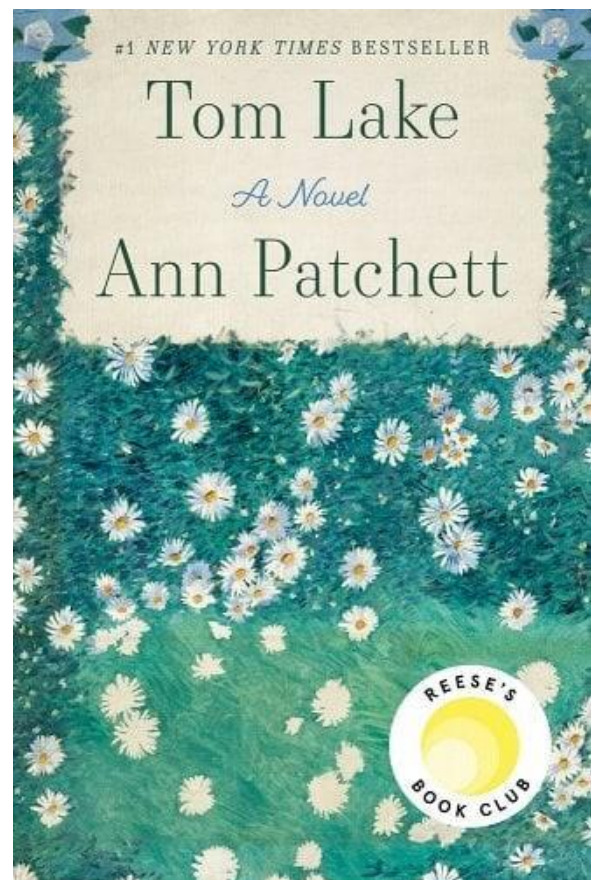
Included in the Kit:

- [Book summary](#)
- [Author biography](#)
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Book Summary:

In this beautiful and moving novel about family, love, and growing up, Ann Patchett once again proves herself one of America's finest writers.

In the spring of 2020, Lara's three daughters return to the family's orchard in Northern Michigan. While picking cherries, they beg their mother to tell them the story of Peter Duke, a famous actor with whom she shared both a stage and a romance years before at a theater company called Tom Lake. As Lara recalls the past, her daughters examine their own lives and relationship with their mother, and are forced to reconsider the world and everything they thought they knew.



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Tom Lake by Ann Patchett

Tom Lake is a meditation on youthful love, married love, and the lives parents have led before their children were born. Both hopeful and elegiac, it explores what it means to be happy even when the world is falling apart. As in all of her novels, Ann Patchett combines compelling narrative artistry with piercing insights into family dynamics. The result is a rich and luminous story, told with profound intelligence and emotional subtlety, that demonstrates once again why she is one of the most revered and acclaimed literary talents working today.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.annpatchett.com/>)

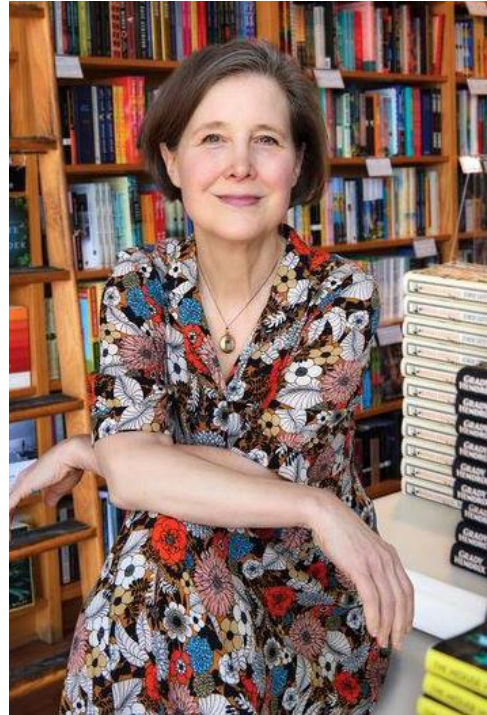


Tom Lake

by Ann Patchett

Meet the Author:

ANN PATCHETT is the author of nine novels, *The Patron Saint of Liars*, *Taft*, *The Magician's Assistant*, *Bel Canto*, *Run*, *State of Wonder*, *Commonwealth*, *The Dutch House*, and *Tom Lake*. She was the editor of *Best American Short Stories*, 2006, and has written four books of nonfiction—*Truth & Beauty*, about her friendship with the writer Lucy Grealy, *What Now?* an expansion of her graduation address at Sarah Lawrence College, *This is the Story of a Happy Marriage*, a collection of essays examining the theme of commitment, and *These Precious Days*, essays on home, family, friendship, and writing. In 2019, she published her first children's book, *Lambslide*, illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser, followed by *Escape Goat* in 2020.



A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and the Iowa Writer's Workshop, Patchett has been the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including a National Humanities Medal, England's Women's Prize, the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Harold D. Vursell Memorial Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Book Sense Book of the Year, a Guggenheim Fellowship, The Chicago Tribune's Heartland Prize, The Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, the American Bookseller's Association's Most Engaging Author Award, and the Women's National Book Association's Award. Her novel, *The Dutch House*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Her books have been both *New York Times* Notable Books and *New York Times* bestsellers. Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages.

In November, 2011, she opened Parnassus Books in Nashville, Tennessee, with her business partner Karen Hayes. She has since become a spokesperson for



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independent booksellers, championing books and bookstores on NPR, The Colbert Report (including the series finale), Oprah's Super Soul Sunday, The Martha Stewart Show, and The CBS Early Show, among many others. Along with James Patterson, she was the honorary chair of World Book Night. In 2012 she was named by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World.

Ann Patchett lives in Nashville with her husband, Karl VanDevender, and their dog, Sparky.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.annpatchett.com/>)



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Discussion Questions:

1. The story unfolds during the spring of 2020, against the backdrop of a pandemic affecting the family's cherry-picking plans. How does the pandemic context shape the characters' interactions and choices? How does it add another layer of complexity to the events of the novel?
2. Lara's daughters—Maisie, Emily, and Nell—all have their own unique paths and aspirations. How do their individual journeys mirror or contrast with Lara's experiences and choices? How do their stories contribute to the exploration of familial bonds?
3. The novel explores the concept of happiness amidst life's challenges. Can you identify moments where characters find happiness or contentment, even when faced with difficulties? How does this theme intersect with the characters' personal growth?
4. Throughout the book, there are moments of revelation and secrets coming to light. How do these surprises impact the characters and their relationships? In what ways do the hidden truths shape the trajectory of the narrative?
5. Lara's relationships—with her daughters, husband, and the people from her past—form the core of the story. How do these relationships evolve over time? How do they contribute to the overall sense of connection and belonging that the book explores?
6. The alternating timelines between Lara's past and the present add depth to the narrative. How do these shifts in time enhance your understanding of the characters and their motivations? How does the structure of the novel create a more immersive reading experience?
7. The characters often find solace and joy in the simple moments of life, such as picking cherries together. How do these everyday activities become significant in the context of the story? What do they reveal about the characters' values and priorities?





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8. Lara's journey from her theater experiences to her role in the family's orchard showcases her growth and transformation. How does Lara's character arc exemplify the themes of self-discovery and personal evolution? What lessons can we draw from her journey?
9. The novel has been praised for its exploration of ordinary living and the strength of relationships. Can you pinpoint specific instances where these themes are highlighted? How do these moments contribute to the overall atmosphere and message of the book?
10. *Tom Lake* has been described as a meditation on different forms of love and the lives led before significant moments. How do these meditations on love and past experiences enrich your understanding of the characters' motivations and choices? How do they contribute to the emotional resonance of the story?

Source: Wrote a Book website
(https://wroteabook.org/book-club-questions-for-tom-lake-by-ann-patchett/#google_vignette)

Recipes:

Michigan Cherry Salad

- 7 ounces fresh baby spinach (about 9 cups)
- 3 ounces spring mix salad greens (about 5 cups)
- 1 large apple, chopped
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped pecans, toasted
- 1/2 cup dried cherries
- 1/4 cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese



Dressing

- 1/4 cup fresh raspberries
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 3 tablespoons cherry preserves
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

In a large bowl, combine the first 6 ingredients. Place raspberries, vinegars, preserves and sugar in a blender. While processing, gradually add oil in a steady stream. Drizzle over salad; toss to coat.

Source: Taste of Home
(<https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/michigan-cherry-salad/>)

Cherry Limeade

- 1 lime, cut into wedges (optional)
- Margarita salt (optional)
- 1 (12-oz.) can frozen limeade concentrate, thawed
- 3 1/2 cups cold water
- 1/2 cup liquid from jarred red maraschino cherries
- 2 cups sparkling water
- Garnishes: lime slices, maraschino cherries



Rub rims of 8 chilled glasses with lime wedges, and dip rims in salt to coat, if desired. Stir together limeade concentrate and 3 1/2 cups cold water; add liquid from maraschino cherries.

Fill prepared glasses with ice. Pour limeade mixture into glasses, filling each two-thirds full; add sparkling water to fill. Note: We tested with San Pellegrino Sparkling Natural Mineral Water.

Source: Southern Living
(<https://www.southernliving.com/recipes/sparkling-cherry-limeade>)

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