**“Commonwealth” by Ann Patchett**

**Discussion Questions**

1. How is each child—Cal, Caroline, Holly, Jeanette, Franny, and Albie—affected by the divorce and neglect that results?  
  
2. What does it mean to become a family again in the wake of divorce? How does each child grow to respond to the family difficulties?  
  
3. In what ways are the siblings good for and to each other?  
  
4. Bert believes that his divorce, all the difficulties for the children, and his marriage to Beverly were inevitable.  
"We’re magic," he says to her. In what ways might this be true? To what extent does romantic love justify their decision?  
  
5. What influence did the time periods, especially the '60s and '70s, have on the behavior and decisions of the characters?  
  
6. What’s added to the novel by the presence of Lomer, Fix’s first partner on the police force?  
  
7. How does the ageing of the four parents—Beverly, Fix, Teresa, and Bert—affect their feelings and behavior regarding each other and the children?  
  
8. Franny falls for Leon Posen because of "the brightness in him." What might this mean? Why do you think Franny and Leo were willing to overlook their age difference?  
  
9. As adults, Jeanette suggests to Albie, perhaps in jest, that they create a family therapy plan for Holly and their mother. What does it take to repair and rebuild family relationships after so much division and tragedy?  
  
10. What do the various literary allusions (*David Copperfield, The Return of the Native, The English Patient*, T. S. Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*) bring to the novel?  
  
11. After writing his novel based on the life stories of the siblings, Leon Posen says "it’s my book," while Albie asks, "how did he end up with my life?" What are the ethical and legal issues of the situation? Should there be regulations for writing about others without their consent?  
  
12. Fix believes, "There’s no protecting anyone…keeping people safe…is a story." To what extent is this true? Why does he believe this?  
  
13. Holly chooses meditation over medication as a way of dealing with her suffering and stress. In what ways is this a healthy response to her life? What of her mother’s question of whether it’s "a real life"?  
  
14. Among other things, Holly is attempting to find inner peace. To what extent does childhood experience determine who we become? How can an unsatisfying or unhealthy self be transformed?  
  
15. Beverly admits late in her life that "other people’s children are too hard." What does she mean? In what ways is this true or not?  
  
16. Discussing their difficult past, Holly says to Teresa, "you got through it." What’s the value of this? In what ways does each character go beyond this to remake his or her life?  
  
17. Bert and Beverly’s kiss sets everything in motion for a lot of people who had no choice in the matter. How does that single decision shape everyone else’s life?

**Author Bio**

Ann Patchett is an American author of both fiction and nonfiction. She is perhaps best known for her 2001 novel, *Bel Canto*, which won her the Orange Prize and PEN/Faulkner Award and brought her nationwide fame.  
  
Patchett was born in Los Angeles, California, and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. Her mother is the novelist Jeanne Ray. Her father, Frank Patchett, who died in 2012 and had been long divorced from her mother, served as a Los Angeles police officer for 33 years, and participated in the arrests of both Charles Manson and Sirhan Sirhan. The story of Patchett's own family is the basis for her 2016 novel, *Commonwealth*, about the individual lives of a blended family spanning five decades.

Other Books include:

1992 - *The Patron Saint of Liars*  
*1994 - Taft*  
*1997 - The Magician's Assistant*  
*2004 - Truth and Beauty: A Friendship*  
*2001 - Bel Canto*  
*2007 - Run*  
*2008 - What Now?*  
*2011 - State of Wonder; The Getaway Car: A Practical Memoir About Writing and Life*  
*2013 - This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage*  
*2016 - Commonwealth*  
*2019 - The Dutch House*