***Tom Lake* by Ann Patchett**

**Discussion Questions**

1. How familiar were you with “Our Town” before reading *Tom Lake*? Do you think this impacted how you felt about the novel?
2. On page 3 during the local Our Town auditions, Lara thinks, “If Cheryl had always wanted to be an actress, I didn’t think I could ever go to the grocery store again.” Discuss whether this was a perceptive or childish thought about adults and unfulfilled dreams.
3. Lara’s middle daughter is the same age Lara was the summer she spent at Tom Lake. Do you think this helped her daughters relate to their mom in a new way?
4. Until she met Pallace, Lara hadn’t been close friends with anyone who wasn’t white. She mentions that the summer stock cast at Tom Lake is more diverse than both her hometown and Hollywood. Discuss why you think that was the case.
5. As you read about Duke’s career as a movie star, did any real celebrities come to mind? Who should play Duke if *Tom Lake* was made into a movie? What about the rest of the cast?
6. The ‘present-day’ timeline of *Tom Lake* takes place during the height of the COVID pandemic when so many families were pulled together or kept apart. Is this the first book you’ve read that included COVID as part of the storyline?
7. After Uncle Wallace’s episode, Lara is upset that she didn’t do more when he was suffering on stage with her on his final night. Duke tells her that she’d be wise to learn that “you can’t save them that won’t save themselves.” Do you agree?
8. “I wanted to have a thought, an action, a memory that I hadn’t run past anyone. I want to see a little bit of the movie by myself.“ In an age of constant communication, have you ever related to Lara’s thoughts as she snuck through the orchard to watch the movie at the Ott’s alone?
9. As she shares her story, Lara thinks, “I want them to think I was better than I was, and I want to tell them the truth in case the truth will be useful. Those two desires do not neatly coexist, but this is where we are in the story.” Discuss the vulnerability required to help others learn from your actions.
10. Lara lets us, as readers, know a bit more than her daughters along the way but also keeps some surprises for us to learn alongside them. Did anyone expect her husband, Joe, and her director, Nelson, to be the same person?
11. There are aspects of the story that the daughters would know, but Ann Patchett keeps from us. It isn’t until page 253 that she confirms Peter Duke is dead. Was this a surprise? A bit later, we find out how recently he has passed. Did you expect him to survive to be 60?
12. Lara says that the present is both an unparalleled disaster (the pandemic) and the happiest time of her life as she has all three daughters home. Each person experienced the pandemic in a different way, with their lows being different depths as so many lost their nearest and dearest. Amidst the hard times, did you have any unexpected silver linings like Lara?
13. In 1997, Duke returns to the orchard and shares that it’s been the place that made him the happiest to think about since the single day he visited a decade earlier. Is there anywhere that you visit again and again or dream of visiting again?
14. Do you agree with Lara’s decision to keep private her visit to Duke at the mental hospital, and the ramifications of that visit?
15. In a PBS NewsHour interview with Jeffrey Brown, Ann Patchett said: “[Lara]’s not going to tell her daughters the whole story, but nobody ever tells anybody the whole story. I mean, we all edit our stories based on our audience. I’m going to tell a story to my husband one way, to my best friend one way, to you one way. It’s not that you’re lying. It’s just that you shape your story to fit your audience.” Discuss how we all edit our own stories.