



Tom Lake

Ann Patchett

A mother shares the story of one transformative summer of love and theater with her grown daughters on the family cherry orchard, weaving memory, motherhood, and the roads not taken.

Reading level: Easy

Best for: clubs who love gentle, literary family stories with a quiet emotional pull

Discussion

WARM-UP

1. What were you wearing, drinking, or doing while you read this book? Did it become a cozy companion?
2. Was there a scene that made you want to call your mom, your sister, or a long-ago friend?

DIGGING IN

1. Lara tells her daughters a version of her past. What family story have you heard told so many times it almost feels like your own memory?
2. The cherry orchard becomes a kind of haven during a hard time. Where is your version of that place, real or imagined?
3. How did the summer-at-Tom-Lake sections make you feel compared to the present-day orchard chapters? Which did you want to linger in longer?
4. Patchett writes so warmly about ordinary tasks like picking fruit and making meals. What everyday rituals comfort you the way the orchard work comforts this family?

GOING DEEP

1. Lara seems genuinely content with the life she chose, even knowing what she gave up. What does her quiet contentment stir up in you about your own choices?
2. Mothers usually edit their stories for their children. What did you feel about the things Lara shares, holds back, or softens, and how did that land for you personally?

On the table

Warm cherry crumble with vanilla ice cream

An ode to the Michigan cherry orchard at the heart of the book

Buttery rosemary biscuits with salted butter and honey

Farmhouse comfort food for a story rooted in a working orchard

Creamy tomato soup with grilled cheese soldiers

The kind of nurturing supper a mother makes while telling a long story

To sip

Hot spiced cherry cider (no alcohol)

Warm, fragrant, and orchard-inspired for a chilly evening of stories

Chamomile and honey tea (no alcohol)

A gentle pour for the book's quiet, reflective mood

Cherry bourbon smash

Muddled cherries, bourbon, and a splash of lemon for a soft grown-up nightcap

Run of show

7:00 **Slow arrivals**

Greet guests with a mug of warm cherry cider and let the playlist set a hushed, homey mood

7:15 **Settle in with soup**

Serve tomato soup and biscuits while people chat and unwind, no book talk yet

7:35 **Warmup questions**

Ease in with the two warmup prompts so everyone gets a turn before deeper waters

8:00 **Heart of the conversation**

Work through theme questions, encouraging personal stories over literary analysis

8:40 **Dessert and deeper questions**

Bring out the cherry crumble and tackle the two deep questions in a softer, candlelit moment

9:15 **Trivia, scorecards, and goodbyes**

Light, fun wrap-up with trivia and bookmarks to take home

HOST TIPS

- Dim the overhead lights, use lamps and candles, and put out throw blankets so people physically relax
- Let silences breathe. Cozy nights are about reflection, not rapid-fire debate
- Have a few extra copies of the questions on the table so quieter guests can read along and jump in

Playlist

Soft folk and acoustic warmth, like a porch swing at dusk

01 Landslide - Fleetwood Mac

03 Cherry Wine - Hozier

05 Hummingbird - Local Natives

07 Helplessness Blues - Fleet Foxes

02 The Night We Met - Lord Huron

04 Orange Sky - Alexi Murdoch

06 Holocene - Bon Iver

08 Wildflowers - Tom Petty

Trivia

1. Who is the author of Tom Lake? (Ann Patchett)
2. In what U.S. state is the family's cherry orchard set? (Michigan)
3. What classic Thornton Wilder play is woven through the novel? (Our Town)
4. In what year was Tom Lake first published? (2023)
5. Tom Lake is set partly during what real-world event that brings the daughters home? (The COVID-19 pandemic)
6. Ann Patchett co-owns a beloved independent bookstore in Nashville. What is it called? (Parnassus Books)
7. Name another well-known Ann Patchett novel. (Bel Canto (or Commonwealth, The Dutch House))
8. What fruit harvest provides the rhythm of the present-day storyline? (Cherries)

Rate the book

Coziness ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Emotional warmth ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Characters you'd invite to dinner ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Sense of place ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Lingering feeling ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

One word for how this book made me feel: _____

A scene I want to revisit on a rainy day: _____

Who I want to read this next: _____

YOU'RE INVITED

Come Sit by the Orchard with Us

A cozy evening of cherries, soft music, and Ann Patchett's Tom Lake.
Bring slippers if you like, leave your hurry at the door.



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