

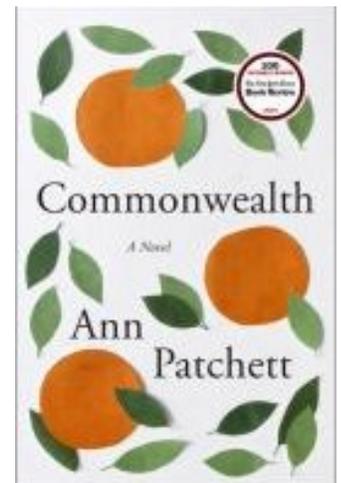


# Commonwealth: A Novel

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 behaviour 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 behaviour 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?





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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. 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?

## About the Author

Ann Patchett is the author of seven novels: *The Patron Saint of Liars*, *Taft*, *The Magician’s Assistant*, *Bel Canto*, *Run*, *State of Wonder*, and *Commonwealth*. She was the editor of BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES 2006 and has written three books of nonfiction --- *Truth and Beauty*, about her friendship with the writer Lucy Grealy; *What Now?* an expansion of her graduation address at Sarah Lawrence College; and *This is the Story of a Happy Marriage*, a collection of essays examining the theme of commitment.

A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, Patchett has been the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including England’s Orange 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 books have been both *New York Times* Notable Books and *New York Times* bestsellers. Her work has been translated into more than 30 languages.

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