

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. Maeve is Danny's sister, but she also takes on the role of his mother, working a job for which she is overqualified to stay near him, and helping him make big decisions about his education. How does the absence of a real mother affect Danny's relationship with Maeve? And how is Maeve affected by the absence of her mother?

8. Reflecting on one of the many hours spent sitting with Maeve in the car outside their former home, Danny says 'we pretended that what we had lost had been taken from us by the person who still lived inside.' What do you think he means by this?

9. Can the house be considered a character in the novel? Why?

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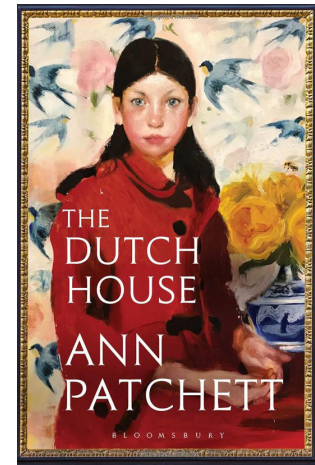
10. Danny and Maeve agree on their perception of Andrea as cruel and vindictive, but their attitudes to Elna differ: Danny is angry at her, while Maeve longs for her. Why do they feel differently about Elna? What do they think of Cyril?

11. Consider the way the novel ends. Is there a sense of forgiveness? Should there be?



## WEST BABYLON LITERARY CLUB

### THE DUTCH HOUSE



**BY ANN PATCHETT**

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## SUMMARY

A tale set over the course of five decades traces a young man's rise from poverty to wealth and back again as his prospects center around his family's lavish Philadelphia estate.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Ann Patchett is the author of six novels including *Bel Canto*, *Run*, *State of Wonder* and *The Patron Saint of Liars*. She was the editor of the *Best American Short Stories* 2006 and has written three books of non-fiction. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop and has been the recipient of numerous awards including England's Orange Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award. Her books have been *New York Times* bestsellers and *New York Times* Notable Books. She also owns Parnassus Books in Nashville, Tennessee, where she lives with her husband.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Danny asks Maeve, 'do you think it's possible ever to see the past as it actually was?' Discuss the role of memory in the novel. To what extent have Danny and Maeve mythologised their childhoods? Are their memories re-shaped by what they understand as adults?
2. The house itself symbolises different things for different characters in the novel. What does it symbolise for Danny and Maeve? How does the absence of their parents affect their relationship towards the house?
3. Discuss the role of foreshadowing in the novel. Why, for instance, are the VanHoebeeks significant? And what can we make of the fact that Danny goes on to work in real estate and marry unsuccessfully, like his father?

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4. Danny is the narrator, but the main character is arguably Maeve. Why do you think Ann Patchett chose to tell the story this way, instead of letting Maeve narrate? What does Danny's perspective bring that Maeve's might not have?
5. Maeve says of Andrea, 'the truth is, I have plenty of memories of her being perfectly decent. I just choose to dwell on the ones in which she wasn't.' Is Andrea just another wicked stepmother?
6. The house inspires pride and joy in Cyril, but the same house repulses Elna so much that she flees from it, leaving her family behind. Why were their reactions so different? Is it fair of Danny to comment that 'our father was a man who had never met his own wife'?