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Truth and Beauty by Ann Patchett

Discussion questions used at SPL July 2014

1. This book was touted as a celebration of friendship and love between two women... is that how you saw it?
2. What do you think the title meant? Whose truth were we reading? Where was the beauty? ? (Patchett's answer.....Ultimately I think the idea for the new title came from Lucy's NPR interview with Terry Gross, which I had listened to the day after she died. In that interview, Lucy talks about "Truth with a capital T" and "Beauty with a capital B." I had listened to it over and over and over again, and I think those words must have lodged somewhere in my brain. It just stuck.)
3. Many readers think the writing in this book was superb... descriptive, honest, touching... how would you describe it?
4. We know Ann Patchett a bit from her novels that we read.... Did her story match up with how you thought you might have known her?
5. Patchett stood in awe of Lucy while in undergraduate school.... And thought she knew everyone. Were you surprised at Lucy's look at the same situation? P48
6. Could you have been friends with either one of the women?
7. What are some of the admirable traits of Ann? What are some of her weaknesses?
8. Same question about Lucy? What were her strengths and weaknesses?
9. Do you think the story happened as Patchett wrote it? Do you think it was colored a bit?
10. How do you think that very first affair she had, with the man known as B----, affected her? How did it color her relationships with men through the years?
11. Why do you think she was such a needy friend? Or was she?
12. Patchett often described the two of them in terms of the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. Did you see it that way?
13. Was Patchett an enabler?
14. There's a passage on p 72 in which Patchett was hurt by Lucy's offhanded remark about how "shell be fine" ... she then said it was both Patchett's blessing and curse that she would always be fine... what do you make of that?
15. Was Lucy jealous of Patchett? Did she ever see the good parts of her own life?
16. It was an interesting look at a writer's life... what did you think of the struggles they both went through to perfect their craft?
17. What did you think when Patchett offered to write Lucy's book?
18. Was all of Lucy's issues centered around her face? Were you sympathetic to all those problems?
19. Did Patchett make you see why Lucy had so many friends who would do anything for her? Did Lucy ever really appreciate the things done for her?

- [20.](#) It was amazing to me the number of surgeries this woman had... often with unsuccessful results. Do you think doctors sometimes go overboard in trying to fix something?
- [21.](#) In Patchett's story, Lucy felt best when she was in the hospital... would you agree with that? Why do you think that was? Do you think that is probably typical of chronically ill people?
- [22.](#) In Patchett's view, do you think Lucy was ever happy for Ann? Or was she jealous? Was Patchett's life something to be jealous of?
- [23.](#) On p 218, Patchett talked about the events of 9/11... did it make sense to you that they were so blasé about seeing the Towers on fire? That they would go back and finish their breakfast?
- [24.](#) Towards the end of the book, on p 225, Patchett reports that Lucy wished she could be a better friend, but that "at least I can make you feel like a saint. That's what you always wanted." Would you agree on that? What was she getting out of this friendship?
- [25.](#) Patchett talks about dreaming of her after her death, and in particular, about the dream where Lucy gives her permission to write a book about her... what did you think about that?
- [26.](#) Did this book make you want to read Autobiography of a Face?
- [27.](#) Did you get a chance to read the article about her sister's reaction to the book? What do you think of that?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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Discussion questions taken from a Book Browse

http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm/book_number/1420/truth-and-beauty

Links to reviews and other articles

People Magazine interview of Lucy Grealy
<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20104580,00.html>

The Atlantic Magazine interview of Ann Patchett defending this book
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/07/my-pornography/306068/2/>

Reviews of Truth and Beauty

<http://redravine.wordpress.com/2008/06/12/the-ant-the-grasshopper-ann-patchett-lucy-grealy/>

<http://users.tpg.com.au/waldrenm/patchett.html>

Article from the London newspaper, The Guardian, about Grealy's family's reaction to the book

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/aug/07/biography.features>

