Discussion Questions for *State of Wonder* by Ann Patchett

1. Barbara Bovender, one of Annik’s caretakers/gatekeepers, tells Marina Annik is “such a force of nature . . . a woman completely fearless, someone who sees the world without limitations.” Is this a fair assessment of Annik? How has the elderly doctor’s past shaped the person she is and the choices she has made?

2. Describe the arc of Marina and Annik’s relationship from the novel’s beginning to its end. How does Marina’s past with Annik affect the decisions Marina makes in the jungle?

3. *State of Wonder* raises several moral and social issues for consideration. Spend some time thinking about each of the following concerns raised in the novel:
   a. What is a developed society’s responsibility to aboriginal people untouched by modern civilization?
   b. How far should modern medicine go in tampering with the life cycle? Should people of any age have children, for example?
   c. Is it wrong to take money granted for one purpose and use it for another if the cause is just?
   d. Does a great man (or woman) have to be a good man (or woman)?

4. Ann Patchett, in *State of Wonder*, joins a long list of authors (Hawthorne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, and Conrad, in *Heart of Darkness*, for example) in exploring how the constraints of society function to keep people safe. In fact, Annik warns Marina, “It’s difficult to trust yourself in the jungle. Some people gain their bearings over time but for others that adjustment never comes.” Does Marina ultimately “gain her bearings?” What about Annik?

5. Review the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. How does it apply to the book?

6. Sprinkled throughout the novel are characters with emblematic names. How do these names add depth to the characters and the tale?