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Helmerich award winner: Ann Patchett

Visit with area high-schoolers among public appearances by author Ann Patchett

■ Acclaimed writer shares insights with area students

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Posted: Saturday, December 6, 2014 12:00 am

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Ann Patchett speaks to students from across the city Friday at Rogers Early College Junior High and High School. She is the recipient of the Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World



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By ANDREA EGER World Staff Writer | 0 comments

Select area high school students had the unique opportunity Friday to ask an award-winning author their most-pressing questions about pieces of her work they have been studying.

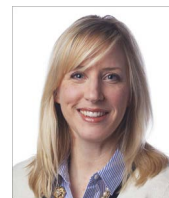
Ann Patchett, who is in town to receive the Tulsa Library Trust's 2014 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award, told 100 or so gathered students anything they wanted to hear about, but she also explained that it is their duty as readers to find some answers for themselves.

"You want to leave holes where the readers can imagine things for themselves. That is the difference between commercial fiction and literary fiction," she said. "In literary fiction, I do half the work and you do half the work. Commercial literature puts you in the back seat of the car and takes you there."

Patchett, who spoke to students from across the city at Rogers Early College Junior High and High School, is the author of award-

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Tulsa World Staff Writer Andrea Eger



Andrea Eger has worked at the Tulsa World since 1999 and has covered public education since 2000. She has completed intensive professional development in education reporting with the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Education Writers Association.

Over the years, her work has garnered her two first place awards in investigative individual reporting from the Society of Professional Journalists – Oklahoma Pro Chapter and numerous first place awards in education reporting from SPJ and the Great Plains Journalism Awards, an eight state competition.

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Public event with author Ann Patchett

Who: The Tulsa Library Trust's 2014 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award-

winner

What: Patchett will give a free public presentation and book signing. She will answer questions from the audience, and her books will be available for purchase.

When: 10:30 a.m. Saturday.

Where: Connor's Cove at Hardesty Regional Library, 8316 E. 93rd St.

winning novels, including "Bel Canto" and "Taft," and of the critically acclaimed "The Magician's Assistant," "Run" and "State of Wonder."

Her nonfiction work — in particular "This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage" and "Truth & Beauty: A Friendship" — has also drawn rave reviews.

For her major contribution to the field of literature and letters, Patchett received the Helmerich Award on Friday evening at a black-tie dinner in her honor at the downtown Tulsa Librarium.

But Patchett began her day sharing with high school students from Rogers, East Central and Cascia Hall, among others, how she dreamed as a child of doing nothing else in life except writing but struggled for quite some years trying to make a living at it.

"Novelists never came to my school when I was a kid. I really thought writers were dead



people," she said, drawing laughter from the crowd seated in the Rogers auditorium.

She recounted how she supported herself by waiting tables and writing for teen and even bridal magazines for nearly a decade, admitting at one point that she could write every single article in a bride's magazine under nearly 20 different pen names and then recycle the story ideas because "no one would notice. Unless you are mentally deranged, you don't read bridal magazines for more than two years."

Patchett said she had happily accepted early on that writing likely would never make her much money, so it was a bit of a revelation to her that her very first novel was published to great acclaim in 1992.

"I was just trying to figure out how to write a novel," she said of that book, "The Patron Saint of Liars." "I just made it up. I didn't do any research."

She next explained how extensive research for her third book changed the way she approached fiction, but she also revealed that the misery of self-doubt and intense self-criticism she experiences while in the midst of writing a novel is what usually inspires her to come up with a great idea for her next novel's plot.

"You have this amazing idea in your head," she said, "but whatever I put down on paper is such a disappointment to me — it breaks my heart.

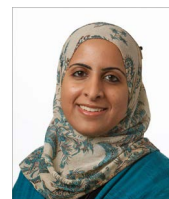
"I'm not nearly as smart as I want to be; I am not nearly as talented. But one of my greatest strengths is my ability to forgive myself — this is the best I can do."

Patchett encouraged the students to learn to do the same for themselves, and she added, "Be brave and be kind. Nothing is more important than those two things."

East Central seniors Delaysha McCall and Celeste Alferrez-Betancourth said afterward that the ability to get their questions answered by Patchett about "Run," a novel their English classes read, was surreal, but they said they were also touched by her advice.

"It's not every day you actually meet a famous author, and what she said about how open-

Tulsa World Staff Writer Nour Habib



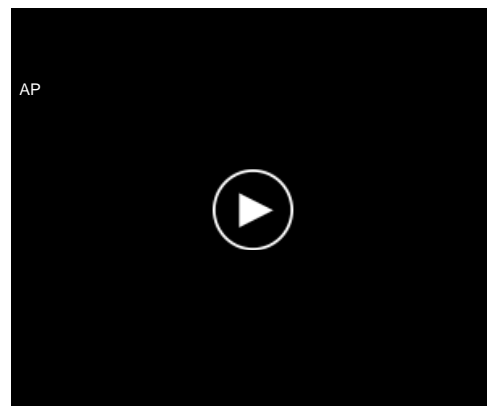
Staff Writer Nour Habib covers suburban school districts. She joined the Tulsa World in 2011, and previously was a general assignment reporter for the Scene section. She graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in journalism and political science. Before joining the World, she covered education for a community newspaper.

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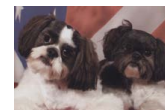


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minded you should be was really good advice," Alferrez-Betancourth said.

McCall chimed in, saying, "Yeah, most people aren't bold enough to go sit at lunch with someone you don't know, like she said, but she's right: You only live once, and to earn respect, you have to have respect for others."

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