

Reading guide for Tara Westover's *Educated* (2018)

1. Reread the epigraph from Virginia Woolf. Why does the author choose to begin her memoir this way?
2. How does the setting of rural Idaho inform the family's experience?
3. How does the 1992 standoff at Ruby Ridge cast a shadow over the Westover parents and children and the survivalism that characterizes their upbringing?
4. Why does Westover's father object to formalized education?
5. In her first class at college, Westover recounts not knowing what the word "holocaust" means. Why is this moment significant?
6. Over the course of this book, the Westover family deals with a number of accidents: Westover's brother Tyler falling asleep and driving off the road, Westover's brother Luke catching on fire, and later, a very serious accident for their father. Early on, Westover writes about "all the decisions that go into making a life — the choices people make, together and on their own, that combine to produce any single event." What do you think she meant by this?
7. Throughout the book, Westover refers back to journals she kept while growing up. How does her recording of her life's events inform this book?
8. By Chapter 22, Westover writes that her life was often "narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs." What is the significance of this realization?
9. After Westover decides to continue her education, she finds it increasingly difficult to reconcile her life on the mountain with her new life as a student of history. She writes that she had a "fractured mind." Does it seem to you that she must lose one life to gain another?
10. Who are the people who make the greatest impact on Westover's life?
11. One professor describes Westover as "Pygmalion," while Westover herself at one point says she believed she could "be remade, my mind recast" at her university. And in the end, she writes that she is a "changed person" from the person she was as her father's daughter, and from her 16-year-old self. "You could call this selfhood many things," she writes. "Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education." What do you make of these final lines?
12. What does Westover learn about family, forgiveness, trauma, and education?