

Book Discussion Questions

Educated by Tara Westover

INTRODUCTION/SYNOPSIS

Tara Westover was 17 the first time she set foot in a classroom. Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, she prepared for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with her "head-for-the-hills bag". In the summer she stewed herbs for her mother, a midwife and healer, and in the winter she salvaged in her father's junkyard.

Her father forbade hospitals, so Tara never saw a doctor or nurse. Gashes and concussions, even burns from explosions, were all treated at home with herbalism. The family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became violent.

Then, lacking any formal education, Tara began to educate herself. She taught herself enough mathematics and grammar to be admitted to Brigham Young University, where she studied history, learning for the first time about important world events like the Holocaust and the civil rights movement. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge. Only then would she wonder if she'd traveled too far, if there was still a way home.

REVIEWS

#1 Bestseller: *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Boston Globe*

Winner of the 2019 ALA Alex Award

Winner of the Goodreads Choice Award for autobiography

"Extraordinary...an act of courage and self-invention." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Beautiful and propulsive...Despite the singularity of her childhood, the questions her book poses are universal: How much of ourselves should we give to those we love? And how much must we betray them to grow up?"—*Vogue*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were your expectations prior to reading the novel? And how did you feel once you finished?
2. Why do you think it was so important for Tara to write her story and tell the truth about her family?
3. Let's discuss Tara's parents. Why was her father so determined that they live off the grid? Do you believe he is undiagnosed bipolar? What are some of the signs that he showed this?
4. Tara's mother is an interesting figure. There are signs that she believes her husband and son goes too far—yet, she never seems to try to stop it, as far as we can tell. Let's discuss her mother more.
5. How did Tyler leaving to attend college completely change Tara's perspective on what was expected out of her?
6. There's so much about religion in this book that we must discuss it. In what ways did both Lisa's father and brother Shawn use religion as a way to manipulate the women of the family, especially Tara?
7. In the Perfect in His Generations chapter, Tara's father shows a bit more layers. He seems completely against her singing and acting in part, yet he continues to drive her to rehearsal and gives her feedback on her performances. What do you think was going on with his back and forth attitude about her performing?
8. Shawn is violent, cruel and ignorant. Why was his violent behavior allowed? What do you think was truly going on with how he treated Tara? How did his jealousy of her impact his horrible actions? Let's talk about the significance of her brother calling her a "whore" without any kind of pushback from her parents. Why did he call women "fish eyes" as an insult?
9. Let's talk about Tara's first year at BYU and the culture shock she experienced. What were some of the key elements that helped her stay in school?

10. Tara tried to date Charles, a boy from her hometown, but when he witnesses Shawn's abuse, she pushes Charles away and doesn't want to admit the truth about her brother. On Page 190, Tara writes about Charles, "He couldn't save me. Only I could. I had no idea what he was talking about." Let's talk about this section.
11. When did Tara truly start to understand that she came from a troubled background and that her family's behavior up until this point was wrong? How did getting an education help Tara see the truth about her family?
12. Let's talk about how education opened her eyes to the world but also means that she can't come home anymore. If she goes home, she's not being true to herself.
13. Where do you think this leaves Tara now? Is there any hope of reuniting with her family? And even better question, should she?
14. Did this story make you feel hopeful? Why or why not?