

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Educated*

by Tara Westover

BOOK GROUP

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

*Reprinted from publisher.*

Tara Westover was born in Idaho in 1986. She received her BA from Brigham Young University in 2008 and was subsequently awarded a Gates Cambridge Scholarship. She earned an MPhil from Trinity College, Cambridge, in 2009, and in 2010 was a visiting fellow at Harvard University. She returned to Cambridge, where she was awarded a PhD in history in 2014. *Educated* is her first book.

## BOOK SUMMARY

An unforgettable memoir about a young girl who, kept out of school, leaves her survivalist family and goes on to earn a PhD from Cambridge University.

Tara Westover was seventeen 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 metal in her father’s junkyard.

Her father distrusted the medical establishment, 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 an older brother became violent.

When another brother got himself into college and came back with news of the world beyond the mountain, Tara decided to try a new kind of life. She taught herself enough mathematics, grammar, and science to take the ACT and was admitted to Brigham Young University. There, she studied psychology, politics, philosophy, and history, learning for the first time about pivotal 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 University. Only then would she wonder if she’d traveled too far, if there was still a way home.

*Educated* is an account of the struggle for self-invention. It is a tale of fierce family loyalty, and of the grief that comes from severing ties with those closest to you. With the acute insight that distinguishes all great writers, Westover has crafted a universal coming-of-age story that gets to the heart of what an education is and what it offers: the perspective to see one’s life through new eyes, and the will to change it.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tara Westover’s memoir recounts her life as the daughter of Mormon survivalist parents who leaves rural Idaho to pursue an education. What do you think she’s referring to with the title *Educated*? And what statement do you think the book makes on education at large?
2. Westover’s quest for an education is a dramatic rebellion by her father’s standards. How does her rebellion differ from that of her older brother Tyler, if at all?

3. Do you think being the youngest child in the family impacted Westover ultimately leaving her family? Would it have made a difference if she'd been the oldest child?
4. Why is it significant that Westover didn't know the word "holocaust" and had no knowledge of race issues in the United States?
5. Which family member had the biggest influence on Westover's quest for a different life? Which non-family members were influential on her life?
6. Westover's life changes dramatically thanks to an encouraging professor at Brigham Young University. How might her life be different if she hadn't applied for the study abroad program at Cambridge University?
7. Westover eventually finds her voice and realizes it's just as powerful as the people who have influenced her life. What is voice, and how important is it that every child be encouraged to find their own?
8. What impact does Westover's pursuit of formal education have on her parents and family?
9. How does education change Westover's view of her childhood? How does she come to terms with how she was raised once she knows the value of education?
10. Westover makes great efforts to ensure the story is as objective as possible, including footnotes where accounts of an event differ, or comparing her diary entries to her memory. As a reader, how important is objectivity in this story, and more largely, in memoirs in general?
11. At 30, Westover is still relatively close in age to the events that occur in this book. How do you think the memoir would be different were it written when Tara was significantly older and more distanced from this time in her life? In what ways would it alter your interpretation of these experiences?

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